

2009

Sacred Imagination

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SACRED IMAGINATION



UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND

GARAVENTA CENTER FOR
CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL LIFE
AND AMERICAN CULTURE

2009

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EDITORS

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*You are the body of Christ
and its members. It is your own mystery
which lies here on the Lord's Table. It is
your own mystery of which you receive.
It is to what you are that you respond,
Amen*

St. Augustine / c. 8

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

On September 15, 2007, the Catholic Church declared the Very Reverend Basile Antoine Marie Moreau, C.S.C. blessed. Fr. Moreau is the Founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the Marianites of Holy Cross, the Sisters of the Holy Cross, and the Sisters of Holy Cross — religious orders of priests, brothers and sisters dedicated to the hearts of Jesus, Joseph, and Mary. The order was founded in Le Mans France in 1837 in the wake of the French revolution and the reign of terror.

Holy Cross institutions and communities in the United States, and throughout the world, in recognition of the zeal and holiness of Fr. Moreau set aside a year of celebration — a year of rejoicing and of spiritual renewal. The University of Portland, as appropriate to its mission as Catholic university in the Holy Cross tradition, fashioned its celebration under the title Sacred Imagination. Activities sponsored by the University and its Garaventa Center for Catholic Intellectual Life and American Culture included a pilgrimage to Le Mans, liturgical celebrations, musical performances, art exhibitions, lectures, books, and study of the spirituality of the institution and its members.

This book, *Sacred Imagination*, represents part of that celebration. The book had its beginnings in the extended study by faculty members from different disciplines of the work *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* by Cambridge professor Nicholas Boyle. Following the faculty's reading and studying of the book, Boyle lectured at the University of Portland and engaged in extended discussion with these members of the faculty and with some of their classes. In response to that study some participants directed their attention directly to Boyle's text while others took up the topic of sacred imagination more broadly. Accordingly, the book is divided into three parts: the first part directly engages Boyle's work; the second part takes up sacred imagination more generally — in art and in literature; and the third part deals with the results of the loss of sacred imagination.

The book begins with the reflections of Louis J. Masson, poet and essayist, as well as Professor of English at the University of Portland. In these pieces Masson provides an introduction to the project and process — author, book, and people. In "*The World for Wedding Band: Meditations on Nicholas Boyle's Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*," Masson offers several essays and poems as a series of meditations that evolved through the process of reading and discussing — as a solitary work and as a community work — Boyle's book. The poems and essays are reflections on the study of the book, reflections, on the journey of a life, reflections on the meaning of being and living Catholic, and reflections on revelation as moving as a river. The poems and essays reveal the life of a mind searching for, listening for, meditating on, and writing about the voice of God manifest in a world and the voice of man as "flesh become word in the mouth of man."

In *The Law and the Letter: Nicholas Boyle's Catholic Approach to Secular Literature*, Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C., a professor of Theology at the University of Portland, strives to provide a concise, reliable account of the literary theory that underlies Boyle's explicitly Catholic manner of interpreting secular literary texts. The article treats the crucial eighth and ninth chapters of

Boyle's *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*.

In *A Catholic Approach to Literature: A Hermeneutical Key for the Catholic University*, Margaret Monahan Hogan who holds the McNerney-Hanson Chair in Ethics and is the Executive Director of the Garaventa Center and Professor of Philosophy, extracts critical elements from Boyle's work to apply in other settings where the sacred and secular meet. She suggests that Boyle's understanding of sacred literature anchors the stability and development of Catholic teaching, and that his claim that secular literature meets sacred literature at the point of sameness of effect — as revelation of the Spirit as Holy and the spirit as community — on the acting subject and, in turn, on the attentive, effective community supply the principles that provide the heuristic structure for a mind or an institution that would be Catholic.

In *How Catholic?* Will Deming, Professor of Theology at the University of Portland, treats the question of whether any approach to literature can be "Catholic" in the broad sense of the term employed by Nicholas Boyle in his *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*. Deming understands the interpretation of literature as a quest for truth or truths. The quest necessarily has a spiritual element. Turning to the interpretive methods St. Paul employs in his Letters, Deming finds that Paul contextualizes his claims to universal truth within an ancient community of interpretation. As a consequence of this contextualization, Paul's claims to a universal truth are limited. Deming finds that Boyle performs a similar act of contextualization to St. Paul's, with the same consequences for his aspiration to universal truth.

In *Imaginative Inventions: A Purposive Account of Literature*, Caery Evangelist, a professor of Philosophy at the University of Portland, examines Boyle's definition of secular literature, scilicet, "secular literature is writing that is non-purposive in nature, whose interpretation is merely to entertain, yet nonetheless, it also seeks to 'tell the truth'" (Boyle, 125). Evangelist claims that Boyle's definition of literature raises two serious problems. First, it conflicts with the ordinary understanding of the value of literature. Second, it appears to defeat the very purpose for which Boyle seeks to use it in his project. Her paper analyzes Boyle's definition of literature and the difficulties it seems to produce, and she proposes that understanding literature as language which undermines the purely descriptive references of ordinary language might better serve to promote his project.

