

Studia Gilsoniana

A JOURNAL IN CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY

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**RENEWING THE WEST:
RELIGION, ATHEISM, AND
COMMON SENSE**

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THE COMMON SENSE AMERICAN REPUBLIC: THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF JAMES WILSON (1742–1798)

I will call “totalitarian” any form of political society that sets no moral limits on the powers of the State. Such societies are well defined by Mussolini’s formula: “Nothing outside of the State, above the State, against the State; everything to the State, for the State, in the State.”

I will call “democratic” any non-totalitarian form of political society. A democratic society does not deny the authority of the State as representative of the body politic and enforcing laws in view of the common good, but it recognizes the presence, in human beings, of something that is outside of the State, above the State, and which it may become necessary to protect against the encroachments of the State. As an instance of such things, I would cite truth.

—Étienne Gilson¹

Laws may be promulgated by reason and conscience, the divine monitors within us. They are thus known as effectually, as by words or by writing: indeed they are thus known in a manner more noble and exalted. For, in this manner they may be said to be engraven by God on the hearts of men: in this manner, he is the promulgator as well as the author of natural law. Despotism by an artful use of “superiority” in politicks; and skepticism, by an artful use of “ideas” in metaphysics, have endeavoured—and their endeavours have frequently been attended with too much success—to destroy all true liberty and philosophy. By their baneful effects, the science of man and the science of government have been poisoned to their very fountains. But those destroyers of others have met, or must meet with their own destruction.

—James Wilson²

¹ Étienne Gilson, “Dogmatism and Tolerance,” An address to the Faculty of Rutgers University, December 12, 1951.

² James Wilson, Constitutional Framer, “Lectures on Law,” Delivered at the College of Philadelphia, 1790–1791.

In our own day it is commonly said that skepticism is the foundation of liberty. It is also commonly said that the American Framers were themselves skeptics. James Wilson (1742–1798) signer of the Declaration, Framers of the American Constitution, and Justice of the first Supreme Court, is an admirable corrective to this because he, like Etienne Gilson and like Socrates, recognized that free government depends upon the light of reason and true philosophy. Just as Socrates argued in the *Republic* that justice requires vigorous opposition to skepticism, as skepticism is the foundation of tyranny, so Wilson argued that political and legal reasoning must begin with the first principles of reason and the natural law. He drew the conclusion that justice would elude the new democracy if the people knew no philosophy.

At the end of the Second World War, reflecting upon the rise of totalitarianism, Etienne Gilson (1884–1978) argued that totalitarian regimes had been built upon skepticism. The spirit of intellectual and philosophical inquiry was absent, no one was allowed to determine what was true for themselves, and in these states freedom of thought was feared rather than encouraged. Skepticism had led to regimes where the leaders defined the truth and enforced it by ideology, propaganda and force. When Gilson gave a talk at Rutgers University entitled “Dogmatism and Tolerance,” he addressed the claim made by the English philosopher and skeptic Bertrand Russell (1882–1979) that relativism was the *sine qua non* of political freedom. He argued that the practical outcome of assuming that there are no first principles of natural law and reason leads to tyranny, where the leaders of the state determine truth and falsehood for themselves.

Gilson argued that freedom of thought, political tolerance, and the conviction that there is universal and unchanging truth will be found together. Freedom of intellectual inquiry leads to the discovery of truth, and truth, whether that articulated by Aristotle, Plato, Thomas Aquinas, or Kant, maintains civilization, order, and freedom. They taught that “some propositions are not merely probably or practically certain, but unconditionally true, provided only we agree upon the meaning of their terms and are able to understand them.”³ Civilization, therefore, is built upon the natural law and the first principles of reason. Dogmatic statements of the natural law, such as Kant’s categorical imperative: “Human beings must

³ Etienne Gilson, *Dogmatism and Tolerance* (Rutgers, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1952), 1.

not be used as means but respected as ends,”⁴ maintain decency and freedom and tolerance within a society. One might say, without stretching the point too far, that Gilson’s life and work expressed that idea. Whether one considers his works on medieval philosophy, or his broader surveys of the history of thought such as *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, all indirectly or directly are devoted to countering philosophical skepticism.

But, between the philosophy of a Russell and a Gilson lay a greater divide, namely the question of whether reasoning is a matter of logically arguing from given commonly-known first principles, or logically arguing about words and concepts as given because there are no first principles. This is a divide which echoes the debates within the eighteenth century Scottish universities from which James Wilson came. Russell stands, more or less, in the skeptical, empiricist tradition of Hume, who denied first principles, Wilson in the tradition of Thomas Reid and other philosophers in Scotland who disagreed with Hume. So while Russell, following Hume, held that a philosophical truth or dogma is more or less identical to a political ideology because certainty eludes reason, Gilson held that philosophical truths, like mathematical truths, are true according to first principles and the light of the intellect. There is nothing like propaganda or ideology in being attached to a truth that one has discovered by the light of reason and nature. Where, therefore, political freedom is found, there needs also exist an open attachment to dogmas, not least the dogma that truth exists by the light of reason in argument from first principles. What are these first principles which exist in us and from which human beings may reason? It is to Wilson’s answer at the time of the American Revolution that I will turn.

At the time of the American Revolution, certain colonial leaders made recourse to classical natural law arguments in order to defend their rights against the English Parliament. It is surprising, given the general interpretation of the American Founding as primarily Lockean that among the Framers was a man who relied not upon the modern natural law arguments of Locke, but rather upon the classical natural law teaching of Richard Hooker, the sixteenth century Anglican Divine whose treatment of natural law was scholastic. Wilson, in his *Lectures on Law* delivered from 1790 to 1792, opposed the skeptical epistemology of John Locke (1632–1704) and David Hume (1711–1776) in order to argue for philosophical realism and for classical natural law.

⁴ Id., 1–2.

In his *Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume had stated that there is no real knowledge of right and wrong, true and false. The senses deceive, they cannot be depended upon to determine reality. To argue against Hume, Wilson had to do two things: first, he had to affirm that there is truth, and secondly, he had to argue that it is natural to mankind to know truth on the basis of sense-knowledge. James Wilson therefore argued that there exists a natural capacity within people by virtue of what he called their ‘moral sense’ to discover moral truth. The moral sense makes first principles available to the mind, and is discovered in reflecting upon sense knowledge. The first principles of the moral sense guide reasoning. We can depend upon sense knowledge and our moral sense because both are God-given. The Creator gave human beings a conscience by which to apprehend the eternal law of God. God’s providential government of creation ensures that human beings might through conscience and reason and revelation know his Law. This is the classic, not modern, natural law teaching. Modern natural law teaching, as seen in Hobbes, Grotius and Locke, is derived from human nature and the desire for self-preservation. It may presume a created order in the universe, but it does not seek the source of that order in eternal law to discover the natural law.

Reading James Wilson, Framers, signer of the Declaration and Justice of the first Supreme Court, one is reminded that in the latter part of the eighteenth century there was, in the English-speaking world, a vibrant debate between philosophical realists, as we would call them today, and skeptics. It took place in Scotland during the Scottish Enlightenment, sometimes called the Scottish Renaissance. Wilson had moved to the colonies after a childhood in Scotland, education at the University of St. Andrews, and an immersion in the philosophy of that day found in Scottish philosophers and Presbyterian ministers Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) and Thomas Reid (1710–1796). His subsequent study of the political theology of Anglican Theologian Richard Hooker (1556–1600)—*Of the Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity*⁵—led him to develop some independence of thought. Combining the metaphysics of Richard Hooker “with the common-sense psychology of the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid,” Wilson offered a philosophy of law based upon the epistemology of Reid and the

⁵ Richard Hooker’s thought reflects his reading of Platonism, Aristotle, and the medieval philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius to Aquinas. He called Aristotle the “Arch-Philosopher.” See Richard Hooker, *Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), Book I.10.4.

metaphysics of Hooker, so to mitigate against the subjectivism and relativism implicit in the American principle of popular sovereignty.⁶

Following Reid, Wilson argued that it is wrong to *assume* that ideas in the mind have no real relation to the world,⁷ and to conclude that knowledge has no real relation to sensible reality.⁸ I am far from believing, Wilson once remarked, that “Mr. Locke was a friend to infidelity. But yet it is unquestionable, that the writings of Mr. Locke have facilitated the progress, and have given strength to the effects of skepticism.”⁹ Hume, he said, doubted the possibility of knowing truth at all, doubted the existence of a rational apprehension of natural law, and called into question the precepts of the faith and the science of the philosopher. His epistemology denies the possibility of real knowledge.¹⁰ In his words, “law and liberty cannot rationally become the objects of our love, unless they first become the objects of our *knowledge*.”¹¹ Thus he wrote a textbook for young lawyers in order to educate them in the dangers of skepticism, by instruction in the true philosophy, hoping that his philosophy of law would come to dominate legal education in the new republic. The existence of a strong philosophical culture in his native Scotland perhaps led Wilson to think it could be duplicated in the new nation.

Wilson’s education illustrates once again that truth which Gilson emphasized, that the study of philosophy is not theology, it is built upon first principles of reason, while theology begins in revelation. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries some Presbyterian university professors decided to revive classical education for the sake of improving the general education of the population at large. Aristotelianism and the

⁶ A. J. Beitzinger, *A History of American Political Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, reprint), 238.

⁷ The Locke of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* does not allow for innate ideas. As many have noted, that position negates whatever reference to laws of nature Locke might want to make in the *Second Treatise*. For if man is a blank slate where does he find any such laws? His natural law theory is moot. To begin with the idea of a self-interested individual who discovers natural law in reason is a very different view of natural law than found in the medieval account, as is clear. Whether or not Reid indeed adequately shows the failure of Hume’s subversion of philosophy is a matter of debate, but for Wilson, it was convincing.

⁸ James Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, ed. Hall and Hall (Indianapolis, IN.: Liberty Fund, 2007, 2 Vols.), 610–611. Wilson quotes Reid at some length in his lectures, sometimes acknowledging the debt, sometimes not.

⁹ Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 472.

¹⁰ *Id.*, 608–609.

¹¹ *Id.*, 435

study of the classics had never entirely disappeared,¹² but it was decided that the universities of Scotland should implement a unified and homogeneous educational system to raise up the level of general culture in the country, and to advance science. An eccentric, but brilliant man, named Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1655–1715)—of interest, no doubt, to Scottish nationalists today—had argued that in order to preserve the distinctiveness of Scottish institutions and culture from the incursion of ideas from English universities, they should implement a unique educational program—a model classical and humanistic education. He hoped Scotland might maintain itself according to the idea of the Greek city state. Part of the plan as set forth in his *Proposal for Schools and Colleges* (1704), was a course of study in both ancient and modern learning. “Ancient philosophy would be taught in the context of ancient literary studies to a relatively small student body.”¹³ It was an “educational policy which gave a priority to philosophy and science studied for the sake of their first principles, not merely for use. The decisive fact about the Scottish Universities . . . was that the medieval curriculum of Grammar, Logic, Ethics, Physics, survived both the Revival of learning and the Reformation.”¹⁴ This was an education in the classics and sciences, culminating in a compulsory course of philosophy, preparing young men for science, law, or divinity. As a result, Philosophy came to have a *cultural hegemony*.¹⁵ Students were able to “argue about Hume’s theory of causality and Berkeley’s theory of perception.”¹⁶ They were taught to argue from first principles. Students studied and argued about the fundamental principles of moral law insofar as they can be “conceived of as antecedent to all positive law and all particular forms of social organizations.”¹⁷ Hence the continuing strength of a philosophy of natural law. For a while in Scotland itself such principles came to be authoritative in common education and discourse.

¹² Richard Tuck, *Natural Right Theories* (Cambridge: CUP, 1979), 44–45. He briefly discusses the general state of Aristotelianism in the Protestant world in the Renaissance.

¹³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 257.

¹⁴ George E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Murdo Macdonald (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, reprinted 2013[1961]), 255–256.

¹⁵ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 247.

¹⁶ Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, 12.

¹⁷ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 239.

People debate of course whether or not there was real homogeneity of philosophical opinion. Certainly there were significant differences and it is a serious question whether Wilson's thought is more dependent upon Thomas Reid or Francis Hutcheson in his treatment of the moral or common sense.¹⁸ Certainly he borrows frequently, without citation, from both. Nonetheless, Reid must have been central when he was arguing against Hume. Of Hume he wrote:

[Hume] annihilates spirit as well as body and reduces mankind—I use his own words—to a “bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.” “There is properly no simplicity in the mind at one time; nor identity in it at different times; whatever natural propensity”—tis indeed natural—“we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity: they are successive perceptions only that constitute the mind.”¹⁹

For Wilson, here lies the problem with Hume—if Hume is right, then one can never trust the commonplace understanding of the ordinary person. If it cannot be trusted, how can democracy stand? If one cannot rely upon the justice of the common man, there is no natural justice, and law is reduced to being the product of utility.²⁰

For Hume, to regard all justice as a matter of utility was not a problem. He argued that moral and political distinctions are not derived from reason at all. In a friendly dispute with Adam Ferguson²¹ about the natural basis of institutions, Hume had argued that institutions are created by nothing but force.²² All one can say of the genesis of the justice and order

¹⁸ Jean-Marc Pascal, *The Political Ideas of James Wilson: 1742–1798* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), Ch. 2. Pascal argues Wilson's philosophy attempted to reconcile Hutcheson and Reid in treating of the relationship of moral sense to common sense reasoning. He also notes, and no doubt this was because Wilson did not live to edit his lectures, that there are large sections in Wilson's discussion of epistemology which are not clearly cited as from Reid or Hutcheson, yet repeat them fairly directly.

¹⁹ Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 605, quoting Hume's *On Human Nature*.

²⁰ David Hume, “Of the Original Contract” (1748) [www.constitution.org/dh/origcont.htm], accessed on Sept. 09, 2015].

²¹ Adam Ferguson (1723–1813) wrote *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, in which he made the argument that society is natural not contractual. This book was well known to James Wilson and he drew upon its arguments.

²² Gary L. McDowell, “Commerce, Virtue, and Politics: Adam Ferguson's Constitutionalism,” *Review of Politics* 45:4 (October 1983): 536–552.

which is proper and necessary to mankind, is that all law is the result of the consent of the weak to the strong.

But that is not a philosophy upon which to build a free republic. From Wilson's standpoint, Hume's epistemology leads to nothing but despotism. In this Wilson was at one with all the other Framers, who for all their diversity of views, held to the existence of truth, and viewed human nature rightly, as rational, whatever differences they may have held as to what reason is. Neither Madison, nor Jay, nor Hamilton, nor even Jefferson, were moral relativists. But they did not see what Wilson saw, which is that truth requires both a metaphysical and epistemological foundation in true philosophy.

Common Sense

Wilson argued that philosophy begins with a common sense apprehension of that reality to which our senses *and our reflection* give us access. It begins with sense knowledge, it is refined by education and clarity. Philosophizing is the exercise of finding general rules of conjecture for what we observe and reflect upon. Human beings can have real knowledge, and seeking truth (philosophy) is not a specialized activity, but is what every man does when he deliberates to himself as to whether to do this or that, or indeed, reflects upon being. The mind is an active principle, Wilson said.

Here lies the great dispute with Hume. Hume's error lies in thinking that what I think I know is the product of thought, primarily, rather than being,²³ and as men do not know being, moral judgements are the product of custom, and accepted in an irrational manner. One might call Hume an anti-philosophical philosopher, and he undermines the ordinary kind of thinking of people. So, Wilson, following Reid held, with the common man, that we cannot reject the common beliefs of mankind as bereft of any merit, and certain beliefs are antecedent to reason, although corruptible by bad reasoning. The exercise of common sense "is that degree of judgement which is to be expected in men of common education and common understanding."²⁴

²³ Étienne Gilson, *The Nature and Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Scribner's, 1937), 316. This is Gilson's mode of expression, not Reid nor Wilson, but grasps the same idea.

²⁴ Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 599.

Ordinary people have in their conscience or moral sense “the *communes notitiae*, the common notions and practical principles of virtue, though the application of them is often extremely unnatural and absurd.”²⁵ One is misled if one concludes from the savagery of certain societies that these principles don’t exist. These common notions exist, even when that application is absurd. “These seeds are planted in their minds by nature, though, for want of culture and exercise, they lie unnoticed.”²⁶ Each has the seed of a logician within. Each has the seeds of a philosopher or an orator. The mind as an active principle works upon what it receives.²⁷ There are various ways of thinking, called operations of the mind, and in all peoples we observe the exercise of these principles. The power of reasoning from these notions is “strictly the process, by which we pass from one judgement to another.”²⁸ But it may be weak and faulty, without direction.

How do we come by these common notions? The external senses and the internal sense both contribute—the “external sense conveys to us information of what passes without us” and the internal sense, or consciousness, what passes within. Our perception through the external senses is as it were a branch of intuitive knowledge, and part of the constitution of our nature.²⁹ The knowledge from seeing, hearing, touching is a power simple and original in the human mind.³⁰

The internal sense or consciousness is purely intellectual. Perceiving, remembering, imagining, reasoning, judging, approving, these are all objects of this consciousness. This is the kind of knowledge that we have about ourselves by looking into ourselves, not through philosophical proof. As Wilson, following Reid, pointed out, even Hume cannot deny the existence of consciousness.

²⁵ *Id.*, 517.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*, 590.

²⁸ *Id.*, 600.

²⁹ Wilson does not give a developed metaphysics of form and matter in his epistemology. Furthermore, while recognizing Aristotle is right about first principles, one should recognize that the idea of the moral sense or common sense is not identical to Aristotle. It is closer to *synderesis* in Thomas Aquinas, but that would require further discussion. A full discussion of the similarity of Wilson’s moral sense to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas appears in William F. Obering, *The philosophy of law of James Wilson* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1938).

³⁰ Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 591.

“Mr Hume, after annihilating body and mind, time and space, action and causation, and even his own mind, acknowledges the reality of the thoughts, sensations, and passions of which he is conscious” . . . Let us felicitate ourselves, that there is, at least, one principle of common sense, which has never been called in question. It is a first principle, which we are required and determined, by the very constitution of our nature and faculty to believe.³¹

Even if Hume denies all first principles, he cannot deny the existence of that capacity of consciousness within the mind which is a principle of common sense. In a discussion of memory, conception and judgement, Wilson applied himself to the task of uniting external and internal senses with consciousness.³² It is indeed these senses which help provide first principles.

The efficient cause of moral obligation is moral sense, reason, and God as creator of mankind, wrote Wilson. To God as creator we will turn, but what is reason? The ultimate ends of man can never be reasoned to, they are reasoned from. Reason performs many services. She determines the proper means to an end, and decides between alternatives; she exhibits an object to the mind, and determines the motives to an action; she judges concerning subordinate ends.³³ Reason will prove, extend, and apply what the moral sense has suggested to us. Although some philosophers have argued, he wrote, that reason is the supreme “arbitress of human knowledge; that by her solely we ought to be governed, that in her solely we ought to place confidence; that she can establish first principles and correct the mistakes of common sense,”³⁴ that is a mistake. Reason is too easily misled, it is a means by which to obtain the good end, it does not offer that end itself.³⁵

³¹ Id., 595.

³² Hutcheson referred to the internal and external senses: “Senses are either *external* or *internal* [and mental]. The external depend on certain organs of the body, so constituted that upon any impression made on them, or motion exciting, whether by external impulses or internal forces in the body, a certain feeling [perception] or notion is raised in the soul . . . By these senses we acquire the first notions of *good* and *evil*” (Francis Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria with A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, ed. Luigi Turco (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 2007), 26).

³³ Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 513.

³⁴ Id., 603.

³⁵ Wilson’s argument is not unlike that found in the *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 79, a. 12, a. 13, where Thomas speaks of *synderesis*.

To those who argue against the existence of the moral sense, Wilson replied, that human beings want to argue well—this is part of human nature—it is evident in the desire of ordinary men and women to dispute and judge about matters good and ill. Even the untutored child has the “apprehension of right and wrong,” if not right knowledge. Hence the “strong inclination in children to hear such stories as paint the characters and fortunes of men. Hence that joy in the prosperity of the kind and faithful, and that sorry upon the success of the treacherous and cruel, with which we often see infant minds strongly agitated.”³⁶ And he added that these principles are “totally distinct from the ideas of utility and agreeableness.”³⁷ The moral sense determines the “end, which he ought to pursue; and he has intuitive evidence that his end is good: but the means of attaining this end must be determined by reason.”³⁸

By way of another example, Wilson observed that the presence of language among all peoples in the world illustrates that moral sense is natural and common to all people.³⁹ Languages were not invented by philosophers, they were “contrived by men in general, to express common sentiments and perceptions. The inference is satisfactory, that where all languages make a distinction, there must be a similar distinction in universal opinion or sentiment.”⁴⁰ For example, people distinguish “an agreeable and disagreeable, a good and ill, in actions, affections, and characters.”⁴¹ All people do not agree about the *most* beautiful thing, but they have an innate desire to make such a distinction. This moral sense improves through habit and education; thus, the *capacity* for moral reasoning is innate and proves its existence. Wilson, thinking like Aristotle, concluded that if there exists a good experienced man, he is the man who models common sense, and that is why we appeal not to the common sense of savages but to “men in their most perfect state.”⁴²

³⁶ Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 510.

³⁷ *Id.*, 509.

³⁸ *Id.*, 514.

³⁹ This argument expressing “the universality of all languages in expressing moral sanctions” is from Reid (see Pascal, *The Political Ideas of James Wilson: 1742–1798*, 60).

⁴⁰ Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 511.

⁴¹ *Id.*, 511.

⁴² *Id.*, 515–516. The passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1113a20–34, to which Wilson probably refers is translated by J. A. K. Thomson: “For the man of good character judges every situation rightly; i.e. in every situation which appears to him is the truth. Every disposition has its own appreciation of what is fine and pleasant; and probably what makes the

Why is this not obvious to philosophers today? “The school of Mr. Locke has given rise to two sects: at the head of one are Berkely and Hume: at the head of the other are Hartley and Priestly.”⁴³ Incoherent as their philosophies are, they “all agree in *assuming the existence of ideas*” without any agreement as to how they appear in the mind.⁴⁴ One philosopher destroys mind by saying it is the same thing as matter, another attacks truth of mind and destroys matter, and so it goes.

In essence, they seem not to recognize that man is composed of body and soul intimately connected, even if we cannot explain entirely in what manner connected. But as a consequence of this connexion “the body lives and performs the functions” and the mind is well adapted to its several end. The mind is for an order higher than that of the body, even “more of the wisdom and skill of the divine Architect is displaced in its structure.”⁴⁵ Thus perception belongs to consciousness, “but the manner in which they are perceived, we cannot explain; for we cannot trace the connexion between our minds and the impressions made on our organs of sense; because we cannot trace the connexion which subsists between soul and body.”⁴⁶

Can one hold someone responsible for stealing or murder if one cannot be certain of what our sense and reason tells us? Wilson observed that the courtroom relies entirely upon common sense knowledge. Unfortunately, he said, Lockean principles had already intruded themselves upon the study of law. Chief Baron Gilbert in his jurisprudence “grounds his general observations on the doctrine of Mr. Locke, that knowledge is nothing but the perception of the agreement or disagreement of our ideas.”⁴⁷ Perusing the first pages of Lord Chief Baron Gilbert’s *Treatise upon Evidence*, “unfolds the reason why I have employed so much pains to expose and remove the sandy and unsound foundation on which the principles of the law of evidence have been placed.”⁴⁸

man of good character stand out furthest is the fact that he sees the truth in every kind of situation: he is a sort of standard and yardstick of what is fine and pleasant.”

⁴³ Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 605.

⁴⁴ *Id.*, 606–612.

⁴⁵ *Id.*, 590.

⁴⁶ *Id.*, 590–591.

⁴⁷ *Id.*, 614.

⁴⁸ *Id.*, 614 and 798. The dates of Chief Justice Jeffrey Gilbert are 1674–1726.

Superiority and Inferiority in Law

“Despotism by an artful use of ‘superiority’ in politicks; and skepticism, by an artful use of ‘ideas’ in metaphysics, have endeavoured—and their endeavours have frequently been attended with too much success—to destroy all true liberty and philosophy. By their baneful effects, the science of man and the science of government have been poisoned to their very fountains. But those destroyers of others have met, or must meet with their own destruction.”⁴⁹ The other target of his reference to “despotism by the artful use of ‘superiority’ in politics” was William Blackstone (1723–1780), whose influential work of jurisprudence was entitled *The Commentaries on the laws of England* (1765), also had the marks of skepticism.

The question that his treatment of Blackstone raises is, to what degree is any legal and political system dependent upon a metaphysic? Can one simply adopt a definition of law absent a recognition of the underlying principles?

Blackstone defines law as “that rule of action which is prescribed by some superior, and which the inferior is bound to obey.”⁵⁰ This definition ought to make one pause and think, wrote Wilson. “Can there be *no* law without a superior? Is it *essential* to law, that inferiority should be involved in the obligation to obey?”⁵¹ If law is only ever created by the act of a superior over an inferior, then what place is given to a higher law, and on what ground does an inferior appeal against the ruling of a superior. The positive law of the nation ends up, on such an account, being supreme. Blackstone argued that Parliament is sovereign. While Blackstone used the terms *law of nature* and *natural right*,⁵² effectively, they are synonymous with existing English laws and liberties. When civil society and Parliament are supreme and the source of all law, then civil law and natural law are identified.

Theories of sovereignty took two forms in the seventeenth century: absolutist divine right of a King whose will is a direct command, and con-

⁴⁹ Id., 492 and 614.

⁵⁰ Id., 471.

⁵¹ Id.

⁵² Blackstone claims to incorporate a theory of the law of nature into his treatise on law, but this is undermined by his theory of parliamentary sovereignty. See his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, vol. I, “Introduction,” s. ii. Blackstone’s metaphysic and epistemology is the same as Locke and Hobbes, i.e. natural law is a law of self-preservation, not a participation of reason in the eternal law. In addition, Blackstone’s God is Will and Power alone; Wilson adopts Hooker’s account of God.

tract theory, which when connected to a positivist view of law, placed absolute sovereignty in the chosen magistrate who personifies their will. In either case it is will, not truth and goodness, which is sovereign. On either account, there was no standard for law external to passion and will.

Against this theory of sovereignty, American colonists revived a theory of higher law, in order to assert that there exists in human beings something that is outside and above the state. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, “if something is contrary to natural law it cannot be made just as a result of human volition” (*S.Th.*, II–II, 57, 2, ob. 2). Richard Hooker, who is Thomistic in his account of natural law, served as a respected English source for them,⁵³ although there were a variety of sources to which they could appeal, not least the English legal minds, Coke and Fortescue.⁵⁴ Wilson made the most use in repeating Hooker’s account of natural, divine, and eternal law, and his theory of consent.

The structure of the *Lectures on Law*, shows that Wilson depended more on Richard Hooker than Blackstone. Instead of writing a commentary on the existing laws of England, Wilson presents a work of political philosophy. In the order of presentation Wilson begins with law as an expression of God’s providential wisdom, offering an account of eternal, divine and natural law (following the first book of the *Ecclesiastical Polity*).⁵⁵ He

⁵³ Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Press, 1991), 246–247. Beitzinger, *A History of American Political Thought*, 5, 34–35, 41, 88–89, 116–117, 132, 140, 147, 162, 235–239.

⁵⁴ As to the varieties, see B. F. Wright, Jr., “American Interpretations of Natural Law,” *The American Political Science Review* 20:3 (August 1926): 524–547.

⁵⁵ Following Richard Hooker, Wilson describes law this way:

“Of law there are different kinds. All, however, may be arranged in two different classes. 1. Divine. 2. Human laws. The descriptive epithets employed denote, that the former have God, the latter, man, for their author. The laws of God may be divided into the following species.

I. That law, the book of which we are neither able nor worthy to open. Of this law, the author and observer is God. He is law to himself, as well as to all created things. This law we may name the ‘law eternal’.

II. That law, which is made for the angels and the spirits of the just made perfect. This may be called the ‘law celestial’. This law, and the glorious state for which it is adapted, we see, at present, but darkly as through a glass: but hereafter we shall see even as we are seen; and shall know even as we are known. From the wisdom and goodness of the adorable Author and Preserver of the universe, we are justified in concluding, that the celestial and perfect state is governed, as all other things are, by his established laws. What those laws are, it is not yet given us to know; but on one truth we may rely with sure and certain confidence—those laws are wise and good. For another truth we have infallible authority—those laws are strictly obeyed: ‘In heaven his will is done’.

follows that with its import for nations, both domestically and internationally, and then moves on to a discussion of man as an individual (epistemology), as a member of society, and of the world. Only at that point does he discuss customary and common law, the positive laws which a particular nation may develop for itself over time. Following upon common law comes his discussion of government, executive, legislative and judicial powers, and then the practice of criminal law and rights. Hence, Wilson sees common and statute law as secondary to natural law, which is the standard of justice.

What common law does show is that consent is the most basic foundation of all positive law, both customary and statutory. In the medieval legal idea of consent, unlike in contract theory, people do not renounce their will. One, indeed, can never be obliged by a law to which one has not consented, and one never absolutely alienates one's sovereignty. Wilson is a democrat by reason of his conviction that all men have common sense, and a moral sense which offers them access to first principles and so are at all times sovereign actors.

The principle of consent was attested to in medieval English law, prior to modern ideas of sovereignty. Wilson repeats it: There was an old medieval adage attributed to "the English Justinian, [King] Edward the first. *Lex justissima, ut quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus approbetur.*" What touches all should be approved by all.⁵⁶ Lord Chancellor Fortescue, who had written that "the statutes of England are framed, not by the will of the prince but by that and by the assent of the whole kingdom."⁵⁷ They did not

III. That law, by which the irrational and inanimate parts of the creation are governed. The great Creator of all things has established general and fixed rules, according to which all the phenomena of the material universe are produced and regulated. These rules are usually denominated laws of nature. The science, which has those laws for its object, is distinguished by the name of natural philosophy. It is sometimes called the philosophy of body. Of this science, there are numerous branches.

IV. That law, which God has made for man in his present state; that law, which is communicated to us by reason and conscience, the divine monitors within us, and by the sacred oracles, the divine monitors without us. This law has undergone several subdivisions, and has been known by distinct appellations, according to the different ways in which it has been promulgated, and the different objects which it respects.

As promulgated by reason and the moral sense, it has been called natural; as promulgated by the holy scriptures, it has been called revealed law. As addressed to men it has been denominated the law of nature; as addressed to political societies it has been denominated the law of nations" (Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 497–498).

⁵⁶ Id., 565. Edward I (1239–1307).

⁵⁷ Id. Lord Chancellor Fortescue (1394–1480).

argue for the superiority of Parliament. There was also the example of consent which the Framers all agreed could be found in the old Anglo-Saxon law. Thinking that the most ancient laws of England affirmed self-government some colonial lawyers like James Otis ironically found themselves defending colonial rule through ancient English law against Parliament. Wilson could even appeal to the Roman Digest: “for the Roman law, was not, in every age of Rome the law of slavery.”⁵⁸ “In the original constitution of Rome, the sovereign power, the *dominium eminens*, as it is called by the civilians, always resided in the collective body of the people.”⁵⁹ The principle was stated, if not always followed. More recently, there was Hooker: “‘Over a whole grand multitude’, says the judicious Hooker, ‘consisting of many families, impossible it is, that any should have complete lawful power, but by consent of men, or by immediate appointment by God’.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, the

lawful power of making laws to command whole politick society of men, belongeth so properly unto the same entire societies, that for any prince or potentate of what kind soever upon earth, to exercise the same of himself, and not either by express commission immediately and personally received from God, or else by authority derived, at the first, from their consent, upon whose persons they impose laws, it is no better than a mere tyranny. Laws they are not, therefore, which public approbation hath not made so.⁶¹

Who has power to make law? The answer lies in the consent of those who are governed. “The consent of those whose obedience the law requires. This I conceive to be the true origin of the obligation of human laws.”⁶² His recourse to an essentially medieval and teleological view of law makes possible the argument that the sovereign power in the reason and conscience of the ordinary person makes popular rule the best form of government.

⁵⁸ Id., 496.

⁵⁹ Id., 571.

⁶⁰ Id., 483.

⁶¹ Hooker, *Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book I.8.10.

⁶² Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 494.

The Governance of God

Who has superior standing and sovereignty which gives them authority to write positive law in the new nation? Wilson, the democrat, replied that the people are sovereign; this is affirmed in the American constitution. But where do the people find the source of their authority? To what or whom do they owe obedience? Is the superiority and sovereignty of the people founded upon their appetites and desires and passions? Are they left without a moral compass? No, he answered, because God did not leave them bereft and without a compass. They have moral sense, reason and the law of God.⁶³ Our “Creator has a supreme right to prescribe a law for our conduct and that we are under the most perfect obligation to obey that law, are truths established on the clearest and most solid principles.”⁶⁴ By that law we govern ourselves, for between “beings, who, in their nature, powers, and situation, are so perfectly equal, that nothing can be ascribed to one, which is not applicable to the other, there can be neither superiority nor dependence.”⁶⁵

There are two ways to know God, by our moral sense or conscience intellectual and active, and revelation of Holy Scriptures. “Far from being enemies, religion and law are twin sisters, friends, and mutual assistants. Indeed, these two sciences run into each other. The divine law, as discovered by reason and the moral sense, forms an essential part of both.”⁶⁶ Insofar as God is author of creation and author of revelation, the law written into both cannot disagree, and each person has access to both by which to govern themselves and govern society:

“Order, proportion, and fitness pervade the universe. Around us, we see; within us, we feel; above us, we admire a rule, from which a deviation cannot or should not, or will not be made . . . Animated nature is under a government suited to every genus, to every species, and to every individual of which it consists.”⁶⁷ God’s law is “a law more distinguished by the *goodness*, than by the *power* of its all gracious Author.”⁶⁸ “Were we to suppose—but the supposition cannot be made—that infinite goodness could be disjoined from almighty

⁶³ Id., 500.

⁶⁴ Id.

⁶⁵ Id., 501.

⁶⁶ Id., 499.

⁶⁷ Id., 464.

⁶⁸ Id., 471.

power—but we cannot—must proceed to the inference. No, it never can be drawn; for from almighty power infinite goodness can never be disjoined.”⁶⁹

God is good and wise, not simply will. It is again Richard Hooker who offers him support. Hooker had argued (against certain Puritan theologians) that God works by his own law which is suitable to his goodness. God is not arbitrary in his actions. “They err therefore who think that of the will of God to do this or that, there is no reason besides his will.”⁷⁰ Wilson concomitantly said: “Let us join, in our weak conceptions, what are inseparable in their incomprehensible Archetype—infinite power—infinite wisdom—infinite goodness; and then we shall see in its resplendent glory, the supreme right to rule: we shall feel the conscious sense of the perfect obligation to obey.”⁷¹ By God’s infinite power He provides for us, by His infinite wisdom he knows us, by His infinite goodness He proposes our happiness. To His goodness alone we trace the principle of his laws. “The rule of his government we shall find to be reduced to this one paternal command—Let man pursue his own perfection and happiness.”⁷²

Blackstone was wrong about the nature of law because he was wrong about the nature of Law. God in his wisdom provides for us to trace through our reason the principles of his law. Wilson put it this way:

No division has been more common, and perhaps, less exceptionable, than, that of the powers of the mind into those of the understanding and those of will. And yet even this division, I am afraid, has led to a mistake. The mistake I believe to be this: it has been supposed that in the operations ascribed to the will, there was no employment of the understanding; and that in those ascribed to the understanding, there was no exertion of the will.⁷³

If, according to Blackstone, the colonists cannot appeal against Parliament’s taxing power, one must agree with Wilson that Blackstone has incorporated the principle of tyranny into his definition of law.

⁶⁹ Id., 503. Here we note Wilson is siding with the Magisterial Reformers such as Hooker, and is rejecting Puritan theology which describes God as absolute and arbitrary power.

⁷⁰ Hooker, *Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book I.2.5.

⁷¹ Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 503.

⁷² Id.

⁷³ Id., 587.

So Wilson's great opposition to Blackstone led him to make an argument for the ontological reality of eternal law through Richard Hooker in order to show that understanding rather than will is the foundation of just law. But this can hardly be that surprising given his education in Scotland where he was taught to think from first principles.

Conclusion

Étienne Gilson had remarked that a democracy can be distinguished from a totalitarian regime by the fact that it "recognizes the presence in human beings, of something that is outside of the State." James Wilson argued that the new United States of America should affirm that principle in its founding jurisprudential and political philosophy. For how could Americans claim that its revolution was just, if they could not also show that justice is eternal and natural. As one constitutional lawyer remarked: "The act of legislating would stand out as a massive act of presumption unless it were understood that there are in fact propositions with a universal reach, which can define what is good or bad, just or unjust, for people in general."⁷⁴ But that of course requires that people study so as to know the first principles of justice.

Such a project also requires defending the capacity of mankind to know this truth, and Wilson pointed to such an argument in his *Lectures on Law*, even though it was not made as thoroughly as might have been necessary. He was also too sanguine in his view of America, as it would appear that as America was not as inclined to philosophical speculation as the *metaphysical* Scots. There was no struggle in the universities in America between sceptics and realists. People did not argue in the streets about the merits of Humean skepticism. Reid's works were important to the first decade or so of university educated Americans, and certainly the Scottish philosophical tradition had some purchase on some academics, but those early generations of Americans were not so inclined to pursue philosophy—practical individuals, they required only a nominal understanding of truth, which as de Tocqueville pointed out, was provided by religious faith.

