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Introduction to the Special Issue of “*Studia Gilsoniana*” on Revolution and the Enlightenment

In July of 2019, we, with the help of Fr. Thomas Onoda (Society of St. Paul X) and with the support of many other friends and colleagues both in Japan and from overseas, convened a symposium in downtown Tokyo on the theme of the dark side of the Enlightenment. The symposium was timed to coincide with the 230th anniversary of the French Revolution (1789), a cataclysmic event which continues to send shock-waves through societies and cultures around the world. Our purpose was to gather together scholars and other public intellectuals to investigate the ever-unfolding consequences of that revolution, and to interrogate the Enlightenment thinking which gave rise to it and which, like the French Revolution (and countless others like it), continues to shape, for better or worse, the present.

We had high hopes for the conference, but we tried to temper those hopes with realistic expectations. Tokyo is, after all, very far from both Europe and the United States, where the French Revolution is perhaps

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best known and studied. And, even more problematic, the two of us are unknown and unfunded. We had nothing to offer prospective participants except the chance to discuss what we felt to be a topic of urgent importance. Everyone would have to pay his or her own way to a hot and steamy Tokyo in the summertime, taking a chance on whether anyone else would even show up. We arrived at the symposium venue—generously provided by Morgan’s home university—on the appointed morning and began to set up the room.

We were, quite simply, overwhelmed by the response to our planned symposium. Scholars, priests, newspaper editors, authors, and interested audience members hailing from Japan of course, France, the United States, England, and China honored us with their presence. Many attended in person, and others, pressed for time, very kindly sent their presentations in video format. New friendships were formed, and enduring ones were strengthened. We also discovered that we were hardly alone in our skepticism of the Enlightenment and our reservations about the French Revolution, and revolution in general. Over the course of the 2019 symposium, we learned that opposition to what we see as the dehumanizing, deracinating paradigms of the Enlightenment, and the ideological violence of the French Revolution, is pronounced. God willing, we plan to hold another symposium on a similar theme in the summer of 2023.

The four years between the first symposium and, if with God’s help our plans come together, the second, were marked by a global nightmare of disinformation, disease, and death. One of us (Lacvivier) managed to put together a smaller-scale conference in 2021, with a few in-person participants and others joining by video. But the chaos of the world kept us from meeting in number as we did in 2019. The Enlightenment remains very real. So, therefore, does the need to assert our human dignity in the face of it. It is our hope that the papers published here, with one exception originally presented at the 2019 symposium, will point the way to a better future. Some other papers presented at the 2019 symposium are being reworked for a future vol-

ume—yet another reason, we submit, to look forward to a brighter tomorrow. As the Enlightenment and global revolution mount, so, too, do we who do not accept their inevitability.

It is on a hopeful note that the papers in this volume begin as well. “Vandalisme révolutionnaire et patrimoine,” by Fr. Jean-François Thomas, SJ, starts out this special issue, reminding us that the French Revolution can be isolated and understood. Fr. Thomas analyzes how the French Revolution, which he sees as the destroyer of heritage, came to found secular heritage conservation as we know it today. Fr. Thomas stresses the programmatic and “deCatholicizing” nature of the attack on French heritage by revolutionary forces, noting, for example, that:

En effet, le vandalisme à la française ne peut se comprendre que situé au sein d'un programme parfaitement organisé pour créer une ère nouvelle mettant à bas les anciens principes, Dieu et le Roi. Il n'est pas accidentel, il ne provient pas du débordement de la populace. Il est un programme religieux ayant pour but de « décatholiciser » la France et de remplacer la vraie religion par des religions de rechange qui correspondent à trois étapes distinctes: le culte de la déesse Raison sous la Constituante, celui de l'Être Suprême sous Robespierre, et celui de la théophilanthropie qui met sur le même plan Dieu et les hommes.

Fr. Thomas then tracks this programmatic “vandalization” of French heritage both religious and royal, observing how the hostility to God and Throne which marked the French Revolution continues to our own day. These observations are given even more immediacy by the April 2019 inferno which tore into Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris—a tragic event which Fr. Thomas notes in the very first lines of his remarkable essay. Despite these centuries of vandalism, however, what is once named can be countered and overcome. Therein lies the hope.

The next paper, by Professor Agnieszka Lekka-Kowalik—the director of the John Paul II Institute at the John Paul II Catholic

University of Lublin and editor-in-chief of *Ethos*—introduces readers to “The Relevance of the Lublin Philosophical School to the Contemporary Intellectual Milieu.” Professor Lekka-Kowalik was not at the 2019 symposium, but it is for this very reason that we are all the happier to be able to include her outstanding essay here. The Enlightenment divides and frightens, seems to overpower thought with paralysis, emotion, and fear. The use of the mind rooted in reality, and the widening of the circle of discourse based on empirical and metaphysical truth, is a sure antidote to the Enlightenment’s poisons. From Poland, Professor Lekka-Kowalik reminds us that “the mode of philosophizing devised at the Catholic University of Lublin in the 1950s,” although known by many names (such as “the Lublin Philosophical School, The Lublin School of Classical Philosophy, The Polish School of Realist Philosophy, and even Lublin Thomism”), is important in no small part because the Lublin School thinkers took philosophy “seriously as a search for answers to fundamental questions.” This is needful now as perhaps never before.