In *Between Truth and truths: Nicholas Boyle's **Catholic Approach to Literature** in the Classroom*, Molly Hiro, a professor of English at the University of Portland, offers her own Boyle-inspired reflections on reading, contemplating, writing about, and especially teaching literature in a Catholic context. Taking exception to Boyle's understanding of Truth, she stakes out a middle ground between singular, universal Truth and multiple changing truths, hoping to lay a foundation in that open space upon which students may have something like a sacred experience of reading. Truth, for Hiro, is constructed by means of such reading. Each student bears a deep ethical responsibility to undertake such a building project, with truth as its final goal.

In *The Bell: Our Symbols as Bridges between Sacred and Secular*, Laretta Conklin Frederking, a professor of Political Science at the University of Portland, examines the intersection of the

secular and sacred as portrayed by Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*. Frederking presents an account of the differing perspectives on the relationship between a religious order — Imber Abbey — and an associated lay community — Imber Court. She claims that Murdoch's narrative provides some insight for those who work where a religious order and a lay community collide and cooperate on a daily basis. Frederking claims that the narrative introduces the idea that if a religious order is closer to God through its ritual and commitment, at least on a more regular day to day basis, then it is the responsibility and privilege of an associated lay community to be at the service of the order. This perspective of difference suggests a spiritual hierarchy within which the lay community continually reinvigorates a cautionary tale of the lowly possibility of humanity. Frederking suggests that shared symbols — here the bells of Imber Abbey and Imber Court — of both communities afford the opportunity for the separate communities to connect as one.

In *Sacred Imagination and History*, Brian Els, a professor of History at the University of Portland, sets out to extend to his own discipline the methodology employed by Nicholas Boyle in *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*. Els is concerned specifically with the history of social welfare and charity, in which the religious motivations of the main actors have hitherto been given short shrift. Focusing on the nineteenth century, Els takes his examples from Protestant Prussia and Catholic Austria, discovering in these contexts instances of how the study of sacred motives can inform our understanding of the historical record.

In *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Catholic Reading*, Richard S. Christen, a professor in the School of Education at the University of Portland, takes up Boyle's theme that secular literary works, like sacred texts, "can speak to us about the relation of the modern world to God." Building on Boyle's insights, Christen's essay looks for "God's face" in a non-literary cultural expression — the arts and crafts movement that flourished from the 1880s to the 1920s in England and the United States. Remembered primarily as a style that applied simple designs, sound techniques, and natural materials to the objects of daily life, the arts and crafts movement was, at its core, a response to modern industrialization, a loose network of individuals and organizations committed not so much to a specific aesthetic as to the premise that a revival of handicrafts could remedy at least some of what was wrong in the modern, industrial world. Christen claims that the arts and crafts movement anticipated a fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching in the presence of nineteenth-century industrialization. Both movements proclaimed that work plays a central role in shaping who we are as persons and that industrialization, because of its approach to work, has debased humans and stunted their growth. Promoters of the arts and crafts attempted to improve the quality and appearance of material objects as well as the work lives of those producing them. Christen claims that Catholic principles and the arts and crafts movement provide a vision of work and a warning against the false promise of materialism.

In *Redeeming Culture*, Nicholas Boyle, the Schröder Professor of German at the University of Cambridge, traces the history of the meaning of the term, "culture." He first considers the

word's use as a singular noun that has no plural, and then considers its much later usage as a plural noun. He finds that a great deal of the development of the meaning of the term occurred first in the German language. Boyle goes on to consider how Christians might re-imagine "culture," finding two respects in which the term is in particular need of Christian re-imagining. His essay concludes with a striking example of the kind of re-imagination he advocates, in a reflection upon Hogarth's *Portrait of the Graham Children* of 1742.

Charles Lehman, calligrapher and artist, is a member of the Portland community. As part of the celebration of sacred imagination he presented an exhibition at the University. Two of his works — *You Are the Body of Christ* and *Finding God* — that were part of the exhibit grace this book. The first, using the words of Augustine, reminds us that we are the body of Christ; the second, using the words of Thomas Merton, reminds us that we cannot find God unless God first finds us. In Lehman's lecture, *Art: Celebration of the Sacred*, he maintains that in an authentic culture, "[p]eople make holy what they believe and they make beautiful what they love." Artists, through contemplation were opened by love and inspired to make the invisible visible, made beautiful works of art to celebrate their Catholic faith because they came to love what they believed to be holy. Catholic artists have done this visually from the era of the catacombs until our present time.

In *Icon as Image of Asceticism and Deification*, David W. Fagerberg, Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, treats the subject of "ascetic aesthetics," associating the good and beauty, which together constitute truth. The ascetic strives for the good. The good is beautiful. The aesthetic gives expression to this truth. The highest form in which the aesthetic may be manifested is in a person — an *imago Dei*. Such personal images are the subject matter of iconography.

In *Reading an Icon: Iconography as Prayer and Art*, Lynne Bissonnette-Pitre, physician, iconographer, and a member of the Garaventa Center advisory board, describes the unique purpose of writing icons as the generation of a dialogue of prayer and communion with God. In her lecture and in her week-long demonstration of the practice of iconography, as well as in this paper, she presents the icon as the visual presence of the word of God and the illumination of sacred scriptures. Her explication, against the backdrop of the iconography wars, of writing and reading the icon provides lessons in history, theology, and sacred art.