All Wilson's energy, all his work and study, all that hope came to nothing, as later generations knew Blackstone's *Commentaries* much better than his lectures. Abraham Lincoln read his Blackstone and Bible together, and indeed, the potentially negative effects of Blackstone's skeptical defi-

⁷⁴ Hadley Arkes, *First Things* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 4.

dition of law are made moot when read in the context of divine law, although as Wilson noted, outside of that context it is more dangerous. Why was Wilson wrong in his assessment of the American mind? Why was he doomed to obscurity rather than celebrated and read? He had been quite as famous in his day as Madison and Hamilton.

The first answer must lie in his ignominious death. To die in debt and shame will tarnish a reputation. Only in the early twentieth century was his body restored to its rightful place and reinterred in Christ Churchyard, Philadelphia, although his book, edited by his son, was available for study soon after his death. Mostly it lay in obscurity with an occasional revival of interest from a primarily Christian audience. Roman Catholic writers took him up in the early twentieth century,⁷⁵ and helped inform John Courtney Murray⁷⁶ when he made an argument about the presence of natural law thought at the Founding. Perhaps it did not seem so important to read a philosophical argument for the relation of constitutional law to natural law when such a relationship was assumed. After the philosophies of progressivism and pragmatism came to dominate legal thinking, that relationship was ignored. But in retrospect, the lack of attention to this robustly philosophical natural law argument for popular sovereignty seems to have been a serious loss to American legal thought. Nonetheless, the fact that there was a Framers who argued so robustly against philosophical skepticism, and so persuasively for true philosophy should not be overlooked. Today when it is assumed that skepticism about truth is the foundation of tolerance and freedom, it is very necessary to read James Wilson, this neglected but important, Framers.

**THE COMMON SENSE AMERICAN REPUBLIC:
THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF JAMES WILSON (1742–1798)**

SUMMARY

James Wilson (1742–1798), lawyer, Justice of the first Supreme Court of the United States, and Constitutional Framers argued, as did Étienne Gilson, that a citizenry who have adopted philosophical skepticism will lose their political freedom, as self-rule requires that citizens be able to reason rightly about the natural law. He advocated a common sense philosophical

⁷⁵ William J. Obering, S.J., *The Philosophy of Law of James Wilson* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1938).

⁷⁶ John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1960).

education in natural law for all lawyers, so that they might know the first principles of moral reasoning.

KEYWORDS: natural law, Étienne Gilson, constitution, James Wilson, William Blackstone, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Locke, Richard Hooker, David Hume, skepticism, liberty, freedom, despotism.

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**THE BALANCE OF FAITH AND REASON:
THE ROLE OF CONFIRMATION IN
THE THOUGHT OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**

Always be prepared to make a defense to any one
who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.
—2 Peter 3:15¹

In the midst of a plurality of religions, Christians are committed to the proposition that the fullness of truth can only be found in communion with Christ and His Church, but if they do not wish to hold their beliefs irrationally, then they must also have some account or reason for why they believe what they do. The so-called “evidentialist objection” against Christianity, which concludes that one should not believe the truths of Christian faith, relies upon two powerful premises that strike at the heart of this tension between faith and reason: (1) one should not believe what does not have sufficient evidence, and (2) Christian beliefs do not have sufficient evidence. The evidentialist objection is troubling, for Christians defending their beliefs do not wish to say that they are founded upon mere human evidence, for they believe by faith; yet still, Christians also wish to affirm that “those who place their faith in this truth, for which human reason offers no experience, do not believe lightly, as those following unlearned fables.”²

¹ *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006). All subsequent scriptural citations (save those found within a text) will be from this edition of the Bible.

² “Huiusmodi autem veritati, cui ratio humana experimentum non praebet, fidem adhibentes non leviter credunt, quasi indoctas fabulas secuti” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra*

St. Thomas Aquinas offers a unique and compelling solution to this objection, which satisfies the Christian need to have faith be a gift from God, while respecting the proper role of reason. In solving the evidentialist objection, it is especially helpful to focus on St. Thomas's teaching on the role of divine confirmation of revealed truths—for the nature of this confirmation and the extent to which it is necessary for Christian belief provides at least one key to understanding the order of faith and reason within the Christian life.

Solutions to the Evidentialist Objection

For St. Thomas, two extremes must be avoided by the Christian who wishes to provide some sort of justification for his belief. On the one hand, a Christian cannot say that what he holds by faith is able to be proved by human reason: "Arguments from human reason have no place in proving what is of faith."³ For the doctrines of the faith should not be "included under the measure of philosophy, as if someone would not believe unless he could hold it through philosophy, since on the contrary, philosophy should be brought under the measure of faith."⁴ The reason why the articles of faith must themselves be beyond human reason is because faith is the "the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1), and if human reason could demonstrate the articles of faith, then they would be intellectually seen and known, and thus, no longer pertain to what is held by faith proper (that being said, for Aquinas, the preambles of faith are indeed demonstrable by human reason). However, this does not necessarily mean that there is no reasoning involved in the act or acts that are prior to belief and which lead one to assent to the articles of faith.

Gentiles, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Tomus XIII (Romae: Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1918), lib. 1, c. 6, 18). This translation and all subsequent translations of St. Thomas are mine unless otherwise noted.

³ "Argumenta rationis humanae non habeant locum ad probandum quae fidei sunt" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Pars prima summae theologiae: a questione I ad quaestionem XLIX*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Tomus IV (Romae: S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1888), q. 1, a. 8, ad 1).

⁴ "Ea quid sunt fidei includantur sub metis philosophiae, ut scilicet si aliquis credere nolit nisi quod per philosophiam haberi potest, cum e converso philosophia sit ad metas fidei redigenda" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Tomus L (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1992), q. 2, a. 1).

For a Christian does not wish to say that there is no reason why he holds his beliefs to be true rather than those of non-Christians; fideism is the opposite extreme that must be avoided by Christians. As has been mentioned above, a Christian does not believe the truths of faith lightly. Thus however one ultimately solves the evidentialist objection, the following two points must also hold true: (1) one must always maintain that the articles of faith are themselves unable to be demonstrated by human reason and (2) one must hold that the articles of faith are reasonably or justifiably held.

Concerning the precise nature of this justification or reasonability of Christian belief, there exists a wide range of opinions. For even if one admits that the articles of faith are not themselves demonstrable by human reason, the testimony to these articles by witnesses is indeed accessible, and therefore, it would appear that men must have some way to determine whether the testimony that they receive is worthy of belief. In the *Summa theologiae* and throughout his works, Aquinas is clear that the reason why Christians believe the truths of faith, truths that are above human reason, is because it is God who reveals them: “The faith of which we are speaking does not assent to anything except because it is revealed by God.”⁵ Thus, the justification for believing that the doctrines of Christian faith are true is that they are revealed by God Himself, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived. St. Thomas goes even further and says that “we do not believe what is above human reason unless it is God revealing.”⁶ But this presents a further problem, for it means that there must also be some means by which man can know that it is really God Who is revealing: either directly, in a special revelation, or through the testimony of witnesses.

Here again, there exists a range of views concerning how one knows whether or not it is God Who is revealing or whether the witnesses are actually testifying in God’s name. On one end of the spectrum, one finds the Lockean opinion of scholars like Richard Swinburne, who holds that there are rational means of determining whether or not a message is from God, and moreover, he claims that it is every man’s epistemic duty to ensure that the testimony he receives is really from God. Under this interpretation, the manner in which one ensures that the testimony is really from

⁵ “Non enim fides de qua loquimur assentit alicui nisi quia est a Deo revelatum” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Secunda secundae summae theologiae: a questione I ad quaestionem LVI*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Tomus VIII (Romae: S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1895), q. 1, a. 1, resp.).

⁶ “Non credimus nisi Deo revelante” (SCG 1.9).

God is by weighing the probability of it actually being from God. In the words of John Locke, “Whether it be a divine revelation, or no, reason must judge.”⁷ Locke defines reason as “the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths, which the mind arrives at by deductions made from such ideas, which it has got by the use of its natural faculties.”⁸ And since reason “can never permit the mind to reject a greater evidence to embrace what is less evident,”⁹ whether or not one should accept a revelation as being from God is strictly a matter of evidence for Locke.

Swinburne’s views on this matter are similar: “We need to take steps to acquire beliefs as probably true, that is, as rationally well supported as we can get them.”¹⁰ Thus, under this interpretation, the motivation for believing the articles of faith is that it seems probable to human reason that the revelation is from God. Once a man has accepted that a revelation is probably from God, then he further assents to that revelation’s content, and this is faith, according to this picture. Furthermore, for Swinburne and Locke it is unreasonable to accept the truths of faith without having first received this kind of evidence.

It seems, however, that the opinion of Aquinas himself is against this view, for he clearly states in the *Summa theologiae* that “when someone either does not have the will, or does not have the prompt will, to believe, unless he is induced by human reason—being thus led by human reason diminishes the merit of faith.”¹¹ And again, further on in the *Summa*, he associates the desire to see signs with a lack of faith:

But he has the more perfect faith who does not require helps of this kind to believe. Hence, to disclose the lack of faith in some, the Lord says, “Unless you see signs and wonders, you do not believe” (John 4:48). And from this it can be understood that those who are so prompt of spirit that they believe God even without beholding

⁷ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), bk. 4, ch. 19, §10, 328.

⁸ *Id.*, §2, 324.

⁹ *Id.*, §10, 328.

¹⁰ Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 88.

¹¹ “Cum quis aut non haberet voluntatem, aut non haberet promptam voluntatem ad credendum, nisi ratio humana induceretur. Et sic ratio humana inducta diminuit meritum fidei” (*S.Th.*, II–II, q. 2, a. 10, resp.).

signs—these are blessed in comparison to those who do not believe unless they see such things.¹²

Thus, from these passages and many others like it throughout his writings, it appears that for St. Thomas there is ultimately something wrong with demanding human reasons before believing that a particular revelation is actually from God. Again, though, it must here be emphasized that this does not mean that Aquinas thinks there is no means by which one can distinguish true revelation from false—what it does mean is that, for Aquinas, human reasons for accepting revelation are both unnecessary and unfitting to the Christian. Thus, if one follows Aquinas, Swinburne and Locke are at least wrong to insist that an appeal to human evidence is necessary in order to justify Christian belief.

On the other end of this spectrum of opinions regarding the justification of faith, one finds the opinion of scholars like Alvin Plantinga, who holds that, in the act of faith, the truths of revelation are simply held as first principles or *basic beliefs*:

My Christian belief can have warrant, and warrant sufficient for knowledge, even if I don't know of and cannot make a good historical case for the reliability of the biblical writers or for what they teach. I don't *need* a good historical case for the truth of the central teachings of the gospel to be warranted in accepting them. I needn't be able to find a good argument, historical or otherwise . . . It doesn't require to be validated or proved by some source of belief *other* than faith.¹³

Plantinga claims that his opinion is faithful to the thought of both John Calvin and St. Thomas Aquinas. He says that Scripture is “self-authenticating” and even “self-evident” in a sense: “For the person with faith . . . the great things of the gospel seem clearly true, obvious, compelling.”¹⁴

¹² “Est autem perfectioris fidei qui non requirit huiusmodi auxilia ad credendum. Unde, ad arguendum defectum fidei in quibusdam, dominus dicit, Ioan. IV, nisi signa et prodigia videritis, non creditis. Et secundum hoc, potest intelligi quod illi qui sunt tam prompti animi ut credant Deo etiam signis non visi, sunt beati per comparationem ad illos qui non crederent nisi talia viderent” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Tertia pars summae theologiae: a questione I ad quaestionem LIX*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Tomus XI (Romae: S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1903), q. 55, a. 5, ad 3).

¹³ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 259.

¹⁴ *Id.*, 264.

Belief for Plantinga is “an immediate response to the proclamation.”¹⁵ The reason why Plantinga thinks that it is reasonable to believe the truths of the Gospel without any further verification other than the truths themselves is because of the working of the Holy Spirit in renewing man: “The internal instigation of the Holy Spirit working in concord with God’s teaching in Scripture is a cognitive process or belief-producing mechanism that produces in us the beliefs constituting faith.”¹⁶ Thus, in Plantinga’s view, both the revelation (or the testimony to the revelation) and the interior working of the Holy Spirit are required before one is justified in accepting that revelation, but what is *not* required is a calculation of the probability of that revelation being divine or true (as in Swinburne and Locke). Plantinga’s account is very compelling, as it avoids the unreasonable expectations of Swinburne and Locke, and it further provides an epistemological theory that better conforms to the experience of Christian believers. Plantinga depicts faith as simply a basic knowledge that is given solely by the gift of God, and this is an idea that seems to be very much in line with both Scripture and with many texts from St. Thomas himself (as will be shown below).

Yet Plantinga’s solution is also somewhat dissatisfying—as Swinburne himself complains.¹⁷ Plantinga successfully shows how Christian belief may be taken as a properly basic belief, and he further defends Christian belief against the attack that claims it is unwarranted or unjustified, but he does not explain exactly how a Christian is supposed to distinguish true revelation from false. For Plantinga, Christian beliefs are simply recognized to be true and divine, due to the help of the Holy Spirit, and there is little more that can be added to this account. As for religious pluralism, Plantinga regards this phenomenon as simply “a manifestation of our miserable human condition”¹⁸ that does not in itself constitute an objection against Christian belief. Thus, even if Plantinga’s account is mostly accurate, it does not provide a helpful explanation of the recognition of the divine to those who have not yet received such recognition, nor does it completely account for how true recognition of the divine can

¹⁵ *Id.*, 267.

¹⁶ *Id.*, 284.

¹⁷ “The question which worries the atheist and many a theist is not, I suggest, Plantinga’s question about whether Christian belief is warranted in his sense, but my question about whether it is rational in the above sense—whether it is probably true, given our evidence—and it would have been good if Plantinga had considered that question” (Richard Swinburne, “Plantinga on Warrant,” *Religious Studies* 37 (2001): 207).

¹⁸ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 456.

completely account for how true recognition of the divine can be differentiated from merely supposed recognitions of the divine.

As regards St. Thomas's own opinion, it is difficult to ascertain exactly where he stands on this issue. Not only is there disagreement about what St. Thomas's actual opinion is, but some scholars also see some development in Aquinas's thought, which adds a further layer of complexity to the issue.¹⁹ That being said, according to the careful and detailed analysis of Fr. James Brent, O.P., St. Thomas's account is largely in agreement with the account of Plantinga:

God's spiritual touch upon the heart of the listener . . . inclines the listener to believe, and the inclination to believe serves as light for making a judgment by inclination . . . A person presented with testimony to the gospel, being inclined to believe on account of God's spiritual touch upon the heart, sees by the light of his or her own inclination just how right it is to believe. The listening person knows whether to believe by way of inclination.²⁰

Though limited space does not allow for a full defense of Brent's interpretation of Aquinas here, it is true that his description of the act preceding faith seems to be very faithful to Aquinas's writings: "For faith, two things are required: one is the inclination of the heart to believe, and this is not from hearing, but from the gift of grace; but the other is the determination about what is to be believed and this is from hearing."²¹ Thus, Aquinas answers the evidentialist objection by appealing to a gift of God that disposes the heart to believe, rather than to mere human evidence that makes it probable that God is revealing. In other words, Christian beliefs are rightfully held as first principles because they are known to be revealed by

¹⁹ "As Aquinas's views on grace matured, so did his understanding of the process that produces the properly and essentially basic judgment of faith" (Fr. James Brent, O.P., "The Epistemic Status of Christian Beliefs in Thomas Aquinas" (Doctoral dissertation, St. Louis University, 2008), 230). Note, however, that Brent does not think that Aquinas ever held the view that Christian beliefs should be based on human evidence: "The passages . . . are too evenly distributed from throughout Aquinas's productive years to make any such case" (id., 140).

²⁰ Fr. James Brent, O.P., "Knowing Whether to Believe," Unpublished Paper, 14.

²¹ "Ad fidem duo requiruntur: quorum unum est cordis inclinatio ad credendum et hoc non est ex auditu, sed ex dono gratiae; aliud autem est determinatio de credibili et istud est ex auditu" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, Volume 37 (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), c. 10, lect. 2, §844).

God, and they are known to be revealed by God by the grace of God that disposes the heart and not by (mere) human evidence. Thus, the “sufficient evidence” that is reasonably required by a rational human being turns out to be the action of God Himself upon the human heart.

If Plantinga and St. Thomas are correct, though, then why would God choose to confirm revelation through miracles or other signs? Brent lists three probable reasons: (1) the confirmation makes the truths of faith easier to believe; (2) it allows one to compare revelation claims in order to help sort out what is to be believed; and (3) confirmation can verify that faith is reasonable or prudent, against any objections to the contrary.²² Although these reasons are certainly true, there are at least two additional important points that should be considered in regard to confirmation. (1) First, for Aquinas, “confirmation,” divine or otherwise, is not part of a strict terminology and thus not limited to merely external signs; so that when it comes to divine confirmation, St. Thomas does not draw a sharp distinction between outward signs and the divine instinct that moves the heart. This is an important point to note, because while Aquinas does indeed say that external signs themselves are not necessary to have in order to justify belief, he does seem to think that some sort of divine confirmation is necessary, as will be shown more fully below. (2) Moreover, once one realizes that divine confirmation is not limited to mere external signs, the external signs themselves gain a new level of meaning and become more than just mere corroboration of the articles of faith. These additional considerations do not fundamentally alter Plantinga or Brent’s interpretation of Aquinas, but they do help explain other passages in Aquinas that seem to be somewhat Lockean and, what is more important, they provide a more developed picture of the nature of confirmation in divine revelation—thus showing not only that the Lockean picture is wrong, but also how aspects of the Lockean picture do indeed point to valuable truths concerning the relation between divine revelation and human reason.

Confirmation in Divine Revelation

It is difficult to point to passages that explicitly lay out what Aquinas means by the term *confirmare* or *confirmatio*; in most passages, the term seems to imply “strengthening” or “establishing,” but elsewhere, Aquinas explicitly interchanges the term with *probare*, which has the

²² Cf. Brent, “Christian Beliefs in Aquinas,” 223–225.

stronger sense of “proving.”²³ In passages that explicitly regard the teachings of faith, the term “confirmation” often refers to outward miracles or visible signs, but sometimes it also refers to the authority of scripture and even to the workings of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in these contexts, it simply refers to whatever establishes that the revelation is truly from God, whether this is an internal or an external confirmation.

If instead one interprets confirmation in a narrower sense, so that it only refers to external miracles, then it is indeed true that Aquinas does not think confirmation is necessary for belief. As Brent points out, “People who believe due to a process of instinct alone, without possessing corroboration drawn from miracles and other signs, do nothing contrary to reason in so believing.”²⁴ And moreover, “In fact, Aquinas says in several places it is more praiseworthy for people to believe *without* considering such confirmatory signs.”²⁵ However, the problem with limiting the term “confirmation” to mean only external miracles is that Aquinas himself does not seem to limit the term in that way.

There are a number of passages that show that for Aquinas, divine confirmation has broader connotations, and, if it is understood in this broad manner, such confirmation may indeed be necessary in order to judge that a revelation is from God. In c. 6 of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas explicitly sets out to explain why it is the case that Christians do not hold their faith lightly. Here, he says that the divine wisdom “manifests its own presence and the truth of its teaching and inspiration by fitting arguments.”²⁶ He continues, “In order to confirm that which exceeds natural knowledge, it [divine wisdom] visibly manifests works that surpass the ability of all nature.”²⁷ Aquinas then lists some examples of this confirmation: the curing of illnesses, the resurrection of the dead, miraculous signs in the heavens, etc. But St. Thomas does not end the list here; instead he continues with one final example of divine confirmation: “And what is even more wonderful, the inspiration of human minds, so that the simple and uneducated, filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, reach in an instant

²³ Cf. Roy J. Deferrari, *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Boston, MA: Daughters of St. Paul, 1986). See also *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 111, a. 4.

²⁴ Brent, “Christian Beliefs in Aquinas,” 219.

²⁵ Brent, “Knowing Whether to Believe,” 15.

²⁶ “Quae sui praesentiam et doctrinae et inspirationis veritatem, convenientibus argumentis ostendit” (*SCG* I.6).

²⁷ “Ad confirmandum ea quae naturalem cognitionem excedunt, opera visibiliter ostendit quae totius naturae superant facultatem” (id.).

the highest wisdom and eloquence.”²⁸ It is clear that Aquinas is here stating that this inspiration or motion of the Holy Spirit is a part of the divine confirmation, whose purpose is to reveal both God’s presence and truth. St. Thomas explains that he is here following St. Paul’s letter to the Hebrews, in which St. Paul himself states that the doctrines were confirmed (lat. *confirmata*, gr. ἐβεβαιώθη) to men by God’s bearing witness “by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will” (Heb 2:4). In his own commentary on this epistle, St. Thomas remarks that “God gave testimony by two sensible signs, namely, by miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.”²⁹ Thus, both miracles and the workings of the Holy Spirit are two different types of divine confirmation, which is itself a manifestation of God in His power and truth.³⁰

St. Thomas continues this line of thought in the following chapters of the *Summa contra Gentiles*. He says that “it is criminal to believe that what is so evidently divinely confirmed is false,”³¹ which means that one must always be willing to follow whatever is divinely confirmed, but on the other hand, he notes that “those who introduced erroneous sects proceeded by contrary paths,”³² which at least implies that what proceeds by contrary paths, i.e., what is only humanly and not divinely confirmed, is not to be followed. St. Thomas continues by asserting that the “only means of convincing adversaries of this truth is from the authority of the Scripture *confirmed by divine miracles*: for we do not believe what is above human reason unless it is God revealing.”³³ Here, however, as in many other Thomistic texts, one must be very careful not to stray from St. Thomas’s meaning—for it would be easy to interpret the above passages from the *Summa contra Gentiles* in a Lockean or evidentialist manner. But as has

²⁸ “Videlicet in mirabili curatione languorum, mortuorum suscitatione, caelestium corporum mirabili immutatione; et, quod est mirabilius, humanarum mentium inspiratione, ut idiotae et simplices, dono spiritus sancti repleti, summam sapientiam et facundiam in instanti consequerentur” (id.).

²⁹ “Deus autem duplici signo sensibili contestatus est, scilicet miraculis et donis Spiritus Sanctus” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, Volume 41 (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), c. 2, lect. 1, §99).

³⁰ “Christ crucified . . . the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23–24).

³¹ “Nec . . . tam evidenter divinitus confirmatum sit, fas est credere esse falsum” (*SCG* I.7).

³² “Hi vero qui sectas errorum introduxerunt processerunt via contraria” (id., c. 6).

³³ “Singularis vero modus convincendi adversarium contra huiusmodi veritatem est ex auctoritate Scripturae divinitus confirmatae miraculis: quae enim supra rationem humanam sunt, non credimus nisi Deo revelante” (id., c. 9); emphasis mine.

been shown above, the “confirmation” that God is revealing can take many different forms and is not limited to mere human evidence. An evidentialist would interpret St. Thomas as saying that man has a duty to receive and to test external miracles before he accepts what appears to be revelation, and indeed, the above passages do seem to indicate that man has a duty to seek some sort of divine confirmation, but still, they do not warrant construing this confirmation to mean mere “human evidence” or “external miracles.” Instead, the confirmation of revelation should be taken in a broader sense to include any manifestation of God’s presence and truth.

There are several passages from throughout the *Summa theologiae* that demonstrate these same points regarding confirmation. In one of the few places where St. Thomas deals directly with the objection that the Christian doesn’t have sufficient evidence to believe, he responds, “He who believes has sufficient motive to believe, for he is moved by the authority of the divine teaching confirmed by miracles and, what is more, by the interior instinct of God inviting. And hence, he does not believe lightly.”³⁴ (In the original Latin text, it is even clearer that St. Thomas is here stating that the divine teaching is confirmed by two kinds of confirmation, namely, miracles and the interior instinct.)

Earlier in the *Summa*, St. Thomas explicitly says that for a man who is instructing others in divine teachings it is necessary that he “confirm or prove what he says, otherwise his teaching would not be efficacious.”³⁵ Here St. Thomas also distinguishes human confirmation from divine confirmation: “But confirmation in those things that are placed under reason is through arguments. But in those things that are divinely revealed and above reason, the confirmation is through those things that are proper to divine power.”³⁶ Thus, here as elsewhere, St. Thomas does not limit confirmation to mere human arguments, and he still thinks that confirmation in this broader sense is somehow a necessary part of divine teaching.

³⁴ “Ille qui credit habet sufficiens inductivum ad credendum, inducitur enim auctoritate divinae doctrinae miraculis confirmatae, et, quod plus est, interiori instinctu Dei invitantis. Unde non leviter credit” (*S.Th.*, II–II, q. 2. a. 9, ad 3).

³⁵ “Ut possit confirmare vel probare ea quae dicit, alias non esset efficax eius doctrina” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Prima secundae summae theologiae: a questione LXXI ad quaestionem CXIV*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Tomus VII (Romae: S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1892), q. 111, a. 4, resp.).

³⁶ “Confirmatio autem in his quae subduntur rationi, est per argumenta. In his autem quae sunt supra rationem divinitus revelata, confirmatio est per ea quae sunt divinae virtuti propria” (id.).

As a final proof of the manner in which St. Thomas uses the term “confirmation,” it is helpful to look at the text of his commentary on the Gospel of St. John, in which St. Thomas especially emphasizes the importance of believing *readily*, without the need of external signs and without basing one’s belief upon human reason. Rather, a Christian believes “neither because of natural reason, nor because of the testimony of the law, nor because of the preaching of others, but only because of the truth itself.”³⁷ Here as well, St. Thomas divides confirmation into at least two different kinds: “God testifies to someone in two ways, namely sensibly or intelligibly . . . He testifies intelligibly by an inspiration in the hearts of those who ought to believe and to hold.”³⁸ Moreover, both of these kinds of manifestation are works of God, which confirm His presence and teaching: “From the fact that He does the works of God, it can be evidently known and believed that Christ is God.”³⁹ Thus, even though Christians believe only *because* of the truth and not *because* of external signs, it must be remembered that the manifestation of the truth is at least part of the nature of divine confirmation.⁴⁰ Throughout his commentary on John’s Gospel, St. Thomas only condemns dependency upon sensible signs; he does not condemn dependency upon the interior workings of God, and indeed, he asserts that this internal confirmation is necessary in order for men to know that God is revealing. In explaining the passage, “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin” (John 15:24), St. Thomas takes pains to make clear that “the works” refer to both exterior and interior manifestations of God:

³⁷ “Nec propter rationem naturalem, nec propter testimonia legis, nec propter praedicationem aliorum, sed propter ipsam veritatem tantum” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, vol. 35–36 (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013), c. 4, lect. 5, §662); this translation and all subsequent translations of this work are mine.

³⁸ “Deus testificatur alicui dupliciter, scilicet sensibiliter et intelligibiliter . . . Intelligibiliter autem testificatur inspirando in cordibus aliquorum quod credere debeant et tenere” (id., c. 5, lect. 6, §820).

³⁹ “Evidenter ergo congosci potest de Christo et credi quod sit Deus, per hoc quod facit opera Dei” (id., c. 10, lect. 6, §1466).

⁴⁰ “The primary sign of credibility, to judge from the Gospels, would seem to be the person of Jesus, with His vitality, determination, and compassion, and His uniquely authoritative manner of teaching and acting. As *secondary signs, not wholly separable from the person and work of Jesus*, the Gospels call attention to the miracles” (Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, Theological Resources (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 20); emphasis mine.

But it must be noticed that Christ attracts by word, by visible and invisible signs, namely, by the moving and stirring of hearts from within . . . This interior instinct is therefore the work of God for acting well, and he who resists it, sins . . . [This passage] must be understood not only of what is visible, but also of the interior instinct, and the attraction of the teaching. If indeed this had not been done among them, they would have no sin.⁴¹

Thus, it is not true to say that confirmation is a wholly unnecessary feature of divine revelation, for “through the works of God, we are led to a knowledge of Him.”⁴²

Further on, in discussing the doubting of St. Thomas the Apostle, Aquinas notes that, in fact, “it would have been excusable enough if he had not believed immediately, because, as it says in Sirach 19:4, ‘He who believes quickly is light in heart’.”⁴³ Thus, Aquinas recognizes that the sin of the doubting apostle does not lie in his act of discerning whether or not the revelation was from God, but instead, Aquinas locates the sin in the apostle’s hardness of heart, which Aquinas identifies with his “not wanting to believe except by a sensible proof.”⁴⁴ Thus, here again, it is clear that only the type of confirmation that is “sensible proof” is unnecessary, and there is indeed a certain kind of proof or confirmation that is needed prior to the act of belief. At the very least, it is necessary for an interior moving of the heart to take place before one can make the judgment that a revelation is indeed coming from God.⁴⁵

⁴¹ “Sed est attendendum, quod Christus attraxit verbo, signis visibilibus et invisibilibus, scilicet movendo et instigando interius corda . . . Est ergo opus Dei instinctus interior ad bene agendum, et qui ei resistunt, peccant . . . Intelligendum non solum de visibilibus, sed etiam de interior instinctu, et attractu doctrinae: quae quidem si in eis non fecisset, peccatum non haberent” (id., c. 15, lect. 15, §2055).

⁴² “Per opera Dei in eius cognitionem ducimur” (id., c. 9, lect. 1, §1300). “Faith is man’s answer to the external testimony of Christ, and at the same time to the interior attraction of the Father and the testimony of the Spirit. This is the twofold dimension of God’s one single word of love” (René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966), 78).

⁴³ “Et quidem satis fuisset excusabilis, quod non statim credidit: quia, ut dicitur Eccl. XIX, 4: qui cito credit, levis est corde” (Aquinas, *Commentary on John*, c. 20, lect. 5, §2549).

⁴⁴ “Noluit credere nisi senibili argumento” (id.).

⁴⁵ “The Evangelists, particularly John, teach that one cannot sincerely accept the Christian message unless he experiences the inner attraction of grace and is willing to live up to the moral demands of the gospel” (Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 20).

Even though Brent and Plantinga are correct in stating that external miracles are not strictly needed in Aquinas's account, it would not be a faithful rendering of his position to exclude all types of confirmation from the act that precedes belief.⁴⁶ But perhaps this is largely a question of definition, for neither Brent nor Plantinga want to imply that there is *no* justification involved in Christian beliefs. Brent simply concludes that "the Christian faithful possess internally accessible justification of a specific sort for their beliefs,"⁴⁷ which is precisely the position advocated here. What makes this position anti-evidentialist is the opinion that Christians "hold what is corroborated by reasoning otherwise than by reasoning,"⁴⁸ which indicates that the act which precedes faith, while corroborated by human reasoning, cannot simply be reduced to it. However, evidentialists are correct in thinking that there is some justification needed, which justification distinguishes Christian beliefs from false beliefs, and this is why Aquinas thinks that some confirmation is necessary, since "confirmation" can refer to both internal and external works of God; in other words, there has to be some way by which the human person can recognize that it is God revealing. Where evidentialists go wrong is in thinking that it is human reasoning itself that justifies the act of belief.

The Internal Works of God

At this point, one could object that if both external miracles and interior callings qualify as confirmation, then this is simply another version of evidentialism. That is to say, one could object that Brent and Plantinga are still appealing to a certain kind of evidence, but have simply shifted the problem to another level by calling their new evidence "divine instinct" or

⁴⁶ "If Christ had not performed visible miracles, however, there still remained other ways of drawing to faith to which humans would be bound to give assent. For humans were bound to give assent to the authority of the law and the prophets. They were also bound not to resist an inner calling" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibeta* 2, q. 4, a. 1, resp., in Brent, "Christian Beliefs in Aquinas," 126). "Sed quia sermo propositus confirmatione indiget ad hoc quod recipiatur, nisi sit per se manifestus; ea autem quae sunt fidei, sunt humanae rationi immanifesta: necessarium fuit aliquid adhiberi quo confirmaretur sermo praedicantium fidem. Non autem confirmari poterat per aliqua principia rationis, per modum demonstrationis: cum ea quae sunt fidei, rationem excedant. Oportuit igitur aliquibus indiciis confirmari praedicantium sermonem quibus manifeste ostenderetur huiusmodi sermonem processisse a Deo, dum praedicantes talia operarentur, sanando infirmos, et alias virtutes operando, quae non posset facere nisi Deus" (*SCG*, lib. 3, c. 154, n. 8).

⁴⁷ Brent, "Christian Beliefs in Aquinas," 222.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

“divine inspiration” instead. On this interpretation, before Christian belief takes place, human reason simply takes into account both these kinds of confirmation, treating them as evidence for the revelation, and then reason makes a judgment that it is probably God Who is revealing, and thus, one should accept the revelation as true.

In order to show why this evidentialist picture is not at all what Aquinas has in mind, one must again revisit his commentary on the Gospel of John. Here, Aquinas emphasizes the fact that no amount of human reasoning can ever lead to the act of faith itself.

Truly no one can come unless drawn by the Father . . . The human heart of itself tends to what is inferior and is unable to rise to what is above unless it is drawn. But if it does not rise up, this is not a failure on the part of the one who draws, who in Himself fails no one; but rather, this is because of an impediment belonging to the one who is not drawn . . . In the state of uncorrupted nature, there was no impediment preventing one from being drawn up, and hence all men could participate in it. But in corrupted nature, all are equally held back from this drawing by the impediment of sin; and therefore all need to be drawn up. But God, inasmuch as it depends on Him, extends His hand to draw up everyone.⁴⁹

This passage is essential to understanding the need to be moved by God’s grace before one can come to believe in Him. Aquinas is saying that the primary reason why it is absolutely necessary to be moved interiorly by the grace of God before one can know Him through faith is because of the presence of sin. There is something about the very nature of sin that drags human nature down and prevents men from being drawn up to higher things by God. In fact, sin blinds men to seeing the truths of higher things. Further on in this same commentary, Aquinas refers to the darkness of sin, which “does not belong to human reason in itself, but to the appetite, inasmuch as it is badly disposed through the passions or habit, desiring some-

⁴⁹ “Vere nullus venire potest nisi tractus a Patre . . . cor humanum ex se ad inferiora tendens, non potest sursum elevari nisi tractus. Si vero non elevator, non est defectus ex parte trahentis, qui quantum in se est, nulli deficit; sed est propter impedimentum eius qui non trahitur . . . in natura integra non erat aliquod impedimentum prohibens ab hac tractione, unde tunc omnes homines huius tractionis poterant esse participes. Sed in natura corrupta omnes per impedimentum peccati aequaliter prohibentur ab hac tractione; et ideo omnes indigent trahi. Deus autem omnibus ad trahendum manum porrigit quantum in se est” (*Commentary on John*, c. 6, lect. 5, §937).

thing as good that is nevertheless not truly good.”⁵⁰ Thus, both original and actual sin prevent men from being capable of knowing higher things insofar as they drag men’s desires to lower things that are not truly good. This darkness or ignorance of sin is culpable ignorance, however, because its source is an evil will: “Therefore this ignorance is no excuse, because they did not do so out of ignorance, but out of another root, namely, out of hatred and a certain malice.”⁵¹ Thus, no matter how carefully one investigates the things of God, if one’s heart is not oriented towards Him by a prior act of grace, then it is impossible to reach Him by the act of faith: “When therefore someone diligently inquires, either this is done from a good intention, in order to adhere to it, or from a bad intention, in order to condemn it.”⁵² Thus, in order for men even to have the capacity for the certain knowledge of these higher things that faith brings, and a knowledge of these things *as desirable*, God must Himself provide a remedy that re-orientes human desires to the things that are above: “Human ability is therefore unable to come to Christ through faith.”⁵³

How then does this re-orientation take place? First, St. Thomas notes that “the Father draws to the Son in many ways.”⁵⁴ Even though all men are drawn to a knowledge of God, “men are of diverse conditions, and are led to and disposed towards the knowledge of the truth in various ways.”⁵⁵ Some men are drawn more by external signs and miracles, and others are drawn more by the truth itself: “Therefore, in order to show the

⁵⁰ “Et istae sunt rationis humanae non ex se, sed ex appetitu, in quantum male dispositus per passiones vel habitum, appetit aliquid ut bonum, quod tamen non est vere bonum” (id., c. 8, lect. 2, §1144).

⁵¹ “Non ergo est eis ignorantia ad excusationem: quia non ex ignorantia hoc fecerunt, sed ex alia radice, scilicet ex odio et certa militia” (id., c. 15, lect. 5, §2049). “Causa incredulitatis vestrae, sed militia vestra . . . Ex Deo non sunt vitio et prava affectione” (id., c. 8, lect. 7, §1259).

⁵² “Quando enim aliquis diligenter inquirat: aut hoc facit bona intentione, ut scilicet ei adhaereat, aut mala, ut eum condemnet” (id., c. 9, lect. 3, §1340). “Quaerebant autem signum, non ut crederent, sed quia desperantes, quod signum ostendere non posset, et sic eum reprimerent et impedirent. Quia ergo prave quaerebant, non dedit eis signum apertum, sed occultum in figura, scilicet signum de resurrectione” (id., c. 2, lect. 3, §396).

⁵³ “Est ergo humana facultas deficiens ad veniendum ad Christum per fidem” (id., c. 6, lect. 5, §934). “Si caeca essetis, id est vos caecos reputaretis, recognoscentes per humilitatem peccatum vestrum, non haberetis peccatum: quia curreretis ad remedium. Peccatum enim remittitur per gratiam, quae non datur nisi humilibus” (id., c. 9, lect. 4, §1363).

⁵⁴ “Multipliciter Pater trahit ad Filium” (id., c. 6, lect. 5, §935).

