

# FELLOWSHIP OF CATHOLIC SCHOLARS

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### THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Benedictine Style ..... Rev. Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.

### THE BISHOPS' CORNER

Inadequacies in the Theological Methodology and Conclusions of *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* by Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler ..... Committee on Doctrine, USCCB  
To Number Our Days Aright ..... Bishop Thomas J. Tobin

### ARTICLES

The Pope, Condoms and the “Banalization of Sexuality”—  
Sorting through the Questions ..... Robert L. Fastiggi  
*Properties of a Lover* by Thomas More ..... Russell Shaw  
Cultural Identity ..... Jude P. Dougherty  
The Liberating Truth of Catholic Teaching on Sexual Ethics ..... William E. May  
The Fiftieth Anniversary of *Love and Responsibility*: An Appreciation ..... John M. Grondelski  
Romano Guardini’s Christocentrism ..... José Manuel Fidalgo.  
Translated by Kenneth Baker, S.J.  
The Natural Law, the International Theological Commission,  
and the Search for a Universal Ethic ..... Robert L. Fastiggi  
Apologetics: A Critical Component of Adult Catechesis  
in North America ..... John Gresham  
Moral Blindness: What Practices of Ours Will Future People Condemn?  
*A Response to Kwame Anthony Appiah* ..... Mark S. Latkovic

### OPED COLUMNS ..... William Saunders

Abortion and Military Facilities

What Happened to the First Amendment?

Federal Judge Overturns Executive Order

### BOOK REVIEWS

*Critique of Christian Origins. Abd Al-Jabbar.* A parallel English-Arabic text,  
edited, translated, and annotated by Gabriel Said Reynolds  
and Khalil Samir ..... Jude Dougherty

*The Human Person: According to John Paul II.*

by Brian Bransfield ..... Janet P. Benestad

### BOOKS RECEIVED

### NOTICES

### EX CATHEDRA

On Pope Benedict XVI’s Conversation Last Summer

with Peter Seewald ..... J. Brian Benestad

### SCHEDULE for Future Issues of the Quarterly

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### CONTENTS

THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER.....	2
THE BISHOP'S CORNER	
Inadequacies in the Theological Methodology and Conclusions of <i>The Sexual Person:Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology</i> by Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler.....	4
To Number Our Days Aright .....	13
ARTICLES	
The Pope, Condoms and the “Banalization of Sexuality” ...	14
Properties of a Lover .....	19
Cultural Identity .....	21
The Liberating Truth of Catholic Teaching on Sexual Ethics.....	23
The Fiftieth Anniversary of <i>Love and Responsibility</i> .....	25
Romano Guardini’s Christocentrism.....	29
The Natural Law, the International Theological Commission, and the Search for a Universal Ethic .....	40
Apologetics:A Critical Component of Adult Catechesis in North America.....	42
Moral Blindness:What Practices of Ours Will Future People Condemn? .....	46
OPED COLUMNS.....	49
BOOK REVIEWS	
<i>Critique of Christian Origins</i> .....	51
<i>The Human Person:According to John Paul II</i> .....	51
BOOKS RECEIVED.....	53
NOTICES .....	54
EX CATHEDRA .....	54
SCHEDULE for Future Issues of the Quarterly .....	56

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### THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

# Benedictine Style

The writings of Pope Benedict XVI give the lie to the rumor that encyclicals are chiefly intended as a cure for insomnia.

Not only do we find in his letters remarkable clarity and spirited defenses of Catholic doctrine but charming stories of modern saints and helpful suggestions about the formation of conscience and the cultivation of a good prayer life.

At one point, for instance, *Spe salvi* (§33) explores Augustine’s comparison between how God enlarges and purifies our prayer in order to replace bitterness with his love in much the same way as we may need to wash away the taste of vinegar before we can truly enjoy the sweetness of honey. That encyclical also introduces us to certain ways in which suffering can become a school for hope, especially by the stories of the ex-slave Saint Josephine Bakhita (§3) and the long-imprisoned Cardinal Nguyen van Thuan (§32).

*Deus caritas est*, the first of Benedict’s encyclicals, was no less amazing. There our German shepherd battles the three great German wolves—the Masters of Suspicion, Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. More traditional forms of scholarly argument tend to abstract from the personal and to concentrate on providing argumentation and evidence for the positions under discussion. When one disagrees with them, one needs either to attack the validity of their reasoning or the truth of their premises. But the distinctive feature of the masters of suspicion—and of postmodern and deconstructionist thinkers in their wake—is to proceed by raising suspicions about the motives of their opponents through the allegation of charges whose plausibility rests more on resentment than on evidence or argument. The rhetorical power of such a strategy comes from putting one’s targets on the defensive. A modest response can make it seem that the accused is really guilty and incapable of mounting any more of a defense, while a vigorous response can easily suggest that one is just trying to hide something under the very energy of the reply.

Benedict tries to find a suitable middle course by combining an extremely clear but rhetorically modest explanation of Catholic doctrine with an exposure of the misrepresentations that are invariably part of the smoke screen laid down by

the masters of suspicion. He then provides stories of Catholic saints and martyrs whose sacrifices are above suspicion. In this way *Deus Caritas Est* counters Freud's attacks on Christianity's alleged fear of eros by explaining the authentic Christian view of sexuality and love (§2–18). He counters the Marxist use of resentment (e.g., in the famous phrase "religion is the opium of the masses") by admitting what Marx has right in his social critique while noting where Marx went wrong (§26–28, 31). Thirdly, he attacks the nihilism of Nietzsche's perspectivalism in taking all truth claims merely to be assertions of power and in denying the possibility of objective (let alone eternal) truths on the ground that everyone must speak from some standpoint within some history and culture (§28–29). There is, of course, a kind of performative contradiction involved in perspectivalism, for it claims to be a generally valid explanation itself. The pope's various stories about Mother Teresa, Don Bosco, and Vincent de Paul (§36, 40) add not only a human touch but also an unanswerable set of examples that the suspicions charged against Christianity are groundless.

The most recent (2009) encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (CV) has a complexity quite different from its two predecessors. But like *Deus caritas est* it makes an important contribution to Catholic Social Teaching, especially in its first chapter. Although its publication appears to have been delayed for two years (the middle chapters may well reflect a set of questions not yet resolved within the curia), the occasion for its composition was the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 encyclical *Populorum progressio* by Pope Paul VI. Like Pope John Paul II's 1987 *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Benedict's *Caritas in Veritate* revisits the topic of human development that was at the core of *Populorum Progressio*. Again like *Sollicitudo*, *Caritas in veritate* carefully distinguishes between excessively extrinsic visions of development, which consider only questions of economics and material development, from a more comprehensive view of the topic. This fuller view would include the notions of moral development in the life of the virtues and the importance of real worship for human development, the role of making and keeping such commitments to others as marriage and family for human maturation, and the need to provide religious freedom in civil society in order to make possible the genuine search for the truth about God.

In making his own contribution to Catholic social teaching in this and his previous encyclicals Pope Benedict seems clearly intent on re-asserting the triple focus (the cultural, the economic, and the social) that

Catholic social teaching has exhibited from the early days of the Church. In doing so he clearly seems to want to correct the erroneous tendency noticeable in some quarters to emphasize only its economic and social aspects and to treat the life-issues and other cultural concerns as if they were peripheral and unimportant. At CV §12 he explicitly resists the notion that Catholic post-conciliar social teaching is discontinuous with its pre-conciliar statements.

Of all the themes covered in the pages of *Caritas in veritate*, one of the most important, in my judgment, is his insistence that the Church's teachings on life and family issues are inseparable from those on economic and social-political issues. Yet, his manner of handling the life issues component of Catholic social doctrine differs significantly from, say, that of the "seamless garment" approach, which tended to blur the difference between innocence and guilt and between practices that are intrinsically immoral such as abortion and euthanasia and those issues like capital punishment on which the prudential judgments offered by reasonable people may disagree. In Benedict's encyclicals thus far there is no discussion about capital punishment among the life issues, despite the recurrent attention that topic received in the works of John Paul II. But there is again and again efforts to resist the tendency of some theorists to co-opt the principles of Catholic social teaching on economic and social issues into a politically liberal agenda.

In this encyclical Benedict repudiates the tendency to confine the life and family issues and the social-political issues to different silos. He is thus on an entirely different course from that favored by some thinkers to treat the views typical of political liberalism on various issues of economy, poverty, and race as if these answers were the substance of Catholic social teaching, and its only significant component at that. Benedict shows great profundity in his substantive positions on these issues and his way of presenting them is, in effect, a clear denial that they can be separated from the questions of marriage, family, and respect for innocent human life at all the stages of its development. In this regard we find similar substantive positions in documents like Pius XI's *Casti connubii*, Paul VI's *Humanae vitae*, and John Paul II's *Evangelium vitae*, but the Benedictine style is to treat of the life issues in the very same document where he is considering the social issues—he regards them as inseparable, and so should we. ♣

*Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.*

# Inadequacies in the Theological Methodology and Conclusions of *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* by Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler

15 September 2010  
 Committee on Doctrine  
 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

**O**n November 2, 2007, Archbishop Elden Curtiss, then archbishop of Omaha, published a statement concerning two articles by Prof. Emeritus Michael G. Lawler and Prof. Todd A. Salzman, both members of the faculty of theology at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska.<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Curtiss expressed his disappointment that in these articles the authors “argue for the moral legitimacy of some homosexual acts.” He went on to affirm: “Their conclusion is in serious error, and cannot be considered authentic Catholic teaching.” The following year Professors Lawler and Salzman published a book, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Georgetown University Press, 2008). This book contains the same erroneous conclusion. Moreover, applying a deficient theological methodology to additional matters, the authors reach erroneous conclusions on a whole range of issues, including the morality of pre-marital sex, contraception, and artificial insemination. Because of the pastoral danger that readers of the book could be confused or misled, especially since the book proposes ways of living a Christian life that do not accord with the teaching of the Church and the Christian tradition, the USCCB Committee on Doctrine has examined the moral methodology found in the book and offers the following brief presentation of the problems posed by it.

The ambitions of the authors of *The Sexual Person* are not small. *The Sexual Person* does not offer minor revisions to a few points of Catholic sexual ethics. Instead, the authors insist that the moral theology of the Catholic tradition dealing with sexual matters is now as a whole obsolete and inadequate and that it must be re-founded on a different basis. Consequently, they argue that the teaching of the Magisterium is based on this flawed “traditional theology” and must likewise be substantially changed. The fact that the alternative moral theology of *The Sexual Person* leads to many positions in clear conflict with authoritative Church teaching is itself considerable evidence that the basic methodology of this moral theology is unsound and incompat-

ible with the Catholic tradition. While it would be a simple matter to cite the texts presenting magisterial teaching on these issues, the Committee on Doctrine has judged that it would be more helpful in this case to examine the basic presuppositions of the alternative moral theology proposed in *The Sexual Person*. This examination could thus serve the broader purpose of helping Catholic moral theologians more generally to continue rediscovering a more adequate basis for addressing contemporary moral questions.

The authors of *The Sexual Person* do not hide the fact that many of their conclusions come into direct conflict with magisterial statements. Indeed, much of the book is devoted to demonstrating the supposed inadequacy of magisterial statements and the moral theology that underlies them. Given that the two principal sources of traditional Catholic moral theology are Scripture and the natural law, a crucial part of the argument of *The Sexual Person* is a critique of the use of Scripture and the natural law in formulating sexual ethics.

## The Critique of Scripture

**T**he authors correctly point out that the Scriptures do not provide “a systematic code of sexual ethics” (22). Even where there are specific scriptural references to certain sexual behaviors, however, the authors strive to show that what the Scriptures say is not relevant to our present questions. In support of their judgments, the authors appeal to the historicity of the scriptural texts. Indeed, the authors insist on the capital importance of “historical consciousness” throughout the book. “A characteristic of sacred scripture, then, is the historicity it shares with every other document subject to sociohistorical conditions. If that is the case with scripture, the normative theology of the earliest churches, it will be the case also with the theology and doctrine of every later church” (13). In their view, interpreters must avoid an overhasty movement from the literal meaning of scriptural statements to a normative meaning of those statements for us today. “It is never enough simply to read the text to find out what it says about sexual morality. Its original socio-historical context must first be clarified and then the text

can be translated, interpreted, and inculcated in a contemporary context” (14).

While there is nothing controversial in the basic recognition of sociohistorical conditioning, the question remains as to whether or not in applying this principle of historical consciousness the authors so exaggerate the singular and particular character of historical occurrences as to fall inadvertently into a kind of historical relativism. Is it possible for an ancient text to be normative in all sociohistorical contexts? While the authors seem to recognize at least the theoretical possibility, in practice they are always arguing that the historicity of both scriptural texts and Church doctrinal statements renders them no longer normative for the contemporary situation. Moreover, at several points the authors repeat their charge that the critical deficiency of “traditionalist” Catholic moral theology—and the magisterial teaching that still employs it—is that it lacks historical consciousness and makes unfounded assertions that past statements continue to be normative in all times and places. In *The Sexual Person*, repeated appeals to historical consciousness serve to discredit norms based on scriptural texts or Church statements and to clear the way for the assertion of contrary positions.

The primary example of this is the section on homosexuality. The authors acknowledge that some scriptural texts condemn homosexual behavior, but argue that these condemnations are based on “a false assumption, shaped by the sociohistorical conditions of the times in which they were written” (217). In fact, this “assumption” turns out to be not a single assumption but two distinct assumptions. The first is the idea that “all human beings naturally share the heterosexual condition”: “Neither the Bible nor the Christian tradition rooted in it prior to the twentieth century ever considered the homosexual condition; they took for granted that everyone was heterosexual” (217). The second is the idea that “any homosexual behavior is a perversion of ‘nature’ and immoral” (217).

For the authors of *The Sexual Person*, the scriptural condemnations of homosexual behavior are nothing more than expressions of the sociohistorical assumptions of the writers. In their view, this is evident from the fact that the scriptural writers condemn homosexual behavior “specifically as a perversion of the heterosexual condition they assume to be the natural condition of every person” (217). The basis of the condemnation is thus taken to reveal the scriptural writers’ assumption about the naturalness of heterosexuality, an assumption that has supposedly been disproven in the modern world. For the authors, there can be no perversion of the heterosexual condition by homosexuals since their natural orientation is not heterosexual, but homosexual. “In its modern meaning, homosexuality is not and cannot be a perversion of the heterosexual condition because homosexuals, by natural orientation, do not share that condition” (217).

There are, however, two flaws in this argument. First, an examination of the structure of the argument reveals that it is circular, for it depends on the authors’ prior assumption that homosexual activity is “natural” for those with a homosexual inclination. Salzman and Lawler argue that the fact that the scriptural writers condemn homosexual behavior as unnatural without making an exception for those with a homosexual inclination shows their ignorance of the supposedly established fact that homosexual behavior is natural for those with a homosexual inclination. This alleged ignorance makes what the scriptural writers say about homosexuality irrelevant to the contemporary discussion. For Salzman and Lawler, a major objection to their position that homosexual activity is natural for those with a homosexual orientation has thus been removed. Such an argument, however, does not demonstrate the “naturalness” of homosexual activity, but merely presupposes it.

Second, the argument depends on an equivocal use of the term “natural.” Salzman and Lawler are correct that the scriptural writers regard heterosexuality as natural and homosexual acts as unnatural. For the scriptural writers, “natural” refers to what is consistent with the natural order established by God, in which man and woman were made for each other and the intrinsic purpose of human sexuality is fulfilled only in the marriage bond of man and woman. Salzman and Lawler’s critique of the scriptural writers’ position, however, presumes a different meaning of “natural.” They speak of the homosexual orientation as “natural” in a more general sense as something that is not chosen (see 65, 89, 150–51, 217, 233). What they fail to acknowledge is that an inclination to homosexual acts can be “natural” in the way that they use the term and still “unnatural” from the perspective of the scriptural writers and the tradition of Catholic moral theology. The argument of Salzman and Lawler conceals the difference between their position and that of the scriptural writers.

The authors of *The Sexual Person* assert that since the “biblical assumption is now scientifically shown to be incorrect, the Bible has little to contribute to the discussion of genuine homosexuality and homosexuals as we understand them today” (217). The claim that the “biblical assumption is now scientifically shown to be incorrect” is misleading, however, particularly because there are in fact two assumptions at issue. As for the “assumption” about the universality of heterosexuality, this can be said to be “scientifically” disproven only in the very narrow sense that there is empirical evidence that some people experience a sexual inclination directed primarily toward persons of the same sex. Whether or not the scriptural writers, along with the rest of society until the twentieth century, were indeed ignorant of the fact that some people have a predominantly homosexual inclination, is

a historical question that cannot be considered resolved by the evidence provided in *The Sexual Person*. The only evidence adduced by Salzman and Lawler is the silence of the scriptural writers in places where they would expect to see specific references to homosexual as opposed to heterosexual orientation. In any event, the answer to this question is not decisive for the larger question about the naturalness of homosexual acts. As for the scriptural writers’ “assumption” about the naturalness of heterosexual behavior and corresponding unnaturalness of homosexual behavior, this has in no sense been “scientifically” disproved. This is rather the central issue, on which the scriptural writers and the authors of *The Sexual Person* take conflicting positions. It is disingenuous for the authors to imply that their opinion has been proven by science.

The basic problem of the use of Scripture in *The Sexual Person* is that the authors treat scriptural statements as so historically conditioned that they have no relevance for subsequent ages. While there is a contemporary philosophical current that espouses a kind of historical relativism, according to which truth is not stable but varies according to historical context, such an extreme position is neither correct as a philosophical assertion nor compatible with the Christian faith. As Pope John Paul II explained: “Human language may be conditioned by history and constricted in other ways, but the human being can still express truths which surpass the phenomenon of language. Truth can never be confined to time and culture; in history it is known, but it also reaches beyond history.”<sup>2</sup> The possibility of the perception and transmission of truth across historical contexts is absolutely essential for the Christian understanding of divine revelation, which affirms that God has revealed himself in the history of Israel and enters history through the Incarnation of the eternal Word.

The Church recognizes that the Scriptures are historical documents and that studying them using historical methods will contribute to a better understanding of their meaning. The basic reason for this is that “God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion.”<sup>3</sup> Because God uses such human means to communicate divine truths, the

interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.<sup>4</sup>

The Church has never doubted, however, that with proper study and analysis it is possible not only to come to an understanding of the meaning that the scriptural writer intended but also, through an understanding of the human words, to come to an understanding of what God intended to convey to us by means of the human writers. History is not an impassable barrier for communication of God’s truth through Scripture.

The Church has also insisted that the interpretation of Scripture does not come to completion with the historical examination of the text. The larger context of the Sacred Scriptures as a whole must be taken into account, as well as the whole tradition of the Church.

In the final analysis, all interpretation of Scripture is subject to the authoritative judgment by those responsible for the Church’s deposit of faith. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.<sup>5</sup>

### The Critique of the Natural Law

While the authors of *The Sexual Person* use an exaggerated appeal to historical consciousness in order to portray Scripture as largely irrelevant for developing a sexual morality for the contemporary age, they hold that traditional natural law arguments are not only relativized by their historical conditioning but entirely discredited by modern philosophical developments such as the sociology of knowledge. They cite the argument of David Hume that a moral obligation cannot be deduced from what exists in nature (48). Echoing Hume’s epistemological skepticism, they contend that the human intellect is unable to grasp an intelligibility in nature that has moral implications.

All we can understand from “nature” is the naked facticity of a reality, sexuality and sexual intercourse for instance; nothing else. “Nature” reveals to our attention, understanding, judgment, and decision only its naked facticity, not our moral obligation. Everything beyond “nature’s” facticity is the result of interpretation

by attentive, understanding, rational, and responsible human beings. (48-49; see 227, 259)

For them, we never truly know nature itself but only our interpretations of nature. They insist that “nature” is a “socially constructed category” (259; see 7, 49). To help keep readers constantly aware of this fact, the authors always refer to “nature” in brackets (7, 49).

Whereas the Church teaches that natural law is a human participation in the divine law, the skeptical presuppositions of Salzman and Lawler seem to deny the reality of such a participation. They discuss the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s treatment of natural law in *Persona Humana*, where the Congregation asserts that

all evolution of morals and every type of life must be kept within the limits imposed by the immutable principles based upon every human person’s constitutive elements and essential relations – elements and relations which transcend historical contingency. These fundamental principles, which can be grasped by reason, are contained in “the Divine Law – eternal, objective and universal – whereby God orders, directs and governs the entire universe and all the ways of the human community, by a plan conceived in wisdom and love. Man has been made by God to participate in this law, with the result that, under the gentle disposition of Divine Providence, he can come to perceive ever increasingly the unchanging truth.” This Divine Law is accessible to our minds.<sup>6</sup>

The authors raise a specific objection to the proposition that the divine law is “accessible to our minds,” which for them “raises serious hermeneutical questions” (227). Without the divine law being accessible to our minds, however, there is no human participation in the divine law and hence no natural law.

In their view, natural law moral judgments have no objective basis in knowledge of the order of nature; such judgments are derived from socially constructed interpretations of nature. “When we derive moral obligations from ‘nature,’ we are actually deriving them from our human attention to and our interpretation of and evaluation of ‘nature’” (49). Since sociohistorical locations are different, interpretations of “nature” will vary as will judgments of moral obligation based upon “nature.” “It is, of course, inevitable that different groups of equally rational human beings may derive different interpretations of ‘nature’ and moral obligation deriving from ‘nature,’ and that any given interpretation may be wrong. That fact has been demonstrated time and again in history, including Catholic history” (49, see 227).

The authors insist that the problem of the plurality of interpretations and judgments cannot be resolved by an

appeal to the “objective” reality of nature.

What is frequently called *objective* reality by uncritical common sense is more properly called *social reality* or reality humanly invested with *social existence, meaning, and truth*. Objective knowledge is like a mythology. It is “an arbitrary construct in which a given society in a given historical situation has invested its sense of meaningfulness and value.” (53-54; quotation from Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* [New York: Doubleday, 1969], 215)

Since every interpretation of nature is socially constructed, there is no objective reality apart from the meaning given it by social actors. When there is a disagreement about the meaning of an action, “it is utterly futile to point out to committed actors the ‘objective’ meaning of the act, for the objective meaning is the meaning assigned to the act by social actors, not the naked, uninterpreted facticity of the act” (49-50).

Here we see that the authors use the term “objective” in a peculiar way. According to their usage, an interpretation of nature or a meaning assigned to nature is “objective” if it is considered to be “objective” by social actors; “the decisive criterion for the meaning of any human action, including any moral action, is the meaning assigned to it by social actors” (49). Since social and historical contexts are inevitably plural, there will a plurality of meanings and thus of what are seen as “objective truths” by various actors. The authors contend that there is an “evident plurality of objective moral judgments in the modern world” (55). “Plural meanings and truth, all of which are deemed objective by the actors who subscribe to them, derive inevitably from the plural sociohistorical perspectives that abound in the human world” (54).

With this affirmation of the inevitable plurality of “objective” interpretations of nature we find that in the *The Sexual Person* there is virtually nothing left of “natural law” apart from the name. Natural law thinking has its origins in the efforts of philosophers to distinguish between what is judged to be good or bad on the basis of social custom or local law and what is judged to be good or bad on the basis of the intrinsic nature of things. By definition, arguments based on the natural law will concern what is universal and transcultural. Since their emphasis on sociohistorical conditioning leads Salzman and Lawler to reject the very idea of universal and transcultural moral norms, it is not clear why they retain the name of natural law at all. On the one hand, they assert that they agree that “absolute ethical norms exist and that these norms dispel all possible confusion” (54, see 224). On the other hand, the only universal and absolute ethical norm that they acknowledge is the bare, abstract ethical imperative to do good and avoid evil (54-55, 224-25). Beyond that they evidently see no possibility of formulating specific norms that would apply

across cultures and ages.<sup>7</sup> “From the revisionist perspective, there are no absolute material norms of right and wrong actions because the open-endness of human freedom and the basic goods are granted their full significance” (99, see 122–23).

The root of the problem here is philosophical, an epistemology distorted by skepticism. Although the Catholic Church does not require that one adhere to any particular philosophical school, there are some philosophical positions that do not accord with the Catholic faith and so are unsuitable for Catholic theology.<sup>8</sup> An epistemology that denies to human reason the capacity to grasp the intelligibility of nature and to discern an intrinsic order to nature is too skeptical to be compatible with a Catholic understanding of the human person as created in the image of God and a created order that has come into being and is sustained in being by the eternal Logos. Pope John Paul II warned of the dangers that come with a loss of confidence in the capacity of human reason to come to knowledge of the truth.

Once the idea of a universal truth about the good, knowable by human reason, is lost, inevitably the notion of conscience also changes. Conscience is no longer considered in its primordial reality as an act of a person’s intelligence, the function of which is to apply the universal knowledge of the good in a specific situation and thus to express a judgment about the right conduct to be chosen here and now. Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly. Such an outlook is quite congenial to an individualist ethic, wherein each individual is faced with his own truth, different from the truth of others. Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature.<sup>9</sup>

It is possible and necessary both to acknowledge historical conditioning and to uphold the capacity of human reason to grasp something about the human nature that is shared by people in various ages and cultures. As Pope John Paul II explained:

It must certainly be admitted that man always exists in a particular culture, but it must also be admitted that man is not exhaustively defined by that same culture. Moreover, the very progress of cultures demonstrates that there is something in man which transcends those cultures. This “something” is precisely human nature: this nature is itself the measure of culture and the condition ensuring that man does not become the prisoner of any of his cultures, but asserts his personal dignity by living in accordance with the profound truth of his being.<sup>10</sup>

The International Theological Commission points out that concrete application of the natural law cannot be accomplished by a syllogistic deduction from abstract principles but requires knowledge of contingent realities that vary over time.<sup>11</sup> This means that the moral theologian must gather together not only the resources offered by theology and philosophy but also those provided by a wide range of disciplines, from economics to biology, that provide insight into what the natural law requires in a particular situation.<sup>12</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms: “Application of the natural law varies greatly; it can demand reflection that takes account of various conditions of life according to places, times, and circumstances.”<sup>13</sup> The *Catechism* goes on to insist, however, that the historicity of the natural law does not negate its universality. “Nevertheless, in the diversity of cultures, the natural law remains as a rule that binds men among themselves and imposes on them, beyond the inevitable differences, common principles.”<sup>14</sup>

Natural law includes an acknowledgment that we are not the ultimate creators of the moral order, that there is a moral order prior to all human creation. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche found the idea of such a preexisting order to be an intolerable limitation on absolute human creativity. In fact, however, the natural law does not impinge upon human autonomy, but is rather liberating in that it prevents us from becoming the prisoners of our cultures by providing a standpoint beyond culture, beyond what is mere convention.