In *The Impact of Morality, Selflessness, and Justice in Emile Zola's Ladies' Paradise*, Elise Moentmann, a professor of History at the University of Portland, finds revelation of the sacred in the seemingly godless world of Zola's novel, *Au Bonheur des Dames*. The revelation finds expression through the singular righteousness of Denise, the provincial shop girl who is the novel's main character. As Denise triumphs over the pervasive immorality and injustice of her milieu, she affords an instance of how virtue, selflessness, and forgiveness can transform human circumstances and reveal the existence of a greater than human power.

In *Sacred Imagination in Michael McLaverty's "The Poteen Maker"* Fr. David Sherrer, Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Portland and former president of King's College, suggests

that the teacher of the children in this small rural Irish community offers his students lessons on many levels. The science lesson in evaporation and condensation — the poteen making — is both symbol and reality, and it is portrayed as having a sacramental character. It is a sign which teaches the young and leads them to love of learning, of each other, of their teacher, and of their community, and it is a reality that nourishes their teacher and their learning.

In *Pope Benedict and Dante: Love in the Modern World*, Rev. Stephen C. Rowan, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Portland, brings Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *God is Love*, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* into a mutually illuminating encounter. After summarizing Benedict's and Dante's understanding of love, Rowan considers some potentially deleterious ideas about love that circulate in our contemporary culture. Finally, he turns to Benedict's reflections on how Christian love must find personal and practical expression in the world today.

Departure and Return: What I Love about Trakl, an essay by Laura McLary, a professor of German at the University of Portland, moves on three levels. On one level it tells of the tragic and tortured life of Georg Trakl — a life lived within the years of great political and social upheaval that marked the early years of the Twentieth Century in Western Europe. On another level it tells the story of McLary's own struggle — in the company of Trakl's work and her educational travels — to leave behind the remnants of an imperfect childhood and to mature to adulthood without tragedy. On a third level it tells of her observations — through the lens of the memory of her pivotal experiences — of the encounters of her students with their own departures and returns.

In *To Imagine Otherness: Insights for Post-Holocaust Christians from Claude Lanzmann's Shoah*, Michael Cameron, a professor of Theology at the University of Portland, addresses some of the challenges of thinking religiously in the shadow of the Holocaust. He applies Christian sacred imagination to Claude Lanzmann's monumental film, *Shoah*, with the ambition of arriving at a more fruitful mode of Christian repentance. Drawing upon these reflections, the article offers a number of proposals by means of which Christians might move toward a new manner of repentance and care for the Other.

The Garaventa Center for Catholic Intellectual Life and American Culture is deeply grateful to Mary Garaventa and her family for their continuous support of the Center which bears their family name and for their support of the University of Portland which is *Alma Mater* to Silvio Garaventa, Marie (Cookie) Garaventa Adler, and Joseph Garaventa. The Garaventa Center, the editors of this book, and the faculty who participated in this project are grateful to Brother Donald Stabrowski, C.S.C., Provost of the University of Portland, for his support of this project.

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Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C., Ph.D.

Margaret Monahan Hogan, Ph.D.

SECTION 1:
ENGAGING BOYLE'S
SACRED AND SECULAR SCRIPTURES

THE WORLD FOR WEDDING BAND

MEDITATIONS ON NICHOLAS BOYLE'S
SACRED AND SECULAR SCRIPTURES:
A CATHOLIC APPROACH TO LITERATURE



BY LOUIS J. MASSON

I. Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird or Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Book

*I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.*

Wallace Stevens

1

The book. *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* by Nicholas Boyle lies on the desk before me. Over a period of months, it lay on a long table near to hand for thirteen of us who gathered in an upper room to see what would come of a collective reading and reflection. To read, to reflect, to discuss, and to put words to paper: that was the task. Here begin my words.

2

The author. Fittingly, we broke bread seated around a long table with Nicholas Boyle and his wife after we had read and pondered his book. When you have been speaking about and to a book for several months, hearing its words and sentences in your head but in your own voice, there is something transformative hearing the living author speak, shaking his hand, passing him salt across the table. The book then has a different voice, and having a sense, a strong impression of the author, can confirm what one can only surmise in the writing. You have to lean into the voice of the man to really hear him clearly; he speaks softly, carefully, and slowly. He strikes one as genuinely a man of his Catholic faith and beliefs. And I honor that, though I would see his and my church in a slightly different slant of light. His is a book that I sometimes disagreed with, but it remains a book that troubled me as often as it prodded me to my own epiphanies. And I think of these as pauses when in conversing with the book, a random series of meditations evolved, sprung from my mind like a flock of black birds startled from their roost and taking to the sky willy-nilly in every direction.

3

The bird. The birds, for there are several, flew into my mind years ago when I first read Wallace Stevens's poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." They have a habit of catching me unawares when I encounter something for the first time, inviting me to literally or imaginatively consider different perspectives just as the poet did looking at his blackbird. When we met with the book before us there were usually thirteen of us.