⁵⁵ “Homines sunt diversae conditionis, et diversimode ad veritatis cognitionem perducti et dispositi” (id., c. 1, lect. 4, §119).

way of salvation to all, the Lord wished to open both ways, namely, of signs and of wisdom.”⁵⁶ Both of these types of confirmation are given and both draw men to God, but those men “who believe because of the teaching are more commendable, for they are more spiritual than those who believe because of signs, who are coarser and more on the level of sense.”⁵⁷ That being said, in the case of both the more spiritual man and the less spiritual man, the inner teaching is necessary before the act of faith can take place, whereas the external signs are only necessary for the less spiritual man, and only on account of his defects. Indeed, without this internal re-orientation of the heart, it is sometimes perhaps possible for someone to be convinced that a revelation is from God or probably from God—but this is the sort of equivocal belief that the demons have, and this kind of belief *does not incline one to the act of faith as such*, because faith is a certain assent to God’s revelation that is made *through* the will’s being directed to the higher good. Thus, St. Thomas says that “faith which is the gift of grace inclines man to believe according to some affection for the good, even if it is unformed [lifeless]. Hence, the faith which is in the demons is not a gift of grace, but rather, they are compelled to believe from a shrewdness of their natural intellect.”⁵⁸ In the *De Veritate*, q. 14, St. Thomas again confirms that such “faith” is only equivocally so called, for *such belief is not assented to by the will*, which assent is essential to faith and which assent can only be granted by a gift of God’s grace.⁵⁹

To get a clearer understanding of this interior teaching or movement of the heart, it is helpful to turn to St. Thomas’s commentary on the *De Trinitate*. Here he draws a comparison between the light of the understanding and the light of faith:

That which inclines one to assent to intellectual principles or to known conclusions is a sufficient induction that forces assent . . .

⁵⁶ “Ut ergo Dominus omnibus ostenderet viam salutis, utramque viam pandere voluit, scilicet signorum et sapientiae” (id.).

⁵⁷ “Sed commendabiliores sunt qui propter doctrinam credunt, quia sunt magis spirituales, quam qui propter signa, qui sunt grossiores et agis sensibiles” (id., c. 2, lect. 3, §418).

⁵⁸ “Fides quae est donum gratiae inclinatur hominem ad credendum secundum aliquem affectum boni, etiam si sit informis. Unde fides quae est in Daemonibus non est donum gratiae; sed magis coguntur ad credendum ex perspicacitate naturalis intellectus” (*S.Th.*, II–II, q. 5, a. 2, ad 2).

⁵⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Tomus XXII (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1970), q. 14, a. 9, ad 4.

Hence also in the faith in which we believe in God not only is there an acceptance of the things to which we assent, but also something inclines one to assent; and this is a certain light, which is the habit of faith, divinely infused into the human mind.⁶⁰

St. Thomas further explains that this light of faith does not provide us with any propositional content, but instead it simply inclines us to assent to the truth that we hear. He then gives an analogy: as the senses are to the understanding that knows first principles, so is hearing to the light of faith. Even though all human knowledge comes through the senses, the intellect has a certain power by which it can recognize essences and first principles with certainty, through receiving the sensible forms and abstracting knowledge from them. Just so, even though all revelation comes to men through hearing the testimony of witnesses or even through a direct revelation, it is the light of faith that enables one to accept these principles as being certain, as being from God, and as being desirable to accept in themselves. In other words, only the light of faith, acting upon the testimony that is heard, can give the human intellect not only the certainty that it is God Who is revealing but also the ability to accept the revelation as good in itself to believe, since only the light of faith can incline men's wills to assent to these higher truths.

Conclusion

What does this broader picture of confirmation ultimately add to various accounts of the act of faith? Ultimately, it vindicates that part of the evidentialist objection which says that there must be something about revelation that makes it reasonable for a human being to accept. God does indeed provide many different means through which we may recognize that it is indeed He Who is revealing, by manifesting Himself through visible and invisible works, all of which draw men to Himself. However, the above clearly presents a very different account than that of the evidentialists, for it does not allow human reason alone to adjudicate between what revelation is from God and what revelation is not from God. Instead, one is only capable of grasping the invisible truths with an act of faith if one al-

⁶⁰ "Sed illud, quod inclinatur ad assentiendum principiis intellectis aut conclusionibus scitis, est sufficiens inductivum et ideo etiam cogit ad assensum . . . Unde et in fide qua in Deum credimus non solum est acceptio rerum quibus assentimus, sed aliquid quod inclinatur ad assensum; et hoc est lumen quoddam, quod est habitus fidei, divinitus menti humanae infusum" (Aquinas, *De Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 4).

lows oneself to be moved interiorly by the grace of God. So much is this the case that, according to Aquinas, external miracles by themselves would never be able to bring one to faith and, in fact, one would not incur any guilt by refusing to believe solely on the basis of external miracles:

For if we speak of whatever miracles, they would have excuse if they had not been done among them by Christ. For no one is able to come to Christ through faith unless he is drawn . . . Therefore, if no one had drawn them to faith, they would be excused for their unbelief.⁶¹

That much being said, the act of faith is still reasonable and justifiable inasmuch as it is not made lightly, but it is made by the light of divine confirmation, which takes many forms, tailored to each individual, but which also always and necessarily involves a reshaping of the human heart so that it has a desire for the higher things. Even before the act of faith then, the Word first discloses Himself to our inmost being: “The Word of God is not only light in Himself, but also He manifests everything that is manifested.”⁶² Thus the saying is true that “We love, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

**THE BALANCE OF FAITH AND REASON:
THE ROLE OF CONFIRMATION IN THE THOUGHT OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**

SUMMARY

The evidentialist objection against Christianity, which states that the Christian faith does not have sufficient evidence to justify belief, can be troubling for Christians, for they do not wish to say that their beliefs are founded upon mere human evidence, and yet, they also wish to affirm that “those who place their faith in this truth, for which human reason offers no experience, do not believe lightly, as those following unlearned fables” (*SCG* I.6). St. Thomas Aquinas offers a unique and compelling solution to the evidentialist objection—a solution that confirms the Christian belief that faith is a gift from God, but which also respects the proper place of human reason within the believing life of men. St. Thomas

⁶¹ “Si nos loquamur de quibusque miraculis, haberent excusationem, si in eis facta non fuissent per Christum. Nullus enim potest ad Christum venire per fidem nisi tractus . . . Unde si nullus esset qui eos traxisset ad fidem, excusabiles essent de infidelitate” (Aquinas, *Commentary on John*, c. 15, lect. 5, §2055).

⁶² “Verbum Dei non solum in se lumen est, sed etiam est Omnia manifestans quae manifestantur” (id., c. 1, lect. 4, §118).

teaches that God provides both internal and external confirmation of what He reveals, although only the internal confirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary to justify Christian belief. Aquinas's teaching concerning the role of divine confirmation of revealed truths provides at least one important key to understanding the delicate balance between faith and reason within the Christian life.

KEYWORDS: St. Thomas Aquinas, evidentialist objection, justified belief, divine confirmation, faith and reason.

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THE FAILURE OF NEW ATHEISM MORALITY

In his book *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens*, the Roman Catholic theologian John F. Haught discusses the recent growth of *new atheism*. According to Haught the new atheists—who include both scientists and philosophers—subscribe to a belief system known as “scientific naturalism.” The central dogma of scientific naturalism is the following: “[O]nly nature, including humans and our creations, is real; that God does not exist; and that science can give us complete and reliable knowledge of reality.”¹ As Haught’s description makes clear, scientific naturalists are committed to two beliefs: (1) *scientism*, which is the view that only science can give us complete and reliable knowledge of reality, and (2) *metaphysical naturalism*, which is the view that no supernatural entities exist.² In holding both of these beliefs, scientific naturalists separate themselves from the majority of scientists and philosophers who reject at least one of these beliefs.³ In addition, as others have noted, there is an “evangelical” nature to the new atheism, “which assumes that it has a Good News to share, at all cost, for the ultimate future of humanity by the conversion of as many people as possible.”⁴

Because of their commitment to scientism and to metaphysical naturalism, new atheists have claimed that the methods of science can success-

¹ John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), x. Throughout this essay I use “scientific naturalism” exclusively as Haught defines it.

² For a good discussion of metaphysical naturalism and the new atheists, see Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), especially 1–11.

³ Most scientists only affirm methodological naturalism, not metaphysical naturalism. And most philosophers reject scientism.

fully study topics traditionally considered outside of the bounds of science, such as ethics. For example, in his book *The God Delusion*, the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins puts forth an argument that “our sense of right and wrong can be derived from our Darwinian past.”⁵ And Sam Harris, in his book *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, argues that “morality can and should be integrated with our scientific understanding of the natural world.”⁶

I have treated the topic of scientism and its serious problems elsewhere.⁷ As such, here I shall focus on the metaphysical naturalism that new atheists and other naturalists accept, with the goal of answering the following question: Can metaphysical naturalism provide an adequate foundation for objective moral values? I shall argue that the answer is “no” and I will discuss several serious problems inherent in a naturalistic account of the foundation of morality. Before I can do this, however, I must clarify what I mean by objective moral values.

First, I hold that moral values are prescriptive. That is, they tell us how we *should* act. The word “should,” however, can be used in different ways. For example, if you want to climb Mount Everest you should buy a very warm coat, and you should pack enough food and supplies, and you should get a good Sherpa to guide you. Of course, instead of doing all of that you could simply decide not to climb the mountain. After all, mountain climbing is optional. Morality, however, is not optional. This raises a second point, namely, that moral prescriptions carry with them a force of inescapable necessity. Immanuel Kant, in insisting that the supreme moral principle was not hypothetical, but categorical (and thus binding on all rational beings at all times) recognized this type of necessity. Third, and finally, I hold that a moral proposition such as “parental child abuse is wrong” is either true or false. In this particular case, I would argue that the proposition is true. As such, I will not entertain the view that moral values are neither true nor false as non-cognitivist philosophers hold, or that they are merely subjectively true or culturally true as moral relativists hold.

⁴ Jeffrey W. Robbins and Christopher D. Rodkey, “Beating ‘God’ to Death: Radical Theology and the New Atheism,” in *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Amarnath Amarasingam (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 35.

⁵ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 214.

⁶ Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 195, note 9.

⁷ Robert A. Delfino, “The Cultural Dangers of Scientism and Common Sense Solutions,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 3:supplement (2014): 485–496.

Since at least as far back as Plato, the majority of Western philosophers have sought a metaphysical foundation or ground to support objective moral values in the sense I have described above—that is, prescriptions about good and evil that are objectively true and necessarily binding. Whereas for Plato the Form-of-the-Good provided this metaphysical ground and for medieval thinkers God provided this metaphysical ground, scientific naturalists cannot appeal to such supernatural entities. So, the question remains—can the scientific naturalist provide a metaphysical foundation that explains how moral values are objectively true, prescriptive, and carry with them an inescapable necessity? Let us examine that question next.

Natural Foundations of Objective Moral Values

Objective moral values cannot exist if there are no moral agents. A necessary condition for moral agency is metaphysical freedom, which is the ability of an agent to have acted otherwise than she did because she has control over her actions. Even Immanuel Kant, who was certainly skeptical of traditional metaphysics, affirmed that freedom of the will is a necessary postulate of pure practical reason without which morality is not possible.⁸ Obviously, scientific naturalists cannot appeal to supernatural moral agents. Therefore, if it turns out that metaphysical naturalism is not compatible with the freedom of living physical beings, then metaphysical naturalism cannot serve as a satisfactory metaphysical foundation for objective moral values. As such, the problem of freedom is an important issue that we must address.

The Problem of Freedom

There certainly have been some scientists and philosophers who have understood metaphysical naturalism to preclude human freedom. Consider, for example, the comments of neuroscientist and new atheist Sam Harris. In a chapter section titled “The Illusion of Free Will,” he writes the following:

⁸ “These postulates are those of *immortality*, of *freedom* considered positively (as the causality of a being so far as this being belongs to the intelligible world), and of the existence of God” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002), 168 [5:132]).

[Y]ou tend to feel that you are the source of your own thoughts and actions. *You* decide what to do and not to do. You seem to be an agent acting of your own free will. As we will see, however, this point of view cannot be reconciled with what we know about the human brain . . . All of our behavior can be traced to biological events about which we have no conscious knowledge . . . you are no more responsible for the next thing you think (and therefore *do*) than you are for the fact that you were born into this world.⁹

Obviously, when metaphysical naturalism is understood in this narrow, reductive, and determinist way, it cannot serve as an adequate foundation for objective moral values. For this reason, many naturalists have embraced a broader understanding of metaphysical naturalism—one, they claim, that is compatible with human freedom. Indeed, even some Christian philosophers and theologians have embraced a view very similar to this—that everything which exists, except for God, is a physical being. For example, Nancey Murphy—in her book *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?*—asserts the following: “My central thesis is, first, that we are our bodies—there is no additional metaphysical element such as a mind or soul or spirit. But, second, this ‘physicalist’ position need not deny that we are intelligent, moral, and spiritual.”¹⁰

Murphy calls her position non-reductive physicalism; and apart from her stance on God, non-reductive physicalism seems like the only option left for metaphysical naturalists if they wish to defend human freedom and objective moral values. I have argued elsewhere, however, that there are serious reasons to doubt that non-reductive physicalism can account for human freedom.¹¹ I cannot reproduce all of those arguments here, but let me briefly discuss the main difficulty, which has to do with the problem of *emergence*.

In order for non-reductive physicalism to be different from the narrow understanding of physicalism discussed above, non-reductive physi-

⁹ Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 102–104 (emphasis in the original). Harris tries to salvage (unsuccessfully in my judgment) some notion of moral responsibility based on the overall complexion of one’s mind and character. See id., 106–112. See also Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 48–60.

¹⁰ Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ix.

¹¹ See Robert A. Delfino, “Christian Physicalism and Personal Identity,” in *Global Spiral* [www.metanexus.net/essay/christian-physicalism-and-personal-identity], accessed on Sept 28, 2015].

calists must hold that new causal powers, such as freedom, can emerge in living organisms over time. Because scientific naturalists do not want to appeal to souls or non-material entities, they must hold that these new causal powers emerge, ultimately, from complex arrangements of microphysical parts. However, with the exception of quantum indeterminacy, the microphysical world is a world of determinism. In addition, quantum indeterminacy, which is a kind of statistical randomness, is not enough for genuine freedom. Even if quantum events are random, I will not be free if my actions are caused by quantum events over which I have no control. As such, it does not seem possible that the causal power to make genuinely free choices can emerge from the microphysical world—quantum or otherwise.

If the above arguments are correct, then neither the narrow nor the broad understanding of metaphysical naturalism can account for freedom. In such a case, neither human beings nor any living physical being would be a moral agent, and thus the attempt to provide a naturalistic ground for objective moral values would have failed. Still, for sake of argument, let us assume that the ability to make free choices can emerge during the course of biological evolution. Even in this case, however, there would be doubts about whether biological evolution could serve as a satisfactory metaphysical foundation for objective moral values. So, let us explore that possibility next.

The Problem of Evolution

A common strategy employed by scientific naturalists has been to argue that morality is the product of, and thus has its foundation in, biological evolution. For example, as I mentioned above, Dawkins made a Darwinian argument for the existence of moral values in his book *The God Delusion*. There he discusses how evolution can select for various things, including altruism towards kin and reciprocal altruism.¹² But is this an adequate metaphysical foundation for objective moral values? Can the fact that evolution has selected for altruism toward kin, for example, make the proposition “parents should not abuse their children” objectively true? It seems to me that the answer is “no” for several reasons.

First, as Richard Joyce argues, even if morality is the product of evolution, and thus it is useful for the survival of the species, it still could be a fiction. This serves to undermine, in the sense of casting doubt upon,

¹² Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 219–220.

the truth of our moral beliefs: “[O]ur moral beliefs are products of a process that is entirely independent of their truth, which forces the recognition that we have no grounds one way or the other for maintaining these beliefs. They *could* be true, but we have no reason for thinking so.”¹³

Second, insofar as objective moral values have to be prescriptive, how can we move from the historical fact that evolution selected for X to the moral fact that parents should do X? This is directly related to David Hume’s point that we cannot derive an ought (how things should be) from an is (the way things are).¹⁴ It is not enough to respond that parents should treat their children well because it is a fact that good treatment will be beneficial for the future of the human species. This is the type of “should” we discussed earlier when I said a person planning to climb Mount Everest should buy a warm coat. Such “shoulds” are merely conditional on whether you decide to pursue the end in question; they do not carry the inescapable necessity of a moral prescription.

Instead, to argue against Hume we need a way to overcome the “is-ought problem.” Unlike the new atheists, I think theists have a philosophical advantage here. For example, Alasdair MacIntyre argued in *After Virtue* that the “is-ought problem” can only be overcome by recognizing that human nature has an essential purpose and function, which has its ultimate foundation in God.¹⁵ In other words, teleology is the key to overcoming the “is-ought problem.” Yet the new atheists, aside from rejecting God, also seem unanimous in their rejection of teleology in nature. Dawkins’s famous book *The Blind Watchmaker* expresses this position:

Natural selection, the blind, unconscious, automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, has no purpose in mind. It has no mind and no mind’s eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, no sight at all. If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, it is the *blind* watchmaker.¹⁶

¹³ Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), 211.

¹⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, book III, part I, section I, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1978), 469.

¹⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd ed., 1984), 58.

Some naturalist philosophers have argued for a kind of teleology in nature that requires no supernatural foundation.¹⁷ But even if that were possible (and I don't think it is), the problem is that such teleology would be a contingent, brute fact—with no reason for its being.¹⁸ And this leads to two additional arguments why I think that a person would be justified in holding that evolution, as understood by the scientific naturalists, is neither an adequate foundation for the truth of moral prescriptions nor for their inescapable necessity.

The Radical Contingency Argument

The first argument I call the *radical contingency argument*. In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins suggests that the benevolent actions of noble people, such as those who adopt children, could be the result of a misfiring of an evolutionary rule of thumb.¹⁹ He gives the example of how mother birds are programmed by evolution to feed the little birds in their nest, but the rule misfires if “another baby bird [from a different mother] somehow gets into the nest.”²⁰ Following this train of thought, we might say that the virtuous actions of Blessed Theresa of Calcutta are nothing more than misfirings. Yet, significantly, would not this undermine the inescapable necessity that moral prescriptions are supposed to carry? After all, if this type of activity is the result of a misfiring, then should not Mother Theresa correct her behavior? As Haught has argued:

¹⁶ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 5.

¹⁷ Some examples include, Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Stephen R. Brown, *Moral Virtue and Nature: A Defense of Ethical Naturalism* (New York: Continuum, 2008), and Richard Cameron, “How to Be a Realist about sui generis Teleology Yet Feel at Home in the 21st Century,” *The Monist* 87:1 (2004): 72–95.

¹⁸ Aquinas in the fifth way (*Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 3) and in other passages (e.g., *Summa theologiae*, I–II, q. 1, a. 2, responsio, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, 23, n. 6, and *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2, responsio) successfully argues, in my judgment, that the teleology in natural things must have its foundation in intelligence (a willed, rational order). One reason intelligence is necessary is because only intelligence as an immaterial power can envision an end that does not yet exist *yet* order something to that end of being (essence and existence). In contrast, matter by itself cannot transcend what is here and now. For an excellent discussion of this topic see, Leszek Figurski, *Finality and Intelligence: Is the Universe Designed?* (Wydawnictwo Bezkrzesy Wiedzy, 2014), especially chapter four.

¹⁹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 220–221.

²⁰ Id.

How can the amoral process of natural selection become the ultimate court of appeal for what is moral? Even if our ethical instincts evolved by natural selection, we still have to explain why we are obliged to obey them here and now, especially since they may be evolutionary misfirings.²¹

Misfirings in the course of evolution show that there is a contingency problem when trying to use biological evolution as a metaphysical foundation for objective moral values. But the contingency problem is much deeper than this. It extends also to the nature of the physical universe—for example, the laws and constants of physics and the natures of things such as electrons and quarks. If an intelligent cause is not responsible for them, then there is no reason why the aforementioned things have the natures they do.²² As such, they could have had different natures and that raises a second contingency problem. We are still not finished, however, for the contingency problem runs even deeper than this.

There is a third contingency problem concerning the existence of the universe itself. Why, we might ask, does anything exist at all? Again, unlike the new atheists, I think theists have a philosophical advantage here. Theists can argue that in the absence of a necessary being there is no reasonable explanation for why anything exists at all.²³ Of course, some philosophers, such as Hume, have suggested that the material universe is a necessary being.²⁴ However, Thomas Aquinas has argued (correctly in my judgment) that a composite being cannot be a necessary being (and certainly the universe taken as a whole is a composite of many beings).²⁵

²¹ Haught, *God and the New Atheism*, 73.

²² As argued in note 18 above, only intelligence can ground teleology. However, in the world of the scientific naturalists, intelligence emerges very late in history. It is not prior and foundational to reality, as in a theistic world-view.

²³ *The Ultimate Why Question: Why Is There Anything at All Rather than Nothing Whatever?*, ed. John F. Wippel (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

²⁴ David Hume, *The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1980), part IX, 56.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, I, 18 and 42, 8–11. In *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 3, Aquinas makes a distinction between a necessary *per se* being and a necessary *per aliud* being. But even if the material universe were a necessary *per aliud* being that would not be enough to salvage Hume's objection. For Hume to succeed he must argue that the universe is a necessary *per se* being, yet he cannot do that for the reason I gave above and for other reasons. For example, to be a necessary *per se* being precludes a real distinction between being and essence. But even if the material universe were one thing, as opposed to a collec-

Moreover, even if things could exist in the absence of a necessary being, then surely their existence would be contingent. At best, then, scientific naturalists are faced with a contingency that runs through everything—that is, they have a *radical* contingency problem.

Given this radical contingency, two important questions arise. First, how can nature, understood as radically contingent, ground objectively true and necessarily binding moral prescriptions? The answer is that it cannot because whatever moral inclinations or moral values emerge in such a world would be radically contingent and there would be no ultimate reason for why they should be this way and not another way or, even, why they should exist at all. This nullifies the necessary force moral prescriptions are supposed to have. A second question that arises is the following: Why should I, as a rational being, feel obliged to obey something that is non-rational and thus clearly inferior to me? Let us examine this next.

The Transcendence of Persons Argument

The last question leads to a second argument which I call the *transcendence of persons argument*. Recall that we have been assuming (for the sake of argument) that human persons with reason and freedom can emerge from biological evolution as understood by the scientific naturalists. In such a case, however, there would be several senses in which human persons would transcend the mechanisms of evolution and thus would not be subject to them. For example, evolution might explain why I have the inclination and desire to have children, but does this put upon me a moral obligation to have children? No, for unlike lower life forms, my ability to freely choose to mate or not allows me to transcend the mechanisms of evolution. Also, I transcend the mechanisms of evolution in the sense that, unlike other life forms, I have the power to alter the course of evolution through genetic engineering. Finally, as a rational and free being, I am superior to the non-rational and non-free mechanisms of evolution and thus transcend them. As such, any moral inclination or rule of thumb produced by evolution lacks the necessary force required for moral prescriptions.

There is something of an irony here for scientific naturalists who embrace non-reductive physicalism. The very non-reductive physicalism they hope makes the emergence of reason and freedom possible for hu-

tion of things, there would still be a real distinction between the being and essence of the material universe.

mans would also make humans transcend, in the ways described above, the physical world and its processes—including biological evolution. Because of this transcendence, there is a sense in which a human being would occupy a position similar to God for scientific naturalists. This is because in the world of the scientific naturalists human beings, at least as far as we know, are the supreme form of life. Humans alone, it appears, exist with freedom and reason in a physical universe largely filled with lifeless matter and mostly (or exclusively) non-intelligent and lesser life forms.

With no God and humans occupying the role of supreme beings, why should humans look to evolution or anything else in nature as a foundation for objective moral values? This opens the door to the dark path of Friedrich Nietzsche that Étienne Gilson warned about in his essay “The Terrors of the Year Two thousand.”²⁶ It is the path of asserting your own will and creating your own moral values without being limited by nature or the values of the masses. It is a dangerous path and one that is incompatible with objective moral values.

Conclusion

Although the arguments above are not exhaustive, they cast serious doubt on the view that metaphysical naturalism can provide a satisfactory metaphysical foundation for objective moral values. Indeed, the new atheist attempt to ground objective morality in metaphysical naturalism fails for three reasons. First, metaphysical naturalism cannot account for freedom or moral agency. Second, the “is-ought problem,” in the context of metaphysical naturalism, precludes the prescriptive nature of objective moral values. Third, and finally, the problems of radical contingency and transcendence of persons, which result from metaphysical naturalism, preclude the necessary force that is supposed to accompany objective moral values.

If this analysis is correct, then only two options remain. One option is, simply, to reject objective moral values. Perhaps some naturalists will be content with a much weaker understanding of moral values. Indeed, some of them might feel liberated to view morality as an illusion—as something foisted upon us by our genes for the sake of reproductive success—and something from which we can finally rid ourselves. However, I

²⁶ Étienne Gilson, *The Terrors of the Year 2000* (Toronto: St. Michael’s College, 1949).

am sure many will find this position unacceptable. Indeed, I agree with Joyce, who has made the argument that:

Moral naturalism without clout [i.e., without the inescapability of moral prescriptions] . . . seems to enfeeble our capacity to morally criticize wrong-doers; . . . might actually encourage wrongdoing for certain persons; and . . . renders moral language and moral thinking entirely redundant. Such a value system is . . . surely too wimpy to be mistaken for morality.²⁷

The only other option is to argue that objective moral values have a non-natural foundation. I think this is the correct course to take, and as I alluded to above, I think the solution can be found in theism, specifically as understood in the Thomistic tradition. God, as the intelligent cause responsible for both the existence and natures of things, can account for the teleology that is necessary for the prescriptive nature of moral values. God, as intelligent, necessary, and Supreme Being avoids the problems of radical contingency and transcendence of persons that undermined the necessary force that is supposed to accompany objective moral values. Of course, to provide an adequate and detailed defense of God as the only satisfactory metaphysical foundation for objective moral values would require much more space than I have here, so I will have to argue for it elsewhere.²⁸

THE FAILURE OF NEW ATHEISM MORALITY

SUMMARY

New atheists, such as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, generally speaking, are committed to two main beliefs. The first is scientism, which is the view that only science can give us complete and reliable knowledge of reality. The second is metaphysical naturalism, which is the view that no supernatural entities exist. In this article the author focuses on the metaphysical naturalism that new atheists and other naturalists accept, with the goal of answering the following question: Can metaphysical naturalism provide an adequate foundation for objective moral values? He argues that the answer is “no” and he discusses several serious problems inherent in a naturalistic account of the foundation of morality.

²⁷ Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality*, 208.

²⁸ I would like to thank Marie George, Jon Weidenbaum, Tony Spanakos, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful suggestions on this paper. My gratitude also extends to Peter Redpath, Curtis Hancock, and Fulvio Di Blasi for their encouragement. *Et Deo Gratias*.

KEYWORDS: atheism, ethics, evolution, metaphysical naturalism, objective moral values.

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**WE ARE MODERN
AND WANT TO BE MODERN**

Among contemporary cultural historians, political theorists Brad S. Gregory, Pierre Manent, and Rémi Brague, each in his own way has addressed the transformation of what was formally known as “Christendom” into its modern present. No one needs to be told that the repudiation of an inherited culture has left individuals as well as societies without a moral compass. The evidence is too great. Some saw it coming a generation or more ago. We could cite the English historians, Hilaire Belloc and Christopher Dawson, and their French contemporary Paul Valéry, as well as the American George Santayana.

I begin with Santayana. Some may recall Santayana’s often quoted judgment: “The shell of Christendom is broken. The unconquerable mind of the East, the pagan past, the industrial socialist future confront it with equal authority. Our whole life and mind is saturated with a slow upward filtration of a new spirit—that of an emancipated, atheistic, international democracy.”¹

Writing more than a hundred years ago, Santayana, in Volume Two of his five-volume study, *The Life of Reason*, draws a distinction often missed between “social democracy as an ideal” and “democracy as a form of government” in which power lies more or less directly in the people. Social democracy, he claims, “is a general ethical ideal, looking to human equality and brotherhood, and its radical form is inconsistent with such

¹ George Santayana, “Winds of Doctrine,” in *The Works of George Santayana* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1937), 3.

institutions as family and heredity property.”² Democratic government, by contrast, is merely a means to an end, an expedient for better and smoother government in certain states at certain times. “A government is not made representative,” he warns, “by the mechanical expedient of electing its members by universal suffrage. It becomes representative only by embodying in its policy, whether by instinct or intelligence, the people’s conscious and unconscious interests.”³

No friend of social democracy, Santayana finds its spirit deadening, given its attempt to unite whole nations and even all of mankind into a society of equals, admitting of no local or racial privileges by which a sense of fellowship may be stimulated. The spirit of social democracy is deadening, he maintains, for it is “to ambition, to the love of wealth and honor, to the love of a liberty which meant opportunity and adventure, we owe whatever benefits we have derived from Greece and Rome, from Italy and England.”⁴ “Civilization” he continues, “has hitherto consisted in the diffusion and dilution of habits arising in privileged centres.”⁵ One may think of Vienna, Paris, and Oxford, or Palermo, Munich, and Cambridge, among others. Civilization has not sprung from the people, he claims. “To abolish a natural aristocracy would be to cut off the sources from which all culture has hitherto flowed.”⁶ And then this powerful condemnation, “The one way of defending the democratic ideal is to deny that civilization is a good.”⁷

Brad S. Gregory, in search of what makes us what we are, looks to the 16th century, convinced that modernity dates to the Protestant Reformation. In Gregory’s judgment the Reformation succeeded in the sense that it provided an alternative way of grounding Christian answers to life questions and thus provided a basis for living a Christian life, ideologically and socially separate from the Roman Catholic Church.

On the eve of the Reformation Latin Christianity had achieved a comprehensive, sacramental world view based on truth claims about God’s action in history, centered on the Incarnation, life, teachings,

² George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: or the Phases of Human Progress*, vol. II: “Reason in Society” (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921), 116.

³ Id., 121.

⁴ Id., 134.

⁵ Id., 125.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id., 125–126.

death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Intellectual life was vibrant, if sometimes contentious, variously institutionalized not only in universities but also in monasteries, at princely courts, and among participants in the religious Republic of Letters.⁸

The unintended problem created by the Reformation became the problem of how to know what true Christianity is, given the open-ended range of rival truth claims that followed diverse exegetical interpretations of sacred scripture. Reason alone in modern philosophy, Gregory holds, like scripture alone, has proven incapable of discerning or devising consensual persuasive answers to life's large questions. There is no shared, substantive common good, nor are there any prospects for devising one. A centrally important paradoxical characteristic of modern liberalism, Gregory finds, is that it does not prescribe what citizens should believe, how they should live, or what they should care about.

Pierre Manent would not disagree. In his discussion of modernity he too looks to its origins: "We have been modern now for several centuries. We are modern, and we want to be modern."⁹ If so, in what century did modernity really begin—the 16th, 17th, or was it the 18th century? Origins are bound to be obscure, but whatever the case, in Manent's judgment, modernity is a project, formulated and implemented first in Europe, but nevertheless intended from the beginning for all of humanity, a movement that is destined never to arrive at a term.

Developing a theme from an earlier work, *The City of Man* (1995), Manent probes deeply into Western history:

If we want to understand the modern project, we must begin with the city, for it is in the city that people deliberate and form projects for action. It is in the city that people discover that they can govern themselves and learn to do so. They discover and learn politics . . . The city is the shaping of human life that makes the common thing and the execution of the common thing in a plurality of cities hostile to each other and divided within.¹⁰

⁸ Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 189.

⁹ Pierre Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City: On the Western Dynamic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 1.

¹⁰ *Id.*, 5.

The political form that succeeded the city was the empire. With the coming of Christianity, add a third form, one created by the Church that is at once a city and an empire. Europeans soon found themselves confronted by competing authorities. “They were assailed by prestigious and contradictory words—the words of the Bible, the words of the Greek philosophers, the words of the Roman orators and historians—and they did not know which to retain.”¹¹ With Luther’s revolt, the authority of the Word of God itself became divided between that of the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church. Ironically, the Scriptures themselves were accessible only through the mediation of the Church and in the first instance in the language of the Church, Latin. By all accounts, Luther’s Reformation created a spiritual upheaval, but it was also and inseparably a political revolution, indeed, a national insurrection. Different European nations selected the Christian confession under which they chose to live and imposed it. Thus, says Manent, the confessional nation became one of history’s political forms.

Europe produced modernity, and for a long period of time Europe was its master and owner. Today Bacon and Descartes reign in Shanghai and Bangalore at least as much as in Paris and London. Within Europe, in spite of the multiple treaties that created the European Union, Manent finds that civic cooperation is feeble and the religious word almost inaudible.

Europe finds itself militarily, politically and spiritually disarmed in a world that it has armed with the instruments of modern civilization. It soon will be wholly incapable of defending itself. By renouncing the political form that was its own, Europe has deprived itself of the association in which European life had found its richest meaning.¹²

Manent’s emphasis on the city follows his recognition that a degree of cultural unity is required as the foundation of a body politic. One cannot be a citizen of the world, he maintains, nor even of Europe. An identifiable common good can only be the fruit of a coherent, sustainable tradition within a homogenous population.

In addressing the political development of the West, Manent finds it necessary to pause in order to take stock of the tools of knowledge appropriate for his investigation. Like Santayana he finds that there are two versions of modern political theory, with one emphasizing “science” and the

¹¹ Id., 6.

¹² Id., 13.

other “experience.” There is the political science of Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke, whom Manent calls “the architects of the modern state,” and “the guiding spirits of modern politics.”¹³ Arguing not from experience, modern political science, says Manent, takes its inspiration from Hobbes’s fictional individual, postulated in a state of nature in which all war against all. From that postulate Hobbes derives the mythical social contract theory and all that it entails, including the scope of human rights. In Manent’s judgment,

Modern political science in its founding moment, overcomes the grave deficiencies of modern political experience, the absence, so to speak, of an authentic political experience in the Christian world, by forging access to a pre-political human experience on the basis of which it will be possible to construct a new political order.¹⁴

Lost is the experience of those living in what was formerly called Christendom.

Perhaps the most up-to-date version of Hobbes’s starting point is that of John Rawls, whose “original situation,” Manent suggests, is “the postulation of a state of nature without nature.”¹⁵ As in the case of Hobbes, Rawls’s theory of justice trumps experience, and facts do not matter in a theoretical construct. Perhaps we should contrast Hobbes and Rawls with Machiavelli, who, Manent says, “wrote about how men actually lived, not the way they behaved in those imaginary republics and principalities.”¹⁶

In *Metamorphoses of the City*, at the end of the discussion “Empire, Church and Nation,” Manent identifies Jewish law, Greek philosophy, Christianity, and Democracy as four great moments in the history of humanity. The four great spiritual determinations of Western humanity, he maintains, not only form a chronological succession but also mark the major stages on the gradient of increasing universality. In drawing his study to a conclusion, Manent is wistful: Is it possible, he asks, to imagine a new stage, the result of a mediation of Christianity and the modern conception of humanity? By way of an answer, he finds the building blocks in a certain solidarity between Jewish law and Christianity, and between Christianity and the gods of the Greek philosophers, insofar as those accounts provide a rational conception of divinity. But the “Religion of Hu-

¹³ Id., 23.

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Id., 26.

¹⁶ Id., 7.

manity” understood from the modern perspective has left behind Jewish, Christian, and even Greek philosophical notions of the divine. “Modernity by embracing Humanity,” writes Manent, “has expelled the highest idea to embrace the largest idea which is the idea of humanity itself.”¹⁷

It is true, as Brad Gregory has ably pointed out, that the Reformation in rejecting the mediation of the Church as a separate and visible institution weakened Christianity to the detriment of its social influence. In the aftermath of the Reformation, “The believer,” writes Manent “instead of being saved by partaking in the sacraments of the Church, instead of being part of the Church, is instructed by Luther that he is saved by faith in the Word of God alone.”¹⁸ What happens, Manent then asks, when the Church is set aside? “The spiritual ministry is appropriated by every Christian in what is called the universal priesthood.”¹⁹ Lost is the mediation of the Church between man and God. Relieved of the burden of the ecclesiastical order, the Christian community inevitably falls under the state, as it soon did in Luther’s Germany. “However unsatisfactory or disappointing the mediating institution may be—Yahweh is forever reprimanding or chastising his people—it is the bridge over the abyss that separates the Immense from the lowly. What Christianity brings is mediation, not distance.”²⁰

Rémi Brague, in the company of Paul Valéry, insists on the recognition of another dimension of Europe that is sometimes not given due weight or is overlooked, namely, the contribution of Rome, not only for its sense of law but as transmitter of the Hebrew and Greek contribution to European culture. Rémi Brague, in his insightful work published in an English translation as *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*, argues that Europeans have failed to recognize, value, and defend what is a unique culture with consequences for the rest of the world.

Brague begins his treatise in an attempt to define what are we talking about when we speak of “Europe.” It is a geographical entity to be sure, and as a place, Europe precedes Europe as a Continent. As to its “content” or character, Europe is the whole set of historically identifiable facts that have taken place within that geographical space we call Europe. Thus Husserl can speak of “European sciences” and Heidegger of “Occi-

¹⁷ Id., 304.

¹⁸ Id., 311.

¹⁹ Id., 319.