Contrary to what Nietzsche believed, the natural law reveals the grandeur and not the servility of the human person. The capacity to distinguish the natural order from what is a matter of human convention, whether custom or law, presupposes a grasp of the fundamental order of creation which in turn points to the fact that human reason participates in the eternal law governing that order.

*The moral law has its origin in God and always finds its source in him;* at the same time, by virtue of natural reason, which derives from divine wisdom, it is a properly human law. Indeed, as we have seen, the natural law “is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation.” The rightful autonomy of the practical reason means that man possesses in himself his own law, received from the Creator.<sup>15</sup>

### A Dualistic View of the Human Person

Catholic tradition holds that the human person is a unity of body and soul, an embodied spirit. St. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that the soul is not the person; rather, the composite of soul and body is the person.<sup>16</sup>

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts: “spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.”<sup>17</sup> Salzman and Lawler reject the idea of a dualism of body and spirit (125, 132), yet in their moral analysis they treat the body, along with its acts, as if it were an external instrument of the spirit and not integral to the human person.

The authors’ skepticism about knowledge of the natural order contributes to this dualistic view. For them, the body and bodily acts, as part of “nature,” have no meaning that is not socially constructed. Thus they analyze the moral meaning of human acts without reference to the human body, since all that matters is the meaning assigned to bodily acts by the human spirit. They criticize the Catholic natural law tradition as grounding its moral analysis in the “physical” and “biological.” “Posing an intrinsic meaning to sexual acts on the foundational basis of physically functioning genitalia and the location of (male) orgasm prioritizes the physical and biological over the personal and relational” (64). By contrast, they claim that their revisionist approach is above all a “personalistic” approach, for it prioritizes the “personal” and the “relational.” “A personalist approach to natural law first asks questions about the *meaning* of sexual acts for human relationships before asking the biological question of genitalia or the spatial questions of where orgasm takes place” (64).

Salzman and Lawler acknowledge that in the Catholic moral tradition that “prioritizes the physical and biological over the personal and relational” concern for the personal and relational is not absent. They note that while the Catholic moral tradition affirms that bodily or “heterogenital” complementarity is a necessary condition for a moral sexual act this is not a sufficient condition (149). “Heterosexual rape and incest take place in a heterogenitally complementary way, but no one would claim they are also personally complementary” (149). In the “personalist” moral analysis of Salzman and Lawler, which they claim prioritizes the personal and relational, however, concern for the bodily dimension in fact virtually disappears. For example, they propose that homosexual acts can be justified on the basis of a personal, affective complementarity between persons of a homosexual orientation. In their view, personal complementarity is independent of bodily complementarity, and exists even when contradicted by bodily non-complementarity. The implication here is that the personal and the bodily are separable. Rather than an integral part of the human person, the human body becomes merely an instrument of the human spirit, an instrument that can be manipulated according to one’s desire.

Indeed, in this moral analysis that stresses the distinction between the physical and the personal, bodily matters, such as the “physically functioning genitalia” that are involved or the “location of (male) orgasm,” have no role. For

the authors of *The Sexual Person*, a sexual act of virtually any physical description, whether it be vaginal sex, oral sex, anal sex, or masturbation, can be justified if this act has a suitable meaning in the minds of those involved. For them, the only relevant question is whether “a particular sexual act facilitates or frustrates the partner’s human flourishing, their becoming more affectively and interpersonally human” (68, see 156). In the end, the body and its actions have no intrinsic meaning that must be honored.

## A Radical Alternative to the Tradition of Catholic Moral Theology

The authors of *The Sexual Person* present a sharp contrast between the outdated “traditionalist” moral theology, still employed by the Magisterium, and the new “revisionist” moral theology that has emerged since the Second Vatican Council. In their view, this “traditionalist” moral theology is characterized by a “classical” worldview, according to which reality is seen as “static, necessary, fixed, and universal” (2). “The method utilized, anthropology formulated, and norms taught within this worldview are timeless, universal, and immutable, and the acts condemned by these norms are always so condemned” (2). On the other hand, “revisionist” moral theology is characterized by an embrace of “historical consciousness.” In the historically conscious worldview, reality is seen as “dynamic, evolving, changing, and particular” (2). “The method utilized, anthropology formulated, and norms taught within this worldview are contingent, particular, and changeable, and the acts condemned by these norms are morally evaluated in terms of evolving human knowledge and understanding” (2).

Following the revisionist approach and its emphasis on the sociohistorical conditioning of all statements, Salzman and Lawler do not propose alternative objective and unchanging standards for moral behavior that apply universally as replacements for those of the Catholic tradition. Not only do they fault Church teaching on sexual matters for particular universal moral norms, such as those that prohibit premarital sex or homosexual acts, they fault Church teaching for offering any universal moral norms at all. In their view, moral theology—and Church teaching—should provide only general guidelines for behavior while leaving judgment concerning particular situations to individuals and their consciences.

Salzman and Lawler claim that Catholic social teaching provides a model for the kind of sexual ethics that they are advocating. “In social reality, the Magisterium does not pretend to pronounce on every last detail or to impose final decisions; it understands itself as informing and guiding believers and as leaving the final judgment and application to their faithful and responsible conscience” (8–9, see

263–64). They argue that in sexual morality, as in social morality, the Church should provide general principles not particular norms.<sup>18</sup> “Sociomoral principles are guidelines for reflection, judgment, and action, not unchanging moral imperatives based on divine, ‘natural,’ or ecclesiastical law, and demanding uncritical obedience to God, ‘nature,’ or the Church” (9). They contend that by proposing general principles and leaving open concrete conclusions Church teaching can be said to remain constant while adapting to changing sociohistorical conditions. “Principles remain constant. Judgments and actions might well change after reflection on changed sociohistorical conditions and the ongoing flow of human events illuminated by rational reflection and the data of the social sciences” (9).

Salzman and Lawler reject the idea of forming moral judgments about specific sexual acts in themselves. The traditional moral theology condemns certain acts in themselves, regardless of the particular historical context. In their view, the problem is that “the focus is on the act, not on the meaning of that act for human persons and their relationships” (92). For Salzman and Lawler, however, acts can never be morally judged as good or bad in themselves—as universal types that appear substantially the same in different cultures and ages—but only within a particular sociohistorical context, in relation to the persons who do them and their interrelationships with others. Thus they propose a “relation-centered” moral theology that judges acts based on what they mean for the persons who do them and for their relationships with other persons, as opposed to an “act-centered” moral theology that condemns certain acts in a universal way as applying to all persons in all times and places (95–96).

It should come as no surprise that after undergoing such a drastic revision there is little left of Catholic moral theology in *The Sexual Person*. The authors can offer only vague and essentially subjective guidelines for moral judgment. In their view, the judgment of a particular sexual act “is to be determined, as all moral judgments are to be determined, on the basis of its impact on human flourishing with the context of a particular interpersonal relationship,” whether or not this act “facilitates or frustrates the partners’ human flourishing, their becoming more affectively and interpersonally human and Christian” (156).

The standard offered by *The Sexual Person* is simply inadequate as a criterion for moral judgment. The inadequacy can be seen first of all in the conclusions reached. The authors approve homosexual behavior, premarital sex, contraception, and artificial insemination. The Church’s Magisterium has taught clearly and consistently that these are morally wrong. Furthermore, the inadequacy can be seen in the weakness of the standard itself, which is so vague and so subjective that it is difficult to see what sexual relationships among consenting adults could possibly be judged

immoral apart from those that are obviously abusive. It is true that setting limits to sexual behavior does not seem to be a primary concern of the authors in writing the book; they say very little about sexual behavior that cannot be morally justified. Indeed, rather than setting moral limits, the chief concern of the authors of *The Sexual Person* appears to be to provide a moral justification for sexual behaviors that are common in contemporary culture but rejected as immoral by the Church. In their attempt to provide such a justification, however, they have had to depart substantially from Catholic moral theology, leaving only vague prescriptions that do not come into conflict with contemporary culture.

## “Experience” as Primary Criterion for Moral Judgments

For Salzman and Lawler all moral decisions are radically particular, so that any attempt at drawing universally applicable norms from Scripture, natural law, or Church teaching is futile. What standard then remains for an individual faced with a moral decision in a concrete situation? Alongside the traditional theological sources of Scripture, reason, and Church tradition, the authors propose a fourth—experience (214, see also 16). Catholic moral theology has traditionally recognized the importance of experience for developing a connatural ability to discern in particular situations what is in accord with virtue. While Scripture, reason (reflecting the natural law), and Church teaching provide universal norms on certain acts one may never do morally, many other kinds of acts are morally good or bad depending on the particular circumstances. In such cases, although there are indeed universal moral norms, these must remain general to a certain degree. The moral actor must always make a prudential judgment taking into account the circumstances of a particular situation, thus mediating between the universal and the particular. The experience of moral action helps to refine one’s instinctual judgment about what is and what is not in accord with virtue.

For Salzman and Lawler, by contrast, experience is an independent source of moral knowledge that appears as a rival to Scripture, reason, and Church teaching. In fact, experience can be used as a basis for criticizing the traditional sources. In their view, traditionalist moral theologies have ignored the experiences of various people such as married couples and homosexuals and thus have not recognized how the experience of Catholics in our day has shown the falsity of their universal norms prohibiting such things as premarital sex, contraception, and homosexual behavior (73, 75, 88). By contrast, Salzman and Lawler posit experience as an authoritative source in itself and

propose a dialogue between experience and the traditional sources, rejecting what they see as “unidirectional instruction from the Bible and Christian tradition to human sexual experience” (16). They assert that their book “presents a sexual theology in which the contemporary human experience and understanding of sexuality and sexual activity are equal partners in the moral dialogue” (16).

In fact, experience turns out to be the determinative source of moral knowledge for Salzman and Lawler in matters of sexual moral theology. This seems unavoidable given their insistence that Scripture, natural law, and Church teaching have all been rendered questionable on the basis of their sociohistorical conditioning and that moral decision-making is radically particular, something that belongs to the individual in a particular circumstance, insofar as universal norms are without foundation. In the case of homosexuality, they state explicitly that experience is primary; it is “a determining source on this issue” (232).

In the dialectic between the sources of moral knowledge for morally assessing homosexual acts and relationships, experience is foundational and even primary. We concur with Farley, who notes that experience “is an important part of the content of each of the other sources, and it is always a factor in interpreting the others.” It provides a sociohistorical context for interpreting the other sources of moral knowledge, and it illuminates if, and to what extent, the sources taken individually and as a whole and the normative conclusions that they reach “make sense” and “ring true” in terms of “our deepest capacity for truth and goodness.” (232)

The sharp difference between the role of experience in traditional Catholic moral theology and that in the revisionist moral theology of *The Sexual Person* is evident. In Catholic theology, experience does not function as an independent or semi-independent basis on which to criticize the moral norms of the Scripture and Church teaching. One’s subjective experience is not an unfailing indicator of what is good and bad. Because of the effects of sin, one may experience pleasure in doing something bad and repugnance in doing something good. Moral norms should not be trimmed to fit one’s experience. Rather, truly virtuous moral experience depends on following the norms. Since the moral virtues are acquired through the repeated performance of virtuous actions, one must begin the process of acquiring a virtue as learner, by following the guidance of the authoritative sources as to what actions are truly virtuous. Once one has acquired a virtue by repeated actions in accord with such guidance, one is well-disposed toward acting virtuously in concrete situations. Harmony between one’s experience and the moral norms is the goal.

For Salzman and Lawler, however, since experience itself has become the foundational criterion, the question arises as to how one should act to acquire a virtue if the standard is one’s previous moral experience. There is a clear danger in relying on one’s personal experience in a world marred by sin to serve as a standard by which one can reject moral teaching that conflicts with that experience. The very idea of unnormed, individual experience as foundational results in a dangerous circularity, so that one’s prejudices and those of one’s culture can be simply reinforced.

There is need of a standard above one’s personal experience—provided by natural law, Scripture, and the Magisterium. Salzman and Lawler, however, explicitly reject the idea of a hierarchy among the sources of moral knowledge. “Traditionalists use a hierarchical approach to the sources of moral knowledge and tend to interpret Tradition in the narrow sense of magisterial teaching, especially as this teaching pertains to moral absolutes. Scripture, reason, and experience, in that order, are all subject to the Magisterium’s interpretation” (214). Revisionists, on the other hand, “use a dialectical approach between the four sources of moral knowledge” (214). In this approach, there is no overall authority to resolve conflicts among the sources; there can only be “dialogue.” “When there is a conflict between these sources, a process of research, dialogue, and discernment must be undertaken to determine right understanding of divine law. This is a complex and involved process, which takes time, patience, and a commitment to dialogue” (215). How conflicts are to be resolved in this revisionist approach is not at all evident. As this approach has been applied to sexual morality in *The Sexual Person*, it is always experience that has the last word.

The vagueness of this call to dialogue points again to the inadequacy of the revisionist approach. Salzman and Lawler have posited human experience as an authoritative source of moral knowledge on the same level with Scripture, natural law, and Church teaching and then discredited the latter three sources by an exaggerated appeal to historical consciousness. With contemporary experience left standing as the principal authority, it is perhaps inevitable that their positions on moral theology reject everything in Church teaching that comes into conflict with contemporary culture. This only serves to bring into sharp relief the need for standards beyond individual experience and beyond the culture of our day. It also serves to highlight the need for an ultimate authority to resolve conflicts among contemporary experience, natural law, Scripture, and Catholic tradition.

## Conclusion

Professors Lawler and Salzman present their book as a *quaestio disputata*, as an examination of a disputed question in the way of the medieval universities (4). The scholarly disputations of the Middle Ages, however, took place in a framework provided by Catholic faith, requiring a recognition of the authority of Sacred Scriptures and authoritative Church teaching and a knowledge and appreciation for the Catholic theological tradition. The authors of *The Sexual Person*, by contrast, base their arguments on a methodology that marks a radical departure from the Catholic theological tradition. Consequently, it is not surprising that they reach a whole range of conclusions that are contrary to Catholic teaching. The Committee on Doctrine wishes to make it clear that neither the methodology of *The Sexual Person* nor the conclusions that depart from authoritative Church teaching constitute authentic expressions of Catholic theology. Moreover, such conclusions, clearly in contradiction to the authentic teaching of the Church, cannot provide a true norm for moral action and in fact are harmful to one's moral and spiritual life. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, where we find a genuine systematic presentation of the faith, we look for that wisdom that reflects the words of everlasting life.

The issues treated in *The Sexual Person* are indeed vital matters for the life of the Church in our time. They should be thoroughly studied and discussed by theologians as part of their service to the Church and to society. The efforts of theologians, however, can only bear fruit if they are in fact carried on within a hermeneutic of continuity and in the framework provided by the Catholic theological tradition and the teaching of the Church. New presentations of the truth of Catholic moral teaching are needed today, but the proposal contained in *The Sexual Person* is seriously flawed and falls short of the goal of theological investigation, *fides querens intellectum*. ♫

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Elden F. Curtiss, "Archbishop Clarifies Catholic Teaching," *The Catholic Voice* (2 Nov. 2007), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *On the Relationship between Faith and Reason (Fides et Ratio)* ([www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0216/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0216/_INDEX.HTM)), no. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)* ([www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)), no. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics (Persona Humana)* ([www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19751229\\_persona-humana\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19751229_persona-humana_en.html)), no. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Salzman and Lawler are not entirely consistent in that they employ at

least one argument that depends on the natural law in its structure and that seems to propose universal norms concerning specific acts when they argue that it is unnatural and immoral for heterosexuals to engage in homosexual behavior and for homosexuals to engage in heterosexual behavior (67, 168, 233).

<sup>8</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *On the Relationship between Faith and Reason (Fides et Ratio)*, no. 49: "The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others." <sup>9</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching (Veritatis Splendor)* ([www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0222/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0222/_INDEX.HTM)), no. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., no. 53.

<sup>11</sup> International Theological Commission, *The Search for Universal Ethics: A New Look at Natural Law* ([www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_index.htm)), nos. 53–54.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ([www.usccb.org/catechism/text/](http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/)), no. 1957.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching (Veritatis Splendor)*, no. 40.

<sup>16</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae I*, q. 75, a. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 365.

<sup>18</sup> It is true that Catholic social teaching is usually framed in terms of general principles that positively prescribe certain kinds of actions rather than negatively proscribe specific actions. Catholic social teaching, however, does not exist separated from the whole of Catholic moral theology, but rather deals with a particular subject matter within that whole. Its general positive principles are not unconnected to negative precepts prohibiting particular actions found elsewhere in Catholic moral teaching, but rather presuppose them. For example, the pursuit of social goals such as promoting justice within society, increasing solidarity among nations, and coming to the aid of the poor presupposes basic negative norms such as those against deliberately killing the innocent, stealing, or bearing false witness.

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# To Number Our Days Aright

By Bishop Thomas J. Tobin

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*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart (Ps 90:12)*

**I**wonder . . . will it be many years from now, or in the near future? Will it occur at home, in a hospital or in some other public place? Who will be with me when my heart stops beating, or will I die alone? In which season will I die, and what time of the day will it be? What will be the specific cause of my death? Will it be sudden or predictable? Will it be peaceful or painful?

Of course I don't have the answer to any of these questions. The circumstances of my death are known to God alone, and I trust completely in His infallible decision-making ability. And please be assured, dear reader, that in reflecting upon these questions I do so not with a morbid, frightened spirit, but peacefully, more from a sense of spiritual curiosity than anything else.

I remember hearing that in the Middle Ages monks kept a human skull on their desk as a constant reminder of their mortality. Now, though you might not want to employ that particular technique, and while you might not prefer to dwell on the specific details of your death, I do think it's helpful and healthy to remember that indeed, someday, you will die.

The Scripture passage referenced above is really insightful; it's one of the most provocative verses of the Bible. If we number our days aright – in other words, if we recall that we are mortal and that our time on earth is limited – we gain true wisdom. There are two particular lessons we can take from our close encounter with mortality.

The first is to recall that someday we will be held accountable for the conduct of our lives on earth, and that the inescapability of that judgment should motivate us to lead good and holy lives. Think about Jesus's description of the Last Judgment found in St. Matthew's Gospel, when the Lord will separate the sheep from the goats. (Hm . . . which group will you be in?) And recall, too, that St. Paul taught that "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; each one of us will have to give an account of himself before God" (Rom 14:10, 12).

It seems that there's something in human nature that makes us behave differently when we know that we'll be held accountable. In the classroom we study a bit harder when final exams are approaching. On the highway, we

watch our speed when we spot the cruiser parked alongside the road.

The same is true, or should be, of our moral, spiritual lives. If we recall that someday we'll stand directly before God, one-on-one, and answer for our time on earth, doesn't it change the way we behave? Shouldn't we spend more time cultivating our knowledge and love of the Lord in prayer and worship? Shouldn't we be more determined to keep the Commandments, trying to avoid temptation and sin in our lives? Shouldn't we try harder to love one another, to treat one another as brothers and sisters in the human family, to be a bit more understanding, gentle, patient, kind, generous, and forgiving with one another?

It just seems to me that if we kept the reality of our final judgment before us all the time, everyday, the depth of our spirituality and quality of our moral lives would grow exponentially.

The second lesson we can learn from the reality of mortality is the need to keep a sense of perspective about the trials and tribulations of everyday life and not to spend too much time worrying about things that really don't matter.

When I walk around my cemetery for exercise and prayer I think about that a lot. Each one of the hundreds, the thousands of people buried around me had some problems and difficulties in their daily lives, each one knew moments of sadness and sorrow, defeat and discouragement. And yet their time on earth was so brief, and now they're gone. It's always my hope and prayer that the good folks buried in the sacred ground of our cemetery had holy and peaceful lives, that they enjoyed life, and that they didn't waste too much time chasing after material things and fretting over the little anxieties and problems they encountered.

It's not to say that we can casually discount the importance of our time on earth, or irresponsibly ignore the challenges and problems that come our way. But it is to say that we need to keep some perspective, that in the bright light of eternity the problems and worries of today just might not be quite as traumatic as they seem at the moment.

During the month of November especially, we reflect upon the lives of the saints in heaven, and pray for the poor souls in purgatory. Let's remember that someday, maybe someday soon, you and I will be included in that number. That thought shouldn't frighten us at all, but in fact it should help our earthly pilgrimage to be productive and peaceful. ♣

# The Pope, Condoms and the “Banalization of Sexuality”—Sorting through the Questions

By Robert L. Fastagi  
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## The Initial News Reports

**O**n the weekend of November 20–21, 2010, the news spread quickly. On Saturday, November 20, the Vatican newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, carried some excerpts of a soon to be published book, *Light of the World*, which records an extended interview between Pope Benedict and the German journalist, Dr. Peter Seewald. One of the excerpts contained some brief remarks of the Holy Father touching on the issue of using condoms to help curtail the spread of AIDS. The cited comments were a portion of some longer ones given by Pope Benedict on the subject in *Light of the World*. The context was the recollection of the Pontiff’s remarks on his way to Africa in March, 2009 in which he reaffirmed the Church’s conviction that the spread of AIDS could only be overcome by “a humanization of sexuality” not the distribution of condoms. Dr. Seewald then noted that some critics believe “it is madness to forbid a high-risk population to use condoms.” The Holy Father replied:

“There may be a basis in the case of some individuals, as perhaps when a male prostitute uses a condom, where this can be a first step in the direction of a moralization, a first assumption of responsibility, on the way toward recovering an awareness that not everything is allowed and that one cannot do whatever one wants. But it is not really the way to deal with the evil of HIV infection. That can really lie only in a humanization of sexuality.”

The next question followed: “Are you saying, then, that the Catholic Church is actually not opposed in principle to the use of condoms?” Pope Benedict responded:

“She of course does not regard it as a real or moral solution, but, in this or that case, there can be nonetheless, in the intention of reducing the risk of infection,

a first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality.”

These brief comments generated some extreme headlines. “In Rare Cases, the Pope Justifies the Use of Condoms,” said the *New York Times*, which also claimed that “Pope Benedict XVI has said condom use can be justified in some cases to help stop the spread of AIDS.”<sup>2</sup> A *CNN Report* headline for Nov. 20 proclaimed: “Pope Approves Use of Condoms in Fight Against AIDS,” and, in similar fashion, the *Telegraph* in the United Kingdom reported, “The Pope Drops Catholic Ban on Condoms in Historic Shift.”<sup>3</sup> Taking these headlines at face value, *Yahoo News* soon noted that, “AIDS Campaigners Welcome Pope’s U-Turn on Condoms.”<sup>4</sup>

Within 24 hours the Holy See recognized the need for a clarification. In a statement issued on Sunday, November 21, 2010, Fr. Federico Lombardi, S.J., the director of the Holy See’s Press Office, emphasized that, “the Pope is not reforming or changing the teaching of the Church, but reaffirming it, placing it in the perspective of the value and dignity of human sexuality as an expression of love and responsibility.” He then noted that the Holy Father makes it clear that “we cannot solve the [AIDS] problem by distributing condoms,” and “the sheer fixation on the condom implies a banalization of sexuality.” He also reiterated the fact that the Church “does not regard [the use of condoms] as an authentic and moral solution.”

Many sources, though, claimed that Pope Benedict’s words signaled a change in Church teaching.<sup>5</sup> The *New York Times* spoke of “the Vatican’s first exception to a long-held policy banning contraceptives.”<sup>6</sup> CNN’s Senior Vatican analyst, John Allen, stated that the *Light of the World* shows that “the pontiff has flexibility in the church’s opposition to birth control,” and he thought the Pope was making the point that “when somebody is using a condom … to prevent the transmission of a disease then it would be OK.”<sup>7</sup> The often-cited Catholic journalist, Rev. James Martin, S.J. spoke of Pope

Benedict's comments as "a game-changer," and he added that "by acknowledging that condoms help prevent the spread of HIV between people, the pope has completely changed the Catholic discussion on condoms."<sup>8</sup>

In reaction to the alarming headlines and dubious assertions of the Press, a number of Catholic theologians tried to set the record straight. Fr. Joseph Fessio, S.J., the publisher of the English edition of *Light of the World*, made it clear that the Pope did not "justify" the use of condoms at all, and he noted that some of the confusion was due to problems in the Italian translation of the book.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Janet E. Smith pointed out that a proper reading of the Holy Father's comments reveals that "he does not in any way think the use of condoms is part of the solution to reducing the risk of AIDS."<sup>10</sup>

## The November 23, 2010 Presentation of *Light of the World* and the Subsequent Comments of Fr. Lombardi

**O**n Tuesday, November 23, 2010, there was a formal presentation of the book, *Light of the World*, with speeches given by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization and the Italian journalist, Dr. Luigi Accattoli. Following the two speeches, Fr. Lombardi answered questions from the Press. One of them inquired whether there was a major difference between the Italian translation of the Pope's remarks in *Light of the World* as referring to a female prostitute (*una prostituta*) in contrast to a male prostitute as in the original German (*ein Prostituierter*). Fr. Lombardi responded:

I asked the Pope if there was a serious problem with the choice of the masculine rather than the feminine ... He told me no. The point — and for this reason I did not make any reference to you [about this] in Sunday's statement — is the first step in taking into account the risk to the life of another with whom I am in relation. This is the same whether it deals with a man or a woman or a transsexual.<sup>11</sup>

Fr. Lombardi's simple reply led to a flood of exaggerated headlines. On November 23, MSNBC [online] reported in bold letters: "Pope: Condoms OK for Women with HIV too." The same day the headline for *USA Today* proclaimed: "Vatican: Everyone Can Use Condoms To Prevent HIV." Special interest groups

soon began to exploit the misinformation for their own ends. Jon O'Brien, the president of the abortion rights group, "Catholics for Choice," issued a statement in which he claimed that conservatives are now "left clutching at straws." He went on to say that: "One can only hope that [the conservatives] will embrace this new position and advocate for condom use whenever necessary;" and he added: "organizations that have been hesitant to provide condoms to those living with HIV and AIDS must move immediately to put this new teaching into action."<sup>12</sup>

## Sorting through the Questions

**T**he dissonance between what Pope Benedict XVI actually said and what the Press claims he said is startling. This why Bishop Samuel Aquila of Fargo, North Dakota issued a statement in which he urged the faithful and all people of good will to "read the entire book" of the Pope. He went on to say: "Do not depend on the media for your understanding of what Pope Benedict states; rather go to the source in order to find the truth and not someone's misunderstanding and false interpretation of what was actually stated."<sup>13</sup>

In what follows, I will try to sort out the different questions that have arisen in wake of the Holy Father's comments about condoms and the HIV problem in *Light of the World*. I will try to offer some brief comments on each issue.