4

The thirteen. Sometimes this is the unluckiest of numbers, and yet, for me, since I was born on the thirteenth of a January rather long ago, it is auspicious. I remind myself also that when the disciples met with the master, there were thirteen. We, of course, are not disciples but bear academic titles, doctors all, in Theology, Philosophy, Education, History, Political Science, German, and English and American Literature. More importantly, we are thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, and seventy. We are Protestant, Agnostic, and Catholic (staunch, lapsed, and recovered). We are clergy and laity. We are men. We are women. We teach but remain students of the world and our lives. We honor the world and the word.

5

The upper room. The Last Supper comes to mind: the long table and the thirteen people. I suppose the table is a misrepresentation by Renaissance artists furnishing the Middle East with European furniture. Yet the grouping and the table hold sway. The disciples must have met often enough in rooms where they fell into amicable table talk as well as learning from their master. And each of us has led or participated in a seminar around a table with a small group; perhaps it is the ideal setting for serving ideas and words. And we would not be gathered here if it were not for what was said in upper rooms and in the countryside of the Holy Land two thousand years ago.

6

Three minds. Wallace Stevens begins the third stanza of his poem with "I was of three minds." I look at the book and I look at the twelve I have gathered with and I am of three minds. I am Catholic, I am a writer, and I am a fairly typical aging professor of literature whose life has been shaped by growing up and old in the middle and end of twentieth-century America. These I bring to the book, both my lenses and my baggage, but in turn the book invites me to ponder how the sacred and the secular color and shape the facets of my life.

7

The crows. In our upper room, I find that I usually sit opposite the windows that frame a view of the quad which stretches toward the Chapel of Christ the Teacher and beyond the chapel toward the Willamette River, and beyond the river toward the hills and mountains, and finally beyond them, toward Mt. Hood. When I came West, I was told this was God's country, and certainly Mt. Hood seems to reach into the heavens. Looking up from our discussion, I catch sight of a crow winging across the campus or I catch sight of one perched on the cross that tops the stubby glass-sided steeple of the chapel. I have sat under that steeple that allows light to fall into the sanctuary and seen the light broken by the silhouette of a crow landing on the cross. The sight disturbs me and delights me. It depends I suppose on how to see this black bird. Disturbing because I can imagine crows or their cousins at the site of Christ's crucifixion perched on the cross bars of the crosses, carrion birds ready to scavenge the soon to be corpses and reveling in their tasks with their cacophonous cries. Or I reject that sight and see the beautifully iridescent bird witness with its bird's eye view the consecration, the world of

nature or the natural world witness to the sacred and the spiritual.

8

The faith. Here that definite article causes difficulty: *the* faith. What to do with a book built on a very restricted sense of faith and belief? And how hard it is to define faith or belief when you are seated in a room with people of different faiths or who see a shared faith in different ways. Inevitably good men and women holding to their own faiths must relinquish words to a polite silence.

9

The words. Mazes or maps? I am struck once again by the power of words: to enlighten or to confuse. I think it was Byron who said of his fellow poet Coleridge's explanation of the imagination that he wished Coleridge would explain his explanations. And nearer to our time, Robert Frost said that there were two kinds of poets: those who wished to be understood and those who didn't. In considering the sacred and secular, especially the sacred, how tortured the language can become, especially when wielded by academics.

10

The world for wedding band. The poet read, "He wore the world for wedding band," and a few minutes later,

How small a thing is hope—

Hairspring body, mind's eye, and all endangered.

And in my mind's eye, I watch the poet once again walk in a snowstorm as I did nearly half a century ago when I was a freshman at Le Moyne College in upstate New York. He wore a hooded coat and his black cassock whipped in the wind. Framed in window, he appeared like a single black letter moving across a blank page: Daniel Berrigan. Poet, priest, Jesuit, teacher, gadfly, war protestor, FBI fugitive, ex-con, and probably prophet: Berrigan became all of these, but it was the poet Berrigan who touched me. I would hear him read from "Events" and "Hope," and he was the first poet I ever heard reading from his own works. For Berrigan, hope was a "fretful cricket" and the world Christ's "wedding band." These were epiphanic images for me, preparing me for my later discovery of the poems of an earlier Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins. In the poems of both poets, I was struck by the divine discovered through the natural world. Many of their poems became chapters in what is for me a non-biblical scripture of spiritual discovery, celebration, and prayer through an embrace of nature and of the everyday world around us.

11

The word made flesh. After a midnight Christmas mass, children, some held in their mothers' arms, approach the crèche just behind the altar rail. The older ones kneel; the smaller ones stand with their arms folded on the rail. A plaster Mary, Joseph, the Child, two sheep and oxen and a wooden manger placed in straw: they are in their traditional places. And above, a life-sized Christ bends his head downward toward the manger from His cross. But the children do not look up; invariably they look to the baby. It is all there: child and man, crèche and

crucifix, birth and death, earth and heaven. With sleep in their eyes the children will turn from the altar and walk into the silence of the night.

12

Revelation. Wallace Stevens begin the penultimate stanza of "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" with "The river is moving." I subscribe to the notion that revelation moves through time just as a river does. All time, before and after biblical time. I envy the time of Samuel, though we are told that even then "it was rare for Yahweh to speak in those days; visions were uncommon." Where is the voice now? Where was it before? Are there, were there whispers? I look to the poets.