²⁰ Id.

dental metaphysics.”²¹ Obviously mere residence on the Continent does not make one a European. Confronting the fact that many immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa refuse to assimilate, choosing instead to retain their own culture and even live under their own law, Brague concludes: “A European is one who is conscious of belonging to a whole. One is not a European without wanting to be one . . . The frontiers of Europe are solely cultural.”²²

Continuing his analysis, Brague argues, “A culture is defined in relation to the people and to the phenomena it considers as its other.” Europe to the extent that it is Occidental is the other of the Orient. As Christendom, Europe is the other of the Muslim world. To the extent that it is Latin Christendom, Europe is the other of the Byzantine world. “Byzantium,” says Brague, “never thought of itself as European. It always thought of itself as Roman.” The cultural realities that one designates in this way do not limit themselves to the European space, neither in their origin nor in their ultimate expansion.²³ Considering the question, “Who are we as Europeans: Greeks or Romans, or Jews, or Christians, or in a sense a little of each?” Brague is convinced that Europe is essentially Roman. The Roman character of Europe is found in its sense of order, in the patriarchal family, in its sense of fatherland. “To be Roman is to perceive oneself as Greek in relation to what is barbarous, but also barbarous in relation to what is Greek. It is to know that what one transmits does not come from oneself.”²⁴ Roman culture is essentially a passage, a way, an aqueduct. The relation of Europe—as Christendom—to the Old Testament is in a sense a “Roman” relation. “The Christians themselves are essentially ‘Romans’ insofar as it is from Rome that they have their ‘Greeks’ to which they are tied by an invisible hand.” In the light of this somewhat fanciful analysis, Brague can say, “Christianity is to the Old Covenant what the Romans are to the Greeks.”²⁵

Christianity played a major role in the early stages of the formation of the European Community following World War II due to the influence of Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schumann, and Alcide de Gasperi. That influ-

²¹ Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*, trans. from the French *Europe, la voie romaine* by Samuel Lester (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2012), 20.

²² *Id.*, 6.

²³ *Id.*, 21–22.

²⁴ *Id.*, 40.

²⁵ *Id.*, 54.

ence has waned as time has gone by, and today the European Union is little more than a set of trade agreements. As to the future of Europe, Brague is convinced that the cultural task awaiting Europe consists in becoming Roman again. Europe must also become conscious of its intrinsic and even global value, that is, of its exceptional nature, of its “eccentric” character, as it faces both internal and external barbarism. It must again become convinced of its worthiness in relation to which it is only the messenger and servant. “It must regain or become once again the place where one recognizes an intimate relationship of man with God, a covenant that descends to the most carnal dimensions of humanity, that must be the object of unflinching respect.”²⁶ Amplifying that judgment, he writes, “For Europe to remain itself, it is not necessary that everyone who inhabits it recognize explicitly that they are Christians.”²⁷ As to its future, Brague hopes that, in spite of the cultural problem created by its immigration policy, Europe will remain a place that recognizes the separation of the temporal and the spiritual, where each recognizes the legitimacy of the other in its proper domain.

Pierre Manent and Rémi Brague are not alone in taking a dim view of Europe’s future. Charles Murray, in promoting his book *Human Accomplishment*,²⁸ summed up his conclusion for a promotional blurb when he asserted, “Europe’s run is over.” Pierre Manent, although pessimistic, stops short of Murray’s conclusion. Rémi Brague calls for a “Counter Enlightenment.” Viewing Europe in the light of its modern history, it is difficult to believe that the philosophical skepticism introduced in the 18th and 19th centuries has so undermined the self-confidence of a civilization that has given so much to the world, such that it is not able to defend itself. Christianity may be on the defensive in some self-blinded intellectual circles, but the empiricism of Hume and the fideism of Kant are easily challenged. Yet, Jürgen Moltmann stands to remind us that traditions once challenged are all but lost.²⁹

²⁶ Id., 189.

²⁷ Id.

²⁸ Charles Murray, *Human Accomplishment: The Pursuit of Excellence in the Arts and Sciences: 800 b.c.–1950* (New York: Harper, 2003).

²⁹ Moltmann was especially conscious of the role that tradition plays in preserving equilibrium within a people, grounding hope and mitigating fear. “Traditions,” he writes, “are alive and binding, current and familiar, as long as they are taken as a matter of course and as such link fathers to sons in the course of generations and provide continuity in time. When this unquestioned familiarity and trustworthiness becomes problematical, an essential element in tradition is already lost. Where reflection sets in and subjects the tradition to critical questioning, with the result that accepting or rejecting of them becomes a conscious act, the

WE ARE MODERN AND WANT TO BE MODERN**SUMMARY**

The author traces the thought of George Santayana, Brad S. Gregory, Pierre Manent, and Rémi Brague, who addressed the transformation of the West into its modern present. They all show that by being cut off from its cultural and political inheritance in modern times, Western Civilization presently finds itself in a burning need of recovering its identity. To save its identity, the West is to challenge the errors of modernity. We used to have the example of Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle in the darkest hours of World War II, and the remarkable example of John Paul II who through his leadership of the Solidarity movement inspired hope not only in his own people but also for others in the Soviet bloc at the time. “The cultural task awaiting Europe,” to use a phrase of Rémi Brague, challenging though it may be, may in time find its voice in another Churchill or John Paul II. At present, with no remedy in sight, all we can do is to hope.

KEYWORDS: West, civilization, Europe, Christendom, democracy, culture, politics, George Santayana, Brad S. Gregory, Pierre Manent, Rémi Brague.

traditions lose their propitious force” (Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 291).

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MODERNISM AND THE GROWING CATHOLIC IDENTITY PROBLEM: THOMISTIC REFLECTIONS AND SOLUTIONS

Being Catholic makes one a member of a people set apart, a royal priesthood,¹ made clean and steadfast in the Faith,² sanctified as the Bride of Christ. According to the Catholic Catechism, it also denotes universality as the correct and complete confession of faith and full sacramental life, and a mission to make all persons members of the People of God.³ The Church’s missionary task involves raising up the truth and goodness God has distributed among men, “to purify them from error and evil.”⁴ To effect Her remedy, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Church promoted a stable, universal philosophical system embedded in the “catholicity” of reason to promote the faith. It was a “battle-ready” Thomism bolstering both the front lines and the field hospital of faith.⁵

Today, many Christians suffer from an identity crisis—a false reign of the heart or caricature of charity detached from the work of reason and the gift of supernatural wisdom. But pragmatic collective activism is not

¹ 1 Peter 2:9, cited in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 803.

² See Aquinas on the meaning of “sanctity” as both “being made clean” and “being steadfast” in faith: S.Th., II–II, 81, 8.

³ CCC, 837–838; 845.

⁴ CCC, 856.

⁵ Maritain refers to the “catholicity” of reason in *St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958, original French ed. 1930), 76: “This double unity, this double catholicity of reason and grace, of the human spirit and the Church, needs an intellectual organ to manifest it, strengthen it, and diffuse it.” The Ignatian language of the Church as a “field hospital” after battle has been used by Pope Francis I, in his interview with the director of Italian Jesuit magazine *Civiltà Cattolica*, Fr. Antonio Spadaro (August 19, 23, 29, 2013).

contemplation in the world, as Maritain knew, and is arguably a denial of the universal call to holiness. Although today authentic Thomism often stands in practical disuse, it is still the unique measure by which we can identify and denounce Promethean forms of humanism which dominate our culture.

Modernism's dichotomies have cost the Church three jewels of Catholic identity, purchased at great price: the metaphysical unity of Western culture, a sound sense of human nature on which it is built, and a Thomist spirituality which once infused philosophy and theology and guided pastoral practice. The Catholic modernist, not surprisingly, welcomes his crisis of identity. Under Henri Bergson's inspiration, Scholasticism and Thomism are viewed as closed, static systems void of life, while contradiction denotes the energy of change, progress, and creativity.

The modernist notion of truth underlies the antinomian atmosphere in the Church today, and a solution to the cultural confusion and malaise it engenders is found along three Thomist lines: a reaffirmation of the vitality of speculative order, a sense of the contribution of affectivity, contemplation, to the integration of natural, revealed and mystical wisdoms, and the rehabilitation of an objective spirituality and liturgy. Gilson's nuanced position on the encounter of Thomism, the Magisterium and modernism grafts a historical, textual approach onto Pope Leo XIII's Thomistic mandate of *Aeterni Patris*. In conjunction with the insights of Gilson, the Thomist solution is argued to condition the Church's ability to reverse its modernist course of pragmatism, pluralism and a pastoral rhetoric that suppresses Catholicism's contemplative charism.

The Role of Philosophy in the Church's Mission

To the extent that it has wedded Aquinas's thought to the Church's mission of salvation of souls, the Magisterium reveals the power of dogma and theology to shape pastoral practice. Aquinas's precise distinctions and his assimilative and creative vision were nourished by an interiority emanating from the eternal heart of the Church. The ebb and flow of Thomism in Church documents through time, however, has been far from even. After a lengthy term of disuse, Aquinas's thought was retrieved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, languishing under a tide of Cartesian and Kantian interpretations. Pope Leo XIII led a revival of authentic Thomistic studies in ecclesiastical formation while Étienne Gilson's his-

torical approach also rightly put the focus back onto Aquinas's own texts. Neo-Thomist philosophers (such as Maritain, Garrigou-Lagrange, and Gilson) and the Magisterium, each in their own way, called for the integral formation of members of Christ's body in the modern world. This was to be achieved in various ways: by promoting Aquinas's principles and doctrines derived from study of the new critical editions, by developing the insights of Aquinas in relation to the plurality of schools in Scholasticism,⁶ and by applying the commentatorial and manual traditions to contemporary problems.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Church's theological and pastoral life was often sustained by a commitment to Aquinas's vision of the relation between faith, reason, and culture. In the fourteenth century, Pope Urban VI promoted Aquinas's teaching as the true and Catholic doctrine. Pius V boldly declared Aquinas a Universal Doctor (1567) and "the most brilliant light of the Church" whose philosophical categories underpinned the sacramental system.

Leo XIII recommended Aquinas above all other philosophers as "the chief and master" of all Scholastic Doctors (*Aeterni Patris*, 1879), and Vatican I's *Dei Filius* (1870) propounded a Thomist view of natural theology in contrast to modernist agnosticism in the guise of rationalism and naturalism. Focusing on faith and reason, the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* struck a balance between fideism and rationalism. Philosophy, in particular that of St. Thomas, was to serve three functions. First, there is its apologetic task. Aquinas's philosophy establishes the preambles of faith, and defends it to the nations by an "extrinsic" method using signs and miracles. Second, it endows sacred theology with the habit and nature of a science, by organizing the data of revelation in a coherent set of arguments. Third, it furnishes theology with arguments to combat her opponents.⁷ Aquinas's

⁶ "Scholasticism" (meaning literally "of the schools") refers to a medley of medieval thinkers, in particular, Bonaventure, Thomas, Scotus, and Suarez, as these used the heritage of Christian Scripture, the Church Fathers, and a host of philosophical insights from Greek philosophy. It includes not only Aristotelian influences, but a strong Neoplatonic stream. "Neoscholasticism" refers to the revival of Thomism in the modern era. On these terms, see Philip A. Egan, *Philosophy and Catholic Theology: A Primer* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009), 49–50.

⁷ On *Aeterni Patris*, see, e.g., Gerald McCool, *Nineteenth Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977), 228–240; Gerald McCool, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 34–36. McCool uses Gilson as an example of the defeat of the supposed unitary scholastic doctrine, an interpretation that was vigorously challenged among Thomists, as seen in a set of essays in *Tho-*

thought carried the advantage of universality and unity, for it absorbed the heritage of patristic thought and unity of doctrines which “had long lain dispersed like scattered limbs.”⁸ It lent the objective universality of Aristotle’s principles to all branches of theology, in contrast to post-Kantian individualism and the confusing medley of modern philosophies.⁹

Pius X crowned St. Thomas once again as the Church’s preferred *magister* in his *24 Thomistic Theses* (1914), and as the cure for modernist errors in both the *Lamentabili Sane* (1907) and *Pascendi Dominici gregis* (1907), support for which was reiterated in *Sacrorum antistitum* (the Oath Against Modernism, 1910). Pius XI’s *Studiorum duces* (1923) made Aquinas’s “method, doctrine, and principles” mandatory in clerical formation, and *Deus scientiarum Dominus* (1931) echoed *Aeterni Patris*, while Pius XII’s *Humani generis* (1950) continued the theme of St. Thomas’s pride of place in priestly formation, to combat the errors that flow from relativism.

Despite the efforts of Pope John Paul II to revive Aquinas as a beacon following his de-emphasis in the Second Vatican Council,¹⁰ post-conciliar Thomism has nearly collapsed, alongside the Western canon and the contemplative ideal, due in large part to modernism’s de-Hellenization of the Church.¹¹ Pockets of dedicated Thomist scholars exist,¹² but the

mistic Papers VI, ed. John X. Knasas (Houston, Texas: The Centre for Thomistic Studies, 1994).

⁸ Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, 108. In this section of his encyclical, Leo describes the Scholastic method in the words of Sixtus V (1585–1590), as outlining “that appropriate and interconnected coherence of things and causes.”

⁹ McCool (*Nineteenth Century Scholasticism*, 233) views scholastic philosophy to contain several weaknesses. These include its supposedly ahistorical nature, and its failure to acknowledge diversity among philosophers and even commentators such as Cajetan. In addition, the criterion of truth for a Thomistic doctrine was not the texts of Aquinas himself, but unanimous agreement among Thomistic commentators.

¹⁰ In *The Decree on Priestly Formation* (*Optatam totius*, 15), the “perennial philosophy” is lauded, and Aquinas is recommended as a guide (id., 16). In the *Declaration on Christian Education* (*Gravissimum educationis*, 10), the Church is exhorted to follow “in the footsteps of the Doctors of the Church, especially those of St. Thomas Aquinas.” Previous Magisterial recommendations and mandates are not mentioned. On this topic, see Jose Pereira, “Thomism and the Magisterium: From *Aeterni Patris* to *Veritatis splendor*,” *Logos. A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 5:3 (2002): 170–171.

¹¹ On the demise of the so-called “Thomistic revival,” see, e.g., Daniel McNerny, “The Revivification of Sound Christian Philosophy,” *New Oxford Review*, part I (May 2015), and part II (June 2015). Ratzinger noted that modernism rejected the “Hellenization” of the Church through Greek and medieval philosophy, and many modernists substantiate this rejection (starting with Bergson—see, e.g., his work on mysticism). Bernard Lonergan—in

institutional weight in Catholicism has largely shifted towards anthropologies and spiritualities provided by the Jesuit (transcendental Thomist) school. One interpretation of events is that the demise was caused by popes' attempted transmission of a "unitary system"—and indeed, *Pascendi* warns teachers not to abandon Aquinas's metaphysics at their intellectual and spiritual peril.¹³ Scholasticism (and philosophy, and thus theology) is complex, and the legislative approach did not withstand the explosion of "Thomisms" in the twentieth century, ranging from Louvain Neo-Scholasticism, to transcendental, phenomenological, analytic, and existential varieties.

Early in his pontificate, John Paul II accepted philosophical pluralism¹⁴ and in his 1993 encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, abrogated his predecessors' imposition of Thomism on the Church,¹⁵ reinforcing this position in *Fides et ratio*.¹⁶ Aquinas is embraced as a metaphysical guide for theology,¹⁷ yet the Second Vatican Council's openness to modern philosophy is lauded as well.¹⁸ Philosophy as such is promoted in ecclesiastical study and

his *Doctrinal Pluralism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, Aquinas Lecture, 1971) among other works—berates the influence of Hellenization, as did Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his *Razing the Bastions: On the Church in this Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993, original German edition 1952).

¹² On the situation of post-conciliar Thomism in various institutions of philosophy and theology, see, e.g., D. Q. McInerney, "The Rise and Fall of the Thomistic Renewal, Part II: A Revival Cut Short," *New Oxford Review* (June 2015). McInerney rightly blames a resurgent modernism (among other reasons) for the collapse of the Thomistic renewal, and points to the existence of a few faithful Catholic colleges and universities as a safe harbor for disseminating the Thomistic worldview.

¹³ Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici gregis*, 39–40.

¹⁴ In his address on the occasion of the first centenary of *Aeterni Patris*, for instance. See John Paul II, *Pontificia Universitate S. Thomae Aquinatis, saeculo expleto a datis Encyclicis "Aeterni Patris,"* AAS 71 (August–December 1979): 1480, where other "philosophical currents" are considered as "natural allies" of Aquinas. See Pereira, "Thomism and the Magisterium," 176.

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 29: "Certainly the Church's Magisterium does not intend to impose upon the faithful any particular theological system, still less a philosophical one."

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 49: "The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one philosophy in preference to others."

¹⁷ Footnote 115 (of *Fides et ratio*, 97) refers the reader to John Paul II's 1979 *Angelicum* address, in which Aquinas is recommended to the youth for study, due to his "openness" and "universalism," and in particular, due to his realism which is based on the *actus essendi* and directs the mind towards "pure Act, namely, to God."

¹⁸ Aquinas's contributions are highlighted in *Fides et ratio*, 43–44, and the Council's references are discussed in *id.*, 59–61. In paragraph 59, various modern (and modernist) philoso-

formation (*Fides et ratio*, 62) and Aquinas stands as a model for the relationship between faith and reason. The Magisterium has a positive role of providing data for inspiration,¹⁹ yet it does not interfere in the autonomy of philosophy's method and principles, which proceed according to the light of human reason (id., 49). The "unity of truth" encompasses a variety of paths towards it (id., 51), and the original vocation and dignity of philosophy consists in cultural formation through the gift of thought (id., 6).

Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that the Church is the guardian and promoter of the goods basic to human life and flourishing, over and against the reductionist tyrannies of the world of work, hedonism and nihilism. As Guardini and Pieper predicted, She alone is left with the task of philosophy—not just as an academic pastime, or ensconced in seminaries as a stepping stone to theology and the pastoral challenges of the "real" world, or as aesthetic frippery, but as an indispensable cornerstone to human culture.

While Benedict XVI sees a parallel between prophets and philosophers in that both strive towards the *Logos*, Christianity surpasses ancient philosophy's segregation of religion and truth.²⁰ Reason, not blind will or matter, is at the origin of creation, or reason abolishes itself.²¹ Benedict describes himself not as a Thomist but as an "Augustinian," as faith is the path to understanding,²² and an epistemology based not on an illusory notion of "pure nature" but on the will's and mind's purification through

phies are mentioned as "parallel to Pope Leo's call," producing philosophical works of great influence and lasting value."

¹⁹ *Fides et ratio*, 60 notes the role of Vatican Council's *Gaudium et spes* as a "virtual compendium of the biblical anthropology from which philosophy too can draw inspiration." On the relation of *Fides et ratio* to the study of Aquinas, see John F. Wippel, "Fides et ratio's Call for a Renewal of Metaphysics and St. Thomas Aquinas," in *The Vocation of the Catholic Philosopher: From Maritain to John Paul II*, ed. John Hittinger (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 145–165.

²⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 139–141. Pope Benedict's famous 2006 Regensburg Address addresses the issue of reason or the *logos* in relation to religion.

²¹ Joseph Ratzinger, "The Truth of Christianity," Sorbonne Address, 25–27 November 1999, trans. Maria Klepacka, cited in Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 63.

²² Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium. An Interview with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 33, 41.

faith, makes Augustine his preferred “counterweight” to Aquinas.²³ With the relaxation of the imposition of Thomism on the Church, philosophy’s status as “handmaid” remains in Christian philosophy, but the general handling of diverse philosophies and cultural worldviews lacks the safeguard of Thomistic metaphysical principles, which also guarantee theology’s objective and universal truth.²⁴

Modernism’s Characteristics

Catholic modernism has been defined in opposite terms by its friends and enemies. Whether as the “sum of all heresies” or as a transformation of consciousness inspired by evolutionary theory and the progress of science, its new definition of truth impacts on dogma, ecumenism, and the role of Aquinas and classical culture in the Church. Modernist sympathizers laud it as a “renaissance,”²⁵ and as “a purification of the religious sense and an integration of Catholic truth,”²⁶ and as a “movement for reform which received official expression in the Second Vatican Council,”²⁷ while those opposed to it have called it the “synthesis of all heresies” (Pius X) and its departure from Aquinas’s philosophy a rejection of the Magisterium itself (Pius XII).²⁸ Modernism was defined and even created as a movement, its friends tell us, by its papal opponents, particularly, Leo XIII

²³ Id., 60. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, iii, ed. H. Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 155. Cf. Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 4–6.

²⁴ As Thomas Joseph White, O.P., puts it: “The Catholic philosophical and theological response to our own secular and pluralistic age will require, among other things, the renewal of a more robust philosophical Thomism present within the intellectual life of the Church” (“Toward a Post-Secular, Post-Conciliar Thomistic Philosophy: *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity* and the Challenge of Contemporary Natural Theology,” *Nova et vetera* 10:2 (2012): 530).

²⁵ Nicholas Lash, “Modernism, *Aggiornamento*, and the Night Battle,” in *The Bishops and Writers: Aspects of the Evolution of Modern English Catholicism*, ed. Adrian Hastings (Wheatthampstead: A. Clarke, 1977), 55.

²⁶ Alexander Dru, Illyd Trethowan, *Maurice Blondel: The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* (London, 1964), 32.

²⁷ Alexander Dru, “Modernism and the Present Position of the Church,” *Downside Review* 82 (1964): 110.

²⁸ Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, and Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, cited in James Weisheipl, “The Revival of Thomism as a Christian Philosophy,” in *New Themes in Christian Philosophy*, ed. Ralph McInerny (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 183.

and Pius X, who tried to halt the reconciliation of the Catholic faith with freedom in historical, biblical and scientific research.²⁹

For modernists, “living” philosophy is known by change, the quality by which we recognize life. But Thomists³⁰ view the *philosophia perennis* as “living” from its point of origin. Because its first principles are above time, it can, over time, incorporate new truths at home with those principles.³¹ Aquinas’s thought, modernists add, has little to do with the “dry,” “rigid,” and “wooden” introductory textbooks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The mantra that Scholastic philosophy is “a-historical” stems from the manuals’ impersonal style. But they offered condensed solutions to problems priests would encounter, including the need for a Catholic worldview in a pluralist society.³² In fact, Aquinas’s thought is often at the root of the unfairly maligned scholastic manuals.³³ The charge of a-historicity also stems from the view that Aquinas erected a system of created “eternal truths” in an intransigent philosophical essentialism, a misconception corrected by members of the Toronto school.³⁴

²⁹ See, e.g., Harvey Hill, *Politics of Modernism*, 195 (cited in Joseph Kelly, *History and Heresy: How Historical Forces Create Doctrinal Conflicts* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 110) says that Pius X created the movement of modernism by calling it a heresy in *Pascendi* (1907); while Gabriel Daly, O.S.A. (“Theology and Philosophical Modernism,” in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-modernism in Historical Context*, ed. Darrell Jodock (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 89) says that Rome did much to create the monster it slew, by erecting an “artificial criterion” for modernism.

³⁰ Such as Maritain and Garrigou-Lagrange.

³¹ Jacques Maritain, “Theonas,” in Jacques and Raissa Maritain, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires; Paris: Editions Saint-Paul, 1987), 896, 899. Cf. Lawrence Dewan, *Wisdom, Law and Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 88.

³² The scholarship of Edward Feser (*Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Heusenstamm, Germany: *Éditiones Scholasticae*, 2014), 7), James Schall (“Is Scholasticism Making a Comeback?,” *Crisis Magazine*, 19 January 2015), and John Lamont (“Attacks on Thomism,” *Rorate Caeli*, 1 January 2015) concur on this point.

³³ On the negative characterization of Thomism in general and the manual tradition in particular, see Lamont, “Attacks on Thomism.”

³⁴ Namely, Gilson, Maurer and Phelan, for example. Gilson discusses why Aquinas’s thought is existentialist, not essentialist, in *Being and Some Philosophers*. Maurer refutes the view that Aquinas asserted there were created “eternal truths” or eternal truth outside of the Divine Mind, in “St. Thomas and Eternal Truths,” *Mediaeval Studies* 32 (1970): 91–107. Phelan also discusses the charge in his discussion of Fackenheim’s work on the topic, in *St. Thomas and Historicity*, Marquette Aquinas Lecture (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1961).

In 1907, Cardinal Mercier³⁵ defined modernism as the view that believers draw the object and motive of their faith from within, denying historically revealed truth and the teaching authority of the Church—in short, promoting faith as “private judgment.”³⁶ Weisheipl called it an intellectual spirit advanced by zealous non-isolationist clerics trying to meet a liberal and rationalist world, by explaining dogma’s evolutionary quality.³⁷

Leaders of the movement include lay scholars (Blondel, le Roy, and Baron von Hugel) and priests (Tyrell and Loisy, both excommunicated, and Laberthonnière), each stressing either a philosophical, theological, or mystical aspect. Influenced by Nietzsche’s emphasis on the will and by the Bergson’s evolutionary metaphysics, and repelled (as was Leo XIII³⁸) by the incursion of Cartesian philosophy in Catholic seminaries for over more than a century, modernists unanimously denounced Aristotle and Greek philosophy in general.³⁹ They opposed Thomist apologetics, which used natural theology, to their new “method of immanence” and to a pragmatist notion of truth in relation to dogma. Modernism exchanged a rational basis for belief in God and the supernatural for an emotional view of faith as a motion of the heart, a feeling which becomes the measure of dogmatic truths.⁴⁰

The irony of their turn to pragmatism and immanence lay in the fact that Descartes himself championed pragmatism and immanence by de-throning theology to make us “masters of nature” and by obliging philoso-

³⁵ Archbishop of Malines and Primate of Belgium, who died in 1926.

³⁶ And thus, modernism is a Protestant heresy according to Mercier. See Cardinal Desiré Joseph Mercier, “Letter on Modernism” (1907). See Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2007), 5. Bernard Reardon popularly defined it as “the attempt to synthesize the basic truths of religion and the methods and assumptions of modern thought, using the latter as necessary and proper criteria” (Bernard Reardon, *Roman Catholic Modernism* (London, 1970), 9).

³⁷ Weisheipl, “The Revival of Thomism as a Christian Philosophy,” 178.

³⁸ On Pope Leo XIII’s replacement of Cartesian manuals with Thomistic ones in seminaries, see Thomas A. Hartley, *Thomistic Revival and the Modernist Era* (Toronto, Canada: Institute of Christian Thought, University of St. Michael’s College, 1971), 33.

³⁹ On this, a particular view of Laberthonnière, see James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, Vol. I: “The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century,” 2nd edition (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), 364.

⁴⁰ On this, see Philip Egan, *Philosophy and Catholic Theology: A Primer* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009), 54.

phers to proceed in “angelic” fashion, starting with God and with thought.⁴¹

The Church’s Reaction to Modernism

Weisheipl gave two reasons for the modernist crisis, which also explain the Church’s reaction to it. First, there was the false view among philosophers and theologians that they had to make a choice between Thomistic principles and modern insights, and second, the failure to return to Aquinas himself in the intellectual formation of the clergy.⁴²

As early as 1864, restoring Thomism to schools and seminaries formed the Church’s strategy of engagement. Pius IX appended a *Syllabus of Errors* to his encyclical *Quanta Cura (Condemning Current Errors)*, condemning rationalism, its denial of the supernatural, and condemning those who would make the Roman Pontiff “reconcile himself to and agree with progress and liberalism.”⁴³ Pope Leo XIII’s Thomist restoration comprised four actions: 1) the 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris* mandating Christian philosophy for schools and seminaries according to Aquinas’s principles, 2) instituting the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas (the Angelicum) to centralize the dissemination of Thomism, 3) founding the Leonine Commission in 1880 for the critical edition of Aquinas’s works, and 4) proclaiming Aquinas the patron of Catholic education.⁴⁴

Pius X’s “legislative” or “disciplinary” Thomism⁴⁵ returned to Pius IX’s method of making lists of errors. *Lamentabili Sane* (1907, “With Truly Lamentable Results”) listed 65 errors taken from the writings of

⁴¹ See Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1940), 29.

⁴² Weisheipl, “The Revival of Thomism,” 185, 179 §37.

⁴³ On the 1864 *Syllabus*, see Egan, *Philosophy and Catholic Theology: A Primer*, 3–4.

⁴⁴ In his letter *Cum Hoc Sit* (4 August 1880). On these four acts, see Thomas A. Hartley, *Thomistic Revival and the Modernist Era* (Toronto, Canada: Institute of Christian Thought, University of St. Michael’s College, 1971), ch. 2. The earlier *Syllabus of Errors* published by Pius IX in 1864 (appended to the encyclical *Quanta Cura*) listed 80 errors (in 10 categories), in a condemnation of political liberalism.

⁴⁵ The difference between Leo XIII’s and Pius X’s approach to Thomism was in part the agenda of legislation with respect to the restoration of Thomism in the pontificate of Pius X. On this distinction, see, e.g., Russell Hittinger, “*Pascendi Dominici Gregis* at 100: Two Modernisms, Two Thomisms: Reflections on the Centenary of Pius X’s Letter Against the Modernists,” *Nova et vetera* 5:4 (2007): 843–880.

Loisy,⁴⁶ and *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907, “Feeding the Lord’s Flock”) formed his anti-modernist manifesto. The 1910 *Oath Against Modernism* (taken by all clerics until 1967), the *Index of Prohibited Books*, and the censuring and removal of modernists from European teaching posts was accompanied by newly-formed parish “vigilance” committees. The *Summa theologiae* was mandated as a textbook in theology by pontifical degree-granting institutions, and a 1914 *motu proprio* (*Doctoris Angelici*) warned against deviating “so much as an iota from Aquinas, especially in metaphysics.”⁴⁷

Finally, the Congregation of Studies issued a list of 24 fundamental Thomist theses in philosophy, serving as “stabilizers, guaranteeing uniformity” in philosophy⁴⁸ for Catholic thinkers and clerics—a core group of philosophical theses dealing with being, nature, soul, and God—a summary of Catholic reason when many theologians were opting for the claims of personal “experience” and feeling.⁴⁹ Through the concepts of potency and act, God’s transcendence is secured and a philosophy of creation could be erected; natural science is possible due to intrinsic principles and teleology; human immortality is secured through immaterial cognition, and God’s existence is demonstrable from principles of reasoning and from cues from the natural order.

⁴⁶ See Weisheipl, “The Revival of Thomism as a Christian Philosophy,” 178. A list of the contents of the Church’s legislative response to modernism under Pius X can be found in Alec Vidler, *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church: Its Origins and Outcome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 217–233.

⁴⁷ See Weisheipl, “The Revival of Thomism as a Christian Philosophy,” 180. Interestingly, John Paul II returns to extolling Aquinas’s metaphysical guidance in *Fides et ratio*. He takes the position that although the Church has no philosophy “of her own,” she should nonetheless revere Aquinas, especially in the study of metaphysics. Since metaphysics gives the first principles to the other areas of philosophy, Aquinas’s pride of place is tacitly affirmed. While the precise version of Thomism is not specified, the commendation of existential Thomism as found in Gilson and his school is apparent. In his own philosophical works, John Paul II promoted phenomenological Thomism.

⁴⁸ Hartley, *Thomistic Revival and the Modernist Era*, 56.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians*, 3–5. Kerr refers to Alessandro Maggolini, “Magisterial teaching on experience in the twentieth century from the Modernist crisis to the Second Vatican Council,” *Communio* 23 (1996): 224–243. In his article “Thomism and NeoModernism,” John Lamont defends the 24 theses as a clear, succinct, and useful summary of Aquinas’s teaching, thus debunking the modernist critique of them as a set of rigid and simplistic aphorisms designed to stifle creativity and the philosophic spirit. Similarly, Lamont persuasively argues that the manuals’ economical presentation served the purpose of training clerics, and that the critique of manuals ignored this pastoral necessity.

In contrast to today's ecclesial extroversion, the Church knew that Her own house required interior order before She ventures out to the margins and peripheries. Her traditions and intellectual life are not an inauthentic cocoon (or museum) which only an updating or *aggiornamento* can correct. Showing the compatibility of faith and reason prepared the Church to turn "outwards" to the world,⁵⁰ and towards the problems created by modern philosophy.

The papal reaction, called a "reign of terror"⁵¹ by modernists culminated in Pius XII's 1950 encyclical *Humani generis*. Inspired by Garrigou-Lagrange, it critiques efforts to "free" dogma from scholastic concepts, and warns against errors flowing from philosophical relativism, which starts with empiricism and positivism.

Modernist and Traditional Definitions of Truth

Although modernists such as Blondel and Laberthonnière rejected immanence as a doctrine (for it implies pantheism), they adopted it as an indispensable *method* to construct their argument for God's existence. Christian apologetics, reasoned Blondel, must begin with our interior life of consciousness and ferret out its demands, and ignore the old "extrinsicist" apologetics which relied on external proofs from the world, and on miracles. As Tyrell put it in 1909, the lay Catholic's place is not just "to receive the faith passively as one receives a traveller's tale of regions beyond his ken, a tale which he repeats to others . . . but with no guarantee of personal experience or conviction."⁵² He detached the truth of the Gospel from historical claims, making the Gospel's "proof its capacity to act as a medium of experience."⁵³ This squared with Bergson's exchange of what he called "the direct perception of the essence of life, the flux of experienced duration,"⁵⁴ for classical realism. God was actually a "continuous

⁵⁰ The necessity of "turning inwards" before "turning outwards" is detailed by J. J. Denier, as cited in Hartley, *Thomistic Revival and the Modernist Era*, 45.

⁵¹ Weisheipl, "The Revival of Thomism as a Christian Philosophy," 178, e.g.

⁵² George Tyrell, *Medievalism*, 3rd revised and enlarged edition in 1909 (Turnbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1994), 59, as quoted in Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians*, 6.

⁵³ Bernard Reardon, "Demythologizing and Catholic Modernism," *Theology* 59 (1956), as cited by Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 378.

⁵⁴ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, as quoted in Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution of Certain Agnostic Antinomies*, Vol. I, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis, Mo.; London: B. Herder Book Co., 1934), 29.

projection” of unceasing change and action, essentially unknowable except through mystical intuition.

Today, the German bishops’ adoption of modernists’ historicist, evolutionary philosophy stems also from their embrace of Hegelian idealism. In an introductory theology text, Cardinal Kasper describes Christianity as an inextricable element in a Heraclitean cosmic dance: “Everything is involved in upheaval and change; hardly anything fixed or solid is left. Not even the Church and its understanding of the faith have escaped this historical transformation.”⁵⁵ The experiential imperative of this view has been taken up recently by the German Catholic Bishops in the Family Synod. Cardinal Marx has pointed to the reality of “life” as constituting a decisive factor in dogma and in this context calls the synod “historically important.”⁵⁶

Opposing the manuals’ abstract apologetics,⁵⁷ Blondel’s idea of truth as “adequation of mind with *life*” was said to appeal to the “whole person,” reflecting the perspectives of cultural and personal history. Not only our knowledge of God, but even our knowledge of being, is subject to a prior “option” or freedom, as Blondel understands it:

We must implicitly place before ourselves the problem of our destiny, and subordinate to option all that we are and all that concerns us. We cannot acquire the notion of being and of beings, except by

⁵⁵ W. Kasper, *Einführung in den Glauben* (Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1972, 4th edition 1975), trans. V. Green as W. Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (Burns and Oates, 1980), 155 (English translations are from this text). Cf. Kasper’s approval of Hegel’s statements: “For Hegel, truth is the whole. ‘But the whole is nothing other than essence consummating itself through its development . . . The True is thus the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk’” (id., 156).

⁵⁶ On quotes from Cardinal Marx, Archbishop of Munich and Chairman of the German Bishops Conference, and Bishop Bode, Bishop of Osnabrück, regarding the synod, see *Rorate Caeli*, 26 February 2015, quoting Regina Einig, *Die Tagespost*, 25 February 2015: “the comments of two of the three bishops chosen as delegates for the synod . . . were made to journalists during the spring meeting of the German bishops’ conference. Below are its main excerpts, with emphases added by us. The main point seems to be the new German Bishops’ attitude of moving on alone, which could indicate that they foresee that they will not be able to ‘guide’ the Synod as easily as they had thought possible. Blackmail is in the air in the German Conference . . .”

⁵⁷ Blondel attempted to avoid skepticism by reasoning that there must be a way out of the immanence of consciousness posited by Kant, and man’s interior life of consciousness must be the point of departure. See Maurice Blondel, *L’action: essai d’une critique de la vie et d’une science de la pratique* (Paris: Alcan and Presses Universitaires de France, 1893).

way of this alternative . . . being becomes known, not before, but after this freedom of choice.⁵⁸

Even metaphysics has its “substance in the will” and has no truth apart from it, for him—Garrigou calls this a metaphysical voluntarism.⁵⁹ Aquinas’s definition of truth as an “adequation” or conformity of the mind with things was deemed static, arid and intellectualist.

Ironically reminiscent of the Cartesian interiority it sought to overcome, Blondel’s method of immanence has the subject reflecting on its own “dynamism” of thought and will, where the believer experiences God as a subject⁶⁰ rather than as a mere object. The will’s ineradicable longing for the infinite, points to an unavoidable “free option”—either to open oneself with humility to the possibility of supernatural revelation, or to refuse, and forfeit the quest for life’s meaning.⁶¹ This choice follows on the primary freedom he spoke of earlier, which he says shapes our knowledge of being. As with James’s pragmatism, ideas are ratified by action, or their success in the world, and remain subjective until such verification.