### 1). Has the Pope approved the use of condoms as a means for the prevention of the spread of AIDS?

The answer here is no. The Holy Father specifically says the use of the condom "is not really the way to deal with the evil of HIV infection," and he makes it clear that the Church "does not regard it [the condom] as a real or moral solution." When asked: "Is [the Pope] saying that in some cases condoms can be permitted?" Cardinal Raymond Burke, the prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, replied: "No, he's not. I don't see any change in the Church's teaching ... in fact he makes the statement very clearly that the Church does not regard the use of condoms as a real or moral solution."<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Fr. Fessio observed: "In sum, the Pope did not 'justify' condom use in *any* circumstances. And Church teaching remains the same as it has always been — both before and after the Pope's statements."<sup>15</sup>

2). If the Pope did not approve the use of condoms as a general policy, did he not indicate that it could sometimes be used as the “lesser evil” in particular cases: for example, with prostitutes?

The Pope did not actually approve or justify the use of condoms by prostitutes. Some have claimed that he regarded condom use by prostitutes as the “lesser evil,” but he never refers to condoms in such terms nor does he justify their use. In other words, Pope Benedict was not *recommending* that prostitutes use condoms to help prevent the spread of the HIV virus. It would be incongruous for him to recommend something he does not consider a “real or moral solution.” In the example of the prostitute using a condom, the Holy Father was merely *recognizing* that using a condom “can be a first step in the direction of a moralization.” The Pope was speaking here as a pastor of souls who understands that even those engaged in evil sometimes show signs of moral sensitivity and movements toward conversion. Janet Smith gives the example of bank robbers using guns without bullets and Fr. Fessio speaks of muggers using padded pipes to reduce injuries. *Recognizing* some diminished evil in such choices is not the same as *recommending* robbing banks with blank bullets or mugging people with padded pipes. Even if criminals take steps to lessen the harm they do, their robbing banks and mugging people remain moral evils. Similar examples can likewise be provided. For example a man who engages in pre-marital sex might decide to limit himself to sex only with women he would offer to marry if pregnancy occurs. This might be a first step in the direction of a moralization but this does not mean the Church can approve of his fornication. Likewise, a Catholic cohabiting couple might decide to marry in a civil ceremony after the birth of their first child. The Church can recognize in this decision a moral awareness, but this does not mean she can approve of Catholics uniting in civil rather than sacramental marriages. In a similar way, the Holy Father recognizes that a prostitute using a condom to help reduce the spread of HIV infection might, on a subjective level, be making a first step toward moral conversion. Ultimately, the Church would hope for the prostitute to give up the evil of prostitution and live in a chaste manner. As the Bishops of Kenya note: “The Holy Father brings out an important point, that even those who find themselves deeply entrenched in immoral life, can gradually journey towards a conversion, and acceptance of God’s laws.”<sup>16</sup>

3) Some people think it was significant the Pope said there was no difference whether the prostitute was male or female. Does this acknowledgement by the Pope really matter?

With a female prostitute there are the added dimensions of the condom operating as a contraceptive in addition to it serving as an intended means for reducing the spread of HIV infection. In the case of a male prostitute, conception is impossible so the condom cannot be intended as a contraceptive means. The acknowledgement by the Holy Father would only matter if he were actually approving the use of condoms by prostitutes. Then it could be said that he was approving the use of a condom, which, in the case of female prostitutes, acts as both a contraceptive and a means for reducing the spread of HIV. As explained above, however, the Holy Father was *not* approving the use of condoms by prostitutes, whether male or female. He was merely observing that in the intention of the prostitute to reduce the risk of infection there is a possible “first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality.” As Fr. Lombardi explained on November 23, this point is the same whether it was a case of a female prostitute, a male prostitute or a “transsexual.”

4) Some Catholics, including bishops, seem to be open to a limited use of the condom, not as an intended contraceptive, but as a means for reducing the spread of AIDS. Has the Pope distanced himself from this view?

The Church has yet to make an absolute definitive pronouncement in this regard, but the clear consensus of Catholic leaders, including Pope Benedict, is one of strong opposition to condom use as a general policy to prevent the spread of AIDS.<sup>17</sup> In the last decade, statements by the Southern African Bishops Conference, the Indian Bishops Conference, the Pontifical Academy for Life, and the Pontifical Council for the Family have all rejected condom use as an effective means for combating the spread of AIDS. There are several reasons for this position.

First, from a purely medical point of view, condoms only reduce rather than eliminate the risk of infection. Even groups that promote condoms to overcome the spread of HIV admit that they only have an effectiveness rate of 69–90%.<sup>18</sup> In cases of men having anal sex with men, failure rates have been reported at 16.6%.<sup>19</sup> The AIDS virus is roughly 450 times smaller than the

spermatozoon [the sperm cell] and some believe it can, at times, pass through the latex of the condom.<sup>20</sup> Based on objective research, some leading scientists and bioethicists have come to defend Pope Benedict XVI's conviction that condoms are not the solution to the spread of AIDS.<sup>21</sup> Campaigns promoting condom use are dangerous because they increase promiscuity and give condom users a false sense of security.<sup>22</sup> In his June 10, 2005 speech to visiting bishops from five African countries, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his deep concern "over the devastation caused by AIDS and related diseases." The Holy Father, however, noted that, "the traditional teaching of the Church has proven to be the only failsafe way to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS."

Statistics support the wisdom of the Church's policy. An abstinence-based program in Uganda reduced the AIDS infection rate from 29% to 4% in ten years while a condom campaign in Botswana led to an increase of HIV infection (from 27% to 45%) among urban pregnant women.<sup>23</sup> If condoms have a 10-15% failure rate in preventing pregnancy,<sup>24</sup> it only stands to reason that they can fail to stop the HIV virus. Leakage rates of condoms can range from 0.9% to 22.8%.<sup>25</sup> A woman can get pregnant only during a limited time (5-8 days) of her fertility cycle, while HIV can be transmitted at any time of the same cycle. This is why the First Lady of Kenya, Lucy Kibaki, in a May, 2006 speech given to Kenyan schoolgirls, lamented how the promotion of condom use was increasing the spread of AIDS in Kenya and other African countries.<sup>26</sup>

**5) Some Catholic theologians and bishops seem to be open to the use of the condom in the case of spouses affected with the HIV virus. Has the Pope accepted or condemned their view?**

**N**othing Pope Benedict has said manifests support for this view even if he has not explicitly or formally condemned it. Several years ago, this issue received a significant amount of media attention. In an April 21, 2006 interview, which appeared in the Italian weekly, *L'espresso*, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini (the retired Archbishop of Milan) stated that the use of condoms could be justified as "a lesser evil" (*un male minore*) in a marriage when one of the spouses is infected with AIDS. Several other Catholic leaders, including Cardinal Godfried Daneels of Belgium, have made similar statements, and Fr. Martin Rhonheimer of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome has defended possible condom use from a slightly different

perspective.<sup>27</sup> The basic argument, though, is that the use of the condom to prevent the spread of the HIV virus is not contraception because the condom is intended as a means for protecting against the spread of infection rather than as a means for hindering procreation.

Janet E. Smith has provided a detailed and compelling refutation of this argument.<sup>28</sup> When a condom is used, the marital act is deprived of its unitive and procreative orientations. Even if there is known sterility, marital acts are still procreative in type even if they are not procreative in effect. Moreover, the use of the condom frustrates the natural unitive dimension of the conjugal act, which requires insemination in the vagina. This is why some canonists question whether a marriage is truly consummated when a condom is used.<sup>29</sup> The intended use of the condom as protection from the spread of the HIV infection does not change the moral object of using a condom, which, by its nature, frustrates the unitive and procreative ends of the marital act. According to Catholic moral doctrine, each and every marital act must remain "ordered *per se* to the procreation of human life" (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2366, and Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* [HV], no. 11). Such intrinsic ordering is absent in sexual relations using a condom. Furthermore, Paul VI specifically rejected an appeal to the principle of "the lesser evil" as justification for contraceptive sexual acts (cf. *Humanae Vitae*, 14).

Apart from the contraceptive character of the condom, there is also the medical danger of spreading the HIV virus. If a husband were infected with the HIV virus, would he really wish to put his wife at risk of being infected? As noted above, even scientists who support condoms to reduce the spread of HIV admit that they cannot guarantee against infection.

**Concluding Remarks: the Holy Father's Warnings about "the Banalization of Sexuality" In Light of the World.**

**P**ope Benedict warns that: "the sheer fixation on condoms implies a banalization of sexuality, which, after all, is precisely the dangerous source of the attitude of no longer seeing sexuality as the expression of love, but only a sort of drug that people administer to themselves." At the heart of the Holy Father's message is the appeal for a true "humanization of sexuality" based on faithful, monogamous marriage open to procreation. As a young theology professor, the Holy Father lived through the tumultuous days of the 1960s and 70s when the sexual revolution was in full

bloom. He knows first hand the harmful social and personal effects engendered by “the banalization of sexuality.” This is why he believes that “the sheer fixation on the condom” is really part of the problem not the solution to the terrible spread of AIDS. As the Bishops of Kenya observe, it is only “a true change of heart or conversion that will give sexuality its human and even supernatural value.”<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, many people think the mere distribution of condoms is the solution to the tragic pandemic of AIDS. This is really a simplistic solution akin to those who address teenage pregnancy by simply handing out contraceptives. The true “humanization of sexuality” requires the hard work of conversion and life-style changes. Sadly, the reactions of the Press to the excerpts of *Light of the World* seem to reveal the very “fixation on condoms” and the “banalization of sexuality” that Pope Benedict wishes to overcome.<sup>31</sup> ♦

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Robert L. Fastiggi, Ph.D. is Professor of Systematic Theology at Sacred Major Seminary in Detroit, MI. He is the author of *What the Church Teaches about Sex: God's Plan for Human Happiness* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2009) and a member of the John Paul II Bioethics Commission, [www.johnpaulbioethics.org](http://www.johnpaulbioethics.org). He wishes to thank David M. Hargroder, M.D. and Augustine L. Perrotta, D.O. of this Commission for supplying some medical references.
- 2 Rachel Donadio and Laurie Goldstein, “In Rare Cases, Pope Justifies Use of Condoms,” *New York Times* [on-line edition], November 20, 2010.
- 3 Jonathan Wynne-Jones, “Pope drops Catholic ban on condoms in historic shift,” *Telegraph UK* [on-line], November 20, 2010.
- 4 “AIDS campaigners welcome pope’s u-turn on condoms, *Yahoo News UK & Ireland*, November 21, 2010.
- 5 Hardly any journalists revealed an understanding that the comments made by Pope Benedict in *Light of the World* were not an exercise of the official papal Magisterium.
- 6 Donadio and Goldstein, *New York Times* [on-line edition], November 20, 2010.
- 7 “Pope says condoms may be OK in some circumstances,” *CNN Belief Blog* [on-line], November 20, 2010.
- 8 Victoria L. Simpson and Nicole Winfield, “Vatican shifts ground on condoms, HIV, conception,” *Associated Press* [on-line], November 23, 2010.
- 9 Fr. Joseph Fessio, S.J., “Guestview: Did the Pope ‘justify’ condom use in some circumstances?” *Reuters* [on-line edition], November 23, 2010. Fr. Fessio notes that the German word, “*begründete*,” which means “some basis for” was translated into Italian “one-sidedly” as “*giustificati*” = justified.” Fr. Fessio points out that the Pope was not “justifying” the use of the condom in the case of male prostitutes, he was merely observing that the use of a condom by the prostitute “can be a first step in the direction of moralization.”
- 10 Janet E. Smith, “What does the Holy Father really say about condoms in the new book?” *Ignatius Insight Scoop*, November 21, 2010; Dr. Smith comments were reproduced, in whole or in part, on many other on-line sites; a segment of them appeared in print form in *Our Sunday Visitor* (December 5, 2010), 14.
- 11 “Papa/Vaticano: Su condom indifferente ‘prostituto’ o ‘prostituta,’” Città del Vaticano, 23 nov. [2010], *Apcom* [Italian News Agency]. My translation of the Italian report which reads: “Ho chiesto al Papa se c’era problema serio di scelta nel maschile piuttosto che nel femminile”, ha spiegato Lombardi nella conferenza stampa di presentazione del volume, “Lui mi ha detto di no”. “Il punto – e per questo non vi ho fatto alcun riferimento nella nota di domenica – è il primo passo di responsabilità nel tenere conto del rischio della vita dell’altro con cui io sono in rapporto. Se si tratta di un uomo o di una donna o di un transessuale è lo stesso”.
- 12 “Pope’s Clarification Reveals Significance of Condom Statement,” Press Release of November 23, 2010 found on: <http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/popesclarification.asp>. [Accessed Nov. 27, 2010].
- 13 “Bishop: Read the Pope’s Condom Comments; Urges Faithful to Go to the Source, Not to Trust the Media,” *Zenit*, November 22, 2010.
- 14 John Burger, “Cardinal Burke: What the Pope really Meant,” *National Catholic Register: Daily News* [on-line], November 23, 2010.
- 15 Fr. Joseph Fessio, S.J. in *Reuters*, November 23, 2010.
- 16 Kenya Episcopal Conference, “Statement on Pope Benedict XVI Remarks on Condoms,” 1 December, 2010, no. 9: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201012010599.html>
- 17 Judging from what Pope Benedict himself says in *Light of the World*, it is clear that he does not believe we can solve the problem of AIDS “by distributing condoms.” In the formal presentation of November 23, 2010, however, Dr. Luigi Accattoli claimed that, “[the Holy Father] with caution and courage searches for a pragmatic way by which missionaries and other ecclesial workers can help to overcome the AIDS epidemic without approving but also without excluding – in particular cases – the use of the condom (169ff).” My translation of the Italian which reads: “Cerca con cautela e coraggio una via pragmatica attraverso cui i missionari e altri operatori ecclesiasti possano aiutare a vincere la pandemia dell’aidis senza approvarla ma anche senza escludere—in casi particolari—l’uso del profilattico (169ss).” In spite of this claim, there is no evidence that the Pope actually believes there are “particular cases” in which the use of condoms can be morally justified.
- 18 UNAIDS/04.32 English original (June, 2004). See also *AMFAR AIDS Research Issue Brief 1* (Jan. 2005) in which it is stated that, when used correctly, condoms have an effectiveness of 80-95% of preventing HIV infection. Of course, many times the condoms are not used correctly due to human factors.
- 19 See Elizabeth Stone et al. “Correlates of Condom Failure in a Sexually Active Cohort of Men Who Have Sex with Men,” *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency and Human Retrovirology* Vol. 20(5), 15 April 1999, pp. 495-501. There is a difference between failure rates (due to breakage, slippage, etc.) and effectiveness rates, which are influenced by many human factors such as unplanned sexual encounters, etc.
- 20 Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo (1935-2008) who served as the president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, once described campaigns promoting condom use as playing “Russian roulette” with AIDS: “Cardinal López Trujillo on Ineffectiveness of Condoms to Curb AIDS,” Interview in *Zenit*, November 11, 2003. While this statement was disputed by some scientists, they admitted the Cardinal’s comparison of the size of the HIV virus to a spermatozoon was correct: see “Condoms: The Science,” *BBC News* [on-line] June 24, 2004. The dispute is whether the rate of condom ineffectiveness is due to the ability of the HIV virus to pass through the latex of the condom or other factors such as improper use, poor quality, tearing, slippage, etc.
- 21 After Pope Benedict XVI’s comments made on his way to Africa in March, 2009, Dr. Edward C. Green, a senior research scientist at the Harvard School of Public Health, published an article in the March 29, 2009 issue of *The Washington Post* entitled “The Pope May Be Right.” In Italy, Dr. Renzo Puccetti, a specialist in internal medicine, and Dr. Cesare Cavoni, a bioethicist, co-authored a book, *Il Papa ha ragione! L’Aids non si ferma con il condom* [The Pope is right! AIDS is not stopped with the condom] (Verona, Italia: Fede e Cultura, 2009). See also, “Authors Say Pope is Right about Condoms and AIDS,” *Zenit* Oct. 9, 2009.
- 22 See Brian Clowes, Ph.D., “Case Against Condoms: Death by Latex” avail-

- able on the website of Human Life International: <http://www.hli.org/index.php/the-case-against-condoms/320?task=view>
- <sup>23</sup> See Fr. Thomas D. Williams, "Idle Speculation: AIDS, Condoms and the Catholic Church," *National Review* [online] May 17, 2006 and also Clowes, "Case Against Condoms."
- <sup>24</sup> Cf. Clowes, "Case Against Condoms;" and also "Cardinal Lópes Trujillo Interview in *Zenit*, November 11, 2003; see also *Up To Date* 18.3 (September, 2010) which notes that "about 15% of women will get pregnant during first year of typical use" [of the condom].
- <sup>25</sup> B. Voeller et al., "Viral Leakage Risk Differences in Latex Condoms," *AIDS Res. Hum. Retroviruses* 1994 June 10(6): 701-710.
- <sup>26</sup> Peter Smith, "Kenya First Lady: Condom 'is causing the spread of AIDS in this country,'" LIFESITENEWS.COM (May 23, 2006).
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. Benedict Guevin and Martin Rhonheimer, "On the Use of Condoms to Prevent Acquired Immune Deficiency," *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 5:1 (Spring 2005), 37-48.
- <sup>28</sup> Janet E. Smith, "The Morality of Condom Use by HIV-Infected Spouses," *The Thomist* 70:1 (January, 2006), 27-69.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 45-48.
- <sup>30</sup> Kenya Episcopal Conference, "Statement on Pope Benedict XVI Remarks on Condoms," 1 December, 2010, no. 7.
- <sup>31</sup> After this article was written, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a "Note on the banalization of sexuality: Regarding certain interpretations of 'Light of the World'" in the December 22, 2010 issue of L'Osservatore Romano (p. 7). I believe all my observations in this present article harmonize with the CDF's "Note."

## Properties of a Lover by Thomas More

Prepared by Russell Shaw

In 1510 Thomas More—lawyer, humanist, family man—published his first book. *The Life of Pico della Mirandola* concerns an internationally known Italian humanist who had died sixteen years before at the age of 31. More's book, reworking a worshipful biography by Pico's nephew, takes an ambivalent, subtly ironic view of its central figure, whom More's great-grandnephew John Donne called "a man of incontinent wit, and subject to the concupiscence of inaccessible knowledge."

Scepter Publishers ([www.scepterpublishers.org](http://www.scepterpublishers.org)) has now issued a modern English version of this work—the first in 500 years—prepared by author and Fellowship member Russell Shaw, with an introduction by More scholar Dr. Gerard Wegemer, Director of the Center for Thomas More Studies at the University of Dallas.

Along with a biographical sketch, letters, and a Scripture commentary, *The Life of Pico della Mirandola* contains a group of poems. The final set, entitled "The Twelve Properties or Conditions of a Lover" and almost entirely by More, likens human love to love of God, and, by way of implied criticism, presents a profile of a generous character quite unlike that of Pico della Mirandola. Here are six of the poems.

Above all things on earth the perfect lover  
Unceasingly does wish and long to hear  
All things that do give rise to praise and honor—  
Indeed, that spread the fame both far and wide—

Of his dear love. No wise can he endure  
To hear some other tune that would o'erride  
Or contradict such melody as this.

So also ought God's lover always wish  
To hear the honor, worship, laud, and praise  
Of Him Whose goodness none can fully tell,  
Whom hell and earth and heaven above obey.  
And never should God's perfect lover suffer  
The cursed words of blasphemy to pass  
Nor aught irreverent of God be said.



The perfect lover has no slightest doubt  
About the one his heart is set upon:  
He's sure that in his love no one will find  
Aught other than what's worthy, excellent  
And fair, surpassing far in his esteem  
All others he has known by sight or name;  
And would that all would think as he!

And so of God, most wonderful and high:  
His lover ought in all things value Him,  
Ought honor Him—adore, give glory, praise—  
That everything created in this world  
May shrink to nothing by comparison;  
And gladdened ought God's lover be to learn  
Some way to make the whole world share his mind.



A lover's countenance is deathly pale,  
His sleepless eyes do smolder in his head,  
No stomach does he have for meat or wine,  
And what men say of him he reckons not.  
Eat, drink, lie down, sit up, or walk are all  
The same, for like a fire in his heart  
Desire's flames are raging in his breast.

See here a model for God's lover:  
To keep God constantly in mind,  
To meditate on Him and ever pray,  
While others play and revel, sing and dance.  
No earthly joy, pastime, or foolish sport  
Should coax or turn aside his ardent mind  
From dwelling upon God, his heavenly love.



A lover's heart is swept by winds of passion:  
Now easeful hope, now dread and grievous fear,  
Now perfect bliss, now bitter sorrow's sting.  
And be the loved one near or far away,  
Oft will the tears come coursing from his eyes—  
For perfect joy when they two be together,  
For pain and sorrow when they be apart.

Like feelings stirred by prayer and meditation  
Well up within the breast of one who loves  
The Lord: for when in loving contemplation  
His happiness o'erflows, then too do spring  
The happy tears of joy and fond delight;  
And when his Love does purpose to depart,  
Again he weeps, though now for pain and woe.



The perfect lover will his love obey.  
His joy it is and his desire fulfilled  
To put himself to pain what way he must  
In serving, day and night with diligence,  
That one on whom his tender heart is set  
For love alone, not giving any thought  
To profit or requital or reward.

So also you whose heart is upward turned  
Unto our God: take care that you exert  
Yourself with diligence, so no least thing  
Distract you ever from His faithful service.  
And see that you do render service freely,  
Not bound to Him by hope of gain, but by  
A faithful heart and loving mind alone.



Three things may lead a man to serve unpaid:  
First that he find the work itself reward;  
The second that the ones he serves and loves  
Be very lovable and good themselves;  
Third, that 'tis only reasonable for us—  
With no repining or resentment, mind you—  
To serve those who have first done us great good.

Serve God for love, then, not for hope of pay.  
What happier service could you ever wish  
Than service whose performance is your good?  
And who so kind, so lovely as is He  
Who such great things e'er now for you has done—  
First making you, and then upon the cross  
Redeeming you with His own precious blood?



# Cultural Identity

By Jude P. Dougherty

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When Samuel P. Huntington published *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, in spite of his sterling credentials as a political scientist, the book was largely denigrated by the political left.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it met with overt hostility within the academy, within liberal opinion circles, and in many overseas capitals. Angela Merkel has now been obliged to acknowledge something that many foresaw decades ago, “*Multikulti* cannot work for Germany.” The dream of a multicultural society, of peoples of radically different cultural backgrounds living side by side and enjoying each other’s company has been found to be ephemeral. What Merkel finds true of Germany is true of France and Belgium and in varying degrees of Europe as a whole. The sales of Thilo Sarrazin’s *Germany Does Away with Itself*, over a hundred thousand copies sold to date, attests to a popular recognition that immigration policy must be reversed. It has become clear that Germany cannot absorb a massive influx of people who do not know the language, who refuse to assimilate, and who demand accommodation in the law for their native customs and legal practice. Sarrazin makes the case that German culture, indeed European culture, is being dragged down by untrammelleed immigration from the Middle East and North Africa.

Charles A. Murray, in promoting his book, *Human Accomplishment*,<sup>2</sup> proclaimed, “I write at a time when Europe’s run appears to be over. Bleaker yet, there is reason to wonder whether European culture as we have known it will continue to exist at the end of this century.” Among those who track the present economic and social turmoil on both sides of the Atlantic, few are likely to deny a gradual shifting of economic power to East Asia or fail to acknowledge the increasing hostility of the Islamic world to the West. Harvard Professor, Niall Ferguson writes, “What we are living through now is the end of five hundred years of Western predominance.”<sup>3</sup> We ask ourselves, how account for what many see as Western civilization in decline.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Germany and France were reeling from the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic years,

Wolfgang Goethe (1748–1832), like his friend Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), in the romantic idiom of their day, spoke of a distinctive German character. They became friends when both were living at the time in the German capital of a French province. The unification of the German principalities under Bismarck was yet to come. The common experience of Goethe and Herder in Strasbourg drove home to them the difference between French and German culture. Goethe early on became convinced that all culture emerges from the soul of a people, that is, from its ancestral and popular traditions. It is the nation, he held, that permits the blossoming of genius, for true creative forces are collective. Yet even the young Goethe had a sense of the fragility of culture. Seeking to complete his studies in law, he proposed to the Faculty of Law at Strasbourg a doctoral dissertation topic, “The Power of the Legislature to Determine Religion and Culture.” One of his minor theses, “Natural law is what nature teaches all animals,” was judged *simpliste*, and the dissertation proposal as a whole was rejected. Goethe left Strasbourg without completely abandoning law to become Germany’s most celebrated poet and a physicist of some merit.<sup>4</sup> Having experienced first hand the French Revolution and the social upheaval of the Napoleonic period, Goethe was convinced that nations differ in significant ways and, like Herder, wrote to promote a self-conscious German identity, which he took to be a moral culture based on a set of shared attitudes and attendant scientific and technical achievement.