13

The cover. Perhaps it was in my Catholic grade school that one of the nuns read to us a story of St. Jerome befriending a lion by removing a thorn from its paw. There is a painting by Colantonio with a very earnest lion sitting patiently, left paw raised and turned outward while an equally earnest and brown robed Jerome pulls out the offending thorn. It catches perfectly the image of that I had as a child. I never saw a reproduction of Caravaggio's "St. Jerome Writing" when I was young, but it would have fascinated me, perhaps disturbed me, with its skull, sliver of a halo, and the sinewy old man bent over his books. The skull especially would have haunted my imagination (I would have wondered whose it was and how it came to be on that writing table) though I would have also wondered if Jerome's contemporaries could actually see that halo. Now, I ignore the trope of the skull, halo, and the cardinal scarlet robe. Instead I focus on the bald dome of the old saint's head and the wisps of hair. The hands too catch my eye, the left seemingly holding a page open and marking another for reference. In the right, the hand poised to write. The quill held just aloft, waits ... for the signal from the brain, just as the old venerable head strains for the whispering of inspiration, for just the right words.

II. St Jerome Writing

after the painting by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio

He comes in from the cold,
A rag pile of a man,
Weathered and worn thin
By life in the urban desert,
And takes a place in the first pew
Of the Downtown Chapel
Carefully peeling away layers
Of others' discarded clothing
Almost down to his bony frame,
A Godot tramp or God's holy fool,
Who now leans his bald, scabbed head
And frizzed beard to the altar,
Straining, perhaps, to hear

As the priest reads the gospel
The voice of God.

Strip him completely,
Take away the last rags,
Throw over his shoulders
A robe, a cardinal's scarlet red,
Put him at a table,
Add a skull and a halo,
Finally, throw in three parchment tomes.
Let him hold a quill in his right hand.
There he is: Caravaggio's St. Jerome.

See, he is tired at his labors,
Listening as words dance from
Book to book, straining
As he did in the desert to hear
In the wind in a lion's roar in a bird's song
The voice of his God.
The quill quivers in a bony hand;
God's work is hard. Ink touches parchment
And letters flow into words.

III. The Joy of My Youth

"Et introibo ad altare Dei," began the priest, and I answered, *"Ad deum qui laetificat juventutem meam."* "To God, the joy of my youth," then, were the first words of Latin that I learned, and I spoke them, a nine-year-old boy, kneeling on the first marble step of the altar, overheard only by the priest, the sacristan, and two old women whose faces were nearly shrouded under their black head scarves and whose rosary beads clinked against the wooden arm rest where they leaned their busy hands. Had you asked me at the time if I thought God heard me, I suppose I would have answered, yes, for I truly believed Him present. But my thoughts were not on God but on the words, or more precisely, the sounds of the words.

Or, to be even more precise, an approximate sound of the words since early on I rushed to keep in rhythm with the priest. For me it was more like singing, not unlike learning *"Frere Jacques"* from the French nuns who taught at my *Notre Dame* grammar school. So I was caught up not in worship but in mastering the lyrics and choreography of a ritual I did not fully understand. Yet this house of worship was almost as familiar to me as the house I grew up in across the street from the church.

I pull from memory an even younger me just elbow high standing on the kneeler, resting my head against my mother's winter coat and hearing the priest who was blocked from my

sight by the rows of adults who closed round me like a woolen forest. I heard but could not see and so squinted at the dust motes drifting in the shafts of light from the stained glass windows and reacquainted myself with the figures in the stations of the cross. In the quiet after the three bells of *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*, a branch from the ancient elm that bent over the church roof brushed the slate roof, and I pulled my mother's sleeve. Mother touched her upper lip with one solemn fingertip, admonishing more than interpreting with her whisper, "Steeplejacks." I believed her and could imagine them plying their trade above me.

So at nine and an altar boy, I was at home in the church, but not at ease on the altar, feeling, as I do to this day, somehow out of place, as if I had been asked to join the grownups — company in the living room. I was beyond imagined steeplejacks but old enough to realize Mother Church was whispering to me about so many other things that I could not see. I liked then to walk from the sacristy through the empty church, especially when it was dark as it often was after an evening service. The priest would leave through the back door and I through the front. My footfalls on the stone floor echoed. I looked straight ahead and imagined I could almost feel the weight of the vaulted ceiling as I passed each supporting column. In the near dark, the church was a huge and looming presence of intricately linked stone on stone. I was so small.

Yet, I would always turn back toward the altar before I passed through the doors of the vestibule with its baptismal font where I first cried out in this church. All was in deep shadows; the life-sized crucifix hidden in darkness — darkness broken only by the flickering flame of the sanctuary lamp, announcing the presence of a consecrated host in the tabernacle. A tiny flame burning in the vast space of an empty church, the tabernacle smaller than a dollhouse, the gold ciborium containing a handful of wafer hosts: were these my burning bush, my temple holy of holies, and my God? Only in looking back from so many years can I suggest such notions might have flickered in that young boy. What I do remember with certainty is the glow of that single lamp was comforting in that enclosed darkness. The candle burning within a red glass candleholder flickered as a heart might beat and pulsed life into the stone and darkness and space that loomed around me.