Effects of the Modernist Notion of Truth

The first effect of the new notion of truth is a misinterpretation of the evolution of dogma. In his 1908 book *The Gospel and the Church*, Loisy made dogmatic definitions relative and variable, related to the form of human knowledge at the time of their creation. He points to the Hellenization of early Jewish Christianity as an example, stating “the dogmas may be divine in origin and substance, but they are human in structure and composition.”⁶² Heaven and hell are no longer understood spatially, for example, and the formula is the mere “auxiliary of faith, the guiding line of thought.”⁶³ For Loisy, concepts are the dress in which immutable judgments are culturally transmitted.

⁵⁸ Id., 436.

⁵⁹ Id., 297, as quoted by Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature*, 37, 34.

⁶⁰ That is, the goal or horizon of all of his acts of knowledge and love.

⁶¹ On Blondel, see, e.g. Gerald McCool, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 45–50.

⁶² Alfred F. Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, trans. Christopher Home, 2nd edition (London, 1908), 210–211. Loisy made revelation a matter of man’s interpretation of his own fluctuating experience, identified religious faith with feeling or sentiment, and discarded traditional causal proofs of God as irrelevant.

⁶³ Id., 224–225.

For le Roy,⁶⁴ dogmas function as rules of practical conduct and not affirmations of truths and objects in themselves. The dogma that “God is personal” means that we “should conduct ourselves in relation to God as we do in relations with others,” while the Resurrection simply means that God’s activity is still at work in the world.⁶⁵

In 1944, Henri Bouillard charged Thomists with near-univocity in their view that we have some access to God’s essence, and he distinguished between “eternal affirmations” about God in dogma, and “temporal representations” conditioned by history and culture.⁶⁶ Although Aristotelian distinctions and terms are not themselves dogmas, for Thomas, the dogmas of transubstantiation and Trinitarian doctrine are nonetheless bound to these concepts.⁶⁷

In its emphasis on cultural concreteness and personal experience, pragmatist truth marginalized speculative theology in favor of *praxis* at all levels. Liberation, feminist, ecological, “Christian” Zen and other ideologies point to this tendency. De Lubac focussed on “mystery,” “paradox” and the unknowable transcendence of God, in contrast to “propositional” theology of the manuals. Some even today view Aquinas’s and Vatican I’s insistence that certain preambles of faith, truths about God, are knowable by natural reason alone, as a kind of presumption or “univocity” which threatens the mystery of divine transcendence and the paradoxes of our encounter with this luminous darkness.⁶⁸

For Aristotle and Aquinas, in contrast, paradox is the mere embrace of contradiction unless it is dissolved by the speculative intellect, and with contradiction, an abyss of disorder is opened. Dogmas, such as that con-

⁶⁴ Le Roy developed views which incited the Dominican Garrigou-Lagrange to take up the cudgels against modernism. The head of Bergson’s school of thought, le Roy applied his Heraclitean revolution in metaphysics to the issue of dogma. “Life,” the *élan vital* or sheer becoming as the first principle of reality, meant agnosticism about transcendence.

⁶⁵ Edouard le Roy, *Dogme et Critique* (Paris 1907), 19–20, 25.

⁶⁶ See Henri Bouillard, “Notions conciliaires et analogie de la vérité,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 254; *Conversion et grace chez S. Thomas d’Aquin: Étude historique, Théologie*, no. 1 (Paris: Aubier, 1944), cited in Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2011), 167. There is also Bouillard’s strange notion (controverted by Garrigou) of the “analogy of truth”—just as being is analogous between God and creature, so is truth. Thus, our truth is only similar to, not identical with truth in God.

⁶⁷ Cf. Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 168.

⁶⁸ The claim of overly positive knowledge of God, and even of univocity, is developed by Hans Boersma’s work on *nouvelle théologie*, for instance: *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*.

cerning marriage, can be altered radically, because the identity of a nature is changeable according to circumstances, desire, or, as the modernists say, “life.” For Aquinas, by contrast, a nature is not an accidental feature of life, but refers to the necessities of the species itself.⁶⁹

The “law of gradualism” follows from this notion of dogma: since moral rightness is conceived to lie with the subject,⁷⁰ we shouldn’t fret about being judged harshly against the natural law. The midterm *relatio* of the 2014 Vatican Synod on the Family introduced the concept as a justification for the admission of the divorced and remarried to Holy Communion, although references to this law were removed from the final *relatio*. The “law of gradualism” refers to the often slow nature of the work of grace, enabling a Christian to grow in virtue (John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 34), whereas the “gradualness of the law” is a false idea that there are “different degrees of forms of precept in God’s law for different individuals and situations.”

The law of gradualism reappears in the 2015 Vatican Synod on the Family *instrumentum laboris* (§121) to justify integrating the divorced and remarried into pastoral life. There is no mention of the fact that confusion of the “law of gradualism” with the “gradualness of the law” can lead to the view that marriage might be redefined according to heterodox criteria. Most modernists insist that the language alone changes, so that we might go out to meet the age,⁷¹ but is a short step to viewing human nature as having “evolved” towards an inclusiveness defined by powerful elites. A sign of the failure of *Humani generis*’s attempt to suppress modernism, is that both versions of the *instrumentum laboris* (2014 and 2015) recom-

⁶⁹ S.Th., II-II, 154, 12. He says, “the order impressed on human nature is prior to and more firm than any subsequently established order—such that sins against nature are more grievous than even the depravity of sacrilege.”

⁷⁰ The midterm *relatio* of the October 2014 Synod drew on the “law of gradualism” but its emphasis on affirming “positive” aspects of irregular unions (including cohabitation and homosexual unions) implied a dependence on the “gradualness of the law” as well.

⁷¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar’s clarion call against tradition begins with *Razing the Bastions: On the Church in this Age*, trans. from the original German (1952) by Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), a text which he stands by until his later career (*Test Everything: Hold Fast to What Is Good* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989) 13). Von Balthasar states “Perhaps she [viz. the Church] continued all too long after the Reformation to hand on the old intellectual framework of the middle ages . . . the Church’s representatives remained immersed in their own tradition . . . the Church’s sidelines-position and self-preoccupation . . .” (*Razing the Bastions*, 18).

mend altering our language about natural law,⁷² and call for the pastoral innovations of “gradualism” and “inclusion” in the continuation of *aggiornamento* of an “inward looking” Church.⁷³

A second result of the modernist notion of truth is that the practical intellect is left on its own to determine the “workable” truths of religion in a secular world. Paradox is no longer seen as the holding together in tension of merely apparent opposites that theoretical reason strives to dissolve. Rather, it means entertaining dichotomies and resolving them by appeal to what appears to “work” for an individual or culture, in a kind of “hermeneutic of discontinuity.” Various familiar false dichotomies, such as “dynamic” and “relevant” social justice vs. dry and rigid Scholasticism; the conciliar vs. the hierarchical; the “outward” vs. the “inward” looking or fortress mentality Church;⁷⁴ the “prophetic” and personal vs. the institutional; “mercy” vs. “judgment;” “openness” and novelty vs. security, au-

⁷² The *instrumentum laboris* for the October 2014 Vatican Synod on the Family calls for a new language to communicate the traditional “natural law”: “The language traditionally used in explaining the term “natural law” should be improved so that the values of the Gospel can be communicated to people today in a more intelligible manner” (Synod of Bishops, *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization, instrumentum laboris* (Vatican City 2014), § 30).

⁷³ The 2014 Synod’s final document, approved by Pope Francis I, reflected the will of its writers more than the discussions of the bishops. The *instrumentum laboris* of the Oct. 2015 synod vaguely recommends “an itinerary of reconciliation or a penitential path under the authority of the [diocesan] bishop,” and only “in situations of irreversible cohabitation,” in line with the final *relatio* of the 2014 Synod (§52). Cf. the §121 of the same *instrumentum laboris*, regarding parishes’ “integration” of the divorced and civilly remarried: “the process [must] be accompanied by raising the sensitivity of the Christian community to receive these persons; and this work be done according to the law of gradualness (cf. *Familiaris consortio*, 34), while respecting the maturation of consciences.”

⁷⁴ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar’s early book, *Razing the Bastions*, a contemptuous rejection of all things Scholastic.

thority, and tradition,⁷⁵ etc., are open warnings against the social dangers of speculative reason and the contemplative order.⁷⁶

A third result of the modernist notion of truth is the embrace of various types of pluralism in Catholic curricula in seminaries and colleges. The modernist triumph over natural theology and a Scholastic method based on a few perennial principles, created what we now experience as an incoherent medley in liturgy, catechesis, morals, and a host of ecumenical and ecclesial initiatives. Hybrid Thomisms with existentialist, Kantian, phenomenological and analytical foundations have come to dominate seminaries and colleges. Garrigou's strict-observance Thomism has given way to the anti-Scholastic, anti-metaphysical approaches in institutions within the Jesuit orbit.⁷⁷

A fourth result concerns mystical theology. Given Blondel's method, we cannot be surprised at the post-conciliar makeover of Christian spirituality. Not only dogma, but Thomistic mystical theology itself, largely promoted by Garrigou-Lagrange and his interlocutors, would, by the Second Vatican Council, be suppressed, and replaced with Protestant imports, such as the charismatic movement and Kantian theologies such as

⁷⁵ Pope Francis I's 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, critiques "pelagian" traditionalists as overly abstract, legalist, emotionally immature, in contrast to those who courageously embrace novelties: id., 93–94. In id., 93, "spiritual worldliness" is defined as the seeking of human glory hiding behind the "appearance of piety." In id., 94, Francis says that this "worldliness" is fueled by "the self-absorbed promethean neo-pelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past. A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism . . ."

⁷⁶ C. S. Lewis was also concerned about modern education's herd mentality, which ensures conformism and discourages creative thought. See, e.g., his *The Abolition of Man* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1943).

⁷⁷ These approaches have increased the already contested divisions in Thomism, from strict-observance textual Thomism of thinkers such as Garrigou-Lagrange, to existentialist Thomists such as the school of Gilson, to the transcendental, Kantian inspired approaches of Lonergan and Rahner, to phenomenological Thomists such as Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II), and the more recent "analytical" Thomism inspired by 20th century philosophy of language. The recent book edited by Craig Paterson and Matthew Pugh, *Analytical Thomism* (London: Ashgate, 2006) has a helpful introduction outlining the field of analytical Thomism. Anscombe, Geach, Haldane, and others use the tools of analytic philosophy to place Aquinas in dialogue with the English-speaking philosophical world. One has only to glance at Lonergan Institute publications across North America (or read Gerald McCool's works, such as *From Unity to Pluralism*) for evidence of the charge of "dry," "rigid," and "static" Thomism applied to Thomists of the "strict observance" such as Garrigou.

those of Lonergan and Rahner. The demand for diversity buried the unity of natural, mystical or ascetic and moral theologies promoted by Garrigou, and the project of reintegration through grafting Greek principles and distinctions onto the enterprise of Christian wisdom was put to a halt by the Council's implementers, more interested in the turn outwards and in subjective experience.⁷⁸

A fifth result was noted by *Humani generis*—a false *irenicism* that ignores the salutary and costly struggle for truth. This could not help but be the case, given the subordination of the intellect to the passions, and to the will that modernists put to play.⁷⁹

Underlying the modernist notion of truth is its confusion of practical and speculative intellects, and of intellect and will, resulting in a clerical intellectual anemia which, by separating thought from action, engages neither God nor life with our full powers.⁸⁰

Gilson and Modernism

Throughout a career of examining the roots and branches of a variegated Scholasticism, Gilson admired lay philosophers' (such as Blondel and Bergson) contributions. While the Magisterium's legislative mandate of classical Thomism was embodied in the work of Garrigou-Lagrange, Gilson increasingly fixed his attention on the principles and doctrines of St. Thomas. Nonetheless, he often stood in the crosshairs of the modernist debates within the Church, as seen, for example, in his correspondence with Henri de Lubac.⁸¹ If Gilson and Maritain had not been laity, Gilson

⁷⁸ The 1950 text of *Humani generis* (largely inspired by Garrigou) was a resurrection of the "syllabus-of-errors approach" to theology. From relativism, several errors (immanentism, subjectivism, agnosticism, etc.) were said to emerge.

⁷⁹ Garrigou notes this blurring of faculties by modernists in his discussion of *Humani generis*: "The structure of the encyclical *Humani generis*," trans. from the Italian *La sintesi tomistica* (Brescia, Queriniana, 1953): 541–554 by A. Aversa.

⁸⁰ Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature*, 39.

⁸¹ For example, Gilson's letter of 8 July 1956 in *Lettres de M. Étienne Gilson adressées au P. du Lubac et commentées par celui-ci*, ed. Henri de Lubac (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1986), 20. The English edition is: *Letters of Étienne Gilson to Henri de Lubac (annotated by Father de Lubac)*, trans. Mary Emily Hamilton (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). An example of his long-standing praise for his mentor Bergson is found in "On Behalf of the Handmaid," in *Theology of Renewal: Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of the Renewal of the Church, Centenary of Canada 1867–1967*, Vol. 1 (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1968), 241. Like Maritain, he praises the metaphysical revival that Bergson's evolutionary thought introduced.

maintained, they would also have been censured, due to their exchange of a systematic Aristotelian Thomist Scholasticism for either historical exegesis (Gilson) or a creative synthesis (Maritain).⁸²

Gilson's castigation of Garrigou-Lagrange's⁸³ "authoritarian Thomism"⁸⁴ which imposed one philosophy as an "official ideology"⁸⁵ of the Church, and which "de-theologized"⁸⁶ Thomas, is less well-known than is his insistence on Aquinas's "theological method" and his advocacy of philosophical pluralism within Scholasticism. Modernist tendencies had gained ground in seminaries due to the adoption of Cartesian manuals which promoted the autonomy of philosophy, which in Cartesian terms meant the exile of theological concerns or the separation of faith and reason. The tendency of some neo-Scholastics to forward a medieval "pure" philosophy (de Wulf) or a Kantian "criteriology" (Mercier) in response to Kant exacerbated the problem for Christian philosophers who intuited the theological font of philosophical wisdom.

Gilson's historical focus and assertion of philosophical pluralism within Scholasticism would seem to reflect sympathy for some aspects of modernism.⁸⁷ Yet at least four factors combine to define his thought as anti-modern: his firm rejection of Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary thought⁸⁸ and of the Louvain school's Kantian response to Cartesianism,⁸⁹

⁸² See *Letters of Étienne Gilson to Henri de Lubac*, 69.

⁸³ As well as that of Sertillanges and Mandonnet.

⁸⁴ Letter 4, in *Letters of Étienne Gilson to Henri de Lubac*, 73.

⁸⁵ Letter 2, in id., 53.

⁸⁶ Letter 9, in id., 105.

⁸⁷ In fact, Gerald McCool (*From Unity to Pluralism*) used Gilson's assertion of pluralism in order to create the impression that Gilson rejected Pope Leo XIII's call for a return to a "unitary system" supposedly promoted by *Aeterni Patris*. On this issue, see *Thomistic Papers VI*. In fact, Leo XIII recommended not a unitary system but the "way" of philosophizing of those who to the study of philosophy unite obedience to the Christian faith. On this topic in Gilson, see "What is Christian Philosophy?" in *A Gilson Reader*, ed. Anton Pegis (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Image Book, 1957), 186.

⁸⁸ And his eventual rejection of Bergson's Heracliteanism. Gilson maintained that Bergson revitalized metaphysics, and had a "naturally religious soul as did Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus" but that his anti-intellectualism impeded his grasp of dogma and made a Christian God and Christian philosophy impossible (*The Philosopher and Theology*, trans. Cécile Gilson (New York: Random House, 1962), 135, 137–139, 144). There are two chapters in *The Philosopher and Theology* ("The Bergson Affair" and "Wisdom Takes a Holiday") devoted to the analysis of Bergson.

⁸⁹ Gilson rejected "critical realism" and argued for "common sense" realism in *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986, French original 1983). On a comparison of Garrigou, Gilson, and Maritain on

the priority given to revealed theology as a guide for philosophy, and his rejection of Pope Paul VI's call for a "new" approach to the five ways.⁹⁰ His later career, moreover, was darkened by an "anti-modernist gloom" heightened by his inability to combat the naïve myth of a post-conciliar "renewed Church."⁹¹

The responsibility for the tragedy of modernism within the Church, Gilson argued, lay at the feet of Suarezian-Thomist manuals, which transmitted a "dull rationalism" linked to deism, easier to teach than the authentic Aquinas:⁹² "The rotten theology promulgated by its opponents was in large part responsible for modernism's errors."⁹³ But the cure for modernism does not lie in a Scholastic "synthesis" or unitary system,⁹⁴ reasoned Gilson, but rather in a return to Thomas's theology and his "theological method." Like his medieval contemporaries, Aquinas did not develop an independent philosophy, but harvested the fruits of reason guided by revelation and theology, which in turn guaranteed philosophy's progress and fecundity.⁹⁵ Only a Christian can fully understand Thomas's philosophy,

the topic of critical realism, see Jason West, "Gilson, Maritain and Garrigou-Lagrange on the Possibility of Critical Realism" *Études maritainiennes/Maritain Studies* 17 (2001): 49–69.

⁹⁰ See Gilson, "On Behalf of the Handmaid," 237: "Particularly disturbing is the obligation laid upon us by the Pope to find a 'new affirmation' of God. For indeed, if the old ones are not convincing, what chance have we to discover a more convincing one?" He also argues that instead of altering language, we should recognize that it is not the "handmaid's" responsibility to teach minds incapable of metaphysics the meaning of metaphysical terms (id., 245). There are, of course, many other indications of his anti-modern tendencies.

⁹¹ Henri de Lubac likened Gilson to an elderly, eccentric curmudgeon in Letter 18 of *Letters of Étienne Gilson to Henri de Lubac*, 167. One of his main concerns was the new translation of the Nicene Creed, which dropped the term "consubstantial" as arcane. Without Thomistic metaphysical underpinnings, Gilson argued, systematic theology foundered. See Letter 13, in id., 146–148.

⁹² Letter 9, in id., 105.

⁹³ Letter 1, in id., 23–24.

⁹⁴ Étienne Gilson, "Historical Research and the Future of Scholasticism," *Modern Schoolman* 29 (1951): 6.

⁹⁵ Id., 8–9: "The future of Scholasticism . . . is by bringing philosophy under its influence that medieval theology has liberated metaphysics from physics without enslaving it to itself . . . it is by tending towards this heaven of faith that metaphysics achieves its own liberty and realizes its true equilibrium." In this article, Gilson defends two theses. First, that the separation of philosophy from theology in the study of medieval thought ends by reducing Scholastic philosophy "into a general technique that becomes increasingly poorer in originality and, in the end, identifies itself with the philosophy of Aristotle as seen by Avicenna or Averroes" (id., 5), and second, that interpreting medieval philosophies within their natal theologies guarantees their originality, for Western philosophy's progress in the Middle Ages was secured by its status as an instrument of theology (id., 6).

since his most profound and original ideas flow from a theological source.⁹⁶

Finally, Gilson grappled with Thomism's relevance to modernity (and by implication, with modernism) in chapter four of *The Spirit of Thomism*, entitled "Living Thomism."⁹⁷ While the principles and doctrines of Aquinas are both perennial and vital, Thomists must strive to apply his thought to contemporary issues, after the manner of Aquinas himself, and in the creative manner of Maritain.⁹⁸

Thomist Solutions to the Identity Problem

Retrieval of the Speculative Order: Truth and Dogma

Modernists depart from classical realism by viewing truth as the verification of ideas in the realm of experience—we "make" truth when we see an idea's tendency to "work" in a certain context. Optimism, for instance, is "more" true than pessimism since cheerfulness helps the mountain climber leap over a chasm. For the father of modernism, Henri Bergson, there are no natures, only events, and we modify our beliefs in a process of *inventing* truth to *use* reality, in a way similar as we make mechanical devices to harness nature.⁹⁹ So the truth of dogma is measured by its practical advantage.¹⁰⁰ Contemplation loses its character of an end, for there is no science of "useless" things—truth is what is made or done¹⁰¹—desirable goods to be achieved by the practical intellect.

⁹⁶ Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, 210–211.

⁹⁷ See Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Thomism* (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1964, reprinted: New York: Harper and Row Torchbooks, 1966). On the chapter entitled "Living Thomism," see Victor Brezick, "Maritain and Gilson on the Question of a Living Thomism," in *Thomistic Papers VI*, 1–28.

⁹⁸ Gilson, *The Spirit of Thomism*, 100. As is well-known, Gilson did object to Maritain's reliance on "corrupt" interpreters such as John of St. Thomas and Cajetan, however.

⁹⁹ Henri Bergson, "Sur le pragmatisme de William James, vérité et réalité," preface to James's *Pragmatism*, trans. E. LeBrun (Paris: Flammarion, 1911), as cited in Armand Maurer, "A Thomist Looks at William James's Notion of Truth," *Monist* 57 (1973): 164.

¹⁰⁰ William James, *The Meaning of Truth* (New York: Longmans, 1909), 174. The truth of the idea of "tigers in India," for instance, is measured by its efficiency in our experience with real tigers (id., 44–45). As Maurer notes ("A Thomist Looks at William James's Notion of Truth," 159), aesthetic, moral and theoretical propositions have truth for James when they "cohere" with objects, a consistency that is registered by "theoretic delight."

¹⁰¹ That is, *operabiles*. True ideas for James reap profit in our concrete lives.

But in fact not all truth is “conformity to right desire,”¹⁰² nor is all truth directed to action. Aquinas says that in practical truth, the rectitude of the will determines one’s moral choice and vision. But in speculative truth, the mind and will are *not* the measure of things—rather, the reverse is the case.¹⁰³ God’s mind measures and is not measured; the human mind is both measured and a measure.¹⁰⁴ The will can help direct the mind to reality, and can remove obstacles to our focus on the truth, but does not specify reality’s content. Modernists confuse speculative and practical intellects and their objects, as well as the interplay of intellect and will.

Aquinas’s account of truth corrects these errors. He combined truth as the essence of a thing (its determinate nature) and as the relation of a thing to a knowing intellect, and asserted the priority of the Divine Mind as the source of all truth. Our intellects are essentially receptive, and only accidentally creative in acts of making and doing. Unlike God, we do not create *ex nihilo*, and so are the source of neither a thing’s being nor its truth—we change nothing in the act of knowing. A house, for example, is related essentially to the architect’s mind because he makes it.¹⁰⁵ But even though Sacred Doctrine and dogma are partly practical (not just speculative), they are not artifacts, and so are not essentially dependent on our minds. Dogma is practical only as ordaining us through our actions, to God.¹⁰⁶

Beings exist in three ways: in God’s mind, in things, or in our mind.¹⁰⁷ Truth occurs when the mind, which operates in a vital immanent act, “becomes” the thing after its own mode, and compares two acts of existence in a judgment. The mind achieves the truth when two modes of existence are set side by side and compared, viz., a thing’s extra-mental and its intra-mental being. Truth for Aquinas is thus in a reflective judgment, which involves combining or dividing concepts—the proposition

¹⁰² Whereas James places all truth on the side of conformity to desire, practical truth for Aquinas concerns conformity to “right desire,” and practical truth is only one aspect of truth in general. On Aquinas’s definition of practical truth, see S.Th., I-II, 57, 5, ad 3. Cf. Garigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature*, 43.

¹⁰³ Aquinas, *De Ver.*, I, 2; *In 1 Ethic.* 1, 1, 1–2.

¹⁰⁴ *De Ver.*, I, 2.

¹⁰⁵ S.Th., I, 16, 1.

¹⁰⁶ S.Th., I, 1, 4.

¹⁰⁷ *De Ver.*, 21, 2, 4, ad 4. Cf. Gerald Phelan, “*Verum Sequitur Esse Rerum*,” in *G. B. Phelan, Collected Papers*, ed. Arthur G. Kirn (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967), 144. In creating, God produces and establishes an essential relation or dependence of things on Him.

about this being that, or this being not that, is borne out as factual or not, in the world.¹⁰⁸ Judgment and concepts work together to form the relation of truth in the mind.

For modernists, the concepts and language in which dogma is presented are changeable. Dogmas' immutability stemmed from the judgment about *x* or *y* being the case. This is the reverse of Aquinas's view that judgments do not attain immutability while concepts are merely their changing "representations." The modernist account of the traditional theory of truth also involves the straw man fallacy, by instituting the copy theory whereby we know concepts, not extra-mental reality—in brief, a representationalism at home with a pluralism of philosophies and theologies. Through its focus on judgment and existence, Aquinas's realism, on the other hand, is closer to a unitary philosophical method because it reaches the nonnegotiable truth of things.¹⁰⁹ Limiting knowledge to our concepts breeds relativism, which precludes a universal system of philosophy.¹¹⁰ Ray Dennehy has convincingly argued against the possibility of a plurality of Thomisms on the basis that such a view would require the antithesis of realism.¹¹¹

Aquinas insists that truth is not our creature, because it is based on the reality of things, as well as on the creative power of the Divine Mind. We are not creators of being, but can share in the Self-knowledge of God

¹⁰⁸ On truth as being in the judgment in an act of comparing two modes of existence, see, e.g., S.Th., I, 85, 5, ad 3; De Ver., I, 3c. This is treated by Phelan in "*Verum Sequitur Esse Rerum*," 144–145, e.g.

¹⁰⁹ The link between representationalism and pluralism, and between classical realism and a unitary philosophical method (Thomism) is found in R. Dennehy, "The Philosophical Catbird Seat: A Defense of Maritain's *Philosophia Perennis*," in *The Future of Thomism*, ed. Deal Hudson (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 65–76. Representationalism, he argues, is unable to procure a unitary method, because its criterion of truth is the conformity of one concept to another (the "representation" of a real thing), a view which makes the mind the measure of the real, not vice-versa.

¹¹⁰ Since natural wisdom is embodied, Aquinas's perennial philosophy is the result of various historical strands, but takes its point of departure in things, which are the mind's measure.

¹¹¹ In a representationalist epistemology, "being is walled in by concepts," and "you can never get into the catbird seat which would allow you to compare your concept with the object it allegedly expresses to see if the former is a veridical expression of the latter. The concept of the object and the object of the concept have become one!" (Dennehy, "The Philosophical Catbird Seat," 71). Consideration of the possibility of a unitary scholastic method is also found in the various contributions to John X. Knasas' *Thomistic Papers VI*, in a critique of Gerald McCool's *From Unity to Pluralism*.

when studying theology. In this way, the truth of dogma joins us to the immutable divine life.¹¹²

Our speculative intellect's nobility stems from two qualities. First, it extends to all reality, and in a certain sense he says, it becomes "all in all" because it knows universals, and is analogous to God in whom all things exist.¹¹³ Second, all practical action is based on the speculative intellect's access to truth. Speculative reason "becomes" practical when what is true is desired as good, and put into action.¹¹⁴ Speculative truth is the foundation of the building on which conformity to right desire is built, just as the knowledge of being precedes free choice.¹¹⁵

Contemplation, Affectivity, and the Unity of Wisdoms

Maritain knew that the integration of wisdoms is natural, since metaphysics opens into mysticism in its desire for union with the infinite,¹¹⁶ and the Church's prayer is sustained by thought, as interwoven with dogma. In this way, according to Romano Guardini and Benedict XVI, the heart is guided and purified by the mind.¹¹⁷ The dovetailing of mystical and

¹¹² See, e.g., the opening pages of the *Summa Theologiae*, where Aquinas describes the functions of *sacra doctrina*: It is salvific: "man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth" (S.Th., I, 1, 1); it proceeds from the science of God and the blessed (S.Th., I, 1, 2); it helps join us to God and has a practical dimension of ushering us into eternal bliss (S.Th., I, 1, 4–5); and the wisdom it contains transcends natural theology by treating of God "so far as He is known to Himself alone and revealed to others" (S.Th., I, 1, 6).

¹¹³ De Ver., 2, 2; S.Th., I, 80, 1, quoting De Div. Nom., 5, 1. Cf. Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth: "The Truth of All Things" and "Reality and the Good"* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989; original German editions: 1966, 1963), 84–85. At S.Th., I, 76, 5, ad 4, Aquinas says that "because the spiritual soul can grasp universal essences, it has a potential unto infinity."

¹¹⁴ S.Th., I, 79, 11, sed contra. See Pieper, *Living the Truth*, 143.

¹¹⁵ The analogy of the foundation and the rest of the building is taken from Pieper, *Living the Truth*, 143.

¹¹⁶ Jacques Maritain, "The Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," in Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite, or The Degrees of Knowledge*, 4th edition, trans. Gerald Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 255–289. Maritain called this feature of metaphysics its "hyper-finality."

¹¹⁷ Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, original ed. 1918), ch. 1. Cardinal Ratzinger warned of the dangers of false dogmas masquerading as authentic Catholic prayer in his *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation* (15 October 1989). In particular, he writes: "Pope John Paul II has pointed out to the whole Church the example and doctrine of St. Teresa of Avila who in her life had to reject the temptation of certain methods which proposed a leav-

religious contemplation occurs throughout Aquinas's treatise on the contemplative life (S.Th., II-II, 179-182), where we learn that all types of contemplation unite in their First Principle, Whose loving gaze seeks our own.¹¹⁸

Aquinas's schema of types of wisdom quells the modernist complaint that his idea of truth ignores the richness denoted by the concept of "life." Texts on eternal life, for example, contain a seamless blend of natural, revealed and supernatural wisdoms. Eternal life, he says, refers primarily to God Himself as immutable truth and love.¹¹⁹ Since knowing is our chief operation, knowing *is* life in the best sense.¹²⁰ His syllogism is as follows: "Since intellectual understanding is living activity, and to understand is to live, it follows that to understand an eternal reality is to live with an eternal life. But God is an eternal reality, and so to understand and see God is eternal life."¹²¹ Our path of eternal life is through the goodness of Christ bestowed through His Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection, and made present in the sacraments.¹²²

ing aside of the humanity of Christ in favor of a vague self-immersion in the abyss of divinity" (id., 34, n. 12).

¹¹⁸ S.Th., II-II, 179, 3, ad 1 and ad 3. Cf. Heather McAdam Erb, "Pati Divina: Mystical Union in Aquinas," in *Faith, Scholarship and Culture in the 21st Century*, ed. Alice Ramos, Marie I. George (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 78.

¹¹⁹ John 17:3: "Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." The High Priestly Prayer is found in John 17, where our Lord says that eternal life for man is know the Father and the Son.

¹²⁰ In 17 Joann. lect. 1, §2186. Since the intellect actively knows by being united with its object, perfect understanding involves eternal life.

¹²¹ Id.

¹²² The way to the eternal life which is the enjoyment of God, or Life Itself, is through Christ, as Aquinas states in the Prologue to the *Summa's* Tertia Pars: "Forasmuch as our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), as the angel announced, showed unto us in His own Person the way of truth, whereby we may attain to the bliss of eternal life by rising again, it is necessary . . . that after considering the last end of human life, and the virtues and vices, there should follow the consideration of the Saviour of all, and of the benefits bestowed by Him on the human race. Considering this we must consider 1) the Saviour Himself, 2) the sacraments . . . 3) the end of immortal life . . ." An excellent treatment of the relation of the Incarnation, Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ to the sacraments as means of salvation, is found in Thomas Weinandy, "The Human Acts of Christ and the Acts That Are the Sacraments," in *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario, O.P.*, ed. Reinhard Hutter and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 150-168.

For Aquinas, *contemplatio* is an analogous term, referring to three levels of intellectual vision: natural, revealed, and mystical or properly supernatural contemplation—all of which require the speculative intellect. These three wisdoms converge in their focus on God, whether as First Cause of being, in the natural contemplation which is the work of philosophy, as the fruit of theological study, where God is known from revealed principles, through the imperfect medium of faith, or in mystical contemplation, where the soul, infused with charity, shares in God's inner life through a supernatural mode.¹²³ So, the unity of wisdoms is founded on an analogous sense of contemplation in Aquinas.¹²⁴

The modernist focus on our practical and affective nature finds its answer, ironically, in the nature of speculative theology. Far from being a detached, wooden discourse, theology borrows from God's own knowledge in the data of revelation.¹²⁵ Our experiences are studied only in relation to God (*sub ratione Dei*), as principle or as end.¹²⁶ But theology also has a practical dimension, as ordered to the perfect attainment of charity.¹²⁷ But we don't "do" theology—God is not at our disposal. Rather, we situate ourselves in relation to Him, our Origin and End.¹²⁸ Contemplation involves the will, since beatitude involves due order to the end: "Attaining

¹²³ On the distinction of three types of contemplation, see Erb, "*Pati Divina: Mystical Union in Aquinas*," 79–80. On the division of theology into natural and revealed, see In de Trin., 5, 4, ad 7. On the *philosophi* vs. the *sancti*, see I Sent., Prol. (Erb, "*Pati Divina: Mystical Union in Aquinas*," 80, n. 36). On mystical contemplation, whose term is in the appetite, see S.Th., II–II, 180, 1 (Erb, "*Pati Divina: Mystical Union in Aquinas*," 80, n. 37).

¹²⁴ Cf. Erb, "*Pati Divina: Mystical Union in Aquinas*," 79–80. On the distinction between the contemplation of the *philosophi* and the *sancti*, see In I Sent., Prol. On the distinction of natural and revealed theology, see In de Trin., 5, 4, ad 7. Although theology grasps God "in Himself," this is not quidditative knowledge, since neither in this life nor the next will we exhaust knowledge of God. Only in the beatific vision will we have knowledge of God "through His own essence" but we remain finite, so cannot contain it in its fullness. Cf. John Wippel, "Quidditative knowledge of God," in John Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, Vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 215–241.

¹²⁵ This refers to the theory of "subordination" of sciences. Theology borrows its first principles from the knowledge of God and the blessed. See In I Sent., Prol., a. 3; In Boeth. De Trin., 2, 2, ad 5. Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, "St. Thomas Aquinas: Theologian and Mystic," *Nova et vetera* 4:1 (2006): 4.

¹²⁶ S.Th., I, 1, 7. On this, see Torrell, "St. Thomas Aquinas: Theologian and Mystic," 4.

¹²⁷ "The ultimate end of this *doctrina* is the contemplation of the first truth in the fatherland" (In I Sent. Prologue, a. 3, in Torrell, "St. Thomas Aquinas: Theologian and Mystic," 5).

¹²⁸ See Torrell, "St. Thomas Aquinas: Theologian and Mystic," 5.

happiness depends on the will, in its first movement of love, its hope which causes the search, and in delight resulting from perfect union.”¹²⁹

Not surprisingly, the will and passions find their fulfilment in mystical theology. Mystical contemplation is a connatural or “lived” knowledge of divine things springing from the Gift of wisdom. By this Gift, Aquinas says that the soul has a certain passivity, and “suffers the things of God” (*pati divina*), and tastes the sweetness of His inner life.¹³⁰ The principle and term of this experiential knowledge is in the appetite,¹³¹ a contact with Christ as “the Word breathing forth Love,” in a “loving knowledge” whose effect is to “melt hardness of hearts”¹³² and to transform our judgment of human actions.

So while it belongs to natural wisdom to judge correctly about divine things, supernatural wisdom produces a judgment by the conformity of our nature to them. This wisdom’s cause and term are in the appetite, through charity, and this practical aspect marks spiritual wisdom as the “true pragmatism” in the words of Garrigou.¹³³ Here, the will and appetite are transformed, and even our desires are regulated by the light of faith—but both faith and our natural knowledge of God precede the spiritual experience of the Gifts.¹³⁴

The integration of philosophical and theological wisdom, we have seen, takes place not only on a theoretical, but on a concrete level. The truth about God which reason investigates is a knowledge on which our very salvation depends, says Thomas.¹³⁵ And when we love the revealed truths of faith, or have the “prompt will to believe,” we will turn to philosophy, and study the truth from every angle, to see if some reasons for it

¹²⁹ S.Th., I–II, 4, 3–4. See Heather M. Erb, “The Mountain and the Valley: Medieval Orderings of Contemplation and Action,” in *Human Nature, Contemplation & The Political Order: Essays Inspired by Jacques Maritain’s ‘Scholasticism and Politics’*, ed. Peter Koritansky (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 214.

¹³⁰ S.Th., II–II, 45, 2. On this topic, see Erb, “*Pati Divina*: Mystical Union in Aquinas,” 78ff. Aquinas derives this type of wisdom here (*sapientia*) from the word “taste” (*sapor*): S.Th., II–II, 45, 2 and ad 1.

¹³¹ S.Th., I–II, 180, 1. Cf. Erb, “*Pati Divina*: Mystical Union in Aquinas,” 80.

¹³² On the effects of love as a passion, see S.Th., I–II, 38, 5. Cf. Erb, “*Pati Divina*: Mystical Union in Aquinas,” 85.

¹³³ Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature*, 42.

¹³⁴ Id., 43.