In the aftermath of World War II, Karl Barth, similarly alluding to the notion of a common culture, argued that insofar as the German people spoke a common language, were nourished by a common literature, common music, and distinctive patterns of behavior, they could be held collectively responsible for the atrocities committed under the National Socialists.<sup>5</sup>

The French political theorist, Pierre Manent, writing in 2007, makes the case that the maintenance of national identity remains vital. In his *Democracy without Nations?: The Fate of Self-Government in Europe*,<sup>6</sup> he expresses his fears that the old nations of Europe are on the verge of self-destruction. Manent holds that the democratic nation is the irreplaceable political context for human action, the instrument of self-government, the locus for deliberation, and the administration of

justice. He is convinced that after Maastricht, the EU's political contrivances have become more and more artificial. "With each day they recede further from the natural desires and movements of their citizens' souls." The EU's bureaucratic contrivance, he continues, detached itself from the national political bodies that formed the Union and took on a life of its own. Instead of increasing self-governance, Europe's new instruments of governance shackle it ever more with each passing day, promising an indefinite extension that no one wills and no one knows how to stop. "Embracing democratic 'values' we (Europeans)," writes Manent, "have forgotten the meaning of democracy itself – its political meaning, which is self-government, the self-government of a people." Enlightened despotism has returned in the form of agencies, administrations, courts of justice, and commissions that lay down law or create rules, ever more meticulously contrived.

In Manent's judgment, Europe's governing classes, without explicitly saying so, hope to create a homogenous and limitless human world. In fact, he continues, given its intellectual climate, what distinguishes Europeans from one another cannot be evaluated or even publicly named. The European value that seems to trump all others is "openness to the other," a universal political creed that relegates to the private sphere religious belief and cultural identity. "We (Europeans) do not possess any particular existence," Manent writes, "We do not want to possess any shape, manner or form, a distinctive existence of our own, one that would necessarily be particular." To parry the threat of self-destruction, Manent is convinced that "nothing is more important than to get a grip on our centuries-old development and that means first of all we must become fully aware of the original Christian character of our nations."

As the young Goethe saw, culture is not something abiding. Tradition once broken is not easily

recovered. It may be that Europe is now experiencing the 20<sup>th</sup>-century's neglect of classical and religious studies within its universities. Manent believes that when education is organized on wholly utilitarian lines, society is deprived of a broadly educated class whose knowledge of philosophy, history, and literature could normally be relied upon to provide the wisdom necessary to understand the present.

Benedict XVI puts the case even stronger. Speaking at a conference held within Vatican City, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007, he declared "If, on this occasion, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the treaty of Rome, the governments of the EU wish to 'get closer' to their citizens, how can they exclude such an essential element of European identity as Christianity, in which the vast majority of people continue to identify themselves?" In the same address, he said, "It is unthinkable to create an authentic common European home while ignoring the identity of the people of our continent. . . . an identity that is historical, cultural and moral, more even than geographical, economic or political; an identity made up of a collection of universal values which Christianity contributed to creating, thus acquiring a role that is not only historical but foundational for the continent of Europe."<sup>7</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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- 3 Niall Ferguson, *Wall Street Journal*, Saturday Essay, November 18, 2010.
- 4 Michael Meulers, *Helmholtz: From Enlightenment to Neuroscience* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010).
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# The Liberating Truth of Catholic Teaching on Sexual Ethics

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## Introduction

In book 3, chapter 122 of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas very perceptively wrote: “we offend God only by acting contrary to our own good” (*Non enim Deus a nobis offenditur nisi ex eo quod contra nostrum bonum agimus ut dictum est*).

This ought not surprise us. A much greater authority than even Aquinas—our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—expressed the basic moral norm for guiding human actions in the twofold commandment of love: love of God above all things and love of our neighbor as ourselves. Moreover, he made it clear that we cannot love God, whom we do not see, if we do not love our neighbor as ourselves. And if we love our neighbor, must we not will that the goods contributing to his being more and more fully what God wills him to be flourish in him? And must we not be unwilling intentionally to deprive him of these goods—goods such as life itself, including bodily life and health, physical and bodily integrity, knowledge of the truth and appreciation of beauty, life in fellowship and fellowship with other, development of his skills in work and in play? Moreover, Vatican II, in its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et spes*, 35) declared: “The [moral] norm is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, *human activity should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race*, and allow men as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it.” And Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *The Splendor of Truth* (*Veritatis Splendor*), insisted that “the commandments of which Jesus reminds the young man are meant to safeguard the *good* of the person by protecting his *goods*” (no. 13), goods such as life, marriage, friendship, and others of similar kind.

Thus contemporary Catholic thinkers like Germain Grisez, John Finnis, Joseph Boyle, and Patrick Lee, “translating” the first principle of morality from the

religious language that Jesus used to express it, formulate it thus: “In pursuing and doing the good one ought to choose and otherwise will those and only those alternatives [of choice and action] compatible with a will toward integral human fulfillment.” That’s quite a mouthful, but they then go on to articulate what they call “modes of responsibility” in light of which we can make true moral judgments and good moral choices. A key mode, expressed in two somewhat different ways, can be expressed as follows: One ought not choose to damage, destroy, or impede a basic (authentic) human good either out of an irrational hatred of it or because its continued flourishing inhibits one’s sharing in another basic good that one arbitrarily prefers.

An example illustrates this mode of responsibility. Those scientists who are gung-ho to kill human embryos do so because they judge that the continuing flourishing of the good of life in them inhibits their participation in the goods of knowledge and of others’ participation in the good of health restored by making therapeutic use of those stem cells. They thus judge that killing these tiny humans is just. But as we know, that is definitely immoral.

How does this kind of thinking help us to see the liberating nature of the Church’s teaching on sexual morality?

## Human Goods and Sexual Choices and Actions

What real goods of human persons come into focus when one is thinking about having sex? I think we can all agree that two such goods are the good of *life* and the good of *friendship*. There are others, but let’s think about these two first. Human life comes into focus because having sex (genital coition) is the human bodily act in and through which new human life comes into existence. In fact, if it were not this kind of act, one apt for the generation of human life, no one would even think of contracepting. One would think it stupid to contracept if one were going swimming, or writing a letter, or kissing a

friend, but a lot of people sure do think of contracepting and in fact contracept if they are going to have sex and don't want to have a child. So the good of human life surely comes into focus. But if they contracept, are they not like the scientists who kill human embryos to get their stem cells so that they can share in the good of knowledge and that others might eventually share in the good of health restored? A contracepted genital act is an anti-life kind of act, intentionally inhibiting the beginning of new human life in order to let the contraceptive(s) share in the pseudo-good of pleasure or a false form of friendship with a sexual partner.

And that leads us to think of the impact of genital sex on the basic human good of friendship. One can't have genital sex with one's self; one needs a partner, and a partner of the other sex. Compare the conjugal or marital act described below with what is called premarital sex today. (An older and better term is "fornication.") At times this behavior is described as "making love." But is love a product, a work of the art of love, just as a cookie is a work of culinary art? Many today think that it is, as books on the "art" of making love bear witness. But in truth love is *not* a product that one makes. It is a "gift" of oneself to another. In friendship, whether between males and females or between persons of the same sex, one gives oneself to the friend, who is regarded as "another self." When the gift of self, of authentic love, is expressed in the genital act, it is a true gift only when those engaging in that act are husband and wife, and the act can rightly be called one proper and exclusive to them, namely, the conjugal or marital act. For husbands and wives, by "giving and receiving" each other irrevocably in marriage, have made each other irreplaceable, non-substitutable, and non-disposable in their lives. But fornicators and live-in lovers do not give themselves as bodily persons to each other; rather, they "lend" themselves and their bodies to each other. For them a partner is *not* irreplaceable, non-substitutable, and non-disposable. Thus fornicators and premarital lovers damage the good of friendship precisely so that they can share, not in any basic good of human persons, but rather in the pseudo-good of pleasure.

I think it necessary to distinguish the *marital act* from a *genital act* between a man and a woman who "happen to be married." Husbands and wives "give and receive each other," but they do so in asymmetrically complementary ways. The husband's body is such that he can personally enter into the body of his wife in a giving sort of way and in doing so receive her, and her

body is such that she can receive him into her body in a giving sort of way.

Another way of looking at this is to consider the beautiful verse in Henry van Dyck's hymn "Joy to the World" (sung to the melody of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony) which praises God by addressing him as the "Wellspring of the Joy of Living and the Ocean Depth of Happy Rest." Both man (husband) and woman (wife) are made in God's image and likeness and are to be, like him, "Wellspring of the Joy of Living" and the "Ocean Depth of Happy Rest." But again they do so in an asymmetrical complementarity, with the husband emphasizing "Wellspring of the Joy of Living" and the wife God as "Ocean Depth of Happy Rest." When the husband enters the home, he should be a wellspring of the joy of living, as it were, and his wife should welcome him as his ocean depth of happy rest. What a way to greet one's spouse: "Honey, you are my ocean depth of happy rest." And in joy she replies, "Welcome home, my wellspring of the joy of living."

Moreover, not all genital acts between men and women who happen to be married are true conjugal acts of self-giving love. If, for instance, a husband comes home drunk and forces his wife, who happens to be ill, to have sex (unfortunately this happens), he is *not* engaging in the marital act; he is terribly abusing his wife for his own jollies.

## Non-genital Orgiastic Sex

**W**hat about sex with oneself, masturbation, or sodomic sex, that is, anal or oral sex?

The immediate intention of masturbators is to have a sentient and emotional experience: the sensation of orgasm and the emotional experience of satisfaction. But in choosing to actuate their sexual power precisely as the means to have a conscious experience, a person is using his body merely as an instrument to bring about an experience in the conscious subject. Thus the body is treated, not as integral to the *being* of the person but as the person's instrument. This is quite different from the way the body is *used* in the marital act, when the body functions as integral to the whole person, serving the whole person, and its action is as essential to the doing of the act as is the choice to engage in it. By masturbating, a person alienates himself as a consciously experiencing subject from his own body.

Moreover, if masturbatory sex is viewed within the perspective of John Paul II's "theology of the body,"

we can see that the choice to masturbate damages the body's "nuptial" or "spousal" significance, its capacity for engaging in the marital act.

What has been just been said about masturbatory sex applies to anal and oral sex, whether between persons of homosexual orientations or heterosexual ones.

## Conclusion

**A** basic human problem is that human persons, as a punishment for original sin, are subject to sinful concupiscence. Through baptism we share in Christ's saving death and resurrection and are born to a new kind of life; original sin is eradicated. But sinful concupiscence and death remain as punishments for original sin. Sinful concupiscence, although not sinful in itself, comes from sin (original) and inclines us toward sin (personal), and it so inclines us because it is manifested in disordered desires, among them the desire

for sexual pleasure as if it were something good in itself. Chastity, the virtue we acquire (or that God infuses in us), is a virtue whereby we come into possession of our sexual desires so that we are now free to give ourselves away in love to others. Thus Catholic teaching on sexual ethics is indeed liberating; it liberates us from slavery to our desires.

Finally, we must remember that through baptism we have become one body with Christ. Thus when we "lend" our bodily selves to others outside of marriage, we also lend Christ's body to them, a terrible way of desecrating the body of our Savior (see 1 Corinthians 6:15-20). Marriage is a great human good and, by virtue of Christ's redeeming act, it is now a sacrament of his Church, an efficacious sign making present here and now his life-giving, love-giving, grace-giving bridal union with his spouse, the Church. We must honor God *in our bodies*. We do so by steadfastly respecting the basic goods of human persons, including our own bodily and moral integrity, when making sexual choices. ♫

# The Fiftieth Anniversary of *Love and Responsibility*: An Appreciation

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**F**ifty years have gone by since the first appearance of Karol Wojtyła's *Love and Responsibility* (*Miłość i odpowiedzialność*). The future Pope John Paul II's masterful treatment of the meaning of human sexual love and man's responsibility for it first came out in book form in Lublin in 1960.<sup>1</sup> The book itself was preceded by two longer articles of the same name, setting out key themes in the book.<sup>2</sup> The book was followed in 1962 by a revised and expanded edition.<sup>3</sup> Given the limited press runs of religious books in communist Poland in the early 1960s, the book was later released by the London Catholic Polish Diaspora publisher, Veritas, in 1965.<sup>4</sup>

*Love and Responsibility* was soon translated into the Romance languages: French in 1965, Italian and Spanish in 1969.<sup>5</sup> Recall that this was the period immediately surrounding *Humanae vitae*, when various

quarters, particularly in the English-speaking world, expected that Pope Paul VI would allow at least some forms of contraception. It was also the era when Paul VI named Wojtyła to the episcopal commission whose task it was to provide counsel to the so-called Papal Birth Control Commission. Alas, the English-speaking world had no opportunity to read *Love and Responsibility* until 1981, almost three years after its author was already himself pope.<sup>6</sup>

That fact was unfortunate, for two reasons. This very personalistic defense of the nature and dignity of human procreative sexual love long remained inaccessible to the English-speaking world, even while revisionist theologians were caricaturing Catholic teaching in general and *Humanae vitae* in particular as "physicalistic" and "ignoring personalist values." At the same time, many of these same people were nurturing illusions that Pope John Paul II might "reform" ecclesiastical teaching on the subject, unable to see how such ideas would have been utterly alien to the pontiff's well-articulated

anthropology and ethic of sexuality. As Joseph O’Leary observed, Wojtyła grounded his approach to sexual ethics “in values no one would wish to deny.”<sup>7</sup>

I first came into contact with *Love and Responsibility* in 1983, when I began writing my doctoral dissertation at Fordham University on the pre-papal sexual ethic of John Paul II.<sup>8</sup> My first reaction to the book was a conviction that it was among the most important books I had ever read. My appreciation was twofold. On the one hand, here was a completely personalist yet intellectually rigorous defense of Catholic sexual ethics. *Pace* contemporary theologians who were then attacking Catholic sexual morality as supposedly “physicalistic”—while characterizing their own revisionist efforts to accept contraception, masturbation, homosexual activity, and reproductive technology as “respecting personal dignity”—*Love and Responsibility* demonstrated that exactly the opposite was true. It was ecclesiastical teaching that was thoroughly personalist (even if not always felicitously expressed as such), while it was the revisionist effort to recast that teaching that rested on physicalist foundations. On the other hand, as intellectually rigorous as *Love and Responsibility* was, its conclusions expressed for me in the language of scholarship what I had learned at my Catholic mother’s knee.

Fifty years after its publication, *Love and Responsibility* still articulates basic truths about sexual ethics, the ignoring of which leads both secular and revisionist “Catholic” sexual ethics into serious errors. The seriousness of those errors is compounded by the fact that, as the book shows, they do not represent mere intellectual fallacies but strike at the dignity of the person. Among the truths *Love and Responsibility* sets forth are:

#### *The Fundamental Dichotomy Between Love and Use.*

Wojtyła identified two ultimately incompatible postures that a person can adopt vis-à-vis another: love and use. One can love the other, or one can use him. There is no middle ground: one cannot “generally” love somebody but “occasionally” use him or her. In his later writings, Wojtyła showed that one either goes out of one’s self in love toward another, or one remains locked in one’s self, using others out of that self-love. In *Sign of Contradiction* Wojtyła invoked St. Augustine’s maxim to explain the dichotomy: one can love others to the contempt of self, or one can love self to the contempt of God (“*amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, . . . amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui*”).

The dichotomy that Wojtyła identifies also highlights the tremendous influence that utilitarianism exercises in contemporary ethics, including bioethics and revisionist “Catholic” moral theology. In secular sexual

ethics, the ethical is often declared to be what maximizes pleasure for the greatest number (as long as everyone consents to the mutual use).<sup>9</sup> In contemporary bioethics, utilitarianism competes with varieties of Kantian proceduralism as the basic ethical systems for resolving dilemmas. Natural law ethics, such as is common in the Catholic medical ethics tradition, is rarely to be seen. In revisionist “Catholic” moral theology, utilitarian-inspired efforts to calculate incalculable “ontic evils” and weigh them proportionately against each other becomes the manner by which one qualifies a human act as morally good or bad.

Wojtyła’s argument exposes all these schools of thought as being fundamentally ready to use human persons as long as that use is “justified” by some calculus. They are all ultimately antipersonalistic solutions, notwithstanding their repeated albeit generally empty appeals to “human dignity.”

*The Meaning of the Sexual Urge.* Wojtyła’s insistence that the meaning of the human sexual urge is “existential” is both revolutionary and yet fundamental to sexual ethics. In affirming that the meaning of the sexual urge is “existential,” Wojtyła is not merely stating that it is procreative. Anybody who knows anything about sex knows sex can “make babies.” Wojtyła’s insight goes much deeper. Sex brings about persons. Through sexual intercourse, spouses bring new human *persons* into existence. Because persons are to be loved and not used, in the process whereby persons (and not merely things) come into existence, love of those persons (and not merely a utilitarian calculation of their convenience) is required. If love requires seeking a person’s good, then one cannot love while acting to deny existence.

Furthermore, when one begins to comprehend the true meaning and magnificence of the fact of existence, the contingency and uniqueness of what it is “to be,” then the existential meaning of sexuality ceases to be primarily a problem to be managed. It instead summons one to realize the true nobility of sex as well as the fact that sex has a meaning “bigger than the both of us.” For religious persons, as Wojtyła notes, it is even a realization of their participation together with the Creator in the ongoing work of creation. But even for nonbelievers, a thoughtful analysis of what the sexual urge means reveals that it has great purposes that transcend even the intentions and desires of the two sexual partners. The sexual urge certainly cannot be reduced to either a mere libidinous quest for pleasure or a utilitarian calculus of coordinated pleasures.

Love of persons is, of course, also present in the conjugal relations of the spouses, each of whom is a person. Each spouse is a person to be loved in the totality of his or her being, including the fact that this person here and now can become a mother or a father. Love demands respect for the person in the whole truth of that person; use may decide that some aspects of the person (for example, sexual attractiveness) are desirable, others (for example, potential parenthood) not.

#### *The Structure of Love.*

Love has a physical component. Physical attraction is what typically first brings two persons to each other's attention. As corporeal beings, the senses have a far more immediate and direct impact on people than do spiritual values. But the physical alone—what Wojtyła calls “sensuality”—is not enough for love.

Love has an emotional component. Feelings of love and tenderness, of masculine and feminine values, of “being in love,” are all powerful drivers in the man–woman relationship. But the emotional alone—what Wojtyła calls “sentimentality”—is not enough for love.

Love has an ethical component. Because ethics is about choices, love ultimately requires the free decision to love this concrete person. This person may have been and may still be sexually attractive to and/or emotionally compatible with me—and, God willing, will remain so—but love acquires a backbone only when lifted above the passing fancies of sense appeal, or the evanescence of emotions, by the decision to love *this person*, “for better or worse,” because (s)he is *this person*. In a world buffeted by feelings or guided by “hooking up,” Wojtyła recalls a powerful truth, amnesia about which has greatly contributed to the modern cheapening of “love.”

#### *The Positive Meaning of Chastity.*

Wojtyła straightforwardly challenges a world that views chastity in primarily negative terms, as some kind of denial or repression. He recognizes that a good deal of modern thought sees chastity in those terms and even adapts a term from his phenomenological studies—*ressentiment*—to identify the phenomenon that turns virtues into vices in order to cast the vicious as virtuous.

Chastity, insists Wojtyła, is primarily not about denial, but about affirmation: affirmation of the value of the person. Chastity takes sex as a force in peoples' lives seriously because it takes the person seriously. Because the person is the most important value—a value to be loved, not used—chastity insists that the person not be

reduced to sexual values alone. Against any effort to diminish the person by viewing him primarily through a sexual lens, chastity demands that how people interact with each other sexually be guided by an integral vision of the person. Because an integral vision of the person requires respect for the whole person (including the person as one who shares in the existential meaning of sex), chastity demands that the human proclivity to reduce sex to the merely pleasurable must be replaced by respect for what sex truly *means* between persons.

#### *The Value of Shame.*

Wojtyła’s treatment of shame in *Love and Responsibility* is the philosophical precursor of his theological discussion of shame in Genesis that was part of his “Theology of the Body” catechesis. In contrast to various modern schools of thought which identify shame with repression, phobia, or other negative phenomena, Wojtyła explains shame in positive terms, as a defense mechanism of the person whereby he protects himself against sexual exploitation. Shame serves the person by insisting that the body and sex do not overshadow the value of the person. The proper removal of shame comes from its “absorption by love.” Shame stands in defense of love by holding the person back in the face of sexual situations that may be rooted in physical attraction but not love (which also requires its external, social dimension in marriage). Contrary to the tendency in many modern “sex education” programs, Wojtyła maintains that shame preserves innocence, and thereby helps people appreciate their bodies while treating sexuality with the dignity it deserves. Shamelessness, then, is not healthy. It is not a sign of overcoming Puritanical or Victorian “hang-ups.” It is rather a sign of moral breakdown, a “wreck[ing] of the . . . whole order of things” by subordinating love of the whole person to enjoyment of the other out of mere lustful satisfaction.

#### *The Problem of Justice.*

Justice is traditionally defined as the obligation to give another his due. A dedication to justice, especially social justice, is very prominent in our day. Wojtyła rightly noted that love—including sexual love—requires objective justice if it is truly to be love. His treatment focused on the global demands of marital love, a discussion that far surpassed the cramped focus of canonists of his time who concentrated on the *debitum matrimonii* and discussed marriage in contractual terms. Wojtyła situates his discussion of justice, love, and the person in both horizontal and vertical frameworks, grounded in

a comprehensive and integral theological anthropology. Because the person has a right to be loved and not used, justice demands that sexual relations between persons be acts of true love and not merely unilateral or even bilateral coordination of pleasure. Justice also requires that sexual relations correspond to the social nature of the person (that is, within the permanent and public bond of marriage), to the truth of the whole person (that is, as a being with whom one can share parenthood), and to the truth of the sexual urge itself (i.e., as having an existential, and not merely biological significance). This is the horizontal dimension.

But justice in the realm of sexuality also must have a vertical dimension, and this for three reasons. First, because human beings are contingent beings they are not (contrary to the claims of secularist votaries of the “right to privacy”) merely “their own.” They are accountable to their Creator, who made them a certain way. Even if they might be willing to be used, they have no right to do so, because they are not exclusively their own. Second, because the existential sexual urge is the manner in which the work of creation continues, sexual partners also owe “justice to the Creator” because their actions also share in a work larger than themselves, a work of potentially eternal significance. Thirdly, because the transmission of life also involves the creation of a spiritual person, and because only God creates a soul, justice demands recognition that, even in the sexual realm, human agency always remains subordinate to God’s.

From the vantage point of a half century, notwithstanding the very vocal commitments to justice heard in the Church and in society, justice is regularly and egregiously violated by a sexual ethos that attempts to “play God” through the widespread use of contraception, the manipulation of nascent human life through reproductive technologies and embryo experimentation, and the plague of prenatal infanticide known as abortion.

#### *Procreation, Parenthood, and Vocation.*

Wojtyła’s treatment of justice goes hand-in-hand with an exalted vision of sexual intercourse as a participation in creation itself, with implications for the notion of vocation. While Wojtyła’s book styles itself a philosophical, “ethical” study, I will conclude my reflections by “translating” Wojtyła’s thought on this last theme into explicitly theological terms.

Sexual intercourse is—as John Adams poetically put it in Sherman Edwards’s play “1776”—“more than sexual combustibility.” Already in 1960 Wojtyła described

sexual intercourse as a way in which spouses through love shared in Love’s work of peopling the world with persons. Far from being a “concession to frailty” marriage, even if it was only “of this world,” represents a vocation whose implications were far from just intramundane. Finally, if man’s fundamental spiritual posture is to love, and love by its very nature requires genuine self-giving to another, then marriage and sex are fundamental ways by which human beings spiritually grow. Marriage and sex get the partners beyond themselves. Parenthood is thus everyone’s real vocation. Wojtyła rightly concludes by showing that all genuine parenthood is, in the end, spiritual parenthood, not to the exclusion of physical parenthood but with the recognition that a mother and father become responsible for a new spiritual being. Real personhood thus demands parenthood—transcending one’s self in self-giving love for another—whether that be the love of physical parents for their own progeny or of the celibate whose state of life also finds its *raison d’être* in spiritual paternity and maternity.

Fifty years after *Love and Responsibility* first appeared, I would contend that its riches have scarcely been tapped. The today needs its insights even more today than in 1960. Sexual and marital morality have in many ways markedly declined in the intervening five decades. But, like Wojtyła, I am an optimist, convinced that truth will prevail and set people free. In many ways, the vision of marriage and sexuality set forth in *Love and Responsibility* was ahead of its time. Contemporary society may be more ready for the personalistic vision that *Love and Responsibility* articulates. One should also note that *Love and Responsibility* has been “revised and updated” by the pontificate of John Paul the Great, whose teachings—especially his “Theology of the Body” catechesis—is anticipated by and thus illuminates and expands the ideas contained in the book. The greatest tribute one can pay, on this its golden anniversary, is a careful rereading of this text. It is certainly one of the great books of the twentieth century. ♦

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Karol Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność. Studium etyczne* [Love and Responsibility: An Ethical Study] (Lublin: TNKUL, 1960).
- 2 Karol Wojtyła, „Miłość a odpowiedzialność,” *Ateneum kapłańskie* 51 (September–October 1959), tom 59, zeszyt 2” 163-72; „Miłość i odpowiedzialność,” *Znak* 11 (1960)/7: 561-614.
- 3 Karol Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność. Studium etyczne* [Love and Responsibility: An Ethical Study] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1962).
- 4 Karol Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność. Studium etyczne* [Love and

- Responsibility: An Ethical Study], 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., in the “Polish Library, Blue Series,” no. 9 (London: Veritas, 1965).
- 5 Cited by Adam Boniecki, *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły* [A Calendar of the Life of Karol Wojtyła] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1983), 851, 856.
- 6 Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility: An Ethical Study*, trans. H. T. Willets (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981). Ignatius Press has kept the book in print since 1993.
- 7 Joseph S. O’Leary, “John Paul II on ‘Love and Responsibility,’” *Furrow* 29 (1979): 740. There were, of course, those ready to deny them: failing to follow the intricate line of thought Wojtyła develops lead to some branding his argument a series of non sequiturs. See the unsigned review of *Love and Responsibility* in *Choice* 19 (November 1981): 392. But, as O’Leary notes, if one examines the principles Wojtyła espouses on their self-evident basis, no one would really want to admit denying them. That is not to say, however, that some might *like* the conclusions that flow from those principles: when it comes to applying principles about conjugal morality whose consequences are uncomfortable, history attests to people’s proclivity to evade them by claiming “it’s just about sex.”
- 8 John M. Grondelski, “Fruitfulness as an Essential Dimension of Acts of Conjugal Love: An Interpretive Study of the Pre-Pontifical Thought of John Paul II” (Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1985).
- 9 Natasha Walter (*Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* [London: Virago Press, 2010]) identifies and highlights the problem faced by contemporary liberals in their “choice” and “autonomy” rhetoric (to which she is sympathetic) when she discusses the problems of the hypersexualization of contemporary British culture (her remarks are appropriate to America, too), the ever-earlier sexualization of young girls, and the problems of criticizing this phenomena when cloaked in “choice rhetoric”—even while acknowledging that the real choices available to adolescent females and young women are increasingly circumscribed by the “pornification” of society. I borrow the term “pornification” from Pamela Paul, *Pornified: How Pornography is Transforming Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families* (New York: Time Books, 2005).