The memory remains comforting as I look back through my life with the years aligned like the columns of my childhood church and each year taking me a step further from the flickering faith of my childhood. There was a time, I can say to myself, a time of simple faith. I no longer feel the weight of the stone pillars and vaulted ceiling or the emptiness of the dark in the way I did as an impressionable boy, but there remains the weight of a faith grounded in a particular religion. It is not the weight of stone but of words intricately linked and housing just as certainly the small flame. And the structure is immense and imposing. Yet it may be fragile too. To the poet William Blake, "If the Sun & Moon should doubt/ theyd immediately Go out." What if I looked back and the candle went out? And what if I look back and the candle goes out?

Would the stones fall? Would the darkness prevail? Would the words of my faith, its creeds

and ordinances, be no more than the imaginary steeplejacks that my mother whispered to the child at her side? Ah, so much depends on and grows from that single flame of faith. Oh, to be able to say as I once did, "*Ad deum qui laetificat juventútem meam.*"

IV. Advent

The Word was made flesh.

St. John's Gospel

first Sunday

again

our world

grows round

new life

pregnant

promise

cold wind

whispers

even

to me

alone

afraid

into

my dark

cold room

I hear

it speak:

He comes

again.

second Sunday

winter

drives us

under

old bridges

indoors

seeking

shelter

where we

find it

where we

prepare

a crib

for birth

for Him

safe from

winter.

third Sunday

lonely
 the road
 Wise Men

travel
 our road
 tonight

behind
 dark clouds
 we lose

the light
 but it
 returns

beckons
 says dawn
 to night

says hope
 to me
 poor wise

lonely.

fourth Sunday

the heart
 roads' end
 stable

manger
 soul's straw
 against

cold winds
 haven
 a home

days fade
 early
 year's end

death rides
 the wind
 but life

too He
 comes He
 comes to

the heart.

Christmas

the world
 wakens
 there is

no wind
 only
 a breeze

of song
 smoke from
 altars

candles
 incense
 time stops

repeats
 itself
 manger

mother
 and child
 who saves

the world.

V. Roads in a Wood

"He wore the world for wedding band."

Daniel Berrigan, S.J.

Years before I was born, the poet Robert Frost chose between two roads that diverged in a New England wood. For him, that choice "made all the difference." And long before I became acquainted with Frost's poetry, I became a frequent pilgrim to similar woods that dotted the pastures and small farms a short walk out from the Massachusetts town where I grew up. When I discovered the poems, it was not unlike opening an album of photographs from my childhood. I took them to heart and could have found in the circle of my boyhood wanderings replicas of the roads, the wood piles, the stone walls, the oven birds, and the weathered farms and farmers that are Frost's world.

And as I sit here pondering the sacred and the secular scriptures, I think of his two roads both as real pathways and as life choices. Like anyone reading the poem, I could see a fork and a choice, but looking back on my own life, I tend to see three pathways that I have taken, paths that often run parallel to each other, that intersect, and that often merge. I was carried up the aisle of St. Mark's Catholic church in my mother's arms and handed over to my favorite aunt who told me much later that I responded to my formal entry into the Catholic church with exactly the same scream that I greeted the world at birth: I came into both screaming. So I was set on the church's path whether I wish or not from the very beginning, and I have walked that path intermittently for almost seventy years, sometimes losing my way but somehow returning.

The second road or path was a literal one, or ones. As soon as I had the freedom to wander beyond my own yard, I was off to the woods, "the woods" being my catch-all for whatever field, meadow, clump of trees, pond, stream, or pasture captured my fancy or fell within the range of how far my parents would allow me to roam. In the afternoon, the shadow of the church fell upon a small grove of pine trees where I would climb, as Frost would say, toward heaven. And beyond the pines I walked across a small field that abutted a thin woods, and beyond that, real countryside with farms and ponds, and between and among them there were all manner of dirt roads, trails, and paths to explore. The world of nature was and is at my doorstep, and I look forward to rediscovering each morning if only walking under the trees that line my city streets. On my own, I found my way into the cathedral of nature, though I would not have phrased it that way. And I have worshiped there all my life, though there were times when the family moved to a city and the country roads and paths were closed to me. For me there was in nature sacredness, spirituality, and, perhaps, a kind of voice that I could only compare to what I sometimes found in my church.

Poems and their poets came later, but they revealed my path or paths were already well trodden. I had joined the company of others who sought and sometimes found an Edenic presence and spirituality in the natural world and the world of everyday. And in the poem that is The Bible, I have since childhood been intrigued by the brevity of the story of Adam

and Eve before the fall. They spoke with God in the wilderness, and “God fashioned all the wild beasts and the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it.” So the flesh became word in the mouth of man. And so after we read of the fall, the narrative time of peopling the earth rushes forward.