¹³⁵ In *Meta.*, Prol., as quoted by Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas and the Renewal of Metaphysics,” in Lawrence Dewan, *Wisdom, Law and Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 168.

can be found.¹³⁶ The Gifts of the Spirit join philosophical and theological wisdoms to the deepest center of our life, and in the movement of descent¹³⁷ God enters into the heart of humanity. Our identity forged through the integration of wisdoms is growth in charity and detachment—of humble, earthly dwellings, not a worldly Christendom.¹³⁸ In contrast to modernism's excesses, we need passivity for spiritual progress in the Gifts, and a glimpse of the emptiness of our soul's natural powers in comparison with the plenitude of grace. With John of the Cross, the soul is led to its hiding place in God, Who leads it by the hand, away from its autonomous agency and into supernatural wisdom.¹³⁹

Objective Worship and Catholic Formation

In contrast to paranormal and therapeutic varieties of spirituality, Catholic identity is expressed in objective worship. This worship is objective for three reasons. First, worship is an act of the virtue of religion, itself an ontological relation. Worship signifies the correct order within being by reflecting the orientation of rational creatures towards God through the primary internal acts (devotion and prayer) and secondary external acts (sacrifice, ceremony, ritual) of religion.¹⁴⁰

Second, worship is objective as gearing the creature towards divine transcendence, by awakening contemplation and love within him. Because its purpose is the sanctification of men and the glory of God, worship is less a subjective expression of sentiment than it is a conformity of the members of the Body of Christ to the divine mysteries. Natural reason dictates that we should revere God through acts by which we are ordered to Him in a "becoming manner." Worship involves the doctrine of creation, for it is neither mere self-expression nor ponderous legalism, but reflects

¹³⁶ S.Th., II-II, 2, 10.

¹³⁷ Maritain refers to the movements of "ascent" and "descent" in his discussion of the various Christian wisdoms, as well as of pagan wisdoms, in Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, 3–33.

¹³⁸ Id., 130–133.

¹³⁹ John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, II, 16, as found in *The Dark Night of the Soul, a Spiritual Canticle, and the Living Flame of Love of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. David Lewis (London: Thomas Baker, 2nd edition, 1891).

¹⁴⁰ Even the three definitions of religion Aquinas considers reflect its objective character, as a pondering of divine things through reading (Cicero: *re-lego*), as a continual conversion and choice of God above all (Augustine: *re-eligo*), and as a binding of oneself back to God (*re-ligo*): S.Th., II-II, 81, 1. Cf. Joseph Bobik, *Veritas Divina: Aquinas on Divine Truth* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 53–59.

that part of justice by which we deign to give God His due¹⁴¹ as a Father, Who begets and governs, as the First Principle and Governor of creation.¹⁴²

Worship thus deals with the means to revere God as our final end by proportioning ourselves to the degree we can, to His excellence. Pseudo-Dionysius teaches that Scripture and liturgy are the principal means by which we ascend to the “simple ray of Light itself” Who is the Father of Lights (James 1:17). This Light “grants to creatures the power to rise up, so far as they may, toward itself,” by being “upliftingly concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the Providence of the Father adapts to our nature as human beings.”¹⁴³ Although absolute equality is absent, equality “in consideration” still exists, in terms of “man’s ability and God’s acceptance.”¹⁴⁴ So, as a moral virtue, religion is a “mean” exercised in fitting worship rituals, prayer and devotion. These acts presuppose meditation and contemplation, since every act of the will proceeds from a good understood, since the will arises from the intelligence.¹⁴⁵ Love is awakened by this consideration undertaken by the mind, blocking presumption so we might lean on God’s strength.¹⁴⁶

The purpose of worship is reiterated by Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). A dialectical relation between liturgy and Catholic identity exists. As a work of redemption, liturgy both nourishes and assumes our identity. Yet liturgy is equally the clearest expression of the mystery of Christ, as both human and divine, active and contemplative, immediate and mediating, showing forth the members of the Body of Christ as in yet not of this world—a sign lifted up among the nations (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2). The sacraments and sacramentals, the divine office, the liturgical year, and the Church’s art and music,¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ See S.Th., II–II, 81, 2.

¹⁴² S.Th., II–II, 81, 3.

¹⁴³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 121B–C, as found in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, *Classics of Western Spirituality Series* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 146. In the Dionysian tradition, liturgy is a ceremonial reflection of the cosmic hierarchy.

¹⁴⁴ S.Th., II–II, 81, 5, ad 3.

¹⁴⁵ S.Th., II–II, 82, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Id.

¹⁴⁷ That is, the elements of the Church’s public worship.

emanate from this eternal font to illumine the faithful,¹⁴⁸ while devotion and prayer accomplish their ends through Scriptural meditation and petition in acts of the will and practical intellect.¹⁴⁹ Worship is also deepened by natural contemplation of God, perfecting our nature by joining the beautiful and the true.

Third, worship is objective in its end of sanctifying individuals and society. Being “holy” or “sanctified” entails being made clean as “*sanguine tinctus*,” sprinkled with blood¹⁵⁰ and strong, as backed by the divine law. Through worship, the mind becomes pure as directed towards God (as opposed to earthly things), and strong as unchangeable in adhering to God as its ultimate end.¹⁵¹ Worship sanctifies through signs and language which train the passions and appetites on God, which themselves prod the will to direct our minds heavenwards. So without the acts of religion, the internal ordering of appetites, passions, intellect and will, the moral virtues are weakened and even civic order evaporates.¹⁵² Without religion, the other virtues would not be directed towards the glory of God, says Aquinas.¹⁵³ Thus, as a key element of Catholic identity, worship orders the will to its proper object, God as the universal good, expanding our moral vision, and that of society as a whole. Eucharistic Adoration and processions are such neglected exercises in prayer and evangelization.

Conclusion

In the name of experience and historical consciousness, various forms of Catholic modernism celebrate pluralism by rejecting Scholasticism as a basis for theology. In the process, modernism also suppresses the speculative intellect, jeopardizes the immutability of dogma, and ejects

¹⁴⁸ The public acts of the Church’s worship are detailed in the Second Vatican Council’s document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

¹⁴⁹ Aquinas distinguishes the external and internal acts of worship, and explains the way in which devotion is preparatory to prayer, and prayer is primarily an act of petition by the practical intellect: S.Th., II–II, 83, 3, ad 1 (on devotion as an act of will), and id., II–II, 83, 1 (on prayer). On these topics, see Lawrence Dewan, “Philosophy and Spirituality: Cultivating a Virtue,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (November 1993): 25–30.

¹⁵⁰ In ancient times the purified were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrificial animal.

¹⁵¹ S.Th., II–II, 81, 8. See Bobik, *Veritas Divina*, 57–58.

¹⁵² So, Kevin E. O’Reilly, O.P., argues convincingly that worship is the condition of both civic order and the correct use of reason, in “The Significance of Worship in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas: Some Reflections,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 53:4 (2013): 453–462.

¹⁵³ S.Th., II–II, 81, 1, ad 1.

much of traditional spirituality that is our Catholic patrimony. On the other hand, Thomistic contemplation, mystical theology and worship are bound by a traditional notion of truth that can help us respond to the yearning for affectivity, paradox, and lived truth in a way that transcends the pitfalls of modernist subjectivism and relativism. Gilson's anti-modern stance is based on his affirmation of perennial Thomistic principles, but his emphasis on the "theological method" and his appreciation of the diversity within Scholasticism¹⁵⁴ distance him from less historical, more Aristotelean Neo-Scholastics.

Greek metaphysical principles provide continuity between natural, revealed, and mystical theology in Aquinas, as seen in his texts on eternal life. The perennial philosophy's versatile stability adds a breadth and depth which enables his followers to avoid the modernist theological disorientation and its disastrous pastoral consequences, which finally sees Christianity as a currency invented to maximize our experiences' cash-value.

The richness of Aquinas's thought that suits it as a template for theology flows from its Scriptural, Patristic, and Greek roots. Grounded in the world of being, these roots ensure contact with perennial problems, permitting Thomists to handle the fertile soil of life in which the passions and the will can grow and flourish. With the help of philosophy, Aquinas proved himself to be the theologian of his own Inaugural Lecture—a radiant and pure defense upon the mountains and a channel for grace within the Church.

MODERNISM AND THE GROWING CATHOLIC IDENTITY PROBLEM: THOMISTIC REFLECTIONS AND SOLUTIONS

SUMMARY

Philosophical forces gathered in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Catholic Modernism have crystallized into theological views which permeate the antinomian atmosphere in the Church today, resulting in an ongoing Catholic identity problem, both within the Church and in relation to the world. In place of the perennial philosophy and its contemplative ideal, many now welcome the incoherence of broad philosophical and theological pluralism, while pastoral practice is infused with the fruits of pragmatism and the rhetoric of false

¹⁵⁴ The various Scholastic systems, in particular, those of Aquinas, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, and Suarez, are all treated in depth by Gilson in degrees of similitude to the truths grasped by St. Thomas.

dichotomies (justice/mercy, intellectual/pastoral, tradition/living faith, speculative truth/charity, for example). To reverse this anti-intellectual course, rehabilitation of Aquinas's positions on the primacy of the speculative order and contemplative charism, his integration of natural, revealed and mystical wisdoms, and his sense of objective worship, is needed. A brief account of the robust role of philosophy in the Church's mission and of Gilson's nuanced position on the encounter of Thomism and Modernism supports this assertion.

KEYWORDS: Catholic Modernism, Catholic identity, Aquinas, Gilson, Garrigou-Lagrange, Blondel, perennial philosophy, worship, pluralism, speculative truth, pragmatism, Leo XIII, Pius X, Pius XII, John Paul II, *Aeterni Patris*, *Dei Filius*, *Humani Generis*, *Fides et Ratio*, manualists, gradualism, Scholasticism, contemplation, dogma, mystical theology, Vatican Synod on the Family.

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**THE LURE OF PANTHEISM:
ITS EVANGELICAL FLOWERING AND
WORLD-WIDE DESIGNS**

Though we may not have realized it, Pantheism’s appeal has been nurtured in recent decades. In 1975 the Universal Pantheist Society was established, and in 1999 a break-away group, proudly calling itself the World Pantheist Movement, demonstrated that the number of pantheists was obviously increasing.¹ Arguably, pantheists have existed for most of Western history. But with the existence of the internet and social media, the pantheistically-inclined have been able to organize, communicate, and support each other, and, most importantly, spread the details of their world-view with an evangelical zeal.

If we can think of pantheism as an answer to a question, I find it intriguing to identify the question that it answers; actually, to identify the several questions that could have generated this broadly-understood world-view. Is pantheism an effort to replace theism? To attack it? Or is it more benign, simply an effort to admire nature? Maybe pantheists wish to explore the concept of infinity, or seek to conceptualize an immanent God. Is it connected to environmentalism? Or, is there even enough consensus among pantheists for any of these questions to be answered?

Even though the boundary lines distinguishing one pantheist from another are porous, one tenet is clear for everyone: God is nature, and nature is God. But, why would anyone wish to say this? Clearly those who

¹ The website of the World Pantheist Movement (WPM) is available at: www.pantheism.net, accessed on July 29, 2015. There, WPM reports that there are “tens of thousands of supporters” worldwide who self-identify as pantheists.

are committed to the dominant Western religious systems, systems that believe God transcends His creation, will not identify God as nature; they will not say that God *is* nature. Admittedly there are Christian beliefs that may suggest some sort of identity, e.g., that God is present in His creation by His power or by His continuous creation, that God is present in the souls of the baptized. And one may even quote St. Paul from Acts 17:28: “In Him we live and move and have our being.”² We thus have our first question thrust upon us: What is identity, or, what can the identification of God and nature mean? And a second follows closely: Why should transcendence, in the sense of complete otherness, be rejected? Such rejection is especially curious among Western thinkers, in that transcendence is basic to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In addition, if everything is identified with God-as-nature, how is particularity to be explained?

In my optimistic search to clarify pantheism, I am employing these three basic questions as points of comparison: (1) the question of identity, (2) the question of the rejection of transcendence, (3) and the question of accounting for particularity. To address the genesis of the ideas so widespread online, I have gone back to earlier, weightier expositions of pantheism; specifically, to key expositors like Giordano Bruno (*Concerning the Cause, Principle, and One*), Benedict Spinoza (*Ethics*), John Toland (*Pantheisticon* and *Letters to Serena*), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (selections from various essays). Writings of these individual pantheists, who lived respectively in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, reveal some seemingly tenuous connections, connections that nonetheless help by revealing what pantheism has considered essential. What I offer here, first, is a highlighting of key ideas of each of these four individuals in order to uncover connections; then, I propose a synthesis of their related ideas.

Giordano Bruno

For Bruno, everything is One—the universe or God (they are used synonymously). The very title of his most representative text is a list of three names assigned, i.e., Cause, Infinity, and One. Everything is also called *Substance*. In short, Substance is. Whatever is is Substance. Bruno frequently employs this Aristotelian term, although he modifies its mean-

² The Latin Vulgate expresses it unequivocally: “in ipso enim vivimus et movemur et sumus.” The Vulgate is available at: www.perseus.tufts.edu/collections, accessed on July 29, 2015.

ing in his various disagreements with the *Physics*. There is only one Substance, an infinite Substance; *finite substance*, for Bruno, is a contradiction in terms. But we find Aristotle's distinction of matter and form here also, yet undergoing some change (almost a transmutation if not a transmutation). His Substance is made up of prime matter, meaning passive potency, and universal form, which means *world-soul* and *universal intellect*; and there is a total correlation between the two. God is the absolute identity of these two principles. Further, because these two principles are also named Substance, God is Substance, and Substance is God. The steps of Bruno's reasoning follow a pathway such as this:

1. If man seeks an Infinite, then an Infinite must exist.
2. If an Infinite exists, it must be knowable to some extent.
3. Therefore, if man seeks an Infinite, then an Infinite must be knowable to some extent.
4. Either God is knowable or the universe (God's creation) is knowable.
5. God is not knowable.
6. Therefore, the universe is knowable.
7. Assume: There is nothing outside God and God's creation.
8. If the universe is knowable, then the universe is the Infinite sought by man.
9. (#6)
10. Therefore, the universe is the Infinite sought by man.
11. But God is Infinite, and there can be only one Infinite.
12. Therefore, God is the universe, and the universe is God.

His reason for postulating this Infinite lies in his reading of human nature. Man forever and inexorably seeks knowledge and the good, but these goals can never be fully and satisfactorily achieved in this finite lifetime, and so the dynamism of human life turns out to be a relentless quest for what is infinite. If there were no such infinite, human life would be absurd—its absurdity resting on the non-existence of whatever is the ultimate goal of all human striving. Refusing to recognize any absurdity arising from a human quest for infinite goals, Bruno holds to the existence of the Infinite. The universe is infinite. And, if the universe be infinite, the universe is also God, because there cannot be two Infinities.

Yet, having identified God as the universe, holding that these are not separate, he complicates the equation by maintaining also that they are distinct: "all that we see of diversity and difference are nothing but diverse

and different aspects of the same Substance.”³ The need for making any distinction is explained by the nature of the human mind. Incapable of apprehending infinity, we cannot really grasp this Substance in itself. What we do apprehend is the universe, the parts of which are the accidents of Substance. Bruno’s terminology seeks to clarify this distinction-cum-connection:

. . . everything we see of difference in bodies, in relation to formations, complexions, figures, colors . . . is nothing else than a diversity of appearance of the same substance; a transitory, mobile, corruptible appearance of an immobile, stable and eternal being . . .⁴

Terminology is enhanced to account for the distinction-cum-connection—the connection between infinite Substance (God) and the attributes of Substance (universe), attributes which compose the universe as common-sense experiences it. There are two “kinds” of infinity. The universe has extensive infinity: though the universe is infinite in itself, nevertheless all of its parts are finite; God has intensive infinity, i.e., Infinite in Himself, meaning all of His attributes are also infinite. Employing phraseology dating back to the thirteenth century, Bruno assigns the phrase *natura naturans* to the intensive infinity of God; the phrase *natura naturata* to the extensive infinity of the universe.⁵ This is a distinction aiming at a re-definition of transcendence.

Another such effort is his distinction between *cause* and *principle*. Though in agreement with the traditional understanding that God may be known to some extent through His creation, Bruno sets up a distinction between *cause* and *principle*. A cause is “that which contributes to the production of things from without, and which has its being outside of the composition . . . as efficient, it does not form part of the things composed

³ *Dialogue Concerning the Cause Principle, and One*: “Introductory Epistle,” in Sidney Thomas Greenburg, *The Infinite in Giordano Bruno, with a Translation of his ‘Dialogue Concerning the Cause Principle, and One’* (New York: Octagon Books, 1950), 86.

⁴ *Fifth Dialogue*, in Greenburg, *The Infinite in Giordano Bruno*, 164.

⁵ The best tracing of the legacy of these terms is arguably that of John Deely, who writes: “What has to be stressed in the situation of our present knowledge is that the distinction seems to have been introduced not by Averroes himself, but by the translators into Latin of the Commentary of Averroes on the Physics of Aristotle, which would make the terminology to be of specifically Latin origin dating from the early 1200s” (John Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy From Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 139).

and the things produced.”⁶ He is here recognizing a traditional understanding of transcendence. God, however, is principle, a principle that “intrinsically contributes to the constitution of things and remains in the effect.”⁷ As principle, God is immanent in His creation, not separate from creation. God acts on His creation from within it. He is actually present in His creation but is not exhausted thereby. To understand what he means by this, Bruno’s broken-mirror image helps.

The universal body is contained as a whole in the whole Universe, but the spiritual substance is contained as a Whole in each part . . . Thus the entire nature of its form and Light is reflected as a whole by all particles of matter just as the universal body is reflected by all of matter. This can clearly be seen in the case of a large mirror, which reflects one image of one thing, but if it has been broken into a thousand pieces, each one of the pieces still reflects the whole image.⁸

Regardless of how many broken pieces of Bruno’s metaphorical mirror there are, they are attributes of Substance/God. Everything that constitutes the universe is an attribute of Substance/God. *Attribute* is a safe word, avoiding the use of the word *part*; for what is Infinite does not have parts. Parts are relevant only to a perceiver, e.g., man, whose apprehension of reality is always finite. The universe is open to the possibility of limitless numbers of particular things, and each particular thing is relevant to human finitude. Human apprehension of reality is finite, analogous to Bruno’s broken mirror. His poem *To My Own Spirit* assigns a special place for man in the universe, a place that seeks to account both for man’s finitude and his longing for far more:

Rootedly rests the mountain, deeply grown into one with
the earth;
But its head rises to the stars.
You are kindred to both, my Spirit,
To Zeus as well as to Hades; and yet separated from both.
To Mind, a kindred mind calls you, from the height of things,

⁶ *Fifth Dialogue*, in Greenburg, *The Infinite in Giordano Bruno*, 164.

⁷ *Opere Italiane*, 175, in Greenburg, *The Infinite in Giordano Bruno*, 21.

⁸ *Dialogue Concerning the Cause Principle, and One*, in Greenburg, *The Infinite in Giordano Bruno*, 88.

That you should be the boundary between things above
and below . . .⁹

Baruch Spinoza

Like Bruno, Spinoza employs the term *Substance* to name everything that exists: “By substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.”¹⁰ Also, like Bruno, he argues against the possibility of the existence of finite substances. This means that there is only one Substance, viz. God. “By God I mean an absolutely infinite being, that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.”¹¹ His unique phrase, *Deus sive Natura*, God or Nature, is arguably an indication of his pantheistic stance. Substance is God or Nature: *God* because our intellects perceive the attribute of thought, and *Nature* because our intellects perceive the attribute of extension.

What exists? What is? He begins with a hypothetical entity, Substance, the Infinite, an entity that is posited as more real and more ultimate than anything that we humans experience. While this system is a kind of monism, Substance is not exactly alone; if it were, how would we experience anything at all in that we do not experience this Infinite Substance? There are two realities, Substance and its modes. Humans experience a plethora of realities, in a multi-faceted, finite, and mobile universe, and this reality has to be accounted for. This is an obligation to be satisfied within his system without allowing anything to exist outside of Substance, an obligation satisfied within this substance-monism by creating his concept of *mode*: “By mode I mean the affections of substance, that is, that which is in something else and is conceived through something else.”¹² Modes are not effects brought into existence by God, a traditional view clearly rejected by Spinoza; God is not a cause in the sense that He is outside of and distinct from the effects. Spinoza offers readers the example of the triangle: an infinity of things flows from God’s eternal nature, “just as from the nature of a triangle it follows . . . that its three angles are equal to two right

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Id6, trans. Samuel Shirley, in *Readings in Modern Philosophy*, vol. I, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000), 158.

¹¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, Id5, in *Readings in Modern Philosophy*, 158.

¹² Id.

angles.”¹³ Everything in the universe (man included) is then a mode of God: every object is conceptually contained in God, and every entity is in God, *in*, in the sense that each entity in the universe is caused by God, in an immanentist sense, and can be explained only by God. “Particular things are . . . modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way.”¹⁴ Finite substances are not possible; every living thing and everything that we experience is a mode of God, an Infinite being that expresses itself, gives of itself, without being diminished, that possesses infinite qualities, most of which are not apprehended by any human intellect.

God is the cause of this universe but is not separate from it; God is an immanent cause, a cause from within. God cannot be transcendent: there is only one Substance, and *Substance* has been defined in such a way that only one substance exists and nothing can exist outside of this Substance. Substance has priority over its modes, though, because a mode is conceptually contained in Substance. What is barely a hint of transcendence exists in this primacy of Substance over its many modes, or, in the primacy of a constitutive whole over its many parts. What I’m calling a *hint of transcendence* would have to be the case with the triangle as well: the triangle is prior in some conceptual way to the concept of *three angles being equal to two right angles*. If the notion of transcendence has any meaning here, it would connote a situation of self-causing and self-explaining; Substance would be transcendent because it is not explained in terms of modes. Unlike the traditional understanding of transcendence, this connotation of *transcendence* does not mean *outside* or *without* the universe, since Spinoza intends a strict identity of God and nature. Nothing exists apart from or outside of Substance; once we accept this point of departure, transcendence is impossible. Moreover, as Bruno had done before him, he revives the medieval expressions *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. By the former he means “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, (through) the attributes of substance that express eternal and infinite essence.”¹⁵ By the latter he means this: “all that follows from the necessity of God’s nature, that is, from the necessity of each one of God’s attributes; or all the modes of God’s attributes insofar as they are considered as things

¹³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, Ip17, in *Readings in Modern Philosophy*, 166.

¹⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, Ip25c, in *Readings in Modern Philosophy*, 169.

¹⁵ Id.

which are in God and can neither be nor be conceived without God.”¹⁶ Particularity is accounted for in his special term, modes. *Natura naturata* reinforces his notion that every particular item in common-sense experience is but a mode of God, that is, that God is the totality of *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. Clearly, the more items in the universe there are, the more facets of the divine Substance there are that reveal something about this Substance, which is the dynamic source and free cause of everything that exists. “The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God.”¹⁷ Every particular item in common-sense experience of the universe is explained solely in terms of his special term, modes; and these are either general/infinite or particular/finite. The former, because they are infinite, are not generally apprehended by humans; thought and extension, the exceptions, are apprehended by humans. The latter, the finite modes, are all the particular things that we experience, i.e., the many mutable, contingent, temporal things in our experience. These we experience either through imagination or through reason, and our apprehension of things is finite and inadequate: “We can have only a very inadequate knowledge of the duration of particular things external to us.”¹⁸

John Toland

The word *pantheist* is credited as having been coined by John Toland (1670–1722); the word *pantheism* is credited to Jacobus Fayus (Jacques de la Faye), a Dutch theologian who responded in 1709 to Toland’s work with a 250-page attack. A maverick opposed to all types of authority, both political and religious, Toland helped to establish and continued to foster freethinking sentiment in clandestine Whig groups known collectively as Socratic Sodalities or the Socratic Brethren. An insistence on such features as open communication, toleration of disparate views, and reasonableness in religion moved him out of the Catholicism of his Irish youth into Anglicanism, and eventually out of Anglicanism into deism, and finally out of deism into pantheism.

To the earlier Toland-the-deist, Isaac Newton and Spinoza mattered most: Newton because this great scientist identified laws of nature that liberated Toland from religions whose fables and superstitions—as he thought of them—cut off their believers from others and fostered intoler-

¹⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, Ip29, in *Readings in Modern Philosophy*, 171.

¹⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, Vp24, in *Readings in Modern Philosophy*, 202.

¹⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIp31, in *Readings in Modern Philosophy*, 191.

ance; Spinoza because this great rationalist philosopher presented a unitary, comprehensive view of the world. Still, Toland did not remain content with these. His *Letters to Serena*, published in 1704, is permeated with his criticism of Spinoza on the question of motion, an insight he gathered from his readings in Newton's *Principia Mathematica*.

Spinosa (*sic*) has nowhere in his system attempted to define motion or rest, which is unpardonable in a philosopher . . .¹⁹

Refining his remarks, he wrote the following:

having given no account of how matter came to be moved or motion comes to be continued, not allowing God as first mover, neither proving nor supposing motion to be an attribute nor indeed explaining what motion is, he could not possibly show how the diversity of particular bodies is reconcilable to the unity of substance . . . his system is entirely precarious and without any sort of ground . . .²⁰

Toland's criticism is directed not at locomotion, which Spinoza does address, but to the ability of matter to change its forms in a law-like, predictable way; God, he maintains, has imbued matter with its own motion. Moreover, all sensible qualities of matter would be missing, if motion were not understood as an identifying quality of matter and thus admitted to the same status as extension; all qualities "depend immediately on motion . . . their generation, succession, and corruption, by the numberless mixtures, transpositions, and other arrangements of their parts . . ."²¹

By the year of the publication of his *Pantheisticon* sixteen years later, in 1720, Toland-the-pantheist had emerged. The universe alone exists, eternal and infinite, and the world of our experience is only a portion of the universe. As our earth moves around the sun, so there are other earths moving around their suns. A mantra recited at each meeting of the Socratic Brethren summed it up thus: "The whole is from all things, and all

¹⁹ "Letter IV," in John Toland, *Letters to Serena*, anonymous translation of Toland's Latin original (London: Bernard Lintot, 1704), 144. Available at <https://archive.org/details/letters-toserena01tolagoog>, accessed on July 29, 2015.

²⁰ "Letter IV," in Toland, *Letters to Serena*, 147.

²¹ "Letter V," in Toland, *Letters to Serena*, 168.

things are from the whole.”²² In Toland’s deist phase, God had been conceived of as a creator transcendent of his creation, but a creator who had imbued the material universe with its own power of motion or change. As a pantheist, Toland re-assigned and re-named his God.

The universe is made up of multiple associations and composites of first bodies, elements that are akin to the first bodies of the ancient atomists, such as Lucretius. Toland even repeats the vocabulary of Lucretius, calling the first bodies *seeds*. Even while the composites that they form come and go in a rough-and-tumble manner throughout time, the first bodies (or seeds) out of which they are formed are themselves eternal: they had no beginning and will have no end. Nothing comes from nothing, and so the first bodies must have had no beginning. God is not separate from the material universe; but, completely coterminous with it, God is an explanation for whatever animates, forms, nourishes, and increases the universe. This God, though, is not a God that organized religions would recognize: God is a metaphysical necessity to explain the vitality of matter, a necessity that defines Toland’s universe as hylozoist. Matter is alive, containing within itself all that it requires for the constant motion and change in the universe. This is not a personal God worthy of worship but a metaphysical requirement in an atomistic universe.

All the things in the world of our experience as well as the total universe are “comprised in an intelligent nature, endowed with perfect reason, and same, eternal; for there’s nothing stronger to bring it to destruction: this force they call the soul of the world, as also a mind, and perfect wisdom, and consequently God.”²³ No longer conceived as a person, even if remote and mostly disengaged, God is now only reason, soul (not in a personal sense), mind (again, not in a personal sense), and wisdom. Even more significantly, God/reason/soul/mind/wisdom is *in* the universe as its source of motion/change. God is the explanation of how a material universe constantly changes without running to chaos—how things die, others emerge, and the universe goes on. As a deist, Toland had to envision divine causality achieved from outside; as a pantheist, he places divine causality within. Causality is immanent, not transitive.

²² John Toland, *Pantheisticon, or, The Form of Celebrating the Socratic Society*, anonymous translation of Toland’s Latin original (London: Sam. Paterson, 1751), 14. Available at <https://archive.org/details/cu31924029188393>, accessed on July 29, 2015.

²³ *Id.*, 77.

For that a God, diffused thro' all the mass,
Pervades the earth, the sea, and deep of air . . .²⁴

This familiar geographic metaphor—God being *in* the universe—guarantees that the universe is infinite and eternal, the traditional qualities assigned to God having now been transferred to the physical universe. Toland's obvious concern with explaining motion/change has also been addressed and preserved: motion/change or causality does not originate from outside the universe in the intentions of a transcendent God; rather, its explanation or locus lies fully within the physical universe.

We perceive many particular things within the universe, things which are parts only:

Hence men, and cattle, herds, and savage beasts,
All at their births receive ethereal life;
Hither again, dissolved, they back return;
Nor death takes place; but, all immortal, fly to
Heaven, and in their proper stars reside.²⁵

And here we see the same even more clearly:

All things in the world are one,
And one is all in all things.
What's all in all things is God,
Eternal and immense,
Neither begotten, nor ever to perish,
In him we live, we move, and exist.²⁶

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Emerson's intellectual and spiritual journey into pantheism began with his dissatisfaction with both his ordained ministry in the Unitarian faith and with mainstream Christianity. A Christian denomination that rested on a unitary concept of God, Unitarianism rejected the traditional doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, and, to this extent, offered what was, possibly, a less dramatic move out of organized religion than the analogous journeys of Bruno and Toland. Emerson's central complaint against all forms of Christianity was the notion of a transcendent God and

²⁴ Id., 79.

²⁵ Id.

²⁶ Id., 71.

the limited understanding of revelation that it provided. Traditional Christianity taught that divine revelation was granted to some but not to all; that it was treated as something accomplished and finished. Revelation, he insisted, has to be seen as on-going; every person is open to the spirit of God, and God's revelation must come to every person in every age. No one should be shut out. It was a claim that would later ground his famous doctrine of self-reliance.

The very notion of revelation is tied to transcendence, revelation being necessary to the extent that God, being outside of human experience, chooses to reveal to mankind truths which they could not know in any other way. Divine transcendence necessitates revelation, and so a denial of revelation, traditionally defined, achieves a denial of transcendence. Accordingly, his effort in reconstruction is twofold: (1) to re-define revelation and (2) to argue for immanence.

Revelation issues from within a person, a phenomenon that he names the *moral sentiment*. "Revelation is the disclosure of the soul."²⁷ Authorization for such spiritual and moral self-reliance, however, is needed. At this point, Emerson approaches pantheism: the only entity that exists is the Over-Soul, the only existing thing, a spiritual being, a cosmic psyche in which everything is contained. Persons, things, the universe itself: everything is the self-embodying of the Over-Soul. Noteworthy is his departure from the traditional Christian understanding that God's grace is in the soul of the baptized; the Over-Soul is not *in* persons and things; rather, persons and things are *in* the Over-Soul. Not having individual souls, persons participate in the Over-Soul, a participation that bespeaks an idiosyncratic view of relationship that authorizes his new definition of revelation. "I am part or parcel of the Over-Soul," he writes in *Nature*, as long as the words *part* and *parcel* are not understood as material.²⁸ The Over-Soul is not God, is not worthy of worship, and is not a religious concept; it replaces the traditional God in Emerson's philosophy as the ultimate moral authority, and he often uses the word *God* to refer to the Over-Soul.

Spinoza clearly was an influence on him; passages in both his essays and journals consistently praise the famous rationalist. They do so, though, only after the departure from the ministry and organized religion; it is ap-

²⁷ "The Over-Soul," in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays, First and Second Series* (New York: Vintage Books), 163.

²⁸ "Nature," in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature Addresses and Lectures*, vol. I (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1929), 10.

parent that he changed his mind about Spinoza. In a journal entry for 1868, he writes, "In my youth, Spinoza was a hobgoblin: now he is a saint."²⁹ And he approvingly quotes Novalis's famous observation that "Spinoza was a God-intoxicated man (*Gott-trunkener Mensch*)."³⁰

Inspired by Spinoza, he also adopted the distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*, re-defining these terms to suit his commitment to Idealism rather than the Materialism of most pantheists. *Natura naturata* is the world of human experience, e.g., objects, nature, other persons, even one's own body. We experience only what is material, but what is matter? Lest we worry that the connection may not be sound—the connection between material stuff and the Over-Soul—he re-defines the idea of matter:

What is matter . . . Idealism saith, matter is a
phenomenon, not a substance . . .³¹

Natura naturans refers to Nature as creative, active, and productive; it is "the quick cause before which all forms flee as the driven snow . . . it publishes itself in creatures."³² Nature is what humans are meant to know about—the Over-Soul. There are not two parts to Nature, *parts* referring more correctly to material things. This conceptual-verbal distinction highlights the difference between the Over-Soul and its self-publishing as Nature, a publishing which provides a reminder that the extent of human experience of Nature is always finite experience. Further, the distinction, old though it is, reinforces Emerson's purpose: the participle *naturata* is a perfect passive participle, reminding us that the world of our experience is a kind of product, a published product, a self-revelation of the Over-Soul. The word *naturans* is a present, active participle, making the point of the active and on-going creativity of this cosmic psyche.

This re-definition of revelation requires the immanence of the Over-Soul, though it be an immanence with a twist: everything that we experience and all of Nature are *in* the Over-Soul. Pantheists before Emerson typically began with a materialistic premise and made the move to incorpo-

²⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, vol. XVI, ed. Ronald Bosco and Glen Johnson (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1982), 99.

³⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, vol. XIV, ed. Susan Sutton Smith and Harrison Hayford (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978), 277.

³¹ "Nature," in Emerson, *Nature Addresses and Lectures*, 62.

³² "Nature," in Emerson, *Essays, First and Second Series*, 172.

rate the divine element to account for the reasonableness of Nature. Ever the Idealist, Emerson begins with a non-material entity—a hypostasis modeled after the One in the *Enneads* of Plotinus—and moves to incorporate matter to account for the fact of human experience. He uses the preposition “in” as Spinoza used it, viz. B is *in* A if and only if B requires A for its existence or its understanding. Thus, Nature is *in* the Over-Soul.

What is the basis of individualism then? The key is a theory of perception emerging in *Nature* (1836), his first published effort to explain individualism. Perception is integration of impressions: “all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence.”³³ His impressions are not solid, defined and ready-made, like those of empiricism, but are shaped by the observer integrating such impressions. However it is that “natural objects make a kindred impression.”³⁴ Emerson does not explain here how impressions are made; the observer is a creative element in his perception of objects in Nature and we are presented with a non-empirical understanding of perception.

While different individuals may look at one-and-the-same object, each one sees or apprehends what he is prepared to see or apprehend. Differences among individuals, or even in the same individual in different circumstances, makes each one an individual interpretant of each experience in Nature. All such differences are a function of two dimensions of each person: first, there is the obvious dimension made up of features such as background, education, and vocabulary; second, there is the spiritual dimension, the workings of the Over-Soul as it works toward increasingly more differentiation and particularity. Accordingly, as with Spinoza, Emerson claims that to know Nature is to know the Over-Soul. This perception, this unique and creative integration of impressions, is an achievement, and, being an achievement, is the criterion with which to assess how well one is doing in understanding nature. One indicator of achievement is joy: “In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows.”³⁵ The scene in which he describes himself standing in puddles on a bare common, at twilight, under a clouded sky would not seem especially auspicious, yet he enjoys “a perfect exhilaration” and is “glad to the brink

³³ “Nature,” in Emerson, *Nature Addresses and Lectures*, 7.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

of fear.”³⁶ The often-quoted transparent eyeball passage follows, raising the joy of the lover of nature to an experience that approaches the mystical:

Standing on the bare ground—my head
bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into
infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes.
I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing;
I see all; the currents of the Universal Being
circulate through me; I am part or parcel
of God.³⁷

Conclusion

What *is*, then? What exists? How shall we characterize it? Or, more to the point, how did these iconic pantheists characterize everything-that-is? The physical universe is undeniably here; we are part of it and are immersed in it. Once we acknowledge that much, assumptions, elaborations, distinctions, vocabulary, and conclusions abound, showing clearly that the boundaries distinguishing the four are not clear and tidy—that while there are differences, there are some connections and similarities.

The most important similarity, I believe, is that each one offers some accounting for God, knowing full well that he is departing from the conceptualizations and beliefs that were contained in the tradition that he was rejecting. Bruno’s new God is both transcendent and immanent, but this transcendence rests on two distinctions that lack foundation, viz. the two meanings of the word *infinity* and the distinction between principle and cause. Because these two distinctions are not plausible, this God is not transcendent, despite Bruno’s best efforts. I suspect that these efforts were shaped by his attachment to Hermetism/Hermeticism, a type of Gnosticism originating in Graeco-Egyptian cults which exalted magic and was popular in the sixteenth century.³⁸ It asserts that the Divine is both transcendent and immanent; and Bruno follows suit, importing his two telling distinctions. The massive research of Frances Yates on this question convincingly documents Bruno’s preoccupation with magic.³⁹

³⁶ Id.

³⁷ Id., 10.

³⁸ Information is available at: www.hermetic.com, accessed on July 29, 2015.

³⁹ Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Spinoza's God is both transcendent and immanent, but with a difference. He begins with a metaphysical position that by reasonable deduction allows him to claim this distinction. Everything in his system owes whatever it has and its understanding to a postulated, infinite Substance: it is a Substance that is "in itself and is conceived through itself." Anything else owes its existence and its explanation to this infinite Substance. Humans, however, do not apprehend this infinite Substance; what we do grasp are two of its attributes, thought and extension, and only these two. God, then, is a human apprehension of one attribute of Substance, that of thought; Nature is a human apprehension of the other attribute of Substance, that of extension. Substance remains transcendent, outside of human apprehension. God or Nature is immanent, in that each is an attribute that humans can apprehend. If this is so, it would be consistent with this view of God as a humanly-apprehended attribute of a transcendent Substance, and thus serve to confirm it. The Rev. Frederick Copleston, known for his classic history of philosophy, offered a generous view of Spinoza. The concept *Substance* may be closer to the traditional understanding of God than the referent of his word *God* is. He writes this: "there is discernible in his thought and attitude a reaching out beyond the transitory phenomena of experience to the Infinite Being of which they are the manifestation."⁴⁰

God does not fare well with Toland and Emerson. For Toland, God is an explanatory convenience: matter is not inert stuff, obviously; there is constant change that is not chaotic. There must be a source of reason within matter; the Socratic Brethren have decided to call this source of reason *God*. Emerson sometimes refers to his cosmic psyche, the Over-Soul, as God, but the traditional meaning of the word has changed. Emerson's God is not a person, is not sacred, is not worthy of worship. Influenced greatly by Hinduism, Emerson writes about God or the Over-Soul in a way that suggests a strong connection with the Brahman of Hinduism.