# Romano Guardini’s Christocentrism

By José Manuel Fidalgo

(*Scripta Theologica* 42, n. 2 [2010]: 333-358).

Translated by Kenneth Baker, S.J.

**G**uardini’s work attempts to give a Christian answer to the break in thought which has occurred in modernity. This break, such as the author understands it, is being produced by abandoning God and revelation little by little. With this abandonment the proper vision that man has of himself turns out to be problematic:

By abandoning God man becomes incomprehensible to himself. His countless attempts at determining himself end in these two extremes: in absolutizing oneself or in immolating oneself, that is, in demanding for himself the absolute requirement of dignity and responsibility, or surrendering oneself to an ignominy so profound that he will never again try to experience anything.<sup>1</sup>

To return to the unity of knowledge and to acquire again an integral vision of man, Guardini proposes recovering the centrality of faith and revelation in the world of thought and culture. Only from this point can we arrive at a true image of man and the world.

In this context, the centrality of Christ—the culmination of revelation—is the key to all thought. Revelation is not a series of doctrines or ethical principles, or a collection of truths more or less important for life. Revelation *contains* all of that, but it *is* not that. Christian truth is, essentially, a person: the person of Jesus

Christ, God who became man and has come to save us. Everything relates to him:

Christianity, in the last analysis, is not a doctrine about truth nor an interpretation of life. It is that also, but nothing of that constitutes its fundamental essence. Its essence is constituted by Jesus of Nazareth, by his existence, his work and his concrete destiny, that is, by a historical personality.<sup>2</sup>

This essay proposes to analyze the centrality of Christ in the thinking of Romano Guardini, the characteristics of that centrality, and the gnoseological consequences which follow from it, especially for his anthropology.

To accomplish that, we will begin by considering the concept of *Weltanschauung* and the specific meaning that concept has in Guardini’s thinking.

## 1. The Concept of *Weltanschauung* in R. Guardini

**G**uardini gave the term *Weltanschauung* a special meaning, often in frank opposition to the accepted use it had during his time.<sup>3</sup> Some authors use the word “intuition” as the right translation for the term, although with certain nuances. The Spanish terms “vision” or “contemplation” reflect with more precision than “intuition” the meaning the author wishes to give to the word.<sup>4</sup>

In his book, *Unterscheidung des Christlichen*,<sup>5</sup> the first chapter is entitled “Vom Wesen katholischer

“Weltanschauung” [The essence of the Catholic concept of the world]. There Guardini develops from a scientific point of view the concept we are considering:

With this expression we refer to an intellectual process orientated in a more precise way to the totality of things, to that which is “universal” or “worldwide” in reality. This process is directed, moreover, in a special way to the concrete singularity of this world; through it we confront in a decisive way the surrounding reality. And, finally, the act of Weltanschauung also signifies an evaluation, a measure, a judgment.<sup>6</sup>

In opposition to the habitual imprecision in the use of the term, Guardini tried very early to make *Weltanschauung*—a key concept in all of his writings—a truly scientific concept with a definite object and method:

Moreover, I had to know how it could manage to be a science, that is, not a mere exposition of something of a literary or apologetic nature: an independent science, clearly, and not a hotchpotch of philosophy and theology.<sup>7</sup>

Guardini distinguishes between *Weltanschauung* as an intellectual attitude or a vital act, and *Weltanschauung* as a doctrine.<sup>8</sup> Here we will prescind from this last point in order to concentrate on the meaning of the intellectual attitude and its application to anthropology:

The very act that apprehends the reality of the world in a special way, that is, in a way that gives rise precisely to a Weltanschauung, is not in itself science, but life. That expression is a contemplative act of the totality of man.<sup>9</sup>

The knowledge proposed by Guardini must contain within itself the following characteristic notes:

1. *Totality and original universality*: when one understands truth, one understands something essential and universal from the first moment, in such a way that each element acquires its meaning with respect to that essential something (organic thought).
2. *Singularity and concretion of existence*: the truth of the object is not fully understood as a mere case of a universal concept, because the existence of each object is always concrete and irreducible (this is especially true in the case of personal realities).
3. *The task to realize*: when one understands the truth of the object, one understands also, secondarily, a value and a duty, from which arises an authentic ethical exigency.

There are three totalities:

We have, in the first place, the totality of the world as a summation of the external objects and events; man also belongs to that in what regards his physical being. Secondly, to the extent that he constitutes a unity closed within himself, man is opposed to the world, both as an individual and as a member of a community. Finally, we have the foundation and the absolute origin of the world and of man: God. These are the three totalities or wholes to which the vision of the Weltanschauung is directed, as well as to the particular realities, in the measure in which the outlines are situated in them.<sup>10</sup>

To each one of those totalities corresponds its own *Weltanschauung*. The first totality is the physical world; the second is the human world. (The physical world is integrated into the human as on a superior level where it acquires a new meaning.) The two anterior totalities are included in God where everything acquires its final meaning, its genuine singularity, and its authentic value and exigency.

## 2. Christ as the Gnoseological Principle

The fundamental thesis of the author is that the intellectual attitude of the *Weltanschauung* is only possible fully from Christ. In the meeting with Christ, he affirms, is found the possibility of a Christian vision of the world and of man, a Christian *Weltanschauung* that attains fully the character of totality, concretion, and a task for man. Only from revelation (which reaches its fullness in Christ) is such a vision derived. It is Christ who has an adequate vision of the world, the total and concrete view of human life—the view that constitutes the authentic *Weltanschauung*:

In Christ we catch a glimpse of how he sees the world in a way that is “total”; he sees it correctly. We see how he speaks to the person with security, with respect and independence. We see how he responds completely to the exigencies of the moment—what is simultaneously the “fullness of the times”—being aware of a mission directed precisely to this end. Christ possesses the full view of the Weltanschauung. Its view is the view of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

In order to acquire that view of Christ regarding the world, the right way is faith which responds to the revelation of God: to believe in Christ, to accept his

point of view—to accept him in the first place, to allow Christ to occupy the central place in our thinking:

To believe means to approach Christ, to place oneself in the same point of view in which Christ finds himself. To see with his eyes. To measure with his measures. Precisely in his faith and by his faith the believer stands outside of the world.<sup>12</sup>

That view of Christ (which is the view of God concerning the world) is the view to which the believer must adopt by faith and which constitutes a new way of looking at the world.

What happens when we put Christ in the center of our thinking? What implication does Christ have for human knowledge—for our view of the world and man—when we truly take him seriously? These are the fundamental questions that Guardini asks.

Christ stamps on our view of reality some special characteristics. When by our faith we place Christ, the God-Man, as the center and measure of our knowledge, reality acquires a new configuration.

Following the ideas that appear to be dispersed in our author, we propose to explain in the next place—in a systematic and orderly way—the characteristics of that central position of Christ and its meaning for human knowledge. In other words, how to look at the world through the eyes of Christ.

## 2.1 Distance, Remoteness, Totality

To see the totality in the whole (world and man) and to see the aspect of totality of each element (definitively, its concretion and reality), that is, to understand the sense that each thing has in the whole, the author says, a certain *distance* is necessary.

1. There is no totality without distance. Every global or universal vision of the world and man supposes and requires an *outside*.<sup>13</sup> To know reality it is not sufficient to remove oneself temporally or spatially from it, or to place oneself in an abstract point of view: that is not the true *outside* that provides the total vision and the true dimension of things.

Only something truly transcendent—something really outside of the world—provides the necessary distance to capture the reality and man in his true dimension. If that something transcendent did not exist, if everything were the same and there were nothing distinct—knowledge would cancel itself out: everything would be reduced to homogeneity. One requires “the

distinct” in order to know “the same,” the transcendent to know the mundane, the heterogeneous to know the homogeneous.

This point of view situated “outside” of the world could only consist in the fact that something simply supramundane is given inside the field of the given. That reality would be a species different from the world, and in that would consist its elevating and liberating significance. Moreover, it ought to be “different” not just as a measure, that is, regarding its size, power and vital energy, but also with regard to its quality and essence. Only such a heterogeneous reality would be able to free us from the homogeneous, from the mundane.<sup>14</sup>

2. Transcendent truth transforms itself into a truth that liberates from the immediacy of the mundane. Only Christ, true God, is at a necessary distance to have a total vision of reality. Only he is a heterogeneous reality, distinct from the world, the One who liberates us from the homogeneous. At that distance, through faith, we access revelation. It is the view which is made possible by the faith that participates in Christ’s view of the world:

The clarity with which Jesus perceives the misconduct of the world does not imply that his knowledge comes from that same world, from whose perspective he would have interpreted these or those mundane realities and competencies. In that case, the knowledge would be—so to speak—completely endogenous. Then, however high the point of view is, not for that reason will it remain in the world; and, however prolonged its perspective may be, and profound its field of penetration, it would always remain within the limits of existence. But the reality is that Jesus’ knowledge comes from outside and includes the world in its totality.<sup>15</sup>

The transcendent distance of Jesus supposes liberty and liberation. Christ manifests the truth about the world because, as God, he has absolute liberty and independence concerning it. That liberty of God supposes true liberation for knowledge. Christ is really the free distance and the liberator of the truth:

The bearer of the word of God—who is, clearly and essentially, Jesus Christ—confronts the world with a freedom which has its foundation in the beyond. In each of his words and actions, in the whole activity of Jesus Christ, we notice that he possesses a supreme independence. In him God, free in reference to the world, speaks concerning it. In

the meeting with Jesus Christ the true essence of man is made known; in his presence good and evil are revealed; in his presence man takes the consequences of his mentality—"they discover their own hearts." Christ is "different" from the world; he is "from above." In this way he puts the world in question and forces it to manifest itself.<sup>16</sup>

Christ frees us from partiality and brings us a vision of totality. His point of view, his look is the look of totality which shows us reality in its true character as essential and universal. Christ is always above every dynamism and every particular structure. Christ is always in an elevated position, over the particularities of his time and culture; in that sense one can affirm that he is in a position of totality with the ability to integrate all of the particulars. This surpassing of the particular makes it possible for his words to be addressed to every human being, to every culture, and to every historical period. It allows him to manifest the truth in a complete way. To meet Christ is to meet the Truth. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6).

The distance of Christ, the distance of his being God, reveals itself as essential in order that man may know himself. Christ is truly God, the Son of God. Christ manifests himself in his divinity as infinitely distant from man. It is precisely that distance that allows man and the world to manifest themselves as they are. It is God revealing himself and his eternal plan that points out who man is and what his truth is, because what he reveals proceeds from his consciousness of being Creator and Lord.

Guardini emphasizes the manifestations of that distance of Christ as God, his being different from man—an aspect of him that appears clearly in the Gospel. In addition to the miracles and the explicit words about his divinity that the New Testament presents, one can detect this distance in certain attitudes and manners of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Guardini analyzes some aspects of the life of Christ in which this distance is especially evident: authority, solitude, and awareness of eternity.<sup>18</sup>

Distance is manifested in his authority. He does not speak like other men; he gives divine commands in the first person; he drives the merchants from the temple as from his own house; those who attempted to throw him over a cliff in Nazareth or to seize him in the Garden of Olives shrink back before his person; the people are frightened at some of his miracles on seeing the presence of the supernatural, and so forth:

There is a breath of life about Jesus. There is in him something that commands, that works beyond his words to make them living and giving them power over feeling and heart. . . . They work in the command of his mouth, in the gesture of his hand, and no one can resist him. . . . What shall we call this something? Without doubt it is the something that is contained in his message about the kingdom of God: the sacred nearness of the living God.<sup>19</sup>

This divine distance is also manifested in the solitude of Christ. The entire Gospel reflects this solitude of the Lord. He prays to his Father in a particular way and with intimacy, separated from other men. Men do not understand him and he knows it; not even his Apostles understand him until after the resurrection. This solitude of Christ among men is made especially clear in St. John's Gospel:

Jesus was in indescribable solitude. John, who had reclined on his breast and was the only one among the disciples who, after fleeing, had a change of heart, retraced his steps and remained at the foot of the cross; he is the one who penetrated into the interior life of Jesus more profoundly than the others. . . . His Gospel and his Letters are filled with trembling before the incomprehensibility of that mystery: How can it be that the Lord came into the world that was made by him, and the world did not receive him?<sup>20</sup>

This divine distance of Jesus is also manifested in his relation to time. His eternal consciousness emerges and shines with splendor in some passages of St. John. Thus the infinite abyss that exists between man and Christ shines forth. "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

Here it appears now clearly who he is: the Word. He is the spoken God. He is the living fullness of the being and truth of God.<sup>21</sup>

Guardini maintains that this distance of Christ, his being God, functions as an essential principle to know the human being. That Christ is God is revealed in order to understand the truth about man. In fact, only a divine Person can realize humanity perfectly. Therefore, only from God do we know completely what man is:

Jesus Christ is man with such a lack of reserve as no one else could be; thus, to realize humanity as he did was possible only for someone who was more than a man.<sup>22</sup>

We will stop here for a moment to emphasize an idea of Guardini on this point that seems to us especially relevant.

One of the fundamental postulates of Cartesian rationalism affirms: the complex is explained by starting from the simple. This postulate to a great extent permeates modern thinking: it is present in the mathematical scientism of physics, in biological evolution, and so forth. It is also operative, says Guardini, to a great extent in modern biblical studies. The claim that one can discover a “Jesus of history” by proceeding in this way from the “Christ of faith” is based on a rationalistic prejudice, namely, that the historical Jesus whom the Apostles knew personally was something *simple* (= human), and on that simple foundation the Church added complexity and theological speculation. Now then, the claim to find that supposed original Jesus who would be behind the faith of the Church, our author says, is not a scientific attitude but an incredible one. In short, it claims to substitute faith and tradition with some rationalistic presuppositions that have not been scientifically established.<sup>23</sup>

In opposition to this tendency of modernity to understand man by starting from inferior realities, Guardini points out that in fact man can only be understood from that which is above him:

This way of understanding is in sharp contradiction with the modern tendency to understand man by beginning from something that is below him; to see his realization as a continual ascent from the pre-human, and to see his structure as a construction, certainly more complex, but essentially identical with an animal. But what is certain is the contrary: really one can only understand man from that which is above him. In its turn, concerning the biblical expression that God created man “in his image” (Gen. 1:27), the last word about its meaning will only be uttered with “and the Word became flesh” (John 1:14).<sup>24</sup>

The human person cannot be understood from inferior categories, but from that which is above him. Man is not explained from below but from above, from the infinite, in short, from God.<sup>25</sup>

Only if Christ is more than a man does he have something to say to me.<sup>26</sup> Man needs the distance, the separation, and the diversity of God in Christ. Only if Christ is distinct (God) is one able to speak about salvation. In this sense, Guardini says, one understands also the tremendous initial effort and the extraordinary passion with which the first centuries of Christianity

fought intellectually to consolidate the affirmation of the divinity of Christ, eternal Son and consubstantial with the Father, true God and true man.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2 Principleness, Newness, Origin

**B**eing the God-Man that he is, Christ has the power “to overturn all the known measures of appropriateness.”<sup>28</sup> Guardini emphasizes this aspect with insistence. If we want to understand Christ we have to admit that he does not respond to human categories;<sup>29</sup> he is strictly original, an initiating and unique revelation.<sup>30</sup>

1. With the object of seeing how Jesus Christ does not respond to normal parameters of psychology, Guardini develops a theological description of the personality of Jesus Christ.

His thinking is simple but uncompromising, realistic and nearby; he does not theorize—his words are concrete and living. He announces what is, what must be and what will be—and he does it with authority. His will is forceful and calm at the same time and at the same time it reflects an attitude of continual obedience to the Father. He places himself before things with freedom: he uses them, but with an absolute lordship over them. His situation regarding men is one of friendship and, at the same time, solitude.

There is nothing in the Gospel that may incline one to think that, in essential matters (for example, his relation to the Father), there may have been any evolution or change: His obedience and love for the Father are something immutable in the midst of changing situations.<sup>31</sup>

Although he is inserted in some particular conditions of life, society and history, he seems to soar always above all particular structures. One cannot explain Christ from his nationality, age, the Jewish people, and so forth. This, says Guardini, “is what makes it possible for all to find in him the Redeemer.”<sup>32</sup>

He does not respond to the parameters of a genial personality nor of a religious leader. Strictly speaking, he is not a religious man. He demands faith, but he does not have faith: he himself is the object of faith. He does not fit into any religious type: he is not an ascetic or a mystic or a reformer.

Not what he says about God, but how he brings God. It is not that he teaches to encounter God, but that God makes himself present through him. Jesus is not on the side of the religious act, no matter how

pure and sincere it may be, but he is its object. Not where piety is, but where he is to whom piety is directed.<sup>33</sup>

Jesus is a person in the full sense. He is completely himself, absolutely free. His total offering is a sign of his complete disposition of himself and his total freedom. Nothing in Jesus has a private character; his personal deeds are not important to him. His total preoccupation is his mission: to accomplish the Will of the Father.<sup>34</sup>

Guardini's conclusion from that description is that really one cannot develop a psychology of Jesus in the normal sense of a scientific analysis. Jesus has a psychology (just as he has a history and sociology) because he is a man with a body and a soul; but he cannot be understood from psychology or from any particular science:

That Jesus cannot be dissolved psychologically; that he cannot be understood starting from what we know about the being of man; that it is not allowed to keep him awake, to "uncover" him—all of that constitutes his "principleness."<sup>35</sup>

2. Jesus Christ does not have a beginning—he is the beginning. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). Every attempt to seek a beginning of Christ, one to which Christ responds, distorts and corrupts the truth about him.<sup>36</sup> "There is no concept of Jesus."<sup>37</sup> If one understands by a concept a universal content under which a particular reality is located, this cannot be applied to Christ. One does not understand Christ with concepts, says Guardini. In this sense the author affirms that Christ "belongs to this world in the authenticity of having been incarnated, however, at the same time he is independent with regard to it."<sup>38</sup>

3. Guardini also claims that the "principleness" of Christ determines the relation of man with Christ. A new thing begins with Christ that does not originate from the possibilities of the world. Christ is for man the beginning of a new life, of something completely novel which did not exist at all before him:

This beginning that is Christ himself calls forth a beginning in man and liberates him; even more, it creates him. The beginning of man is the echo of that beginning that Christ is.<sup>39</sup>

This is a crucial point in the thinking of Guardini. The originality of Christ requires a new beginning in man; something new, a new life. This answer of man to the originality of Christ acquires the existential form of decision, conversion:

Man has to recognize Christ, choose him, go towards him, dare to approach him, to obtain from him a new beginning; but all of that is work from above, and forms a whole with what is in Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Christ, who does not respond to human parameters, can be understood only from a faith that is not inferred from human categories and parameters. Faith is the response to the principleness of Christ, and it transforms itself into the beginning of a new life in man:

Faith sees in him the beginning and establishes itself in him. It is disposed to think and live from him, to place itself under his judgment and to depend on his grace.<sup>41</sup>

It is certain that faith has human, psychological, social, and historical conditions.<sup>42</sup> It is true that faith "also has its own logic," and that the believer can give motives for his faith. But faith is, above all, a new beginning beyond the possibilities of the world. Faith comes from above; it is the grace of Christ to which man must respond:

Faith pertains to Christ just like the eye to light. It is determined by the One who also worked the Incarnation—the Holy Spirit. It is the human movement that responds to the movement of the Redeemer. It is the other side of the arrival that refers to the first as love to Love, combining with it into a new existence. Faith is, so to speak, of the nature of Christ. Therefore it is also in the world, as Christ was in it: as beginning. In the world, but not of the world: not coming out of it and not returning to it. With obligations to the world, but not submissive to it. Faith knows the world better than it knows itself; it carries in itself its destiny more intimately than the world ever could; however, it is detached from the world and extraneous to it. St. John expresses this with the greatest profundity when he says: "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith" (1 John 5:4).<sup>43</sup>

To begin the new life of faith, as a response to the principleness of Christ, is a risk. Moreover, just like Christ, the believer is looked upon as a scandal.

4. Only if we take the faith seriously does the truth emerge, and then both man and the world acquire their true aspect. If what we see of Christ does not fit in with our human parameters, that must provoke a revision of our plans and the need to "construct a more profound plan."<sup>44</sup>

Only one who, disregarding every mundane

criterion, accepts from Christ himself what Christ is, receives from Christ himself the revelation about what, from God's point of view, man really is.<sup>45</sup>

From Christ we must revise our image of man. In this way the principleness of Christ functions in anthropology as a principle. In this way faith functions as a gnoseological principle: to accept Christ supposes a change in our vision of man; it supposes that we see man from a new perspective—from God's perspective.

## 2.3 Concreteness, Realism, Historicity

In contrast to the tendency of an excessive “spirit of abstraction,” which is very common today, Christ brings concreteness and realism to our knowledge. The concrete is richer than the abstract: First there is the real God, the living God, and then comes the rational abstraction about God that never attains the fullness of the concrete-living God. The abstract is a partial aspect of the concrete.<sup>46</sup>

1. In the first place, there is the concreteness of God himself which is manifested in Christ. With the Incarnation, indeed, the living God has manifested himself with an unheard of realism.

St. John is the evangelist who, more than others, has reflected on and studied in depth the Word of God and the meaning of the Incarnation. Therefore he presents the Christological realities with a special forcefulness: he contrasts the presence of the *logos* with the realism of the *flesh*. Reflecting on the Gospel of St. John, Guardini says:

The Son of God was made man. He did not just descend upon a man in order to dwell in him, but he was made man. He was really “made” man. And in order that there might remain no doubt, in order that it could not be said that he felt horror before the humiliation of the flesh and that he united himself only in the intimacy of a pure soul or a sublime spirit, John says with great emphasis: “he was made flesh.”<sup>47</sup>

Guardini explains how St. John is located theologically between St. Paul (who did not live together with the Lord) and the synoptics. He did live together with Christ, but before his writings he spent many years reflecting on him and the presence of the Gnostic heresies. Precisely for that reason, along with his strong

spirituality, of the four evangelists he is the one who insists more on the bodily realism of Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup>

2. Another aspect of the concreteness and realism is the historical character of the life of Christ and the Redemption. Guardini insists on this aspect because one runs the risk of making an abstraction out of the Redemption, of seeing it as something necessary.<sup>49</sup> Of course, the concrete mode of the Redemption (like everything that happens in history) does not escape the eternal design of God. But the life of Christ, his historical happening, the deeds that occurred, and the concrete way (the cross) in which the Redemption was carried out—all of that is inserted into history and depends on the freedom of the decisions made.

The salvation of mankind is not realized on the level of nature, nor on an ideal level, or in that of an isolated person, but in the context of history and in a historical way. History, however, results from individual decisions. That is truly history—a fact resulting from the action of an individual, the work of the present moment—when it is changed into decisions for the totality and for all the time that comes afterwards.<sup>50</sup>

Guardini maintains that it is fundamental to understand that things could occur in a different way because, otherwise, the life of Christ and the Redemption would lose all their realism.<sup>51</sup>

3. The other great element of concreteness and realism for human understanding is the Resurrection of Christ. In the real, concrete character of the Resurrection, Christianity stakes its very existence. Already from the beginning of the apostolic preaching, the Resurrection of the Lord is presented as “the vital center of Christianity.”<sup>52</sup>

Guardini warns about the danger of spiritualism. Already from its origins, the various forms of spiritualism have been a constant danger for the Christian faith. In opposition to the Gnostic and spiritualizing errors that propose a vision of Christianity as religious-spiritual experience, St. John reacted by stressing the two pillars of the faith: The Word became flesh, and Jesus has risen from the dead.

Spiritualism is not just an ancient problem. Interesting in this regard is the affirmation of Guardini about the presence even today of the Gnostic-spiritualistic danger, very much like that at the beginnings of the Christian era.<sup>53</sup>

4. The point of view of Christ, his knowledge of the world, is never a mere abstraction. The truth of Christ about the world and about man has never remained a general theory. Christ does not make theories. Christ adds to knowledge a profound concreteness and singularity. The point of view of Christ, which is the methodological distance for a correct understanding of man and his world, is concrete:

The thinking of Jesus, such as is expressed in his words, remains close to the immediate reality of things, of man and of God.<sup>54</sup>

The perspective that Christ contributes is always concrete and realistic, without abstractions. Faith and the supernatural vision that welcomes the perspective of Christ, even though abstract, is always referred to the concrete, to the real just as it presents itself in union with the totality of feeling. The faith—our author insists—is something essentially referred to reality, not to ideas:

To believe means to discover that reality, to unite oneself to it, to move into it. And to live in the faith means to take that reality seriously.<sup>55</sup>

The supernatural vision that is born from faith also has this concrete-realistic dimension. It has the fundamental sense to reconstruct reality from the perspective of faith. Faith reconstructs reality such as it is in the face of the deceptive and apparent realism that denies the presence of God:

The life of faith means to reconstruct one's consciousness of reality. For our senses, dominated by the world, the body is more real than the spirit, electricity is more real than an idea, power is more real than love, utility more real than truth. And all that taken together, the "world," is incomparably more real than God. How difficult it is, even while praying, to sense God as real! How difficult it is, and how seldom it is granted to us, to experience in meditation Christ as real—much more real and more powerful than the realities of earthly existence! And afterwards, to stand up, to return to the world of men, to dedicate oneself to the affairs of daily life, to experience the forces of the environment and of public life and to go on saying that God is more real, that Christ is more powerful than all of that. And to say it with a clear conscience that is not forced. Who can do that?<sup>56</sup>

## 2.4. Judgment, Purity, Objectivity

The distance of God in Christ, with respect to man, and the access to that distance through faith permit one to obtain, says the author, the authentic critical point of view from which one can judge man and his action and the world. Only reality can judge "from outside."