The biblical clock is poetic, measured in names and begetting, but I find it suggestive. In Eden, the world of nature, humanity communes directly with God, with the sacred and the spiritual, and humanity recreates the natural world in language. But what has this to do with the clocks of history and evolution? In some ways the historical past is as beguiling and mysterious as the poetic or mythic past. We do not know with any precision when we became who we now are. Perhaps language emerged fifty thousand years ago, though we possessed the body that we now all share for a hundred thousand years. I like to tease my more progressive theologian friends with the question: When did the human or humanoid first possess a soul and with it a special relationship to God? These questions presume, of course, a certain set of beliefs to even discuss. What we do know, however, is that for most of our past we wandered in the wilderness, in the world of nature.

Despite our industrial footprints, we still do, and most recently we have obviously become very much aware of our place in the world (both vulnerable: the world and humanity). What I like to think, perhaps poetically and not very originally, is that the revelation of the sacred began with humanity’s discovering the world through words and in both discovering and celebrating the sacred and the spiritual. The poetry of the British Romantics of the nineteenth century has a particularly visionary and almost priestly veneration for a world imbued with spirituality. I think of William Wordsworth, William Blake, Samuel Coleridge, and John Clare, and after them the Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins. More recently, I add Robert Frost to the list, knowing quite well that as a self-proclaimed humanist, he would not approve of the inclusion.

In these poets, I find a religious impulse that may speak without the strictures of dogma and that takes the paths of poetry and nature to discover the sacred in the evolving world around us. They are our psalmists. I listen now especially to the song of Mary Oliver who sees “writing poems, for me but not necessarily for others, is a way of offering praise to the world,” and who unabashedly speaks of and to God:

*And still I believe you will
come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know
that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come.*

I like to think that I have walked the same road as such poets and have done so as in my youth in the shadow of my church. “And that has made all the difference.”

VI. Revelations

Below a geese-crossed moon
winter night whispers to
and kisses the frosted windowpanes
as I begin my simple compline,
revisiting the stations
of this traveled day:

paired eagles in a morning sky,
a hummingbird at the feeder
above the drifted snow,
my breath in the air
like a departing soul.

Before they fade
into sleep or dream,
I hold them again
to see what I might hear.

THE LAW AND THE LETTER:
NICHOLAS BOYLE'S
CATHOLIC APPROACH TO
SECULAR LITERATURE

■
BY CHARLES B. GORDON C.S.C.

In his 2002-03 Erasmus Lectures at the University of Notre Dame, Nicholas Boyle enriched the theological study of secular literature by drawing upon his extensive reading of continental philosophy and biblical hermeneutics to give us a new explicitly Catholic literary theory. This article attempts to introduce and describe what may prove to be a seminal contribution to a burgeoning field of scholarly inquiry.

Nicholas Boyle is the Schröder Professor of German at the University of Cambridge. His international reputation is based primarily on his acclaimed biography, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*. Oxford University Press published the second volume of that work in 2000. He is currently at work on volume three. In recent years, Boyle has undertaken an additional intellectual project of comparable scope and importance, reflecting upon Western culture from an avowedly Catholic perspective. The first fruits of that endeavor were published in *Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (T&T Clark, 1998). That book has stimulated fruitful discussion across a range of disciplines in Europe and the United States. The next stage of Boyle's expressly Catholic reflections was presented in the Erasmus Lectures. The lectures, which were published by the University of Notre Dame Press, were entitled, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (2005). The aspects of Boyle's thought with which we are especially concerned are elaborated in the eighth and ninth chapters.

In chapter eight, Boyle considers the question of how secular literature can sometimes be read with something of the same effect as sacred scripture. Without equating sacred and secular writing, he seeks to show how the latter can afford insight into the world's relation to God, the revelation of God's hiddenness, and the reconciliation of the world to God through his Son and the Church.

Boyle first addresses the questions of revelation, authorship, and writtenness by means of some ideas borrowed from Paul Ricoeur's linguistically based Biblical hermeneutics. He finds Ricoeur is indebted to German Romanticism for his belief in a sacred domain of human art in which terms customarily used in reference to sacred literature have application. Ricoeur develops his hermeneutic in opposition to Friedrich Schleiermacher, who aspires to a hermeneutic for secular texts that depends as little as possible upon traditional ways of treating sacred literature.

Boyle affirms with Ricoeur that biblical writings are a medium of revelation now, and not merely, as for Schleiermacher, the account of revelations experienced by individuals in the past. While accepting that secular poetic writings can teach us something about the nature of

revelation, Boyle is unwilling to endorse Ricoeur's conclusion that biblical and non-biblical texts afford revelation equally. Revelation in scripture is a constant that may be relied upon. Revelation may or may not be present in secular texts except perhaps in some formal sense. Familiarity or predictability may impede their revelatory capacity.

On the question of authorship, Boyle sides with Ricoeur against Schleiermacher in holding that a text may have a meaning that goes beyond its author's original intent. Ricoeur's insistence on the revelatory intention of all poetic literature, sacred and secular, is at the root of his objection to Schleiermacher's position. Ricoeur is concerned primarily, not with the author's intention, but the intention of the text to reveal a world. Boyle's motivation for agreement with Ricoeur on this point as it relates to the Bible is fundamentally theological. Acknowledging the Bible to be a work of the Spirit, he is concerned to preserve the Church's understanding of the proper relation between scripture and tradition as well as the dogmatic function of sacred texts. But Boyle is unwilling to exclude the concept of authorship entirely. When securely relegated to a subordinate position, Schleiermacher's essentially secular historicist hermeneutic of authorship can have great utility in application to scripture. Its usefulness in regard to the secular literature of the last two to three hundred years is even more apparent. In the latter case, the large amount of information that is often available about the author of a work and his or her intentions makes the insistence on the inadmissibility of such evidence seem particularly implausible.