These four classic pantheists matter, because contemporary pantheists acknowledge them as their predecessors; and, like their predecessors, they too differ significantly from each other. Overall, contemporary pantheists mirror Toland most closely, Toland with a dose of environmentalism. Lacking the Hermetism of Bruno, the metaphysical complexity of Spinoza, and the Idealism of Emerson, they nonetheless remain eager to be labeled as a theism. A concept of God still matters, even while the notion

⁴⁰ Frederick C. Copleston, "Pantheism in Spinoza and the German Idealists," *Philosophy* 21:78 (April 1946): 43.

of divine transcendence does not. Whatever may turn out to be the accounting for this perspective, contemporary pantheism deserves more attention and study. Tending these ideas may curb the lure of confused thinking.

**THE LURE OF PANTHEISM:
ITS EVANGELICAL FLOWERING AND WORLD-WIDE DESIGNS**

SUMMARY

Identifying key elements in the writings of four classic pantheists (Bruno, Spinoza, Toland, Emerson) provides some conceptual access to contemporary pantheism. While pantheists seek to minimize or even avoid an accounting of transcendence, this metaphysical lack reduces the explanatory power of pantheism.

KEYWORDS: nature, God, pantheism, Bruno, Spinoza, Toland, Emerson, transcendence.

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND ATHEISM. ANALYZING THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF CATECHESIS IN POLAND

Catechesis and atheism are two polarizing words. Catechesis is meant to deepen one's faith and strengthen one's relationship with God, while atheism entirely negates the existence of God. The purpose of this article is to show that despite the fact that these two phenomena are so completely oppositional, yet there is an occasion of their encounter. In Polish society it may take place in catechesis—colloquially called religious instruction, which is conducted at schools. That is why this article is concentrated on outlining ineffective moments of catechesis which may entail atheism. It does not mean, though, that the whole process of catechesis should be deemed ineffective and inefficacious. The main priority is to list those elements that are imperfect, causing aspects of the redemptive ministry of Church to falter. In addition to this, vital recommendations will be provided in order to run the catechesis process more effectively, providing more care for the faith and salvation of man.

Theoretical framework

In order to provide correct methodology and clear terminology, two fundamental terms, *catechesis* and *atheism*, should be defined. In terms of catechesis it should be noted that although definitions of catechesis refer to the universal Church, this article is limited to the reality of the Church in Poland.

Undoubtedly, catechesis is a very rich and complex reality. It is also difficult to give an unequivocal and concise definition of it. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the apostolic exhortation of John Paul II on the catechesis

in our times, *Catechesi tradendae*, it must be stated that “all in all, it can be taken here that catechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.”¹ The very same document underlines in the next bullet point “that the specific character of catechesis, as distinct from the initial conversion—bringing proclamation of the Gospel, has the twofold objective of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ.”²

Whereas the *Catechetical Directory of the Catholic Church in Poland* underlines that catechesis is one of the methods of proclamation of the Word of God in Church.³ Polish bishops emphasize that catechesis should be linked with a pastoral and missionary service of the Church, without losing its specific character, though. And catechesis has an evangelizing character.⁴

This document relates to the specific Polish situation where catechesis is, to a large extent, conducted in a school setting. Bishops, bearing in mind Polish experience, historical backgrounds and a decades-based catechetical tradition, state that “school religious instruction should be treated as part of catechesis, i.e., as a specific form of catechesis. Both in catechesis and school religious instruction it is the Church which is the operator. In catechesis it is realized through a parish, and in school teachings through bestowing religious instruction teachers on canonical mission.”⁵ Hence, it can be concluded that at least within the framework of teaching religion at school, catechesis and religious instruction complete each other.⁶

The next term is *atheism*. The *Catechetical dictionary* states that “in colloquial meaning atheism refers to the negation of God’s existence and consequently leads to the assumption that human life does not directly

¹ John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae* (1979), 18, hereafter CT.

² Id., 19.

³ Polish Bishops’ Conference, *Dyrektorium Katechetyczne Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce* [The Catechetical Directory of the Catholic Church in Poland] (Kraków: WAM, 2001), 18, hereafter DOKPol.

⁴ Cf. id., 18–20.

⁵ Id., 82.

⁶ Id., 73.

relate to God and religion.”⁷ In wider terms we can speak about the lack of faith in God, gods and supernatural forces as they are contrary to reason, are unscientific and thus negate the need for religion.⁸

In consequence, the atheist is a man who does not believe in a personally understood God or gods and thus in his life he does not apply religious reason. The atheist assumes as well that his existence takes place and is created without God’s care. In his view religion is perceived as the illusion of the senses, superstition and a cultural burden to be overcome. The atheist negates any supernatural human hope, claiming that it is a utopia which distracts people from terrestrial life. The atheist sees existence as limited in time and terminated on earth. It is often deemed that God is the creation of imagination, deprived of consistency and equipped with all human features.⁹

Often atheism does not boil down to only negation, but it also proclaims some positive content. A truly ideal atheist, if one exists, does not negate God’s existence but simply does not think of Him. Atheism does not stand for an “easy” life.

From a catechetical point of view, it means that fundamental questions regarding the purpose of life remain unanswered. Man is treated like the only creator of his life history. Atheism is seen then as the source of false concept of man and his relation to society. Negating God deprives man of his foundation and consequently leads to such a social order in which dignity and personal responsibility are ignored. Not only is atheism contrary to religion, but it understates the importance of fundamental values taught through catechesis; and it also leads to spiritual void in man and in society. In a spirit of post-council anthropological catechesis it can be stated that loss of sensitivity to God is the loss of sensitivity to the human person as well.¹⁰

Status quaestionis of the religiousness in Poland

It is symptomatic that atheism, by its nature, may exist only as an opposition to the theistic religious and philosophical tradition. The condition, or “the ground,” for atheism’s existence is what it rejects, questions and undermines, in other words, theistic religion and philosophy. It can be

⁷ J. Gevaert, “Atheism,” in *Słownik Katechetyczny*, ed. J. Gevaert (Warszawa 2006), 62.

⁸ Cf. T. Ślipko, *Zarys etyki szczegółowej* (Kraków 1981), 39.

⁹ Cf. J. Sochoń, *Ateizm* (Warszawa 2003), 98.

¹⁰ Cf. *Lumen Gentium* (1964), 20; John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* (1991), 13; DOKPol, 63.

assumed then that if it was not for theistic religion or philosophy, atheism would not exist. Thus, it is obvious that atheists need believers to exist. An entirely secularized culture would not know of faith in God, but it would not know atheism as an existential option, either. It can be stated that believers need atheists, although this need is not so distinct. As Poland is a country where religion, faith and God play a significant role, it is an ideal environment for atheism's development.

Despite many changes, Catholic faith still constitutes a significant element of Polish self-identification. Over the last few years invariably about 90–95%¹¹ of Polish society declare themselves to be Catholic. Other religious identifications are declared very rarely. Also the percentage of people not connected with any religion is negligible. Empirical data do not point at a radical fall of religiousness in Poland. There is, however, a tendency towards less institutionalized religiousness, where every-Sunday participation in a Holy Mass is not “obligatory” and the canon of Catholic faith does not have to be accepted “fully.” Yet, religion still constitutes a vital part of Poles' lives.¹²

According to the statistical data published in 2015 by the Public Opinion Research Centre regarding the attitude to faith and religious rituals, it can be stated that commonly declared faith in God is quite a permanent feature of Polish society. According to systematically carried out research since the end of the 1990s, invariably over 90% of those surveyed (92–97%) declared themselves to be believers, including 1 out of 10 (recently 1 out of 11 or 12) who assess their faith as deep. The percentage of people declaring to be entirely non-believers has stood low for years (3–8%), and what is important here is that since 2005 this number has doubled (from 4% to 8%). At the same time, the number of those who declare to be deeply faithful has declined from 12% to 8%.¹³

It is also surprising that Poles have a positive attitude to some religious elements in social life. Such elements as crosses in public institutions, the religious character of a military vow, religious instruction taught at schools, the participation of priests and bishops in rituals and state cere-

¹¹ This number is dependent on the method of research. Cf. R. Boguszewski, “Polak—na zawsze katolik? Polska religijność w latach 1989–2008 na podstawie badań CBOS,” *Więź* 9: 599 (2008): 5–10.

¹² Cf. R. Boguszewski, *Religijność i moralność w społeczeństwie polskim – zależność czy autonomia? Studium socjologiczne* (Toruń 2012), 163–165.

¹³ Cf. R. Boguszewski, *Zmiany w zakresie podstawowych wskaźników religijności Polaków po śmierci Jana Pawła II, Komunikat z badań CBOS 26/2015* (Warszawa 2015), 2.

monies, the blessing of the places and buildings of public utilities or priests showing up in public TV—it is not at all controversial for the majority of those surveyed.¹⁴

Additionally, in 2015, 86% of those surveyed declared that they do not mind catechesis at school.¹⁵ An upward tendency can be noticed here compared to 2007 when the percentage of proponents constituted 72%.¹⁶

Yet, the same research illustrates the development of a new phenomenon in Polish society. From 2005 to 2015 the percentage of people declaring to be non-believers has risen from 4% to 8%, and the percentage of those who do not participate in religious rituals has increased from 9% to 13%. Thus it can be stated that the ratio of the non-believers to the believers in 2015 is 8% to 92%.¹⁷

Status quaestionis of catechesis in Poland

Poland is an example of a country which represents quite a specific attitude to religious instruction. As one of very few countries in Europe, Poland guarantees its citizens the possibility to attend catechesis classes at school. Despite the fact that learning religion is of optional nature, it still holds a confessional character.

A school-conducted class of religious instruction was officially banned in the years 1961–1990. It was reintroduced to schools on September 1, 1990. The classes are held twice a week, each 45 minutes long. Priests and nuns constitute a vast majority of teachers of this subject; however, there is a growing number of lay teachers, too. Ethics is offered as an alternative. Back in 1990 many teachers welcomed catechesis at school with applause. Schools with a negative attitude to this subject were exceptions. Yet, for the first years, catechesis at school was often missionary work in fact. In most schools catechesis was also attended by those stu-

¹⁴ Cf. M. Grabowska, *Boskie i cesarskie. O stosunkach między państwem i kościołem(ami). Komunikat z badań CBOS 48/2015* (Warszawa 2015), 4.

¹⁵ Cf. id., 3–5.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Feliksiak, *Opinie o nauczaniu religii. Komunikat z badań CBOS 119/2007* (Warszawa 2017), 2.

¹⁷ Cf. Boguszewski, *Zmiany w zakresie podstawowych wskaźników religijności Polaków po śmierci Jana Pawła II*, 2. The data from the Institute for the Catholic Church Statistics confirm these tendencies: in 2013 the percentage of *dominantes*, so the faithful participating in a Sunday holy mass for the first time since 1980 fell below 40% (and totaled 39,1%). At the same time the percentage of *communicantes*, so the people joining the Communion is rising (in 2013 it was 16,3%).

dents who had not attended it in a parish. In the second half of the 1990s, however, we could observe a drop of interest in catechesis. Luckily, the following years showed that it was not a steady tendency.¹⁸

The latest data on participation in catechesis classes was collected by Bishop Marek Mendyk, who chairs the Catholic Education Committee of Polish Bishops' Conference. They are as follows: in primary schools around 92% of pupils attend catechesis classes, in junior high schools 79%, and in high schools around 61%.¹⁹ These data come from 2012. On this basis it can be concluded that catechesis attendance decreases with age.

These data, however, seem to be optimistic. But when we compare some information found on Internet portals, there are fewer reasons to be complacent. The foundation "Freedom from Religion," on the basis of the data collected by the National Education Ministry, says that in the years 2014–2015 in 786 schools catechesis classes were not conducted for various reasons.²⁰ These are the statistical data arising from students' declarations. Everyday reality seems to bring along more threats and difficulties.

Status quaestionis of atheism in Poland

In the countries under Communist regimes for 50 years after the war, atheism was a prevailing doctrine. Yet, taking into account the history of Poland in the second half of the twentieth century, it did not have a particular impact on the number of religious persons in the present society. On the grounds of the research carried out in 2005, it could be concluded that the number of people proclaiming atheism constituted around 4%. Over the next 10 years this number doubled and in 2014 it was 8%.²¹ Over those

¹⁸ Cf. S. Dziekoński, "XX lat katechezy w Polsce," *Episteme* 102 (2010): 59–72; T. Panuś, "10 razy 'tak', czyli próba bilansu 20 lat nauczania religii w polskiej szkole," *Katecheta* 9 (2009): 47.

¹⁹ These data come directly from the Chairman of the Catholic Education Committee of Polish Bishops' Conference. Whereas a website of the Catholic Information Agency refers to the research from 2012 and gives the following data: catechesis is attended by 98% of primary school pupils, 96% of junior high school students and 91% of high school students (cf. "Szkoły bez nauki religii w Polsce," <http://wolnoscodreligii.pl/wp/szkoły-bez-nauki-religii-w-polsce/>, accessed on 05.20.2015. Bearing in mind personal experience, I can risk a statement that statistical data given by the bishop Marek Mendyk seem to be more relevant to the Polish reality.

²⁰ Cf. "Szkoły bez nauki religii w Polsce."

²¹ Cf. Boguszewski, *Zmiany w zakresie podstawowych wskaźników religijności Polaków po śmierci Jana Pawła II*, 2.

years the percentage of people abstaining from religious rituals has risen from 9% to 13%.²²

Despite those numbers which keep rising, we can still remain optimistic if we compare the situation in Poland with the neighboring countries. The University of Chicago, which did the research, points out that the percentage of atheists in the neighboring countries is much higher, e.g., in the Czech Republic about 40%, in the eastern German Länder about 50%, in the Netherlands about 20% and in France 23%.²³

In Polish society, the majority of atheists come from traditionally Catholic families. The research which was carried out among young people, mostly students, points out that nearly 80% of them are sure that their parents either were or are believers and they admit that they were brought up in a religious spirit. The biggest surprise comes when we learn that all the surveyed atheists (100%) are baptized and received First Communion. 72% of them received the Sacrament of Confirmation, and 12% had a sacramental marriage. What is interesting, 83% of the surveyed atheists used to believe in God. 90% of them gradually accepted that they were wrong. The age at which they abandoned the faith is also interesting. The research showed that 29% of them abandoned the faith under 14, 55% between 15 and 19, and 14% between 20 and 25 years old. These data indicate a tendency according to which the biggest number of faith abandonments take place in the period of the so-called “rebellion” against parents and the surrounding world, in the period of questioning, disappointments and searching for their own identity.²⁴

²² The information given on the websites of the Institute for the Catholic Church Statistics confirm these tendencies: in 2013 the percentage of *dominicanos*, the believers participating in a Sunday holy mass for the first time since 1980 fell below 40% (and totaled 39,1%). At the same time the percentage of *communicantes*, so the people joining the Communion is rising (in 2013 it totaled 16,3%).

²³ Cf. T. W. Smith, “Beliefs about God across Time and Countries” (NORC—University of Chicago), http://www.norc.org/PDFs/Beliefs_about_God_Report.pdf, accessed on 05.20.2015.

²⁴ These data come from the research carried out at Polish universities, and they constitute the foundation for a diploma thesis *Atheism in Poland*.

Catechesis and atheism

In 2012 Father Robert Wawrzeniecki, OMI,²⁵ published an article titled in a provocative way “Catechesis generates atheists.”²⁶ He writes as follows: “I am a catechesis teacher. I read online fora where many young people write about abandoning the faith. In the majority of cases they abandon for the reasons which could be prevented by a well-conducted catechesis.”²⁷

Tracking online fora²⁸ where young people, mostly from junior high schools and high schools and occasionally from universities, publish their comments, one can consider the effectiveness of catechesis. First of all, it turns out that in most cases young people abandoned the faith not due to doubts that they could not overcome by themselves or with the assistance of adults. In the majority of cases, these were the situations which should be solved during a catechesis class. These issues are included in the school core curriculum which school catechesis is bound to. First and foremost, however, the aim is to guide these young people on the way to a personal relation with God and to experience faith in a mature way.²⁹ We can also come across an opinion represented by a priest, Father Kawecki, who wishes “to see at catechesis classes only those who really want to grow up in faith. The phenomenon is that people often attend catechesis although they do not want to, because—I am not sure—they are afraid to unsubscribe from it?; they are afraid that God will take offence . . .”³⁰

Many catechesis teachers come across students who straightforwardly call themselves non-believers. From everyday observations it is clear that they constitute quite a substantial group. Very often these are small children whose parents at the very beginning of the school education declare that they are non-believers, but still they want and ask to let their children attend a catechesis class. Perhaps they do not want to deprive their children of something they were deprived of in their childhood. Another

²⁵ A catechesis teacher in Publiczne Gimnazjum nr 3 (State Junior High School no. 3) in Kędzierzyn-Koźle (Poland) and an academic priest.

²⁶ Cf. R. Wawrzeniecki, “Katecheza produkuje ateistów,” <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/wiara/katecheza-produkuje-ateistow/kg5t9>, accessed on 05.20.2015.

²⁷ Id.

²⁸ Cf. forum on a website: <http://ateista.pl/index.php>, accessed on 05.20.2015.

²⁹ Cf. K. Frejusz, “Niewierzący na katechezie,” *Katecheta* 5 (2012): 51–54.

³⁰ W. Kawecki, “Kawecki o ateistach, którzy chodzą na katechezę, żeby poznać wroga,” http://www.fronda.pl/opinie/czytaj/nazwa/ks._kawecki_o_ateistach,_ktorzy_chodza_na_katecheze,_zeby_poznac_wroga, accessed on 05.20.2015.

group is represented by teenagers who think of themselves as non-believers, but at the same time, in most cases, they are baptized and they want to attend catechesis classes. It is common that there are pupils who attend catechesis and who openly declare lack of faith. There are also those who are treated as non-believers by catechesis teachers and those who attend, but this fact does not seem to change anything in them.³¹

One can consider the reasons for the ineffectiveness of some elements of catechesis. In other words, what are the reasons for which a person who attends catechesis decides to be a non-believer, an atheist, or even to combat the Church. Further considerations will try to understand this.

In an attempt to search for the reasons it is fundamental to understand catechesis, its essence. Yet, student believers and those who “search for or experience religious doubts”³² see its meaning in a different way. When students are non-believers, religious instruction “assumes the character of a missionary proclamation of the Gospel and is ordered to a decision of faith, which catechesis, in its turn, will nurture and mature.”³³ Referring to practice and Church documents it can be stated that a confessional religious instruction is aimed at all the groups of students to whom it nurtures a different task without identifying itself with catechesis in its full meaning.³⁴

Another crucial element is the fact that the identity of a young man is shaped by popular culture. In many aspects the products of mass culture guide young people out of the category of religious thinking or they simply question it. Very often popular culture is reduced to providing entertainment for the largest group of recipients, ignoring at the same time aesthetic and ethical content.³⁵ This kind of encounter with culture will lead to the creation of the so-called *Generation Me*³⁶ where the central motto reads: “As long as I believe in myself, I really do not care what others think.”³⁷ Young people both in America and in Poland grow up in the world where

³¹ Cf. A. Kielian, “Niewierzący? Obecny! Co na lekcji religii robi niewierzący uczeń czy niewierząca uczennica?,” *Katecheta* 5 (2012): 45.

³² DOKPol, 75.

³³ Id.

³⁴ Id., 73.

³⁵ Cf. W. Jakubowski, *Edukacja w świecie kultury popularnej* (Kraków 2011), 25–28.

³⁶ The name comes from the publication of an American psychologist Jean M. Twenge. Cf. J. M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—And More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York-London-Toronto-Sydney 2006).

³⁷ Id., 20.

prioritizing your feelings and thoughts is taken for granted. A practical aspect of this situation are, according to some researchers, online social portals (*MySpace, Facebook, Twitter*). They do not aim to create a community, but to show themselves, gain popularity and dream of fame.³⁸ *Generation Me* is assured of their own value, which is based on very fragile foundations. This generation is less willing to obey the rules of an organized religion; it drifts more towards creating their own religions.³⁹

Many young people are further away from God not only due to yielding to atheistic ideologies or their own weaknesses but more due to escaping to the virtual world, and in particular the world of fictional meetings and apparent contacts. God, however, can be met only in reality and only when we are capable of making a dialogue. If parents do not talk to their sons and daughters about religious issues (if such conversations are not part of the family culture), and if in media they read only articles on some trivial matters, then young people do not know how they can meet God and what to talk to Him about.

People functioning this way are not interested in traditional prayer services or forms of devotion. They will rather look for their personal way of experiencing faith and meeting God—a way which will suit their needs and emotions more. A need may be something positive, awaiting a religiousness proposal which does not lower requirements but offers a personal contact with the Savior.⁴⁰ That is why catechesis should be the venue of a meeting and a dialogue. Some of its elements can be treated as a kind of preevangelization where subjects such as freedom, spirituality or religiousness are under discussion. It is also worth asking young people what their biggest aspirations, ideals and wishes are.⁴¹

It should be also remembered that youth is a long-term period of stormy and intensive changes taking place in a biological, mental and social context of life. It is the time when people struggle with existential dilemmas, look for the answers to fundamental questions regarding the sense of life and their place in the world. Young people undergoing biological changes observe their own transformations; they become new persons, as yet unstable, uneasy and searching for a new definition of their own identity. Young people feel the need to accept an ideology, truth and

³⁸ Cf. M. Janczewski, *CeWEBryci—sława w sieci* (Kraków 2011).

³⁹ Cf. Kielian, "Niewierzący? Obecny!," 47–48.

⁴⁰ Cf. id., 49.

⁴¹ Cf. M. Chorab, "Jestem ateistą... Religijne wybory młodzieży w obliczu kryzysu tożsamości," *Katecheta* 5 (2012): 55–57.

values and to participate in a group adopting a common system of values. Taking into account the errors made by catechists and the imperfection of the catechetical system, young people can easily abandon faith. It may happen when catechesis is not based on the foundation of a personal relation with God. It may also happen when catechesis is reduced to teaching a doctrine and morality and does not lead to a meeting with God in a prayer and conscious sacraments.⁴²

In this context it is worth noting an utterance of a student of the third year from a junior high school. It is referred to in an article on the non-believers at catechesis by a priest, Father Andrzej Kielian. The student in question wrote as follows: "I don't believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And I don't believe in Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who allegedly was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, allegedly always a Virgin, who for our sake was supposedly crucified under Pontius Pilate, who was supposed to suffer, die, and be buried and then descend into hell. Even more I don't believe that on the third day he rose again or that he ascended into heaven, where He allegedly is seated at the right hand of the Father or that He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I completely disbelieve in the Holy Spirit or the holy Catholic Church or the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen. Our Polish paradox is that someone like me is writing this profession of faith while attending catechesis class. So why do I attend it? I think that because I do believe in man and their ability to think rationally. Especially when it comes to my friends at the age of puberty who are in the process of creating their vision of reality. I treat my attendance at catechesis as apostolate, apostolate of wise reasoning."⁴³

What is surprising is the deep awareness of this student. He does realize what kind of situation he is in. Despite physical presence at catechesis, he deepens neither his faith nor his relation with God. It can be concluded that they never existed. This text illustrates two crucial issues. The first one is the awareness of creating his own "vision of reality." It is influenced very clearly by modern culture which promotes the attitude to life as

⁴² Cf. E. Rydz, "Kształtowanie się religijności młodzieży szkół ponadgimnazjalnych," in *Wychowanie młodzieży na poziomie szkół ponadgimnazjalnych*, ed. J. Stala (Tarnów 2007), 21–40.

⁴³ Cf. Kielian, "Niewierzący? Obecny!," 48.

a free self-creation. The other element is the courage to express his point of view, create his philosophy of life and express them at a catechesis class.⁴⁴

In this type of situations one can risk a statement that atheism or disbelief stem from identity crisis. It is the result of improper choices made while searching for their place in the world. Atheism understood in this way may be of ephemeral character. It may be defined as a stage in identity development, which leads to the strengthening of faith of an adult-to-be who found God and will never again doubt the belonging to the Church. When a young man, however, does not receive proper support, then he may acknowledge his religious choice as the right one. In consequence, it will lead to shaping a personality of man deprived of faith and lonely in their atheism.⁴⁵

Another crucial element in catechesis process is the encounter of the two worlds. During catechesis young people who were not baptized meet with those who did not fully go through the process of Christian initiation, who experience a serious faith crisis or are looking for help. These are the young people who, in the name of badly understood freedom, speak of themselves as being free from faith. This situation has to be handled both by catechists and students who believe. In this situation a catechist and catechesis face a tough task. Young people live in the culture which does not favor being close to Christ; and they themselves often place unrealistic demands or hold overly high expectations. The aim of catechesis, in this situation, is to approach the Church and faith. Perhaps the testimony of peer believers showing faith in everyday life will help those who negate Christianity.⁴⁶

On the basis of the above mentioned arguments, it can be acknowledged that catechesis is ineffective towards non-believers. It should be also underlined that the main reason for this is the lack of personal, strong and systematically deepened relation with God. Simply speaking, at school catechesis in Poland there are more and more people who have never gone through the first stage of religious instruction and evangelization. In 1979 John Paul II published the post-synod exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, which spotted the situation in which it should be borne in mind

⁴⁴ Cf. id.

⁴⁵ Cf. M. Chorab, "Jestem ateistą...", 55–57.

⁴⁶ Cf. G. Jurczyński, "Niewiara vs Wiara? Analiza i wnioski z badań dotyczące uczestnictwa osób niewierzących w katechezie na poziomie szkoły gimnazjalnej," *Katecheta* 5 (2012): 58–61.

that the initial evangelization has often not taken place. A certain number of children baptized in infancy come for catechesis in the parish without receiving any other initiation into the faith and still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ; they only have the capacity to believe placed within them by Baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit; and opposition is quickly created by the prejudices of their non-Christian family background or of the positivist spirit of their education. In addition, there are other children who have not been baptized and whose parents agree only at a later date to religious education.⁴⁷

With reference to this situation papal document speaks of the reality of parish catechesis; however, we normally come across the reality of catechesis at school. "The diversity of the religious situation should be kept in mind: there are young people who are not even baptized, others have not completed Christian initiation, others are in grave crises of faith, others are moving towards making a decision with regard to faith, others have already made such a decision and call for assistance."⁴⁸

Conclusions

It cannot be ignored that a spiritual and cultural crisis which we experience in Poland takes its first toll upon the young people: "the rapid and tumultuous socio-cultural change . . . the pressures of consumer society . . . all contribute to make of youth a world in waiting, not infrequently a world of disenchantment, of boredom, of angst and of marginalization."⁴⁹ Alienation from the Church, faith and God or indifference in this regard—all become a kind of attitude. In this context one may pose a question: how to speak a young man of God? What to do so that catechesis will not be a place and time when other young people abandon their faith?

With reference to a two-thousand-year-old tradition of the Church, to what is permanent, there seems to be no revolution. A fundamental solution is the comeback to a classical model and order, where the first instruction precedes evangelization and catechesis. Only the man who came into faith through breaking off with the sin, through conversion and accepting Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior can attend catechesis. Then, indeed

⁴⁷ CT, 19.

⁴⁸ Cf. DOKPoI, 184.

⁴⁹ Id., 182.

catechesis will be the place of deepening one's relation with God and strengthening the faith. This need is observed by Polish bishops, too. In the *Catechetical Directory of the Catholic Church in Poland* they underline that "a new situation of catechesis in Poland after 1990 should give rise to reflection that teaching catechesis at school is a chance for evangelization, as for some students, who are baptized but alienated from faith, school catechesis is the only place where they can get into contact with the Gospel, with faith witnesses, such as catechists and deeply believing students; it is also the only place where children and youth from dechristianized environments may hear the voice of the Church and where they may be introduced into the liturgy and prayer of the Church."⁵⁰

When elements of evangelization are included in the school catechesis, this may be a sign of addressing the needs of people of our times.⁵¹ The first preaching of the Gospel—evangelization—concerns not only pagans or non-believers in Christ, but also all Christians who lack a fundamental initiation into Christianity. The *Catechetical Directory* explains that the recipients of evangelization—the first proclamation of Christ's mystery—are non-believers and those living in religious indifference.⁵² Undoubtedly, as this article tried to show, such people attend school catechesis in Poland.⁵³

A personal meeting with Christ and accepting Him as one's Lord and Savior is fundamental to build faith. It takes place thanks to the first proclamation of the Word which springs up faith in man and calls for response. If, at any stage of catechization, such a meeting and a personal relation take place, it is much more difficult or even almost impossible to go away from God. According to the Second Vatican Council one should focus on positive thinking. In every case of school catechesis, one should not be afraid of threats but proclaim the kerygma explicitly and courageously. It is important to form "personal and mature" faith which would allow the Christians, on the one hand, to critically confront modern culture and resist the temptations and, on the other hand, to successfully influence the man. In other words, it is about keeping one's identity and at the same

⁵⁰ Id., 57.

⁵¹ Cf. *Katecheza ewangelizacyjna. Poszukiwania koncepcji*, ed. P. Mąkosa (Lublin 2010).

⁵² Cf. DOKPol, 61; G. Puchalski, *Katecheza w kontekście nowej ewangelizacji w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II* (Olsztyn 2002).

⁵³ Cf. E. Stelmach, "Jak mówić dzisiaj młodemu człowiekowi o Bogu?," *Katecheta* 7–8 (2012): 94–97.

time having missionary enthusiasm combined with effective proclamation of the Good News.⁵⁴

It should be also remembered to build a personal relation both with God and man. Program assumptions are just a framework and the content is filled up with the message and the testimony of believers. Good programs and interesting textbooks will be of no use when Christians are not skillful, persistent and firm witnesses in any time and any place. A catechist who eagerly and openly stands in front of young people may be a perfect translation of the Gospel into life. A good example of such a catechist is the one who, once trying to ignite the group, posed a question: "My dear, which of you is a Christian? Please raise your hands. No one responded. I thought they didn't understand the question. So I tried in a different way: Which one of you is not a Christian? And at this point came a surprise: six students responded. The rest? Indifferent, indecisive, unsure, maybe frightened. I posed another question: Why did you come here? I believe you are all 18 now, so you can resign from the class on your own request. It is only me who wants to be here and to some extent I have to be here. You, for sure, don't have to be here. Different answers cropped up: because mother will be angry, because the parish priest will want to see a notebook, because granny won't give me pocket money . . . Even an opportunist from the last desk joined the discussion. He explained less aggressively than at the beginning why he came there. It led to a dialogue and although we did not reach the subject of the lesson, a conversation about faith, freedom, compulsion and good intentions paved the way to decreasing the distance between that man in black and those young people. Rebellion and indifference disappeared giving way to openness and interest."⁵⁵

On the basis of this situation, it can be stated that if we want catechesis to be deprived of imperfection, its purpose cannot boil down to the six basic tasks: knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, missionary spirit.⁵⁶ Catechetical tasks compared with evangelizing ones are a lot more detailed and concrete. Young people should be viewed with due responsibility so that it will guard them against atheism. Catechesis is meant to grow young people in their faith, systematically and holistically. To sum up, I will quote John

⁵⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa* (2003), 48ff.

⁵⁵ R. Chalupniak, "Katecheza w służbie przekazu i formacji wiary. Nowa ewangelizacja (w nowej) katechezie," *Katecheta* 7–8 (2012): 9.

⁵⁶ Cf. DOKPol, 86–87.

Paul II who spoke to catechists in Łowicz, Poland, in 1990. The Pope reminded that “this grand good, which is teaching catechesis at schools calls for sincere and responsible engagement. We should use this good in the best possible way. Thanks to catechesis, the Church can run evangelization process even more effectively and broaden the scale of the mission . . . All those who work at school need to show more sensitivity in order to create the atmosphere of a friendly and open dialogue . . . it is necessary to create the atmosphere in which children and youth will be able to freely manifest their religious beliefs and follow them.”⁵⁷

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND ATHEISM.
ANALYZING THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF CATECHESIS IN POLAND**

SUMMARY

Catechesis and atheism are two polarizing words. Catechesis is meant to deepen one’s faith and strengthen one’s relationship with God, while atheism entirely negates the existence of God. The purpose of this article is to show that despite the fact that these two phenomena are so completely oppositional, yet there is an occasion of their encounter. In Polish society it may take place in catechesis—colloquially called religious instruction, which is conducted at schools. That is why this article is concentrated on outlining ineffective moments of catechesis which may have something to do with atheism. It does not mean, though, that the whole process of catechesis should be deemed ineffective and inefficacious. The main priority is to list those elements that are imperfect, causing aspects of the redemptive ministry of the Church to falter. In addition to this, vital recommendations are provided in order to run the catechesis process more effectively, providing more care for the faith and salvation of man.

KEYWORDS: religion, education, catechesis, Poland, atheism.

⁵⁷ Jan Paweł II, “Homilia wygłoszona w Łowiczu (14 czerwca 1999 r.),” in *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny. Przemówienia, homilie* (Kraków 2005), 1144.

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CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF HOPE INTO THE MEDIA CULTURE

Within the culture of communication there exists a media culture, i.e., the nature and influence of the human and technological mediation of ideas, ideals, values, information, storytelling, and rituals. The media have self-propagated in a plethora of communication tools that are constantly evolving. On the one hand, they reinforce the relational dynamic at the heart of culture especially in their social networking form, generating or supporting other cultures in unprecedented ways. On the other hand, they are devastating culture through their symbiotic relationship with consumerism and the will to power, which constitute some of the principal dynamics at the root of modern unbelief.

The main purpose of my considerations hereafter is to indicate how the task of the new evangelization with respect to this phenomenon can build a culture of communication, enlightened by faith.

Atheism According to JPII

How does John Paul II regard “modern unbelief”? While *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*¹ is not a comprehensive treatment of his thought, it does offer insights into how an informed faith can change the course of a history that, in many respects and over a long period of time, has followed a trajectory without God. After situating atheism and faith within a historical context, examining them both in relation to the development of philosophy and theology, John Paul reflects on his contemporaries’ struggle for faith. He describes the characteristics of their inner struggle—in the face of evil and nihilism—to confer meaning on life consonant with the *totality* of

¹ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

revealed truth about God and the human person and to make their individual and societal existence consistent with that meaning. He comments,

One sees clearly that *the response to the question "An Deus sit?"* [Does God exist?] *is not only an issue that touches the intellect . . .* Questioning God's existence is intimately united with *the purpose of human existence*. Not only is it a question of the intellect; it is also a question of the will, even a question of the human heart . . .²

It could be argued that Wojtyla's understanding of atheism was forged during the immediate aftermath of World War II in the crucible of Marxist dialectical materialism and has been supplanted by the challenge of a new reality, a new atheism, the bitter fruit, in part, of 9/11. This new reality is characterized by the insecurity of a multipolar geopolitical economy, disgust and disillusionment at the "wars of religion," and the deference afforded to the magisterium of science, in a search for the origins, meaning, and purpose of human existence apart from God.

Faces of Contemporary Atheism

Let us look at three real atheists of our times, people whose paths I have crossed, to discover any relevance to his perspective.

Atheist #1

On a flight from Toronto to Calgary in 1997, I sat next to an engineer from Poland, living at that time in Ontario. He, his wife, who was also an engineer, and their seventeen-year-old son were atheists. For three hours and some, at his initiative, we sparred about the merits and risks of belief and unbelief, about Poland, and culture. Eventually he admitted that, although "the Church never betrayed us," as he put it, it kept people from advancing economically and politically (no doubt to keep them away from the Communist party). I urged him, "To be Polish is to be a person of faith; it's who you are, historically and culturally. You want to advance? Go ahead! But not at the cost of who you are." We actually ended up praying together as we taxied into Calgary. Only God knows where that journey will *really* end up.

Atheist #2

The following year I was on a flight from Montreal to Toronto, and a young Chinese woman next to me confided that she had been raised an

² Id., 30–31.

atheist in mainland China, then immigrated to Canada and got her degree in mathematics five years previously. On campus she was browbeaten as a sinner by proselytizers. Even so, the “God question” never left her, so she pressed me about God’s existence. After I affirmed her intrinsic worth as a human being, I appealed to the Thomistic “proof” from causality. She countered, “But that doesn’t *prove* God’s existence.” I agreed, explaining that “the proofs demonstrate that faith is not contrary to reason.” What she said next pierced my heart like a knife: “If only someone had talked to me like this five years ago, I would be a Christian today.”

Atheist #3

Theresa was raised in a very devout Catholic family. Her father was a professor who led an evangelism program at a Catholic university. Her first doubts about God’s existence came when she was five. Later, Church politics pressured her father to leave the Church’s employ. The resulting scandalous behavior of some people of the cloth brought intense suffering to her family and soured Theresa to religion and faith itself. She describes her definitive break with God one day when she was 14:

I could not understand how a loving, all-powerful God could allow my family to suffer like this . . . I reasoned that if God . . . did exist, he might as well not exist to me.