1. Christ is judgment of the world. He is not subjected to the world; he is free in the absolute sense of the word. He is the truth, and he thus reveals the truth about man and things. In face of the truth, things and man, events and their meaning are seen in their true dimension. Nothing merely mundane can judge the world. There must be an independent measure, something not subjected to the same human parameters. In his presence the most intimate truth hidden in the human heart is unveiled: "Christ is, essentially, judge and judgment of the world."<sup>57</sup>

Guardini explains that the perspective that Christ introduces into the knowledge of man and the world acquires a practical, evaluating character: a task to accomplish. In effect, truth is, in the last analysis, the source of all objective evaluation and of all praxis correctly established, since it is a matter "not only of a general system of values and obligations, but also of the particular task that this world imposes on man—the work that man is required to accomplish in this world."<sup>58</sup>

The supernatural perspective supposes, in Guardini's analysis, the task that this world, looked at from the truth of Christ, imposes on man. Faith, in effect, not only allows us to access some supernatural truths, but also inserts us into a new life with new values and new purposes:

And if we decide to do this, to look at the world from the vantage point of authentic faith, what will we see? Will we not find a transposition of all things? An insertion into new contexts that come from God and, consequently, a new fixing of ends? Will not a change of proportions take place, a relativizing of magnitudes, an "inversion of values"?<sup>59</sup>

Truth never remains indifferent. Truth always questions life, judges the situation, and requires action. In this sense the irruption of Christ into life, the Christian life, always has a moral aspect. Even so, the author always insists on the priority of *logos* over *ethos*.<sup>60</sup>

Christ is always a scandal. Faith or scandal are the two great alternatives of man before Christ.<sup>61</sup> Before Christ one must always decide: there is no room for

indifference. The Christian, who lives the life of Christ, also participates in this attitude:

In the believer the attitude of Christ is repeated, although in a very small way. Every man who is a true believer is a living judge of the world.<sup>62</sup>

2. Only Christ, Guardini argues, has divine independence and freedom over against the world. Only he can maintain a true view that is absolutely pure and objective about reality: a contemplative view. Only in Christ does one encounter perfect contemplation. He is not seeking anything; he is situated in a position (the divine position) from which there is no need for anything. Only in Christ is one able to find such a view, where there is no admixture of unsatisfied desires, egoism or particular interests:

The unique and specific aspect of Christ is not found in the fact that he renounces the pleasures of the world and demands privations, but that he is free. . . . Perfect freedom—supreme and pure; that is the greatness in the Lord. Thus, he is free of every desire, of all searching for wealth or even sustenance; he is free of every opposition to things and from the tension of renunciation; he is free especially of all resentment, even the most secret, against everything that he does not enjoy and that one notices only slowly. In Jesus freedom is very natural, so much so that it goes unnoticed. His look rests calmly on things when he observes them. He considers beautiful what is beautiful. He accepts the good things in life as they are. Moreover, his total capacity to judge and to love is directed to God.<sup>63</sup>

Guardini uses the concept of purity to refer to this divine perspective of Christ: a view about the world and about man, independent, supreme, not corrupted by any particular point of view, where one finds the perfect unity between truth and love.

For our author, the fullness of knowledge resides only in Christ; only he knows reality such as it is, the original plan; only he can see the world as it is. In this sense, the purity of his view, his supreme independence is, for human knowledge, an absolute point of reference to be able to reach the truth. We cannot free ourselves like that from our particular likes and interests; we cannot look at reality the way Christ looks at it, with pure eyes.<sup>64</sup> Therefore faith, as an incorporation into the view of Christ, means redemption for our knowledge, in our journey toward the truth. It is a radical change in

our life and in our way of looking at things that Christ gives us: a new point of departure.

Faith is, therefore, an event, an instruction, a transformation in which our eyes are renewed, our thoughts are set in a different direction, our opinions about others are changed.<sup>65</sup>

Through revelation and faith man can attain the point of view of Christ; he can reach that pure, supreme, independent view that Christ has of man and the world. Revelation and faith insert man, as a Christian, into a new gnoseological plane: to see things through the eyes of Christ.

### 3. The Catholic View of the World

In what measure is one able to attain this “seeing things through the eyes of Christ? Guardini explains that the limits on human knowledge do not disappear by trying to see the world through faith. The particular conditions of human existence follow from the current ones. In the first place, the typical Christian vision appears under diverse and particular points of view: thus one can speak of a Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox vision of the world, and within each of these denominations one can find further internal subdivisions.<sup>66</sup>

But also within the same Catholic-Christian vision there are in fact diverse particular types, different points of view:

St. Augustine's own vision is profoundly distinct from that of Ignatius of Loyola. St. Thomas Aquinas sees things in a way different from Cardinal Newman. They are all undoubtedly Catholic, but also there is no doubt that they are different in the way that the world appears to them.<sup>67</sup>

There is room for many particular perspectives, proper to each psychological, ethnic, or cultural type. Each person, historical epoch, people, and so on, has its own particular way of seeing things. Within the common denomination of “Christian” there is an authentic diversity.<sup>68</sup>

But viewed correctly, Guardini argues, that diversity is not inconvenient. It would be false to try to reduce the diversity of Christian thinking to an artificial homogenization. Thus it would lose its vital strength, since the particular is always limited and does not attain the possibilities of the whole.<sup>69</sup>

The Catholic-Christian vision of the world which is

made possible by faith in Christ is not a particular type of vision in opposition to others. It is not the predominance of a particular mode of vision:

Just like life itself, Catholicism contains within itself all the typical possibilities. It is possible to show the existence of all the others within its own confines.... The Catholic attitude is unique.<sup>70</sup>

In what does the Catholic attitude consist? Guardini says:

Well then, speaking formally, the Catholic attitude consists in the fact that every particular attitude, determined by psychological, ethnic and cultural types, is included in its universal attitude that transcends all of those. In this way every figure and every vital expression reaches a supreme and organic expression, moderation and reciprocity.<sup>71</sup>

Here we enter into another important point of Guardini's thinking. The Catholic-Christian vision of the world that is made possible by the faith does not consist in a particular mode of looking at the world, but precisely in a universal mode—a universal attitude that can be made present in each individual and in every particular point of view.

The universal vision of reality, Guardini continues to argue, is not opposed to the particular view of the individual. However, at the same time, no particular view is the universal vision. The universal vision, which is definitively the “view of Christ” about the world and man, is not the summation of the particular points of view of individuals.

Pure diversity without unity would be disintegration and, ultimately, death. The “view of Christ” is not something evanescent or nebulous; it is an objective unity of thought. Who possesses this view completely regarding reality? Who possesses the “view of Christ” on the side of any particularism whatsoever? Guardini makes us see the risk of subjectivism that underlies that question. Who can say that his particular point of view corresponds to the thinking of Christ? One is not able to escape easily from the slavery of the particular. There must be, he argues, something objective and at the same time not standardizing. There is need of an objective instance that frees us from the slavery of the particular. That liberating instance is the Church:

The Catholic *Weltanschauung*, in the full sense of the word, that is to say, the view directed to the whole that wells up from the totality of original life—from

the sovereign life in opposition to all typical particularisms, is surely only the Church. Historically she is the depository of the total view of Jesus Christ regarding the world.<sup>72</sup>

Guardini singles out the Church as the one instance that objectifies and liberates thought. The Church constitutes, in the order of thinking, “a living unity of all the particularisms.”<sup>73</sup> The Church is the space that makes possible Christian thinking.<sup>74</sup> Christian anthropology develops, therefore, in her bosom, lives in her interior, in a unitary and liberating space.

The individual Christian lives in the Church, integrated into a totality that does not limit his freedom or suppress peculiarity; on the contrary, she enables them and makes them grow. The Church is the one place where “the individual manages to be completely himself.”<sup>75</sup> In a similar manner, Christian thinking lives in the Church; it is integrated in her and made possible by the faith of the Church that brings us face to face with Christ’s view of the world that helps us avoid the danger of particularism.<sup>76</sup>

The Church permits the freedom and diversity of Christian thinking. Finally, faith is not a prison, but freedom and stimulation for reason. ☩

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> R. Guardini, *Den Menschen erkennt nur, wer von Gott weiss*, included in *Gläubiges Dasein / Die Annahme seiner selbst* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1993), 194.
- <sup>2</sup> R. Guardini, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1991), 14.
- <sup>3</sup> See H.-B. Gerl, “Abbracciare con lo sguardo il mondo,” in *La Weltanschauung Cristiana di Romano Guardini*, ed. S. Zucal (Bologna: EBD, 1988), 242–243. On July 1, 1952, Guardini wrote a letter to Heinrich Fries in which our author states explicitly his opposition to the relativism, subjectivism, and political character that the term *Weltanschauung* had taken on in that epoch.
- <sup>4</sup> See M. Lluch Baixauli, “La Katholische Weltanschauung de Romano Guardini,” *Scripta Theologica* 30 (1998): 629–58. (**Correct spelling of Lluch?**)
- <sup>5</sup> See R. Guardini, *Unterscheidung des Christlichen. Gesammelte Studien 1923–1963*, Band 1: *Aus dem Bereich der Philosophie* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1994).
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 22.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 21.
- <sup>8</sup> See ibid., 30. This expression refers to a methodical reflection on the cognoscitive attitude and its presuppositions.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., 30.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 28.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 33.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 33.
- <sup>13</sup> At the same time, a mere transcendent distance is not sufficient. Pure heterogeneity is not sufficient in order to know the world and man. A pure “outside” does not enter into relation with the world. A reality totally

- extraneous would not permit one to see the world. Christ is not “the absolutely foreign.” Christ is not pure difference, since he also has proximity with reality: complete proximity. In Christ reality truly becomes complete and is completely fulfilled. Christ is *different*, but not *foreign*. He contains within himself all the proximity of man and the world, but in an elevated, complete, *supereminent* way. He possesses in fullness and purity all the positive values and realities of the world. From that distance which is complete proximity, from that freedom, one sees the world such as it is and thus permits a true encounter and a true dialogue with reality. This aspect will be examined more carefully in a later chapter. See *ibid.*, 30–31.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. Guardini uses the terms *ausser* (outside) and *anders* (different).
- <sup>15</sup> R. Guardini, *Der Herr. Betrachtungen über die Person und das Leben Jesu* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1995), 466. (Original edition – Würzburg: Werkbund, 1937).
- <sup>16</sup> Guardini, *Unterscheidung I*, 32.
- <sup>17</sup> Of special interest for this theme are the following Guardini writings: *Das Bild von Jesus dem Christus im Neuen Testament* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder 1961); *Die menschliche Wirklichkeit des Herrn. Beiträge zu einer Psychologie Jesu. Das Wesen des Christentums* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1991); *Jesus Christus. Geistliches Wört* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1992).
- <sup>18</sup> One could find other aspects, but the ones offered here seem to us to be sufficiently important to illustrate the idea of the author.
- <sup>19</sup> Guardini, *Jesus Christus*, 142–43.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.
- <sup>22</sup> Guardini, *Die menschliche Wirklichkeit*, 74.
- <sup>23</sup> See *ibid.*, 81–86.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–75.
- <sup>25</sup> The basis of these considerations, which are very dear to Guardini, is the idea of Pascal that “man infinitely surpasses man.” See R. Guardini, *Christliches Bewusstsein. Versuche über Pascal* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1991), 49–98. (Original edition – Leipzig: Hegner, 1935).
- <sup>26</sup> See R. Guardini, *Die Existenz des Christen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1976), 60 (edited posthumously).
- <sup>27</sup> See Guardini, *Die menschliche Wirklichkeit*, 75–76.
- <sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, 111.
- <sup>29</sup> Guardini, *Der Herr*, 416.
- <sup>30</sup> On the concept of “originality” (*Anfanghaftigkeit*), see Guardini, *Die menschliche Wirklichkeit*, 185.
- <sup>31</sup> See *ibid.*, 145.
- <sup>32</sup> See *ibid.*, 153.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.
- <sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, 164–169.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.
- <sup>36</sup> See *ibid.*, 185–186. Modern thinking, especially since the Enlightenment, has tried to discover the essence of Christ, but this is impossible.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.
- <sup>42</sup> See *ibid.*, 198.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 199–200.
- <sup>44</sup> See Guardini, *Das Bild*, 123.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.
- <sup>46</sup> This may be one of the fundamental gnoseological intuitions that permeates Guardini’s thinking and that constitutes the fundamental theme of his book, *Der Gegensatz: Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendigen*.

*Konkreten* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1998). (Original edition – Mainz: Grünewald, 1925.) This may also explain the pedagogical and formative style of his academic and pastoral activity: the intention to put the public in contact with the real and living God who makes himself visible in Christ.

- <sup>47</sup> Guardini, *Der Herr*, 2.
- <sup>48</sup> See Guardini, *Das Bild*, 71–87.
- <sup>49</sup> See Guardini, *Die Existenz*, 303–309.
- <sup>50</sup> Guardini, *Der Herr*, 247.
- <sup>51</sup> See *ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 494.
- <sup>53</sup> See *ibid.*, 499–502.
- <sup>54</sup> Guardini, *Die menschliche Wirklichkeit*, 114.
- <sup>55</sup> Guardini, *Der Herr*, 234.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.
- <sup>57</sup> Guardini, *Unterscheidung I*, 33.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–29. Here is the source of the “ascetic” dimension of Christian life. One can study the presence of the ascetic element in Guardini in: Lehman, K., “L’eredità di Romano Guardini per la chiesa d’oggi,” in *Tra coscienza e storia. Il problema dell’etica in Romano Guardini*, ed. M. Nicoletti and S. Zucal (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1999), 26–27.
- <sup>59</sup> Guardini, *Unterscheidung I*, 35.
- <sup>60</sup> Guardini’s insistence on this point is significant. Truth always comes first. Thus, for example, in the liturgy. What relation is there in the liturgy between *logos* and *ethos*? In the liturgy, truth has priority. This is the source of its peace and apparent “detachment” from the practical needs of today, its lack of a tendency to moralize and educate. But this priority of truth is not in contradiction with nor does it annul ethical activity. The liturgy is not preoccupied with the practical life, but it knows that the truth with which it puts us in contact directs us to a moral life. See R. Guardini, *Vom Geist der Liturgie* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1997), 79–88. (Original edition – Freiburg: Herder, 1918.)
- <sup>61</sup> See Guardini, *Der Herr*, 50–51.
- <sup>62</sup> Guardini, *Unterscheidung I*, 33.
- <sup>63</sup> Guardini, *Der Herr*, 337.
- <sup>64</sup> Many pages of his book *Der Herr* contain this fundamental idea. They demonstrate how Christ does not see things with our human parameters. For example: justice. When man asks for justice, his request is deformed by his sins and particular interests. Christ alone, from his divine perspective, reveals justice as it truly is. See *ibid.*, 307–314.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.
- <sup>66</sup> See Guardini, *Unterscheidung I*, cit. 36–37. Of course, the author here posits the identification between the Christian vision and the Catholic vision, without denying the value of other Christian confessions.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.
- <sup>68</sup> See *ibid.*, 38–41.
- <sup>69</sup> See *ibid.*, 37–38.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>74</sup> Here he does not address the ecclesiological problem presented by the existence of diverse Christian churches and ecclesial communities and their repercussion on Christian thought.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>76</sup> See R. Guardini, *Berichte über mein Leben. Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen* (Mainz-Paderborn: M. Grünewald-Schöningh, 1995), 43. (Original edition – Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1984.)

# The Natural Law, the International Theological Commission, and the Search for a Universal Ethic

By Robert L. Fastiggi, Ph.D., Professor of Systematic Theology, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the natural law, not only in Catholic philosophy but also in the areas of political science, law, and international relations. Much of this interest emerges in reaction to various forms of skepticism, relativism, and positivism that have challenged the existence of universal ethical principles. It is somewhat ironic that at the very point in human history when modern means of communication have facilitated global interactions, there is less and less agreement on what moral norms should govern the lives of individuals, corporations, and states.

It is within this context that the 2009 document of the International Theological Commission (ITC) assumes great importance. Entitled *À la recherche d'une éthique universelle: nouveau regard sur la loi naturelle* (*In search of a universal ethic: a new look at the natural law*), it is the first document to receive the unanimous endorsement of all thirty members of the ITC since Paul VI established the commission in 1969. The topic of the natural law was assigned to the ITC for the five-year period of 2004–2009. The document was drafted by a subcommittee led by Fr. Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., professor of philosophy at the L’Institut Catholique de Toulouse in France. It consists of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. It is divided into a total of 116 paragraphs or subsections.

The introduction explains the reason for the chosen topic: the search for common moral values is more pressing in a world of increased communication and internationalization. Questions pertaining to the environment, violence, and terrorism have a planetary significance, and, in this context, “the search for common ethical values takes on a renewed relevance” (no. 1). While there are some positive signs in the recent past (for example, the 1948 U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights), various movements, such as moral

relativism and juridical positivism, have threatened the very basis of moral values grounded in human dignity and the common good. The resources offered by the natural law can redirect persons and communities back to those “fundamental orientations of human action” that can be known “by the light of reason” (no. 9).

Chapter one begins by highlighting the “convergences” on moral values found in the many religious and philosophical traditions of the world. Although these traditions vary considerably with regard to their “form and extent,” they nevertheless provide a common affirmation of certain “universal moral behaviors” that are “demanded by the very nature of man,” and which “hold true for each individual and for all peoples” (no. 12). Among the traditions considered are Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese civilization, African religions, Islam, and Greco-Roman philosophy. These various traditions, in their own ways, provide common witness to the “golden rule” of not doing to others what you would not want done to yourself. They also harmonize with many ethical teachings of both the Old and New Testaments, especially those of the Decalogue.

The natural law, which has a foundation in the religious and philosophical traditions of the world, develops in a special way within the Christian tradition. While St. Paul and the Church Fathers provide a strong foundation, it is during the Middle Ages “that the doctrine of the natural law takes on a ‘classic’ form that constitutes the foundational basis for all subsequent discussions” (no. 27). This is especially true in scholastic thinkers, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, who understand the natural law as “a participation of the rational creature in the eternal divine law” (*ibid.*). In the sixteenth century, thinkers such as Francisco de Vitoria used the natural law as a basis for “an international law, namely a universal norm governing the relations of the peoples and the States between them” (no. 28).

While the natural law developed in a consistent and coherent manner within scholastic philosophy, movements such as voluntarism and rationalism led to a

subsequent “secularization” of the natural law (no. 31). The Magisterium of the Church, during the pontificate of Leo XIII (1878–1903), attempted to revive the classic Catholic natural law tradition in reaction to new forms of social organization such as socialism (no. 35). Since the time of Leo XIII, the Magisterium has consistently appealed to the natural law, especially in resistance to movements of moral relativism, individualism, secularism, and juridical positivism (no. 35).

Chapter two tries to root the natural law in a common perception of moral values grounded in universal human inclinations toward happiness and self-transcendence. In this chapter the influence of the moral theologian Servais Pinckaers, O.P. (1925–2008) is evident in the articulation of the “natural dynamisms” at work in the human person (no. 46). These inclinations, first systematically elaborated by Thomas Aquinas, include the impulse “to conserve and develop one’s existence” (no. 48); the drive to procreate (no. 49); the inclinations to live with others in society and seek communion with God or the Absolute (no. 50). These common inclinations form the basis of those moral values that “flow from a human nature in which the essential components remain identical throughout the course of history” (no. 52). These universal moral norms, however, require prudence in their application because of the diversity of historical contexts and situations (nos. 53–59).

Chapter three is the most theoretical and philosophical. It examines the natural law from the perspectives of metaphysics and philosophical anthropology, with a focus on questions of nature, person, and freedom (nos. 64–68). Special consideration is given to the Christian affirmation of the *Logos* as personal rather than impersonal (no. 69). The common participation of human beings in the divine *Logos* forms the basis for the harmony of nature, man, and God. Voluntarism, rationalism, and a deterministic view of physics, however, undermine human confidence in “any immanent teleological rationality” in the cosmos (no. 73). In this context, there is a need for a new “philosophy of nature, which takes note of the intelligible depth of the sensible world,” along with “a metaphysics of creation,” that can help overcome “the dualist and Gnostic temptation of abandoning nature to moral insignificance” (no. 78).

Chapter four investigates the importance of the natural law for the social and political orders. The application of the natural law to the social order flows from the natural inclination of human beings to live in society with others and pursue the common good (no. 85). The natural law, which corresponds to the order of

reason, is “the immanent measure of interpersonal and social human relations” (no. 88). The demands of justice, therefore, are prior to any civil human laws. The Catholic natural law tradition recognizes the reality of natural right (*ius naturale*), which helps to anchor human laws in the natural law (no. 89). Therefore, “natural rights are the measures of human relations anterior to the will of the legislator” (no. 92).

Both the Bible and early Church tradition highlight the distinction between the celestial City and the earthly City. The State, therefore, cannot set itself up as the bearer of “ultimate meaning” (no. 95). The political order is not the domain of ultimate truth, “but it must, nevertheless, remain open to the perpetual search for God, truth and justice” (no. 96). The State, for its part, must protect and support what is necessary for the full realization of the humanity of its citizens, and this “includes certain values, spiritual and religious, as well as the freedom of citizens to determine themselves with respect to the Absolute and supreme goods” (*ibid.*). Although the natural law “is the basis of the social and political order,” it “does not demand an adherence of faith but of reason” (no. 99). The natural law, which is the law of rationality, provides the best protection against those “political myths” that require the adoration of earthly political orders (no. 100).

Chapter five is the most theological. It tries to situate the natural law in the plan of salvation initiated by God, the Holy Trinity. The key is the recognition of Christ as the incarnate *Logos*, the living law of God, who builds upon and completes all the requirements of the natural law. Because of sin, however, the perception of the *Logos* is obscured. The incarnation of the *Logos* in the person of Christ enables man to know “the sublimity of his vocation” (no. 105). What the law of Israel prepared is fulfilled in Christ, who is the end (*telos*) of the law. Christians are called to follow Christ, by “the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the love common to the Father and the Son” (no. 110). The Holy Spirit, therefore, becomes “the interior principle and the supreme rule of believers’ action”; the Spirit enables them “to fulfill spontaneously and with justice all the demands of love” (*ibid.*).

In the conclusion, the importance of the natural law is once again stressed. The natural law “brings together and confirms elements already present in the rational thought of the wisdoms of humanity” (no. 114). It responds to the human quest for “rules for the moral life and life in society” that have a universal and international application (no. 115). The purpose of the

document is then summed up as an invitation to “the experts and spokesmen of the great religious, sapiential and philosophical traditions of humanity,” to draw upon their own sources “to arrive at a common recognition of universal norms founded on a rational approach to reality” (no. 116). Thus, in spite of the many cultural and religious differences, human beings can “work together to promote understanding, mutual recognition and peaceful cooperation among all the members of the human family” (no. 116).

The members of the International Theological Commission deserve much credit for this detailed and penetrating exposition of the foundations and importance of the natural law. Because of a common rational nature, human beings are able to participate in the eternal law of God through natural reason. Faced with the destructive forces of moral relativism and skepticism, it is indeed time to take a new look at the natural law, a law “founded on a rational approach to reality” and ultimately grounded in the divine *Logos*, who is Christ. ♫

# Apologetics: A Critical Component of Adult Catechesis in North America

By John Gresham

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The second Vatican Council's declaration on Christian education lists the following purposes of Christian education: to introduce the catechized into a greater awareness of the gift of faith they have received in baptism; to teach them how to give worship to God; to help them conform their lives to the new life in Christ; and to support their growth toward Christian maturity. Much contemporary adult religious education in the North American context, when it is done well, gives attention to this personal growth in understanding the faith and consequent spiritual development. However, the description of the purposes of religious education in *Gravissimum educationis* does not stop there, but continues with a reference to the vocation of all Christians to “bear witness to the hope that is in them,” citing the classic New Testament passage on apologetics, 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be ready to give an explanation (*apologia*) to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” Religious education should teach the faithful “how to bear witness to the hope that is in them,” in order to “help in the Christian formation of the world.”<sup>1</sup> In his apostolic exhortation on catechesis, John Paul II similarly describes catechesis as a systematic presentation of Christian faith in view of initiation into the fullness of Christian living, but he then goes on to mention “apologetics or the examination of the reasons for belief” as

one of the crucial elements upon which solid catechesis is built.<sup>2</sup> What is too often lacking in adult religious education programs is this apologetic component.

Why is apologetics an essential component of adult religious education? We can first answer this question in light of the cultural context of adult learners in the contemporary Church in the United States. Then, we can answer the question in relation to the vocation of the lay faithful. After making a case for apologetics in adult catechesis, this essay will conclude by responding to a few objections.

Too often, adult religious education fails to acknowledge the continuing influence of Protestantism in shaping American culture. It is not just that American Catholics have many Protestant neighbors; those Catholics themselves are shaped by a culture historically formed by its predominately Protestant heritage. The Catholic adults in our religious education programs often share with their Protestant neighbors an individualistic understanding of faith, a distrust of institutional religion, and a critical stance toward received traditions. They need to hear apologetic defenses of Catholic distinctiveness in order to overcome their own cultural biases derived from the Protestant roots of our American culture. In this cultural context, careful arguments for distinctively Catholic understandings of faith, Church, and tradition are essential for fostering genuine intellectual conversion and formation. Protestantism provides a pedagogical contrast against which Catholic understanding may be taught. For example, the

Catholic understanding of scripture and tradition can be taught most clearly by providing apologetic arguments contrasting it to the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*. An apologetic component to adult formation will use the contrasts between Catholics and Protestants as a teaching tool to foster better understanding of Catholic distinctiveness. At the same time, authentic and genuine strengths of Protestant Christianity, such as devotion to scripture, emphasis on a personal relationship to Christ, and willingness to give public witness to Christ, can challenge us to improve our own adult formation to foster those same Christian principles within a Catholic context. Apologetic catechesis will help Catholics form a devotion to scripture read within the context of the living tradition of the Church, develop a relationship to Christ that is personal without becoming individualistic, and empower them to give witness to Christ as the fullness of truth who fulfills the truth and goodness already perceived by those to whom they witness.