And how do we find the answers we seek? “The crucial feature of Lublin philosophy is realism,” Professor Lekka-Kowalik writes:

Everything that exists—in the language of the School’s metaphysics called “being”—may become an object of research. The proper object should be neutral, i.e., it should enable our constant contact with the investigated object. So, reality is the final arbiter for our cognition. This explains why truth is the goal of philosophical cognition. In a metaphysical sense, the truth is the agreement of a being with the plan of its creator. In an epistemic sense, the truth is the *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, for when we wish to cognize a being, we must “adjust” our intellect to that being – what distinguishes cognition from imagination or projection. So, the being is a proper object of our intellect. When we formulate a result of our cognition—a proposition—we say how things are. This allows us to distinguish cognition from errors or lying.

The knowable reality of our surroundings is a strong counter-punch to the kind of “utopian socialism” (to borrow a phrase from our *dai-sempai* Professor Peter Redpath) in which the Enlightenment specializes. The world is real and we can know it. This is a hope and a joy!

But there remains much work to be done. In peeling back the layers of the Enlightenment, finding the truth about fundamental questions is inevitably paired with finding the truth about events of the past. It is on this indispensable intersection, between thought and memory, that we turn to the work of Philippe Pichot-Bravard, historian at the University of Brest and the author of, among other titles, *La Révolution Française*, winner of the Prix Renaissance in 2015. In his essay for this special volume, “1789–1790: les premiers 14 Juillet: mythes fondateurs de la France nouvelle,” Professor Pichot-Bravard examines some of the founding myths of the French Revolution, their historical reality and what they teach us about the nature of the Revolution itself. The revolutionaries, Professor Pichot-Bravard holds, wanted to eradicate the power of the French throne and of the Catholic Church in France. To this effect, Professor Pichot-Bravard quotes French theologian and author Jean-Joseph Gaume (1802–1879), who wrote, in *La Révolution* (1859) and speaking in the Revolution’s voice:

Je suis la haine de tout ordre que l’homme n’a pas établi et dans lequel il n’est pas roi et Dieu tout ensemble. Je suis la proclamation des droits de l’homme sans souci des droits de Dieu. Je suis la fondation de l’état religieux et social sur la volonté de l’homme au lieu de la volonté de Dieu. Je suis Dieu détrôné et l’homme à sa place. Voilà pourquoi je m’appelle révolution, c’est-à-dire renversement.

‘Hatred for all order not established by man, the privileging of man’s rights above God’s, and the foundation of a religious and social state based on the will of man in place of the will of God’—this seems

to us to be a remarkably succinct expression of the French Revolution, as well as of the Enlightenment which drove and still drives it.

Paul de Lacvivier, in his article entitled “Tribunal révolutionnaire et procès du Roi et de la Reine” (“The Revolutionary Court and the Trial of the King and Queen”), explains how the French Revolution reversed the order of justice through the example of the trial of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. He compares this new state of revolutionary justice with justice in pre-modern Japan, and points out that the French Revolution can be understood as a ‘paganization’ of Christian justice, a corruption of that which came before. It is worth noting here that Lacvivier is the founder of the Ōken Gakkai (Cercle d’Études Royales de Tokyo), a multilingual group of scholars and laypeople dedicated to deepening the understanding of pre-revolutionary, non-Enlightenment forms of government and social order. His paper is thus part of a much larger effort to understand ruptures and continuities between the present and the past, and between the West and the East.

Finally, Jason Morgan offers a paper somewhat similar to the short talk on the nature of the American Revolution he gave at the 2019 symposium. For this special *Studia Gilsoniana* volume, Morgan looks deeper into the American political arrangement over time to find Enlightenment ideology and anti-Catholic strains (very similar to revolutionary France) at work in France’s sister in revolution. Working against a recent book in constitutional theory by noted Harvard Law School professor Adrian Vermeule, Morgan argues in “Common Good Constitutionalism vs. America’s Enlightenment Civil Religion” that the Enlightenment “civil religion” of the United States stands as a formidable obstacle against any attempt to realize a non-revolutionary, non- (and *a fortiori* anti-) Enlightenment paradigm in America.

We extend here our sincere thanks to the editors and copyeditors of *Studia Gilsoniana*, in particular Professor Imelda Chłodna-Błach, for their unfailing help and guidance over the course of this volume’s preparation. We also express a heartfelt thanks to the authors of the

papers here, and to everyone who participated in or attended the 2019 conference. The Enlightenment and the French Revolution are matters of the present hour, and we are greatly encouraged to know that in this very hour there are men and women who seek truth undaunted.

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