The moment that thought crossed my mind, I claimed it as my own, and in that instant I became an atheist . . . I disowned God.³

Through a long, circuitous journey she found her way back to the Church, and in 2010, into the Daughters of St. Paul. We just published a book by Sr. Theresa Aletheia (“truth” in Greek), *The Prodigal You Love: Inviting Loved Ones Back to the Church*.⁴

A New Atheism?

As is widely known, some secular humanists contend that there really is no “new” atheism, only new packaging and new marketing through media.⁵ Other atheists disagree. Appealing to science, the new atheists condemn not just belief in God but respect for such belief. In this crusade

³ Theresa Aletheia Noble, F.S.P., *The Prodigal You Love* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2015), 135–136.

⁴ Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2015.

⁵ Tom Flynn, “Why I Don’t Believe in the New Atheism,” *Free Inquiry* 30:3 (2010): 7–43.

against faith, Victor J. Stenger writes, “the real war is between rationalism and superstition,” imperative because of religion’s public nature and “adverse effect on society.”⁶ The organization, American Atheists, posts an anti-Christmas billboard every year now in Times Square and displays its messages even on buses. Without discounting the influence of science on atheism, in many ways it is the same; it’s just gotten mean.

Mean and popular. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014, Americans who are religiously unaffiliated—describing themselves as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular” (“nones”), accounted for 22.8% of the population, up from 16.1% seven years earlier. It marks the highest growth rate of any group in the study. Not surprisingly, a full 34% to 36% of Millennials (ages 18–33) were thus unaffiliated.⁷

More problematic, perhaps, are the roots of atheism, some of which we saw in the faces we just examined. There, people eschewed faith and religion because of their experiences or desires. Sr. Theresa Aletheia explains it this way: “The roots of my atheism did not lie in a logical refutation of the existence of God—that would come later. Rather than reasoning God’s existence away, I simply denied it.”⁸ Yet, an attempt to “stifle the voice of God,” says John Paul II, “has nothing to offer except the things of this world. And sometimes such an offer brings with it destruction of cosmic proportions.”⁹

If that description fit the ideologies of his day, it most certainly reflects the corrosive influences within culture in ours, especially the deforming power of consumerism on technology and on all the ways that technology affects life. In one of its earlier stages, the cancer of consumerism, to use Pope Francis’s metaphor,¹⁰ manifested itself sixty years ago in this excerpt from a proposal for prosperity by retail analyst Victor Lebow in the *Journal of Retailing*. Annie Leonard made it famous in *The Story of Stuff*:

⁶ Victor J. Stenger, “Why I Believe in the New Atheism (and it’s not just a matter of faith),” <http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/vstenger/MagArticles/IBelieve.pdf>, accessed on June 10, 2015.

⁷ “U. S. Religious Landscape Study,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>, accessed on June 10, 2015.

⁸ Noble, *The Prodigal You Love*, 136.

⁹ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 130.

¹⁰ “Pope discusses Medjugorje, coming encyclical on flight from Bosnia,” *Catholic World Report* (June 6, 2015), http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3931/Pope_discusses_Medjugorje_coming_encyclical_on_flight_from_Bosnia.aspx, accessed on June 14, 2015.

Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption. The measure of social status, of social acceptance, of prestige, is now to be found in our consumptive patterns. The very meaning and significance of our lives today expressed in consumptive terms . . .

[C]ommodities and services must be offered to the consumer with a special urgency . . . We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing pace. We need to have people eat, drink, dress, ride, live, with ever more complicated and, therefore, constantly more expensive consumption.¹¹

This cancer has metastasized over the years and is now taking its toll on science, arts and the media, political structures, and even faith communities. It inverts priorities of individuals and families, substituting choice for truth, desires for needs, the immediate and ephemeral for the eternal, the commodity for the person, and what columnist David Brooks calls “resumé virtues” in place of true character.¹²

John Paul’s Response of Faith

1. It is in this context that we listen to John Paul’s response of faith, which involves the whole person. He writes:

I think that it is wrong to maintain that Saint Thomas’s position stands up only in the realm of the rational. One must, it is true, applaud Étienne Gilson when he agrees with Saint Thomas that the intellect is the most marvelous of God’s creations, but that does not mean that we must give in to a unilateral rationalism. Saint Thomas

¹¹ Victor Lebow, “Price Competition in 1955,” *Journal of Retailing*, <https://hundredgoals.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/journal-of-retailing.pdf>, accessed on June 10, 2015.

¹² This public paucity of “character formation” is the subject of *The Road to Character*, by *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, a secular Jew. In an interview he states: “We as a modern society are cultivating outwardly impressive but ultimately superficial ‘resume virtues’—not *character*. And it’s costing us dearly, both personally and communally” (“A priest’s powerful impact on *New York Times*’ David Brooks,” *CNA Daily News*, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/catholicnews/2015/05/a-priests-powerful-impact-on-the-new-york-times-david-brooks/>, accessed on June 13, 2015).

celebrates all the richness and complexity of each created being, and especially of the human being.¹³

John Paul roots human knowledge in sensory knowledge, then moves quickly to the transempirical, affirming the validity of extrasensory truths shared in common. In addition, far from relegating these to the realm of theology, he recognizes in them a philosophical basis. This is a key element in how John Paul envisioned the new evangelization.

*We are witnesses of a symptomatic return to metaphysics . . . through an integral anthropology . . . one that passes not so much through being and existence as through people and their meeting each other, through the "I" and the "Thou" . . . a coexistence.*¹⁴

2. Commenting on agnostic demands that God reveal himself on our terms, he observes that "The history of salvation is also the history of man's continual judgment of God."¹⁵ John Paul lays the blame for agnosticism at the feet of René Descartes, "who split thought from existence and identified existence with reason itself."¹⁶ I-Am-Who-Am cannot be reduced to "I think, therefore I am." Absolute Mystery is not subject to dissection and analysis (no matter what Victor Stenger thinks¹⁷). Moreover, John Paul says that what God reveals is not for our control, but for communion, and through it, for adoration and our salvation. In the words of English mystic, Evelyn Underhill, "If God were small enough to be understood, He would not be big enough to be worshipped."¹⁸

3. In his response to the question, "What is the use of believing?" John Paul adds a pragmatic consideration to his metaphysical/anthropological synthesis. He draws from the words of Vatican II to state that "the essential usefulness of faith consists in the fact that, through faith, man achieves the good of his rational nature."¹⁹ In this way communion is based on the whole truth about the human person, rather than on a subjective determination of what is right and good.

¹³ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 31.

¹⁴ *Id.*, 34–35.

¹⁵ *Id.*, 61.

¹⁶ *Id.*, 38.

¹⁷ Stenger, "Why I Believe in the New Atheism."

¹⁸ Quoted after Elisabeth Elliot, *Secure in the Everlasting Arms* (Revell, 2002), 91.

¹⁹ *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, quoted in John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 192.

The New Evangelization

The intended demographic of the Church's commitment to a new evangelization is whole peoples who were once evangelized, but who have either rejected Christianity's Greco-Roman patrimony as outmoded and restrictive, or have traded Christian culture for superficial consumerism. I believe that to be effective, the Church's dialogue with these peoples must address the "question" of God with John Paul's threefold response.²⁰ Practically speaking, how does this response translate today? What makes this evangelization new? I mention six elements here, derived largely from the very detailed *Lineamenta*, or working document, published in preparation for the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held in 2012:

1. From the outset, Christian mission, like its theology, has been *incarnational*, earthy, communicated in contemporary terms and formative of culture—the Word with skin on. If we look at a small portion of history, the past hundred years or so, we see numerous icons of "new" evangelization—people who have "incarnated" the Word in their own lives and ministries in a remarkable way. Here are a few:

- the thousands of U.S. women religious who devised new ministries to meet new needs of the pioneer, the immigrant, and the child laborer, profoundly shaping the entire nation;
- Don Bosco and his Salesians, who dared to cross into Turin's "dark side" entering taverns and workplaces to entice young ruffians to join other boys at the Oratory;
- European missionaries to Asia who, at the turn of the last century, propagated the Gospel by new means and fostered native vocations, even when this alienated Europe's bishops;

²⁰ "A 'new evangelization' also means to have the boldness to raise the question of God in the context of these problems, thereby fulfilling the specific character of the Church's mission and showing how the Christian prospective enlightens, in an unprecedented way, the great problems of history. The new evangelization calls us to engage in dialogue with these sectors, not remaining confined to our communities and our institutions, but accepting the challenge to take part in these phenomena so as to speak and bear witness in these sectors, from the inside. This is the form of Christian *martyria* in today's world, engaging in dialogue even with the recent forms of a militant atheism or an extreme secularism, whose purpose is to eliminate the subject of God from human life" (*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith. Lineamenta*, 7).

- Alcoholics Anonymous: In 1990 *Life* magazine listed co-founder Bill Wilson as one of the most influential people of the twentieth century;²¹
- Jacques and Raissa Maritain, Mother Teresa, Brother Roger of Taizé, Oscar Romero . . .

The list goes on. To be new, this incarnational aspect will have to address new situations in radically new ways.²²

2. It is increasingly *lay inspired, involved, and led*.²³ Preceded by the rise of anticlerical Enlightenment thinkers and statesmen, the French Revolution and its aftermath meant death or expulsion for clergy and religious and, all across Europe, the elimination of legal recognition for hundreds of religious communities together with the confiscation of their goods. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, an unintended side effect of this systemic greed was an unprecedented groundswell of the laity in support of the very Church whose influence the secular agenda had tried to ban from the public sphere. Individuals, organizations, and movements on both sides of the Atlantic made notable contributions to a burgeoning lay Catholic sense of Church, history, and social activism.

To garner support for their position, these laity did not hesitate to use the press, the same means used by their opponents. Consider, for example, the project of Blessed James Alberione, founder of the Pauline

²¹ "Life Lists 20th Century's Most Influential Americans," *Deseret News* (Sept 1, 1990), <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/119956/LIFE-LISTS-20TH-CENTURYS-MOST-INFLUENTIAL-AMERICANS.html?pg=all>, accessed on June 10, 2015.

²² John Paul II "said to the bishops in Latin America: 'The commemoration of this half millennium of evangelization will have full significance if, as bishops, with your priests and faithful, you accept it as your commitment; a commitment not of re-evangelization, but rather of a new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods and expression'" (*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith. Lineamenta*, 5).

The new evangelization requires "courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today . . . 'Today all Christians, the particular Churches and the universal Church, are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit'" (id.).

²³ "Nor is transmitting the faith a specialized work assigned to a group of people or specifically designated individuals, but an experience of every Christian and the entire Church . . . This will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel" (id., 12).

Family with its ten branches of laity, clergy, and religious, all dedicated in some way to proclaiming Christ, Way, Truth, and Life in a world of communication. It was a project that he boldly regarded as key to “a new evangelization,” which he saw as essential to the Church’s survival.

From Opus Dei to Communion and Liberation, modern lay movements point to a theological shift, part of Vatican II’s legacy, namely, an evangelization derived from Baptism,²⁴ rather than from the ministerial priesthood, as the basis for the Christian’s right and responsibility to share the Gospel of Christ. Much needed is the integration of Christian values in the social, academic, political, and economic sectors that these spiritualities foster.

3. As was stated above, John Paul proposed an anthropology that “passes . . . through people and their meeting each other.” The new evangelization is, therefore, *relational*, first with God in Christ, then with each other.

In his first encyclical, Benedict XVI underscored this relational aspect of faith:

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction . . . Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn. 4:10), love is now no longer a mere “command”; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.²⁵

To be authentic this love for God must be “incarnated” in love for neighbor—concretely, in *empathy*: “[W]hoever does not love a brother [or sister] whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn. 4:20). Concretely, for example, people claim that the purpose of economics is to increase wealth. How often do they ask: For whom? According to what criteria? And at whose expense?²⁶ John Paul connects a warning against triumphalism vis-à-vis Communism with a warning to the West regarding this very prevailing notion about economics, exacerbated by the media:

How else can we explain the increasing gap between the rich North and the ever poorer South? Who is responsible for this? Man is re-

²⁴ To explore the implications of Baptism for the new evangelization, especially in the integration of catechesis and sacramental practice, see id., Chapter III.

²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 1.

²⁶ As did the participants of the International Congress “Renewing the West by Renewing Common Sense,” held on July 17–20, 2014, in Huntington, Long Island, NY.

sponsible . . . [R]esponsibility lies with the struggle against God, the systematic elimination of all that is Christian.²⁷

Is it really necessary to add here that little hinders the Church's evangelizing effort more than Christians exploiting other human beings?

In his latest encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis writes:

The principle of the maximization of profits, frequently isolated from other considerations, reflects a misunderstanding of the very concept of the economy . . . only when "the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognized with transparency and fully borne" . . . can those actions be considered ethical.²⁸

In this, the popes are calling us to *communion*. In response to the new atheism, God is giving us the new evangelization, an act of charity, that in order to be an antidote to the individualism and isolation of our culture, can only be carried out in communion. The days of the Lone Ranger are over. No authoritarianism, no rivalries, no cultural imperialism, but reverence for the story of God's call to others, collaboration, obedience to the Spirit of God acting through the Church, the body of Christ, and a selfless sharing of the faith values that undergird all the great civilizations.²⁹

4. We usually think of enculturation in terms of ethnicity. The media generated culture in which we globally live crossed ethnic borders long ago. Its languages are being interpreted everywhere in the ethnic symbols in which they are expressed. How can evangelization be *enculturated* there? How can it build a culture of communication in the secular sphere? Through a theology and spirituality of communication. The post-conciliar document, *Communio et progressio*, models such an approach in its review of salvation history and life in the Church through the lens of communication: the faith response to God's self-revelation, lived in communion (nn. 8–12).

²⁷ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 132–133.

²⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si*, 195.

²⁹ In the nascent Church "[t]he process of evangelization became a process of discernment. Proclamation first requires moments of listening, understanding and interpretation. "In many ways, our times are similar to those in which St. Paul lived. As Christians, we too find ourselves immersed in a period of significant historical and cultural change which we will have greater opportunity to treat later in these pages. Evangelical activity demands that we undertake a similar, corresponding and timely activity of discernment" (*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, 3).

To enculturate and so, share, the principles and values that comprise the “operating system” of Western civilization, we will have to reboot. The process for this action is a communication paradigm. The Church will always derive her theology and spirituality from revelation. However, in order to speak the truth in a comprehensible and life-giving way to people of this age, she needs to recover her early methodology: seeing revelation primarily as communication and not just content. In this paradigm for evangelization, the medium becomes the message.³⁰ If the Church neglects to do this, she will continue to see media as extraneous to her mission, and so, will fail to both share the patrimony of the West and integrate with it the riches of the East and the South.

In his evangelization encyclical, *Mission of the Redeemer*, John Paul II observes:

After preaching in a number of places, St. Paul arrived in Athens, where he went to the Areopagus . . . (cf. Acts 17:22–31) the cultural center of the learned.

The first Areopagus of the modern age is the *world of communications* . . . Involvement in the mass media . . . is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel . . . [I]t is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the “new culture” created by modern communications . . . [T]he “new culture” originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology (RM 37.c).

³⁰ “This extensive mixing of cultures is the backdrop to our third great sector which has an increasingly determined effect on the lives of individuals and the collective conscience, namely, the means of social communications, which, while today providing great possibilities for the Church, also represents one of her greatest challenges. Although these means of social communications, in their initial stages, were limited to the industrialized world, they are now able to influence vast portions of developing countries. Today, no place in the world is beyond reach and, consequently, unaffected by the media and digital culture, which is fast becoming the ‘forum’ of public life and social interaction . . . In this sector, the new evangelization means that Christians need to show boldness in these ‘new *aeropaghi*’, where they live everyday, and find the means and approaches to ensure that the Church’s patrimony in education and knowledge, safeguarded by the Christian tradition, has a part to play in these ultra-modern places” (id., 6).

5. The new evangelization is *joyful*, because it trusts in God.³¹ We all face obstacles in living and sharing our faith. Joy does not turn a blind eye to what afflicts society and the Church or fail to recognize our own insufficiency, but neither does it dwell on dour predictions about the future. Crossing the threshold of hope with the Apostle Paul, we see beneath every evil: “[W]here sin increased, grace has abounded all the more” (Rom. 5:20). Pessimism repels! Joy attracts! To quote Joan Rivers: “The first time I see a jogger smiling, I’ll consider it.”³² In his first letter, John models the purpose and style of our own witness: “We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy” (1 Jn. 1:4).

6. Finally, the new evangelization is *prayerful*. “If the Lord does not build a house, in vain do its builders labor” (Ps. 127:1). As the story goes, when Fr. Alberione was approached by a journalist who wanted a photo of this entrepreneur of the Gospel—behind his desk, directing his empire—Fr. Alberione went over to his prie-dieu and knelt before the crucifix. “Here,” he directed, “this is where you can take my picture.” John Paul affirms that prayer “constitutes the easiest way of making God and His redeeming love present in the world.” As we discuss how to renew the West, how convincingly, how faithfully is prayer a factor?

One day as he concluded a parable on prayer, Christ asked a chilling question: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk. 18:8) John Paul describes this question as “the source of the missionary dimension of the prayer of the Church and of the Pope”³³: a longing that Christ at his coming might find faith in the hearts, lives, and societies of the earth. Despite our insufficiency, we answer a resounding “yes!” to that desire of Christ and of every believing Christian.

Who compensates for our lack? Pope Francis answers: “[N]o words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in

³¹ “The new evangelization is an invitation to Christian communities to place greater trust in the Spirit who guides them in the course of history. In this way, they can overcome the temptation to fear and more clearly see the places and programmes where the question of God can be raised amidst people’s lives today” (id., 19).

“[T]he obstacles to the new evangelization are precisely a lack of joy and hope among people . . . We therefore approach the new evangelization with a sense of enthusiasm. We will learn the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing, even at times when proclamation might seem like a seed sown among tears (cf. Ps 126:6)” (id., 25).

³² *Thinkexist.com*, http://thinkexist.com/quotation/the_first_time_i_see_a_jogger_smiling-i-ll/155433.html, accessed on June 13, 2015.

³³ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 24.

our hearts.”³⁴ May the Spirit spark a new Pentecost within and among us and in so doing, grant to the world a new season of faith.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF HOPE INTO THE MEDIA CULTURE

SUMMARY

The “new atheism” and the “new evangelization” have become the buzzwords of the age. Atheism is now the fastest growing “religious” group in the United States; the new evangelization decisively shaped the conclave that elected Jorge Bergoglio to the papacy. Twenty years ago, in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul II reflected pastorally on some of the philosophical, spiritual, and cultural roots of both. His insights, embodied in Christians who live them, offer the Church a key to our times. If evangelization today is to announce the Gospel in the languages of today, what script might it use? What images might it evoke? What might its cadence be like?

KEYWORDS: anthropology, atheism, consumerism, Crossing the Threshold of Hope, faith, John Paul II, media culture, metaphysics, new evangelization, paradigm shift, Western civilization.

³⁴ Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 261.

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STATE VS. GOD: ON AN ATHEISTIC IMPLICATION OF EUROPEAN STATISM

The title of my essay may suggest that I am going to discuss a concept of an atheist government which strives to eliminate the presence of God from public life.¹ I will not, however, proceed in this way and I will skip the emblematic phenomena of European atheism such as the French Revolution, which gave rise to the secular government in France, or the communist revolution, which created a godless government in Russia. The atheism that openly fights against God, though still current in many cultures, has already been well diagnosed and well responded to, at least in theory.² The aim of my article is to reveal a specific form of atheism which consists in promoting the primacy of loyalty to the state over loyalty to God and seems to thrive exceptionally well in historically Christian countries, like that of Poland.

State vs. Religious Loyalty

In 2014 in Warsaw, Poland, a dramatic event took place: a doctor (Bogdan Chazan) who refused, because of his religious faith, to perform an abortion on a woman was dismissed from his practice at the hospital. Under Polish law, abortions are allowed until the 25th week of pregnancy only

¹ On philosophical theories supporting the superiority of politics over religion, see Pawel Tarasiewicz, “Between Politics and Religion—in Search of the *Golden Mean*,” trans. Jan R. Kobylecki, *Studia Gilsoniana* 1 (2012): 122–126.

² See, Zofia J. Zdybicka, “Atheism,” trans. Hugh McDonald, in *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Andrzej Maryniarczyk (<http://www.ptta.pl/pef/haslaen/a/atheism.pdf>, accessed on Oct 25, 2015); Étienne Gilson, *L’athéisme difficile* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1979).

if the life of the expectant mother or her child is at risk, or in cases of incest or rape. The mayor of Warsaw (Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz) said that she cancelled the doctor's contract as director of a city's hospital because he failed to inform the mother that the procedure would be illegal after 24 weeks, and for failing to inform her where else she could go to have the abortion.³

As a result, the public opinion was almost entirely focused on the doctor's decision. Secular media claimed that he did not have a right to either refuse aiding her in finding another hospital that would perform the abortion or to invoke a conscience clause while being in a management position.⁴ Catholic media, in turn, argued that his behavior was absolutely exemplary and quickly perpetuated him as a symbol of freedom of conscience in politics.⁵

Few people paid attention to the other party of the case: the mayor of Warsaw who dismissed the doctor. Her behavior, however, illustrates the point at which I aim: an atheistic implication of European statism.⁶ What can be surprising is the fact that implications of this kind do not need to be represented only by atheists; they can also involve people like the mayor of Warsaw who in her country is very well known as a declared Catholic and a politician closely connected with the Church.⁷

³ "Polish doctor dismissed in 'abortion refusal' case," *BBC News* (July 9, 2014), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28225793>, accessed on June 20, 2015.

⁴ *Nota bene*, "[a]fter his refusal to perform abortion a criminal proceeding started as well as professional disciplinary proceeding in the Physician's Council. Both proceedings were recently decided in favor of prof. Chazan . . ." ("Polish Constitutional Tribunal Dismissed Limitations to Medical Doctors Conscientious Objection," <http://www.en.ordoiuris.pl/polish-constitutional-tribunal-dismissed-limitations-to-medical-doctors-conscientious-objection,3677,i.html>, accessed on Oct 10, 2015).

⁵ Cf. "Protest held outside Polish embassy in defence of dismissed doctor," *The Protection of Conscience Project* (Sept 3, 2014), <http://consciencelaws.org/blog/?cat=1190>, accessed on Oct 15, 2015.

⁶ "[A]lthough the word 'statism' itself rarely occurs, the phenomena it connotes have certainly been widely recognised and discussed. The expression 'statism' first emerged as such in France around 1880 to describe political doctrines that called for an expansion of the role and responsibilities of the state in all areas of the economy and civil society. The word was also used in Switzerland in the 1890s in the struggle to resist a proposed expansion of federal powers at the expense of the cantons, especially in the economic and financial domains. Nowadays, a usage of 'statism' prevails that denotes the dominant position of the state vis-à-vis society, its individual domains, and the individual" (Bob Jessop, "Statism," *Historical Materialism* 15:2 (2007): 233).

⁷ On the connections of Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz with the Church in Poland, see, Sabrina P. Ramet, *Whose Democracy? Nationalism, Religion, and the Doctrine of Collective Rights*

Why did the mayor of Warsaw choose to dismiss a pro-life doctor who tried to save an unborn baby rather than support his action? Why did she give preference to loyalty to the state's law rather than to loyalty to her Christian faith? Why do other Christians ever decide to behave in a way which promotes statism rather than protect the individual from becoming a cog in the machine of the state? I only hope that they do it merely for expediency and eventually realize that no Christian can be a servant of God and of wealth and survive (cf. Lk 16:13).

The European statism, however, is not only well equipped with practical lures, like promising prospects for finding jobs in state administration,⁸ but also it can be well furnished with philosophical arguments which say that: 1) there is no contradiction between Christian faith and absolute loyalty to the government; 2) absolute loyalty to the government can never be wrong or lead to sin; and 3) there is a necessary supremacy of the government over God which conforms with the Bible and the Christian faith. Such philosophical arguments can be supported by at least two philosophers of a great renown, namely Thomas Hobbes⁹ and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.¹⁰

in Post-1989 Eastern Europe (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997), 106: "As early as August 1995, the Polish bishops issued a letter to the faithful calling on them to vote against former communists and to choose candidates 'who will defend ethical and evangelical values (meaning the Church's preferred candidate, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, chief of the Central Bank)."

⁸ Offering jobs by the state is particularly important, especially in those countries where the threat of unemployment is ever-present. In Poland, tendencies in the labor market are best reflected in the popularity of subjects studied at universities. In the 2015–2016 academic year, for example, at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, the overall number of seats for the first year of B.A. and M.A. studies—conducted in Polish language—in administration was planned to reach 310, while in philosophy only 25 (<http://www.kul.pl/jakie-sa-limity-miejsc-na-kazdym-kierunku,12568.html>, accessed on Oct 20, 2015).

⁹ For online information resources on Hobbes, see, Garrath Williams, "Thomas Hobbes: Moral and Political Philosophy," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/hobmoral/>, accessed on Oct 25, 2015); Sharon A. Lloyd and Susanne Sreedhar, "Hobbes's Moral and Political Philosophy," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta (<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/hobbes-moral/>, accessed on Oct 25, 2015).

¹⁰ For online information resources on Hegel, see, David A. Duquette, "Hegel: Social and Political Thought," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/hegelsoc/>, accessed on Oct 25, 2015); Paul Redding, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta (<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/hegel/>, accessed on Oct 25, 2015).

Hobbean Statism

Let us begin with Hobbes to show how he struggles against the God of Christianity and replaces God's authority with the authority of the government which, for Hobbes, is a secular sovereign. Hobbes' political doctrine is too famous, of course, to be in need of a special introduction. Instead I am going to immediately focus on answering the following question: what arguments does Hobbes use to justify the primacy of the secular sovereign over God?

In the second part of his *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes an analogy between the earthly sovereign and the God of the Bible. Both God and the sovereign have absolute power, remain outside the law and consequently cannot act unjustly. The fear of the omnipotent God is, therefore, similar to the terror by which the human sovereign reigns.¹¹ But Hobbes is aware that, as he puts it in his *Citizen*, "no man can serve two masters; nor is he less, but rather more of a master, whom we are to obey for fear of damnation than he whom we obey for fear of temporal death," and again, as he adds in his *Behemoth*, "as much as eternal torture is more terrible than death, so much [the people] would fear the clergy more than the King." The fear of God's eternal punishments then could be a source of anarchy which should be avoided by the earthly sovereign for any price.¹² To escape from this danger, Hobbes robes himself in the vestments of a theologian and delivers a new interpretation of the Scriptures. His reading of the Scriptures has three principal objectives. He strives to show that: 1) with the ascension of Christ to heaven, the kingdom of God has disappeared from history and will come again at the end of time; 2) the absence of the audible voice of God on the earth must be compensated by the interpretation of the Scriptures reserved to and given only by the earthly sovereign;¹³ and 3) the Scriptures do not provide any evidence for the idea that the soul of man is by its nature eternal nor that eternal rewards and punishments—heaven, hell or purgatory—are to be understood literally.¹⁴

Against the most accepted and orthodox Christian interpretations, Hobbes claims that the soul is corporeal and does not have an existence

¹¹ Gabriel L. Negretto, "Hobbes' Leviathan. The Irresistible Power of a Mortal God," in *Analisi e diritto 2001. Ricerche di giurisprudenza analitica*, ed. P. Comanducci and R. Guastini (Torino: Giappichelli, 2002), 182.

¹² *Id.*, 186.

¹³ See *id.*, 185.

¹⁴ *Id.*, 187.

apart from the body. In his view, the soul must perish with the death of the body and will start to enjoy immortality only when the body rises from the dead on the day of resurrection.¹⁵ According to him, the first coming of Christ did not establish eternal life here and now but only the hope of resurrection in the future world. In other words, Hobbes' interpretation of the Scriptures postpones eternal life to an unknown and remote future. In the meantime, people have to accept that their physical death is equivalent to a state of non-existence.

It is evident that Hobbes' teaching on eternal life is a part of his political strategy. By undermining the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, Hobbes strives to make men understand that there is no greater power than the secular sovereign, nor greater evil than corporeal death. In this sense, Hobbes' political philosophy represents an outright assault against the supernaturalist elements of Christianity.

But Hobbes' reformulation of the doctrine of salvation and immortality also has another face: the supernatural powers of the earthly sovereign. Given the correspondence which Hobbes sees between civil obedience and religious salvation, his criticism of the idea of immortality in this life, makes the power of the secular sovereign to resemble even more the power of a secularized god. Whereas salvation in the other world is uncertain, disobedience to the earthly sovereign's will may in this world entail, if not an eternal damnation, at least a death which is equal to a non-existence lasting indefinitely long.¹⁶

Hobbes' reinterpretation of the Scriptures is then part of a strategy of political persuasion. By claiming that the kingdom of God is an earthly kingdom that existed in the past and will not be restored until the second coming of Christ at the end of time, and that there is no salvation nor immortality until the end of history, Hobbes both dethrones the authority of the Church and reinforces the deterrent power of civil sanctions. He places God beyond history, in a distant past and in a distant future. He concludes that we live in a profane time where the only visible authority is the secular authority of the government.¹⁷

What do we think about Hobbes' conceptions of the superiority of the government and the mortal nature of the soul? Would it have any chance to find acceptance among Christians, say, Catholics in Poland?

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ Id., 188.

¹⁷ Id., 189.

Instead of guessing the answer, it seems better to quote some sociological data. In 2012, the Polish Catholic Information Agency reported the results of sociological investigations on the religiosity of Polish society in which 93% members were professed Catholics. Thus, Poles who declared the lack of faith in the immortality of the soul were 29%, those who did not believe in heaven 32%, in life after death 34%, in resurrection 37%, in the existence of hell 44%.¹⁸ Is there still any ground to believe in the complete failure of Hobbes' doctrine in one of the most Catholic societies in the world? Evidently, it seems that there is not.

Hegelian Statism

While the influence of Hobbes on Christian theology seems to be of minor significance, Hegel's importance for modern theology is widely recognized, as: 1) no other philosopher since the 18th century has had more influence on theologians than him; 2) apart from Hegel, it is not possible to understand our recent intellectual history; and 3) his influence can be found even at the Second Vatican Council.¹⁹ How can Hegel be helpful in bringing Christians to accept statism or even adopt it? The answer is contained in Hegel's theory of God.

For Hegel, God is not a transcendent creator but the essence of the universe. This divine essence is thoroughly rational; it is universal reason which underlies the objectivity of all that exists. As an objective rational essence this universal reason develops itself by logical implication into the material universe and then into human subjectivity. Human individuality is thus a subsequent appearance of universal divine essence which completes divine self-manifestation at a certain level.²⁰

The self-manifestation of God, however, can be fully completed neither by humanity as a whole nor by the individuals of which it consists but by the particular states in which individual people live. According to He-

¹⁸ See "Sekularyzacja w Polsce wolniejsza [The Secularization in Poland Slows Down]," Polish Catholic Information Agency (April 13, 2012).

¹⁹ See Daniel P. Jamros, S.J., "Hegel on the Incarnation: Unique or Universal?," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 276, especially n. 2: "Consider the following entry from Gerald O'Collins, S.J., and Edward G. Farrugia, S.J., *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1991) s.v. 'Self-Communication': 'Term used by German idealists like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), and then adopted by theologians like Karl Rahner (1904–1984) and the Second Vatican Council (DV 6) to designate the self-manifestation and self-giving of God in the process of revelation and grace'."

²⁰ Cf. id., 277.

gel, while composing states, the individuals merely reproduce themselves without change from one generation to the next. Their principal occupation in life consists in trading with each other for petty economic advantage. Since individual people are self-serving and capricious, their doings are barely worth noting by the philosopher concerned with nobler things. By contrast, states are mighty, hence important, organizations. Each of them is not just a system of government but an idea incarnate which manifests itself in that system. Like Hobbes, Hegel sees the sovereignty of the state as its most important characteristic in which it differs from other organizations. Unlike Hobbes, Hegel does not see this sovereignty merely as an instrument of imposing law and order on the subjects, but endows it with high ethical content, i.e., with freedom. Thus, the state possesses the freedom to develop in accordance with its own nature; the freedom which consequently the state bestows on its citizens—so long as they cooperate with it. This is possible, because the state is nothing else but a divine self-manifestation, which means that this is God Himself who rules the state by making it rise, grow, reach maturity and decay in an everlasting search for a more perfect political order that is at the same time a more perfect truth.²¹

The theoretical outcomes of Hegelian statism are self-evident: 1) the state is the most perfect self-manifestation of God on earth; 2) outside the state, a man can mean nothing; and 3) the redemption of a man is possible only through the state. There can be no doubt that, while reading Hegel, the adherents of statism must feel like they are in paradise. In the light of Hegel's theory, they can see not only their dreams come true, but also themselves being saints.

Is it possible to make this theory unsuccessful in practice? Is it possible to protect societies from Hegelian statism? It seems it is. The very first thing which comes to mind as a remedy against statism is democracy. Considering that democracy prevails in the West, it seems to be rather impossible for Hegelian statism to be supported by the majority of free people. But regrettably, there is a potential trap: to be ruled by the advocates of statism in a democratic country, it is enough to have a government affected by a conviction about the saving power of the state.²²

²¹ Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999), 195–196.

²² It seems that potential supporters of such a government are especially those who prefer to think of the state as “the nanny state.” On the meaning of the nanny state, see Andrew Irvine, “How to Make Governments Competitive,” in *In the Agora: The Public Face of Canadian*

Statism and Democracy

Theodore J. Forstmann in his article “Statism: Opiate of the Elites,” wittily remarks that letting statism into democracy can be well described by

a new twist on an old fable about a kingdom and a tainted well: One of the king’s men bursts through the palace doors and rushes up to the throne. “Your highness,” he says, “the city well is tainted, and all who have drunk from it have gone mad. Your subjects are marching on the castle to demand your head. You must flee at once!” The king pondered this message for several moments and then made a startling move. He fetched water from the well and drank it himself. Thereafter, the mad king ruled his mad kingdom in perfect harmony.²³

The story of statism in democracy is similar but reversed: “The elites have drunk deeply from the well of political salvation, inducing visions of government-engineered utopia.”²⁴ Today, many of the political leaders in the West believe that the state, not the individual, is the spiritual center of society. According to this view, it is the government that assumes a moral significance and outweighs individual claims.²⁵

A sober reflection on the presence of statism in democracy can be found in the famous book *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville who wrote about America’s future and its citizens: “I am not afraid that they will find in their leaders tyrants, but rather tutors.” A government led by such men “does not tyrannize, it hinders, it represses, it enervates, it extinguishes, it stupefies, and finally it reduces each nation to being noth-

Philosophy, ed. Andrew D. Irvine and John S. Russell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 176–177: “The growth of what Margaret Thatcher used to call ‘the nanny state’ means that psychologically, we and our children have become more and more dependent on government. Often we simply assume that if a task is too large or too complex for us to do it ourselves, the only option is to give it to government. Like all large businesses, large governments benefit from economies of scale; at the same time, though, they lead to greater inefficiencies and reduced individual initiative.”

²³ Theodore J. Forstmann, “Statism: Opiate of the Elites,” *Imprimis* 26:5 (May 1997): 3.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*, 2.

ing more than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.”²⁶

According to Forstmann, adherents of statism implement their shepherdship upon democracy by: 1) making people value security over freedom; 2) manipulating common language; and 3) using the law and the courts to overcome popular will.²⁷

Conclusion

As a concluding remark, I would like to explore the words of Jesus Christ in Mark 12:17, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s,” which seem to be a particularly fertile ground for formulating a Christian reply to the arguments of statism.

In their interpretations, both Hobbes and Hegel want us to focus on Caesar or, speaking more precisely, to get in line with the state rather than to bother ourselves with serving God.²⁸ Such a concentration on the state is to be justified either because God is, as we are told by Hobbes, actually inaccessible for us, or because the state is, as we are taught by Hegel, the most perfect self-manifestation of God. In the light of Christ’s words cited above, however, neither Hobbes nor Hegel can be right. First, since—while living on the earth—we are to give what is Caesar’s to Caesar and what is God’s to God, both Caesar and God are accessible for us here and now. Second, since we are to render to Caesar other things than those we are to render to God, both Caesar and God have to differ from each other.

Consequently, the proper understanding of Christ’s teaching on Caesar and God seems to be an effective defender against the temptation of trading Christian faith in God for either a Hobbean or Hegelian philosophy of statism.

²⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition*, vol. 4, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/quote/281>, accessed on June 21, 2015.

²⁷ Forstmann, “Statism: Opiate of the Elites,” 3.

²⁸ We are strongly encouraged here to think of statism as if it were a kind of idolatry, where the state is the recipient of that glory which is due to God alone.

**STATE VS. GOD: ON AN ATHEISTIC IMPLICATION OF
EUROPEAN STATISM****SUMMARY**

The article consists of four parts. First, it gives an example of statism present in contemporary Europe which consists in giving a priority of loyalty to the state at the expense of loyalty to God. Secondly, it traces the idea of European statism in the thought of Hobbes and Hegel to show how the state was to replace or equal God's authority. Thirdly, it considers whether democracy can efficiently protect against statism. Finally, it explores the words of Jesus Christ—"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's"—to formulate an argument against trading Christian faith for the philosophy of statism.

KEYWORDS: atheism, statism, Christianity, God, Christ, Hobbes, Hegel.