In considering the cultural context of adult catechesis, one must give attention not only to our nation's Protestant past, but also to the increasingly secular, relativistic, and post-Christian character of the present culture. Those Catholic adults in need of religious education often find themselves in an environment that is at best indifferent, and at worst openly hostile, to Christian beliefs and values. The marketplace of ideas, from mainstream media to the cultural cacophony of the Internet, is pervaded by radical skepticism toward theistic and Christian truth claims, hostile criticism of Christian moral teachings, and general negativity toward all organized religions. At the same time, a continued interest, and even hunger, for "spirituality" persists, although often coupled with the disclaimer, "I'm spiritual but not religious." In this cultural context, our faithful Protestant brothers and sisters join us as fellow embattled allies. In the present cultural context, much that was once taken for granted in religious education must be revisited. Such basic questions as the existence of God are widely challenged in our culture, and Catholic adults need to relearn (if they ever learned them in the first place!) St. Thomas's five ways and other responses to atheism and agnosticism. The endless parade of alternative interpretations of the historical Jesus require careful defense of the Biblical witness and the patristic defense of Jesus as the Word incarnate. We can hardly begin to teach about Jesus today without an apologetic defense and explanation of Catholic Christology. Contemporary religious education cannot ignore the skeptical environment of contemporary culture; it must provide

Catholic adults with answers to the questions this culture raises in their own minds about the existence of God and the reality of Jesus Christ. It is not only the truth about God and Christ that must be addressed. Contemporary adult religious education must also provide an apologetic defense of the Catholic view of the human person, with particular attention to the relation between human freedom and truth. This was the emphasis of Pope Benedict XVI when he visited the United States and was asked how to respond to secularism. He answered the query by calling the Church in America to promote

an apologetics aimed at affirming the truth of Christian revelation, the harmony of faith and reason, and a sound understanding of freedom, seen in positive terms as liberation both *from* the limitations of sin and *for* an authentic and fulfilling life. In a word, the Gospel has to be preached and taught as an integral way of life, offering an attractive and true answer, intellectually and practically, to real human problems.<sup>3</sup>

Apologetics is a necessary component of contemporary adult catechesis, not only to address issues raised by the past and current cultural context but also, more importantly, to equip Catholic adults to fulfill their perennial vocation in the world. The laity share in the evangelizing mission of the Church with a particular responsibility to bring the Gospel into the secular, temporal world in which they live and work. First, the laity are called to witness to Christ by their lives and by their words.<sup>4</sup> Thus, when John Paul II speaks of the formation for the lay faithful, he cites the aforementioned apologetics passage from 1 Peter and calls for a doctrinal formation that enables the lay faithful "to give a reason for their hoping" in view of the world and its grave and complex problems.<sup>5</sup> Second, in addition to giving personal witness to Christ, the lay faithful are called to penetrate the world and the social order—including the realms of work, family, politics, professions, media, and all areas of culture—with the truths and values of the Gospel. The Vatican II decree on the apostolate of the laity exhorts laymen, "each according to his own gifts of intelligence and learning[,] to be more diligent in doing what they can to explain, defend and properly apply Christian principles to the problems of our era in accordance with the mind of the church."<sup>6</sup> Adult Catholics need apologetics training, not only so that they might give witness to Christ and effectively share their faith with others, but also that they might defend the teachings of the Church in their application to social

and cultural issues. To give just one example, John Paul II calls on the laity to respond to threats to the human person in the area of bioethics: “The lay faithful, having responsibility in various capacities and at different levels of science as well as in the medical, social, legislative and economic fields must *courageously accept the ‘challenge’ posed by new problems in bioethics.*<sup>7</sup> In this and other cultural, scientific, and political fields, many of the lay faithful will be called upon to give heroic witness to the value of the human person by upholding and defending Catholic teaching on the natural moral law. Catechists working in adult religious education have the responsibility to prepare the lay faithful to become apologists for the Gospel who can defend the moral teachings of the Church by their words and by the witness of their lives.

One possible objection to an apologetics emphasis in adult catechesis is that it might detract from the primary goal of spiritual formation. The primary goal of religious formation is to bring the faithful into intimate communion with Christ so that they might share in the life of the Trinity.<sup>8</sup> Some may object that the argumentative approach of apologetics is incompatible with a focus on personal spiritual transformation through encounter with Christ. An Evangelical Protestant philosopher has answered this objection in an article with the rather Catholic sounding title: “What Do the Five Ways Have to Do with the Ascent of Mt. Carmel? Apologetics as a Modern-Day Spiritual Discipline.”<sup>9</sup> The author argues that “engaging in Christian apologetics strengthens the believer’s conviction of the truth and goodness of the Christian way and that such strong conviction deepens the believer’s commitment to pursue the Christian life with a degree of diligence and constancy that is essential to spiritual maturation.”<sup>10</sup> He mentions the work of St. Anselm, whose arguments for the logic of the Incarnation were intended both to answer the objections of unbelievers and to nourish the faith of believers.<sup>11</sup> He gives the analogy of a person on a journey, who is encouraged to continue that journey, though it is long and arduous, when signs and other evidence assure him that he is on the right path. The claim that there is a dichotomy between apologetic argument and spiritual formation is easily answered by the innumerable readers who have found spiritual nourishment in the writings of such classic apologists as John Henry Newman, C. S. Lewis, and G. K. Chesterton, or in the contemporary works of Scott Hahn, Peter Kreeft, and other representatives of the new apologetics. These apologists inspire confidence in divine revelation,

illuminate the meaning of that revelation, and show its relevance to human aspirations for truth, goodness, and beauty, thus encouraging their readers to persevere in that journey of prayer which leads toward intimacy with Christ.

Is there a danger that an emphasis on apologetics might lead to an argumentative spirit that is contrary to the spirit of Christ? It is possible, but it seems that most sincere apologists quickly move beyond that stage because they realize it is counterproductive to sharing Christ and the Catholic faith with others. They soon learn to give attention to the verse immediately following 1 Peter 3:15, which calls us to give answer to the hope within us with “gentleness and reverence.” A helpful corrective to this tendency is the little book *How Not to Share Your Faith: The Seven Deadly Sins of Catholic Apologetics and Evangelization* by Mark Brumley.<sup>12</sup> Learning apologetics can foster a humble docility to the truth, and engaging in apologetics soon teaches one the necessity of prayerful intimacy with Christ and dependence upon the Holy Spirit as essential to faithful witness.

Another possible objection to an apologetics component in contemporary adult catechesis is the argument that apologetics is inappropriate in this age of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. However, properly understood, such dialogue necessarily includes an apologetic dimension. The Vatican II decree on ecumenism warns against a false irenicism which clouds the genuine meaning of Catholic doctrine and calls those engaged in dialogue to explain the Catholic faith, profoundly and precisely, in terms understandable to those Christians separated from us. It even describes ecumenical dialogue as a humble and charitable “fraternal rivalry” that can lead all participants to a deeper understanding of the riches of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in regard to interreligious dialogue, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue reminds Catholics in dialogue that they “have the duty of responding to their partners’ expectations regarding the contents of the Christian faith, of bearing witness to this faith when this is called for, of giving an account of the hope that is within them.”<sup>14</sup>

One final objection to an emphasis on apologetics might come from those who would say that our efforts for adult human formation are better focused on restoring the beauty of the liturgy and allowing the beauty of the liturgy to foster that holiness which is the Church’s most persuasive apologetic. Cardinal Ratzinger once claimed as much, writing: “The only really effective

apologia for Christianity comes down to two arguments, namely the *saints* the Church has produced and the *art* which has grown in her womb. Better witness is borne to the Lord by the splendor of holiness and art which have arisen in the community of believers than by clever . . . apologetics.”<sup>15</sup> More recently, Pope Benedict XVI gave a more balanced account in reply to a question about the relative importance of reason and beauty. In his answer, the Holy Father recalled his earlier comments but expanded on them, calling for a twin approach emphasizing the interrelated role of reason and beauty, of apologetics and liturgy, of argument and the witness of holiness:

Yes, I think these two things go hand in hand: reason, precision, honesty in the reflection on the truth – and beauty. Reason that intended to strip itself of beauty would be halved, it would be a blinded reason. It is only when they are united that both these things form the whole, and precisely for faith this union is important. Faith must continuously face the challenges of thought in this epoch, so that it does not seem a sort of irrational legend that we keep alive but which really is a response to the great questions, and not merely a habit, but the truth—as Tertullian once said. . . . Also, I did once say that to me art and the Saints are the greatest apologetic for our faith. The arguments contributed by reason are unquestionably important and indispensable, but then there is always dissent somewhere. On the other hand, if we look at the Saints, this great luminous trail on which God passed through history, we see that there truly is a force of good which resists the millennia; there truly is the light of light. Likewise, if we contemplate the beauties created by faith, they are simply, I would say, the living proof of faith. . . . For this reason I think we should always ensure that the two things are together; we should bring them together. When, in our epoch, we discuss the reasonableness of faith, we discuss precisely the fact that reason does not end where experimental discoveries end—it does not finish in positivism. . . .

We are fighting to expand reason, and hence for a reason which, precisely, is also open to the beautiful and does not have to set it aside as something quite different and unreasonable. . . . [I]n a certain way this is proof of the truth of Christianity: heart and reason encounter one another, beauty and truth converge. . . . [L]et us seek to ensure that the two categories, the aesthetic and the noetic (intellectual), are united and that in this great breadth the entirety and depth of our faith may be made manifest.<sup>16</sup>

Adult Christian catechesis in twenty-first-century North America must respond to the past and present cultural contexts with reasons for faith, equipping Catholic laity to fulfill their vocation to be apologists for Christ in the world, sending them forth as those who have encountered Christ in the truth of Catholic teaching and in the beauty of Catholic worship, so that transformed by Christ they may give witness to him by their words and by their lives. ♣

## ENDNOTES

- 1 *Gravissimum educationis*, 2.
- 2 *Catechesi tradendae*, 18.
- 3 Responses of his Holiness Benedict XVI to the Questions Posed by the Bishops, Apostolic Journey to the United States of America, April 16, 2008.
- 4 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 900, 905.
- 5 *Christifideles laici*, 60.
- 6 *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 6.
- 7 *Christifideles laici*, 38.
- 8 *Catechesi tradendae*, 5.
- 9 Steven Porter, *Philosophia christi* 9, no. 1 (2007): 189-200.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 190.
- 11 Preface to *Cur deus homo*.
- 12 Catholic Answers, 2006.
- 13 *Unitatis redintegratio*, 11.
- 14 *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 82.
- 15 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 129-30.
- 16 Meeting of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, August 6, 2008.

# Moral Blindness: What Practices of Ours Will Future Peoples Condemn?

## *A Response to Kwame Anthony Appiah*

By Dr. Mark S. Latkovic  
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In a thought-provoking September 26, 2010 op-ed in *The Washington Post*, “What will future generations condemn us for?”,<sup>1</sup> Princeton University philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that when we look at the past, there are “three signs that a particular practice is destined for future condemnation.”

### **Appiah’s three signs for a practice’s future condemnation.**

First, as with the case against slavery, “people have already heard the arguments against the practice.” Second, he says, again using the example of slavery, “defenders of the custom tend not to offer moral counterarguments but instead invoke tradition, human nature or necessity.” And third, Appiah argues, “supporters engage in what one might call strategic ignorance, avoiding truths that might force them to face the evils in which they’re complicit.” He observes that those who benefited from the fruits of slave labor in centuries past “simply didn’t think about what made those goods possible.”

### **Appiah’s candidates for future moral condemnation.**

With these signs in mind, the following are Appiah’s “four contenders for future moral condemnation”: (1) our prison system, (2) industrial meat production, (3) the institutionalized and isolated elderly, and (4) the mistreatment of the environment.

Although I am sensitive to these four, especially number 3, and do think that number 1 is a pressing issue that transcends political party lines, and further, that numbers 2 and 4 (with some important qualifications) very well might make “the cut” for future moral condemnation, Appiah’s list is, on the whole, a typically secular-liberal one. We might also add that the environment is an issue that people are already very much aware of and concerned about today.

### **My list of candidates for what future peoples will condemn.**

It does not surprise me that missing from the list—and these would be my four candidates—are (1) abortion, (2) embryonic stem cell research, (3) contraception, and (4) euthanasia. The first practice on my list—legal since the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Roe vs. Wade* decision in 1973—is accepted by many in our culture, although it is still highly contested by many persons, especially those in the pro-life movement and the Catholic Church. The second practice is now being vigorously encouraged by numerous scientists, politicians, entertainers, and many in the media, although it too is highly contested by a sizable proportion of the population. The third is largely accepted as a positive good, with a small minority (mostly Catholics, but even some environmentalists, for example) against it. The fourth practice is not firmly established yet, but Western society clearly seems to be moving toward accepting it. Several states in America have legalized it in some form; more, it appears, are on the horizon.

Except for the second practice, which didn’t exist a generation ago in its morally problematic form, the other three were once condemned by most people in our country. In the last forty to fifty years, however, we have witnessed a sea change in how the culture views abortion, contraception, and euthanasia; consequently, we now speak of a “culture of death,” since Pope John Paul II first used that expression in his 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium vitae (The Gospel of Life)*.<sup>2</sup>

The closest my list gets to Appiah’s is probably with my fourth issue, euthanasia, connected as it is to how we treat the sick and dying elderly. Although one could certainly cite other issues subject to a moral reevaluation, these four, I would argue, make “the cut,” even if we simply use Appiah’s less than adequate three-fold criteria for future moral condemnation.

First, with all four issues, people have already heard the arguments against the practice—for many years now. And they are very good arguments, in my opinion. (I will not rehearse them here.<sup>3</sup>) Second, the defenders

of these practices do not invoke tradition or human nature, but they do invoke “necessity,” that is, the need to relieve human suffering or avoid grave harms. For example, many invoke the necessity of using embryonic stem cells in order to find cures for diseases and to alleviate suffering. In addition, their arguments are weak and usually assume a faulty understanding of the human person (for example, anthropological dualism, which separates “personal life” from “bodily life”) and a faulty moral methodology (for example, utilitarianism/proportionalism/consequentialism). Third, supporters look away from their complicity in the evils associated with these practices. In other words, they look away from the real damage to basic human goods the practices bring about, focusing only on the particular goods that they desire to realize, but whose realization depends on doing direct harm to the goods that stand in their way here and now—the most fundamental being life itself, which they are willing to sacrifice for the so-called greater good.

For the four practices on my list to change, not only minds must change, but also hearts as well. That is to say, a radical intellectual, spiritual, and moral conversion must take place in Western culture. The fact that there are morally sound alternatives to each of these practices (for example, crisis pregnancy centers and adoption for abortion, natural family planning for contraception, adult stem cells for the embryonic type, and palliative and hospice care for euthanasia) also bodes well for assigning them to the dustbin of history.

### **How historical circumstances and social change affect moral judgment.**

I have adapted the following five categories, originally offered by Oxford and Notre Dame moral philosopher John Finnis, to explain how historical circumstances and social change can affect moral judgment and lead to the development of moral doctrine or, as the case may be, to the condemnation by future generations of a practice taken today as morally good or at least morally unproblematic.<sup>4</sup> In brief, these categories can help show how authentic moral progress takes place, more effectively than Appiah’s criteria in my view, with the possible exception, I grant, of his third.

1. Social and cultural entities such as borrowing and lending change. Thus, the development of a capital market linking interest on loans with the return on joint productive enterprises means that outwardly similar behavior, in 1310 and in 2010, can involve very different relationships between the wills of those doing it and the

relevant human goods: same behavior, different actions.

2. Options can be transformed by conceptual clarification. A correct moral judgment on the position which mingled religious freedom with indifferentism can be transformed, for example, into two correct moral judgments on alternatives now adequately differentiated.

3. Emotional biases which blocked differentiation, for example, between penal servitude and chattel servitude, can be removed by changed social conditions, allowing the latent moral insight to be clearly articulated, as in the specific moral absolute which excludes slavery.

4. New or apparently new forms of behavior, such as taking the birth control pill, can raise the question whether they are instances of a familiar and more or less well understood form of action, such as contraception, and that question can clarify and deepen understanding of that action and of precisely why one does wrong in willing it.

5. Other new behavior may prove, on analysis, to be indeed a new form of action, such as baby production (for example, *in vitro* fertilization), but one which turns out to possess one morally decisive feature in common with the fairly recent clarified moral evil of slavery.

I agree with Professor Appiah on one thing, and without reservation. That is when he concludes his article with these words: “Let’s not stop there, though. We will all have our own suspicions about which practices will someday prompt people to ask, in dismay: What were they thinking? Even when we don’t have a good answer, we’ll be better off for anticipating the question.” We have many questions to ask. ♦

### **ENDNOTES**

1 Available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/24/AR2010092404113.html?referrer=emailarticle&sid=ST2010100105284>. See also Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).

2 See Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jpii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jpii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html).

3 See William E. May, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), who articulates effective arguments against these practices drawn from natural law and Catholic faith.

4 See John Finnis, *Moral Absolutes: Tradition, Revision, and Truth* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 25–26.

The following are published columns by William L. Saunders, Senior Vice-President and Senior Counsel of Americans United for Life and Chairman of the Federalist Society's Religious Liberties Practice Group.

### Abortion and Military Facilities: The Effect of the Burris Amendment in the Department of Defense Authorization Bill

The U.S. Senate version of the Department of Defense (DOD) authorization bill for FY2011 contains a provision that would change the law regarding abortion in military facilities.

Under current law, abortions may not be performed by DOD medical personnel or in Department of Defense medical facilities except when the life of the mother is at risk, or when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. A woman is permitted to leave the base and make her own private arrangement for an elective abortion.

The Burris Amendment, added to the DOD authorization bill by the Senate Armed Services Committee, would strike from the law the prohibition on use of military facilities for elective abortions. The amendment does not change a separate provision of the law that prohibits the use of DOD funds for abortion.

The DOD authorization bill may receive consideration by the full Senate shortly after it returns from recess in mid-September, or after the mid-term elections in November.

#### Background.

Since 1978, the use of DOD funds for elective abortions has been restricted or prohibited by federal law and policy.<sup>1</sup> Initially, abortions were performed in military facilities, provided they were privately funded.

On June 21, 1988, a memorandum issued by Dr. William Mayer, then-

Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs), prohibited the use of overseas military medical facilities for abortions.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Mayer asserted that it would be an "insensitivity to the spirit" of the law to perform abortions at military facilities, though he conceded that it may not violate the letter of the law.<sup>3</sup>

In 1993, two days after his inauguration, President Bill Clinton reversed the policy. President Clinton criticized the DOD policy as "go[ing] beyond what I am informed the requirements of the statute are." He directed the Secretary of Defense to immediately reverse the ban and permit "abortion services to be provided, if paid for entirely with non-DOD funds and in accordance with other relevant DOD policies and procedures."<sup>4</sup>

President Clinton's policy permitting abortions in military facilities overseas stood from 1993 to 1996. However, during that time, the administration had to seek civilians to perform the abortions – all military physicians refused to perform or assist in elective abortions.<sup>5</sup>

In 1996, Congress passed what is now 10 USC Sec 1093 (b):

*Restriction on Use of Facilities - No medical treatment facility or other facility of the Department of Defense may be used to perform an abortion except where the life of the mother would be endangered if the fetus were carried to term or in a case in which the pregnancy is the result of an act of rape or incest.*

There have been attempts in Congress to change this provision of the law. The most recent (prior to the Burris Amendment) was an amendment to allow abortions in overseas military facilities that was offered in the House in 2006. It failed by a vote of 191-237.<sup>6</sup>

During the Senate Armed Services Committee mark-up on May 27, 2010, Sen. Roland Burris (Illinois) offered an amendment to the Department of Defense authorization bill to strike Section 1093(b) of the U.S. Code. It passed by a 15-12 vote.<sup>7</sup>

#### Effect of the Burris Amendment.

Since the current law does not distinguish between overseas and domestic military facilities, the effect of the Burris Amendment would be worldwide. It would affect military facilities in the

United States and abroad.

However, DOD policy requires military facilities to abide by laws in foreign countries.<sup>8</sup> While abortion is legal and generally available in most countries with American bases (including England, Germany, Japan, and even Turkey), in countries where abortion is illegal, military facilities will still be required to follow those nations' laws.

#### Looking Ahead.

In order for the bill containing the Burris Amendment to become law, it will have to pass through three steps. First, it must be voted on by the full Senate. Second, there will be a conference committee between the House and Senate committees to reconcile the differences between the House-passed and Senate-passed versions of the bill. Third, the conference report will have to be voted on by each chamber of Congress before it can be signed into law by the President.

The full Senate is expected to take up the bill shortly after Congress returns from recess. The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Carl Levin (Michigan), stated on the Senate floor on August 5, 2010, that the full Senate should consider the Defense authorization bill quickly after returning in September, and asked for an agreement to do so.<sup>9</sup> Sen. McCain (Arizona) objected, arguing that the legislation was being used to "move[] forward with a social agenda." He noted that if the bill becomes law, "abortion . . . is going to be performed in military hospitals for the first time in a long time."

In response to Sen. McCain's objection, Sen. Levin stated "[O]bviously, we are going to try to get this bill up in September."

It is expected that at least one amendment will be offered on the Senate floor to strike the Burris Amendment. A straight up-or-down vote on the amendment (or to overcome a motion to table) would require only 51 votes. However, if opponents have to file cloture on the amendment, 60 votes are necessary to get cloture.

Should the full Senate pass the bill, it would then go to conference with the House. It is possible that the Burris Amendment language could be removed in conference. The House version of the bill does not contain the

## Burris Amendment.<sup>10</sup>

After conference, each chamber will have to pass the final conference report in order for it to reach the desk of the President.

Alternatively, it is possible that Congress could opt for a continuing resolution – thus maintaining current law and current spending amounts, without passing the proposed authorization bill.<sup>11</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a history of Congressional treatment of the use of DOD funds for abortion, see David F. Burrelli, CRS Report for Congress: Abortion Services and Military Medical Facilities (Updated July 10, 2008), available at [http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/95-387\\_20080710.pdf](http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/95-387_20080710.pdf) (hereinafter CRS Report).

<sup>2</sup> *Abortion is Restricted at Military Hospitals*, *The New York Times* (July 19, 1988), at A11, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/19/us/abortion-is-restricted-at-military-hospitals.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> President William J. Clinton, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Memorandum on Abortions in Military Hospitals, January 22, 1993; filed with the Office of the Federal Register, available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46322>.

<sup>5</sup> CRS Report at 8-11.

<sup>6</sup> Roll call vote available at <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2006/roll136.xml>.

<sup>7</sup> Sen. Ben Nelson (Nebraska) was the only Democrat to vote against the amendment.

<sup>8</sup> CRS Report at 10.

<sup>9</sup> A transcript of the exchange between Sen. Levin and Sen. McCain is available at <http://levin.senate.gov/senate/statement.cfm?id=327064>.

<sup>10</sup> In July, Rep. Todd Akin (Missouri) and Rep. Gene Taylor (Mississippi) sent a letter to House and Senate leadership signed by 180 members urging them to “reject any language in the DOD Authorization bill for FY11 (or subsequent years) which would weaken or undermine current policy. Expanding abortion in government owned and operated military medical facilities is simply unconscionable and morally unacceptable. Our military facilities should be a place of healing and life-saving. They should not be in the business of destroying the unborn.” Statement released by Rep. Akin and Rep. Taylor available at [http://akin.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1537:akintaylor-letter-to-oppose-abortion-at-dod-medical-facilities-sent-to-house-and-senate-leadership&catid=25:press-releases&Itemid=74](http://akin.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1537:akintaylor-letter-to-oppose-abortion-at-dod-medical-facilities-sent-to-house-and-senate-leadership&catid=25:press-releases&Itemid=74).

<sup>11</sup> A continuing resolution is a type of appropriations legislation that is used to continue to fund authorizations if individual appropriations bills have not been signed into law by the end of the

Congressional fiscal year. It is a joint resolution, and continues to provide funding for existing programs at existing (or reduced) levels.

## What Happened to the First Amendment?

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In case you missed it, the Supreme Court turned the old adage, “Save the best for last,” on its head when, on the last day of its term, it announced a decision that is surely one of its worst ever, and one that could prove deadly for religious freedom on campuses.

In the case of *Christian Legal Society v. Hastings*, the Court decided that the Hastings College of Law could deny registration to a student group as a CLS chapter because it required morally upright behavior of its members and adherence to its statement of faith. Pause and consider that. “Conservative” evangelical students—unlike over sixty other associations of students—may not be recognized as an official student group because CLS wants its members to agree with the theory and practice—the *raison d'être*—of the group, that is, to be good and proper evangelical Christians.

Can one imagine requiring the “animal rights” group to admit unrepentant, proselytizing fox hunters? While the majority opinion claims one cannot only imagine it but that Hastings’s policy actually requires it (under an “accept all comers” policy), the dissent makes short work of that claim. This is not the place to rehearse the whole lay of the land, but suffice to note that no other group has ever been similarly treated by Hastings and that Hastings only announced the existence of this “policy” when it filed its legal brief in the case. Do you smell something fishy? Well, so does the dissent. (“Only religious groups were required to admit students who did not share their views. An environmentalist group was not required to admit students who rejected global warming.”)

The votes in the case were divided along now-familiar lines between four “liberals” (the majority in this particular case) and four “conservatives” (the

dissent), with Justice Anthony Kennedy the key swing vote between the two (more or less solid) blocs. And this time he swung with the liberals (as he often does in “social issue” cases). The dissent was composed of Clarence Thomas, Antonin Scalia, John Roberts, and Samuel Alito, with Alito writing the dissenting opinion.

The dissent demonstrates that the majority upholds a policy by Hastings that really never existed, but was invented to provide a *post hoc* justification for the discrimination against CLS that had already taken place. This is clearly shown, for instance, by the fact that the dean with whom the students met, following an initial rejection by the same dean of their application to register, told them nothing about an “all-comers” requirement, but instead objected because their statement of faith was not compliant with Hastings nondiscrimination policy that includes, most importantly, sexual orientation.

It’s clear what is going on. The conservative evangelical students were disfavored by Hastings because they disapprove of nonmarital sexual activity, including homosexual acts. After all, what could be more offensive in the modern culture, based as it is upon the god of sexual freedom, than such a viewpoint? What could be more “offensive” to the majority of students at a liberal law school (or to the tenured faculty and administration) than those who do not equate any other sexual behavior with that between one man and one woman within the bond of matrimony?

While the majority protested (too much) that this was a “neutral” policy by Hastings, the dissent saw more clearly: “Today’s decision rests on . . . the wrong-headed principle . . . [that there is] no freedom of expression [that must be respected if it] . . . offends prevailing standards of political correctness in our country’s institutions of higher learning.”

Didn’t we have contentious debates about “free speech” on campus during the 1960s and 1970s? Indeed we did, and there is a case from that era that is right on point, *Healy v. James*. That case involved a highly disfavored group, Students for a Democratic Society. When a proposed student chapter refused to disavow violence (as the national SDS refused to do), they were denied registration by a college. In deciding *Healy*,

the Court held this was an impermissible infringement on “association rights” protected by the First Amendment.

What did the majority make of this inconvenient precedent on association rights? As the dissent notes, it ruled, in essence, that “the effects of this discrimination [which are the same in this case as they were in *Healy*,] were really not so bad...that a little viewpoint discrimination is acceptable.” In layman’s terms, they held the constitutional infringement was not *too* bad.

This is rather ridiculous on its face. However, it isn’t funny because it shows what entrenched elites, both in colleges and on courts, are up to. They are determined to vanquish their most hated foe, those who adhere to traditional religious points of view, and they will bend, perhaps break, the Constitution to do so. Which is another reason, by the way, to be careful about whom we confirm for the Supreme Court.

## Stem Cell Flare-up

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**O**n August 23, District of Columbia federal judge Royce Lamberth shocked the world when he overturned President Barak Obama’s executive order providing federal funding for human embryonic stem cell research. On August 31, the Obama administration appealed.

Judge Lamberth issued a preliminary injunction against President Obama’s executive order and the regulations promulgated thereunder. He ordered the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Health & Human Services (HHS) Secretary, Kathleen Sebelius, to cease the federal funding. Why? Because he found that such funding violated federal law. Which law? An appropriations “rider” called the Dickey-Wicker Amendment.

Appropriations bills (providing federal funds) are passed yearly. Under the one affecting HHS, a limitation (a “rider”) has been attached yearly since 1996. The Dickey-Wicker Amendment mandates that federal funds may not be used for “research in which a human embryo or embryos are destroyed, discarded, or knowingly subjected to risk of injury or death.”

Soon after he became President, Obama changed the rules that had governed stem cell research at NIH under President George W. Bush. Among other things, Obama’s order reversed Bush’s policy that federal funds would not go to research on new embryonic stem cell lines. Under Obama, federal funds could be used for that purpose.

At this point, the reader might cry, “Halt; isn’t it crystal clear that funding such research violates the Dickey-Wicker prohibition against funding research in which “a human embryo... [is] destroyed”? Not according to clever lawyers. Under a legal analysis first proposed by government attorneys under President Bill Clinton, there was no violation of Dickey-Wicker *so long as* the federal dollars were not literally used to destroy the embryo. If the embryo were destroyed using another source of funds and its cells extracted, research could proceed using those cells with federal funds. A clever sleight of hand by clever lawyers. The question for Judge Lamberth was whether it was too clever.

He held it was. In effect, he noted that stem cell “research” is a unitary whole—disaggregation of the embryo to get at the cells, which are then used to create lines of stem cells, which are used for on-going research. The *purpose* of destroying embryos is to get their cells.

In my view, he is plainly right, and will be upheld on appeal.

It is interesting that Obama’s end-run around Dickey-Wicker was not his innovation. As noted, it first occurred under President Clinton, whose HHS issued preliminary regulations, which were overtaken by events (that is, the 2000 Presidential elections) before they could be promulgated. Though President Bush limited federal funding to research involving embryos killed before August 10, 2001, his administration essentially adopted the Clinton interpretation. And so did Obama, though he removed the Bush restrictions.

One should not be too quick, however, to criticize President Bush. In my view, his opposition to the general federal funding of embryonic stem cell research—which Clinton and Obama supported—led directly to the scientific discovery of “induced pluripotent stem cells” (“ipsc”), which by dedifferentiating a mature cell to the embryonic state (an amazing thing that sounds like science fiction, but isn’t), pointed the way out of the embryonic stem cell di-

lemma. By the ipsc process, a researcher can obtain embryonic stem cells *without* killing embryos. This should make the controversial way of doing embryonic stem cell research obsolete. In effect, Bush kept the anti-life forces at bay so that ethical science could leapfrog them.

Even before ipsc research, however, there were ethical alternatives available. The most prominent is so-called adult or alternative stem cell research, which utilizes stem cells available in a “born” (or adult) person’s body, or in umbilical cord blood or placentas, none of which involves embryo destruction. Such research has helped tens of thousands of living human beings to get better, to recover from diseases and disabilities of all kinds, while embryonic stem cell research, hailed for its “promise,” has, to date, helped no one. This has not stopped members of the mainstream media from claiming that Judge Lamberth’s ruling threatens medical progress.

Two of these adult stem cell researchers were plaintiffs in the case, and it was very important that they were. An earlier decision in this litigation had resulted in the case being dismissed. Why? Because of an obscure but very sensible policy of the courts—one must have “standing” in order to sue. In order to qualify as a plaintiff, one must have suffered (or have a real likelihood of suffering) an injury; one may not sue because of general belief that a policy is wrong or lawful. Upon review, the case was reinstated because adult stem cell researchers were plaintiffs. And the reason these plaintiffs had standing illustrates an important point lost to the media throughout the stem cell debate: there is not a bottomless pit of federal tax dollars to pay for all research, however promising. Choices must be made. The adult stem cell researcher plaintiffs complained that federal dollars that went to embryonic stem cell researchers was, in effect, denied to them (and violated Dickey-Wicker to boot).

I agree with the judge’s decision, but what is important about the case is probably not the actual outcome. What is important is that it reminds the American public—and the shocked national media—that the controversy about stem cell research is not behind us. The ethical (and legal) issues surrounding such research remain, and as citizens in a democracy, it is our job to solve them.

**Critique of Christian Origins.** Abd Al-Jabbar. A parallel English-Arabic text, edited, translated, and annotated by Gabriel Said Reynolds and Khalil Samir. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2010. lxv + 249 pages.

Reviewed by Jude Dougherty, Dean Emeritus, School of Philosophy, The Catholic University of America, and Editor of The Review of Metaphysics.

This is a volume in the “Islamic Translation” series sponsored by the Brigham Young University. The treatise presented here is the work of a prominent medieval theologian, Abd al-Jabbar, (c. 930s–d. 1024), who writes to explain the birth and nature of Christianity. His task is to defend the claims of Islamic theology that Jesus was a Muslim prophet, against Christians’ claim that He is God-Incarnate, Lord and Savior, and the founder of a Church. *Critique of Christian Origins* is one of many early Islamic critiques of Christianity. Al-Jabbar writes in what is known as the Mu’tazili style of scholarship. With great confidence in the reliability of human reason, he is convinced that religious claims must meet conventional standards of logic. Thus intellectual reflection on God-given knowledge is indispensable.

Muslims usually begin their historical narrative with the time of the Prophet Muhammad and have little to say about the six hundred years between Jesus and Muhammad. Al-Jabbar is aware that Christians, by contrast, have a well-developed historical narrative that connects them to the life and time of Jesus. Muslim scholars before Abd al-Jabbar who tried to demonstrate the invalidity of Christianity did so only at the level of doctrine, hoping to prove that Christianity is abhorrent to reason. In fact, early Muslim scholars possessed little knowledge of Christian scripture and practice in spite of their considerable knowledge of Christological and Trinitarian debates. In the treatise presented here al-Jabbar takes a different tack insofar as he turns to history to support his argument that Christianity is a human invention and not of divine origin.

The translators in their introduction acknowledge that “[i]t is no easy task to describe the *Qur'an's* evaluation of Christianity for the precise historical context of the *Qur'an's* origins is

far from clear.” The *Qur'an* implies that Christians belittle God with their statements about Christ by calling him “The Son of God.” Islam lays claim to Jesus as its own, and He is often presented as one in a chain of prophets from Adam to Muhammad. In the *Qur'an* Jesus seems to be singled out above all prophets. As Reynolds and Samir in their introduction express the doctrine, “His birth without a father at the beginning of his life and his ascension into heaven at its end are extraordinary only inasmuch as they reflect God’s miraculous intervention. They do not redound to Jesus’ nature.”

In establishing Muhammad’s character as a true prophet, Al-Jabbar argues that Muhammad’s book, the *Qur'an*, discloses information that could only have come from God. As the translators summarize his position, “To Abd al-Jabbar, Muhammad’s rejection of Christianity is an indication of the divine origin of his knowledge. No one—especially not a simple and uneducated Arab, as al-Jabbar holds Muhammad to be—would have the audacity to reject an ancient religion, a religion cherished by many people and powerful nations, unless he had divine authority to do so.” It is al-Jabbar’s claim that he, al-Jabbar, knows Christianity to be invalid because of his study of it, but Muhammad could only have known it as revealed by God. Al-Jabbar believes that Muhammad’s “miraculous knowledge of Christianity” is evidence that he is a true prophet. Still, he has to address the charge that a true prophet would not have shed blood as Muhammad did, or have multiple wives and concubines as Muhammad did. This he attempts by claiming that the prophets of Israel, whom the Christians venerate, did as much.

Al-Jabbar is particularly harsh in his treatment of the Apostle Paul, whom he accuses of Romanizing Christianity, and of Constantine for the imposition of Christianity by bloodshed. He is convinced that Christianity is not a valid expression of the religion of Christ but a continuation of pagan Roman practices.

Besides making a rare text available in English, one of the merits of this volume is that the translators introduce the layman to the vast Islamic literature that arose in the tenth and eleventh centuries as Islamic scholars grappled not only with Christian theologians but with Islamic philosophers as well.

**The Human Person: According to John Paul II.** J. Brian Bransfield. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2010.

Reviewed by Janet P. Benestad, Secretary for Faith Formation and Evangelization, Archdiocese of Boston

In his book *The Human Person: According to John Paul II*, Rev. J. Brian Bransfield, a priest of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, has made a great contribution to the study of what has come to be called the theology of the body. In clear and often poetic language, Fr. Bransfield captures the late pontiff’s profound concern that modern culture has robbed individuals of their identity and meaning as human beings. Using categories and concepts borrowed from Sts. Augustine, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and others, he explains what the twentieth-century pope meant when he said that every person is a gift. Appealing to modern theologians, particularly Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar, Bransfield offers a beautiful case for the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of marriage, and the necessity of protecting the family.

Bransfield’s book is divided into three parts. The first part explains the influences that led Karol Wojtyla to understand the need for a new approach to Catholic moral teaching. Living as he did at the culmination of the industrial revolution, and at the height of the sexual and technological revolutions, he saw human beings as being robbed of their very identity. He saw the industrial revolution steal fathers from their families by requiring them to work long hours in the factories and offices. Instead of being taught their father’s trade and the virtues that support it, children went to school to be taught by the state. Fatherless homes bred juvenile violence in boys and out-of-wedlock childbearing in girls.

The sexual revolution forced a shift in the center of human sexuality from the family to the individual. The birth control pill promised to equalize the struggle between the sexes but instead brought for women what the industrial revolution had brought for men—estrangement from the home—plus expectations of promiscuity and cohabitation with the attendant evil of divorce.

Finally, the technological revolution introduced mass media in the form

of TV, film, and electronic devices. Whereas the industrial and sexual revolutions taught people to want goods and pleasure, the technological revolution taught them to want them NOW. Anything that could not produce instant pleasure was seen as an obstacle to be removed. Even the desire for God came to be seen as something that interfered with instant gratification. Wojtyla saw that, as a result of these revolutions, human beings were experiencing nothing less than the obliteration of their very identity, their culture, and their dignity.

Because of his family, friends, and education, Wojtyla experienced life very differently, says Bransfield. His mother was devoted to her family and died when Karol was eight. In her absence, his father provided a strong Catholic influence until he died when Wojtyla was 21. Raised in such a home, the future pontiff became particularly clear-sighted about the value of faithful presence. As a young priest, Wojtyla spent time in the mountains with married couples deep in conversation about the meaning of nuptial love and responsibility. He came to see marriage and family as preservers of real community and a refuge from the difficulties of life, even from a terrorist regime. Finally, as an actor, he learned about a robust and ancient mode of communication, and about the subtlety of gestures and the cadence of the spoken word in a way that formed his bearing and conversation. John Paul II communicated with throngs of people, particularly the young, in a way that overcame the information-laden, impersonal quality of TV and computers.

Living under the Nazi and Communist regimes taught Wojtyla the impact of ideologies that degrade human nature. In particular, they prepared him to appreciate early on that Western secularism and materialism generated by the technological revolution were robbing people of their faith. Over time, the new toys and quest for instant gratification diverted Catholics from the mysteries of the faith. Growing individualism and exquisitely calibrated hedonism made catechesis difficult. Eventually, the pope saw that, particularly in America, as informational technology replaced teaching and learning, the “resilience of an immigrant faith” gave way to a “surface-level sophistication that reduced Catholic identity to

edification and ceremony.” It was his keen sense of what had been lost in catechesis, and his understanding that this loss was not accidental, that led John Paul II to call for a new evangelization.

In Wojtyla’s mind, says Bransfield, the ideologies had so degraded any conception of human nature that this new evangelization had to go back to the original and inviolable mystery of the human person. So Wojtyla went back to Genesis to uncover the truth of the identity of the human person. Adam’s aloneness (original solitude) and the creation of woman from his side demonstrate two things. First, man and woman share a common nature, one distinct from all other creatures made by God. Second, man and woman are relational, they are turned toward one another naturally. They are truly open to one another and vulnerable, not in the sense that the modern world uses that term, but in the sense that by their very nature they seek communion with one another. They are each gift to one another. Furthermore, it is in this communion of persons that human beings are most like God; indeed, that they are the image of God. Unless human beings make a gift of themselves to others, either in a marriage or through the chastity that naturally characterizes the other states in life, they fail to fulfill their identity as human beings. It is this explanation of the theology of the body that comprises the second part of Bransfield’s book.

The third part of the book focuses on theology of the body as it relates to traditional moral theology. Vatican II had called for a renewal of Catholic moral theology that remained faithful to traditional teaching. Through his catechesis on original shame and the wound of sin, John Paul II introduced the idea that God’s response to sin is a plan. Even Cain’s awful sin and punishment do not destroy his dignity because God’s punishment is always healing and restorative.

Using John Paul II’s analysis of Adam’s sin, Bransfield outlines the seven steps in temptation and the countervailing seven steps of grace. The first step in temptation is to bypass the family; for example, the devil approaches Eve when she is alone. The first step of grace, then, includes the family; for example, the angel appeared to Mary, betrothed to Joseph, of the

house of David. The family structure is the preserver of human identity. The second step in temptation is the asking of some innocent little question: “Did God really tell you not to eat of the fruit?” The angel Gabriel, in contrast, makes a bold proclamation: “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.” The third step in temptation always involves a lie: “You will not die,” says the devil to Eve. The third step of grace, of course, is truth-telling; Gabriel tells Mary that the son she will bear will be the Savior of the world. The fourth step in temptation is fear, in the case of Eve, fear of death. The antidote provided by grace is, of course, trust. Gabriel’s words, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” immediately inspire trust. The fifth, and climactic step, in temptation is the act through which a person chooses to conform himself to evil. The fifth step of grace is to conform oneself to God, Mary’s fiat being the model. A Christian, says Bransfield, “waits for God and stands ready to receive all God has to offer. . . . The charity of Christ makes a Christian always ready to give first place to the teaching of the Church.” The sixth step of temptation is hiding from God, from one another as in the case of Adam and Eve, and from the truth. The sixth step of grace is manifested by Mary’s trip to visit her cousin Elizabeth; she offers the gift of herself to her elderly cousin. The seventh and final step of sin is blame—Adam blames Eve for giving him the fruit. Mary’s receptivity and self-giving actions overflow into the very opposite of blame, into praise of God in the Magnificat.

The point of Bransfield’s analysis is to show the exquisite beauty of God’s plan for every soul. The steps of grace show how Christ conquers sin through his incarnation and giving of himself on the cross. Through his gift of self, he saves humanity and brings it back into communion with God. Similarly, through grace, the Holy Spirit transforms the identity of each person who has sinned and brings him back into conformity with God. In the remainder of the third part, Bransfield shows how the sacraments, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Beatitudes, and the cardinal and theological virtues play a role in defining the identity of each human being so that he may live as God intended. Borrowing from Sts.

Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Thomas Aquinas, Bransfield provides a schema to show how each of the gifts of the Holy Spirit builds and nourishes a particular virtue which in turn enables a person to live a particular Beatitude. This threefold relation among the gifts, the virtues, and the Beatitudes is central, says Branfield, to John Paul II's theology of the body. This section of the book would make excellent read-

ing for any advanced high school or college level moral theology course.

That John Paul II lived at the perfect time to point the way toward a civilization of love is a compelling thesis. Because of his own experiences and because of the influences around him, he saw that the deepest need of the human soul—to conform to God—was being suffocated. At the same time that he was forced to witness some of the

worst evils of history, he was educated in the most profound truth the world has ever known. He found a new context in which to express that truth by explaining Genesis in a way that was thoroughly original, utterly faithful, and profoundly inspiring to those who live in the twenty-first century.

## BOOK RECEIVED

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

*God and Public Square*, G. Elijah Dann. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., (2010), hardcover.

*The Essential Bello: A Prophet for Our Times*. Collected by Rev C. John McCloskey, Scott J. Bloch & Brian Robertson. Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict Press, LLC, (2010), paper.

*Bleeding Hands, Weeping Stone. True Stories of Divine Wonders, Miracles and Messages.* Elizabeth Ficocelli. Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict Press, LLC, (2010), paper.

*The Little Way of Lent: Meditations in the Spirit of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.* Fr. Gary Caster. Cincinnati: Servant Books, (2010) paper.

*Preach the Word: Homilies on the Sundays and Feasts of the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite.* Kenneth Baker, S.J. Staten Island, NY: St. Paul's, ( 2010), paper.

*New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy.* Robert J. Spitzer. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, (2010), paper.

*Chicago Catholics and the Struggles within Their Church.* Andrew M. Greeley. New Brunswick (USA) and London: Transaction Publishers, (2011), hardcover.

*The Stigmatist: A novel of mysticism and international intrigue.* Hurd Baruch. Tucson: Mystic Publications, (2010), paper.

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Those who wish to belong to the Fellowship but do not meet these qualifications will normally be considered Associate members, until otherwise classified as Regular members by the Board of Directors. Only regular members shall have voting rights.

**Graduate Student Membership (\$40.00 per year).** This is a discounted rate for students currently pursuing a graduate degree.

**R.I.P. Torleaf H. Benestad.**

Please pray for the soul of Mr. Torleaf H. Benestad, the father of Brian Benestad, the editor of the *FCS Quarterly*. He passed away on November 28, 2010 in Boca Raton, FL, at the age of 93. After serving in the U.S. military from 1936 to 1963, he had worked in banking in New York City, and then retired to Florida. In 2001 he became a Catholic. May God bring him quickly through any purification that he required, and lead him into paradise.

Fr Joseph Koterski SJ  
President, FCS

**Speakers Fund**

This past year the Fellowship was able to match an anonymous challenge

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

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

Rev. Joseph. W. Koterski, SJ  
President of the Fellowship

**Recent Publications and Accomplishments**

Please keep the Fellowship up-to-date on your recent publications and accomplishments by sending a note to Alice Osberger at [osberger.1@nd.edu](mailto:osberger.1@nd.edu).

**List of Fellowship Officers and Directors**

Due to space limitations, the list of officers and directors of the Fellowship is not included in this issue. Their names and contact information, however, can be found on the Fellowship website: [catholicscholars.org](http://catholicscholars.org)

**Ex CATHEDRA**

# On Pope Benedict XVI's Conversation Last Summer with Peter Seewald

Peter Seewald's interview of Pope Benedict XVI during the last week of July 2010 has just been published by Ignatius Press in a book titled *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times*. The interview covers many more topics than can be discussed in a short article. I will focus on both what Pope Benedict says the Catholic Church must do for itself and what its basic contribution should be to the society of any era.

The Church has, first of all, to restore order in its own house. In one of his questions pertaining to sexual abuse in the Church, Seewald quotes the pope as having said on another occasion, "The greatest persecution of the Church comes not from her enemies without, but arises from sin within the Church" (27). Pope Benedict mentions the harm the Church did to itself when various members began to understand the Church in a way that gave sexual abusers a free pass. The Archbishop of Dublin explained to the pope that ecclesiastical penal laws were applied in Ireland up until the late 1950s and then fell into abeyance around the mid 1960s. The specific reason for this change of policy was the prevailing belief "that the Church must not be a Church of laws but, rather, a

Church of love; she must not punish. Thus the awareness that punishment can be an act of love ceased to exist. This led to an odd darkening of the mind, even in very good people" (26). In my judgment, this faulty understanding of the Church can be traced to one of many misinterpretations of Vatican Council II, whose sixteen documents most Catholics have not read.

Still another factor abetting sexual abuse in the Church is the confusion sown by the development of a Catholic moral theology that determines what is good or bad on the basis of the consequences of actions. "In such a context, where everything is relative and nothing intrinsically evil exists, . . . people who have an inclination to [sexual abuse] are left with no solid footing" (38). Otherwise stated, it is harder for people to resist temptation if they live in the tepid intellectual climate created in the Church by a relativistic moral theology. This kind of theology focuses on carving out endless exceptions to moral norms instead of directing people to live at the heights of human dignity. As Pope Benedict says, "There needs to be a sense that being human is like a mountain climbing expedition that includes some arduous slopes" (p. 104).

The Church next has to deal with those elements of

modernity that attempt to keep its teaching out of the public square. “Christianity finds itself exposed now to an intolerable pressure that at first ridicules it—as belonging to a perverse, false way of thinking—and then tries to deprive it of breathing space in the name of an ostensible rationality” (53). Some strains of Western reason claim to have found “what is right” and now desire to repress any opposing views. “When, for example, in the name of non-discrimination people try to force the Catholic Church to change her position on homosexuality or the ordination of women, then this means that she is no longer allowed to live out her own identity... . In the name of tolerance, tolerance is being abolished; this is the real threat we face” (52–53).

When the Church enjoys genuine religious liberty, it can bring God’s Word and the Eucharist to people in the liturgy. Allowing themselves to be changed by God’s guidance and his grace “is the most important precondition for any really positive change in the world” (157). In other words, to respond effectively to the presence of evil in the world, what is especially necessary is “the transformation of the heart—through faith, hope, love, and penance” (165). Pope Benedict adds, “The Church is always called upon to do what God asked of Abraham, which is to see to it that there are enough righteous men to repress evil and destruction” (166). In his homily at Fatima on May 13, 2010, Pope Benedict made the point that “the power of evil is restrained again and again, that again and again the power of God himself is shown in the Mother’s power and keeps it alive” (166). So, with God’s help the Church is able to bestow on the world the gift of enough holy men and women with the ability to resist the power of evil. The Church can succeed because men and women are attracted by God, but it is immensely difficult because they are also continually tempted to become pagans again under the influence of the destructive side of secularism. (Pope Benedict does urge Christians to recognize where aspects of secularism and modernity can be accepted.)

Pope Benedict’s Augustinian theology of history sheds light on why he puts such emphasis on the contributions of holy men and women to the well-being of the world. “As St. Augustine said: World history is a battle between two forms of love. Love of self—to the point of destroying the world. And love of others—to the point of renouncing oneself. This battle which could always be seen, is in progress now, too” (59). Later in the interview Pope Benedict comes back to this theme of the battle between the two loves, noting that “sometimes the one side and sometimes the other will be

stronger” (129). Good love in the world only becomes stronger when the number of genuinely good people increases.

Right now, the pope believes, the Church is acutely suffering the effects of the destructive love. In the Western world there is both a lack of interest in the Church and a movement against it. Despite the indifference and attacks, the great tasks of the Church are to pave the way for an encounter with God and “to instill powers of resistance” against the destructive loves in the hearts of individuals and in the world. “Man can be saved only when moral energies gather strength in his heart; energies that can only come from the encounter with God; energies of resistance. We therefore need him, the Other, who helps us be what we ourselves cannot be; and we need Christ, who gathers us into a communion that we call the Church” (184–85). A Church whose members deepen their faith in God and acquire the requisite moral strength can be a powerful counterweight in the public square to the destructive loves in the world. The “great task of this hour” is for “the inner strength of the faith that is present in people [to] become powerful publicly as well by leaving its imprint on public thinking, too, [so] that society does not simply fall into the abyss” (58).

Although Pope Benedict calls upon good people to offer continuous resistance to the evil in the world, he knows that people need relief from being in resistance mode. So, he calls upon the Church “to develop protective zones in which the beauty of the world, of the gift of being alive, also becomes visible in contrast to the rampant brokenness around us” (177). As examples of these zones, he mentions liturgical celebrations, pilgrimages, parish life, and membership in various other Christian communities.

It would be a shame if Pope Benedict’s comments on condoms—mostly misunderstood and misrepresented by the world’s media— divert serious attention away from the many challenging and insightful thoughts put forth by this pre-eminent theologian and teacher of the Catholic faith during his interview.

For those seeking clarity regarding Church teaching on the condom issue, I would recommend following the discussion on the website of Sandro Magister, [www.chiesa.espressonline.it](http://www.chiesa.espressonline.it), paying particularly close attention to the articles by Luke Gormally (refuting the position of Fr. Martin Rhonheimer), Steven Long, George Weigel, and Rev. Michael Schooyans. ♦

*J. Brian Benestad  
Editor*

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**SCHEDULE FOR FUTURE ISSUES OF THE QUARTERLY**

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The schedule for the publication of future issues of the FCSQ indicates deadlines for submissions as well as topics to be addressed in particular issues. The idea behind the suggested topics is to be of help to the bishops of the United States in their pastoral leadership. For this plan to work I will need timely submissions on these special topics from Fellowship members. Each issue will also have room for articles and reviews not on the chosen topic.

—J. Brian Benestad, Editor

Issue #	Scheduled publication date:	Manuscripts are needed by:	Special topic
34/1	Spring 2011	February 1 2011	Nature of episcopal authority in general
34/2	Summer 2011	May 1, 2011	Role of episcopal authority in regards to religious orders
34/3	Fall 2011	August 1, 2011	The ecclesiology of <i>Communio</i> and the demands of loyalty
34/4	Winter 2011	November 1, 2011	Reiki, Healing Touch, the New Age