Boyle describes his position by means of overlapping circles. One circle represents sacred scripture approached fundamentally through a revelatory hermeneutic. The other circle represents secular literature treated primarily through a hermeneutic of authorship. The area of overlap occurs where a hermeneutic of authorship has a legitimate though secondary application to sacred scripture and a hermeneutic of revelation finds a licit, if subordinate, place in treating secular writing. It is in this area of overlap that secular literature may be the legitimate subject of theological exegesis.

Boyle's discussion of writtenness focuses on what he regards as two misconceptions that Ricoeur and Schleiermacher hold in common. First, neither sees a fundamental distinction between sacred and secular writing. Second, both assume there is an essential distinction between what is written and what is spoken. Boyle treats the second mistaken assumption first. Schleiermacher finds that the written and spoken word are opposed to one another in two ways. First, because the written text lends an unnatural permanency to the spoken word, Schleiermacher regards the composition of a text as the beginning of the betrayal of what is spoken. The encounter with a text involves an effort to work back from it to the author's intended meaning. Second, the text stands in opposition to the words with which its interpreters encompass it. In short, scripture opposes tradition. Boyle asserts that in this regard Schleiermacher (and Ricoeur) neglects a quality of writtenness that is highlighted by Emmanuel Lévinas. Namely, a written text, whether sacred or secular, is animated by the spirit of the oral tradition that surrounds it. Schleiermacher wrongly cuts the written text off from its in-

interpreters. Ricoeur wrongly isolates the text from the spoken language of its author. Rightly regarded, the written and spoken words stand not in opposition, but in continuity with one another.

Having argued that writing and speaking are a continuum, Boyle now seeks to refine our understanding of the relation between sacred and secular scriptures by turning from the image of overlapping circles to that of a spectrum. Boyle places sacred writing and writtenness at one end of the scale, and secular writing and orality at the other. A book of scriptures treated as an object of devotion even when unread can represent the sacred end of the spectrum. Any bit of electromagnetically recorded dialogue from a television reality show can represent the secular extreme. Boyle is concerned with works that register somewhere near the middle of the spectrum. Here we find secular texts that employ fictions and metaphor either lyrically or narratively. They are texts that can legitimately be treated both by a hermeneutic of revelation and a hermeneutic of authorship.

Ricoeur applies the terms “poetry” and “poetic discourse” across the entire range of sacred and secular writing. Boyle confines their reference to the middle ground just described. He denominates the wider range of texts as “literature.” Literature, for Boyle, is language with two characteristics: It tries to tell the truth, and is free of instrumental purpose. We have noted Ricoeur’s conviction that both sacred and secular writing can be revelatory. However, he excludes writing of strictly instrumental purpose from this judgment. Such “ordinary” or “scientific” writing is too concerned to describe things in the world for utilitarian purposes to allow the world, simply as it is, to be revealed. Boyle agrees with Ricoeur on this point, but with a qualification. Ricoeur attributes the revelatory potential of non-instrumental texts to their being “poetic,” in that they employ fiction and metaphor. Boyle finds secular and religious literature to be non-purposive in distinct ways. Postponing his discussion of how sacred literature is disinterested or non-purposive, Boyle asserts that secular literature in particular is non-utilitarian in that it is intended to entertain. It is an essentially playful effort to manipulate words in a manner that causes the reader to experience pleasure in mere writtenness. It is this quality that gives such literature its capacity to provide analogues of revelation.

Boyle begins his ninth chapter with a discussion of what he regards as the second characteristic of literature: its ambition to tell the truth. He suggests that since Ricoeur asserts that literature (what Ricoeur calls “poetry”) has the capacity to be non-theistically revelatory, Ricoeur should also admit that literature tells the truth about things. Ricoeur, however, is unwilling to concede this point. Boyle suggests two reasons for Ricoeur’s reluctance to do so. First, Ricoeur may fear that the admission that literature makes true statements might provide a warrant for the consideration of authorial intention. Second, if literature tells the truth about things, it could be regarded as useful. Ricoeur might see this as a threat to its non-purposive status. The upshot is Ricoeur’s insistence that literature refers to things only indirectly, by means of metaphor. It says one thing and means another. Boyle’s fundamental objection to this conclusion is that it conflicts with our experience of literary fictions. He insists that we

experience fictional characters, like Dickens's Mrs. Jellaby, not as metaphors, but as examples of the human types they represent. Literature, for Boyle, uses words to tell us the truth about things. If we were to deny this, we would be hard pressed to hold that literature can be the occasion of the Revelation of Being.

For Boyle, then, literature is a non-instrumental use of words to tell the truth about life, and the defining characteristic of secular literature in particular is its ambition to employ words non-instrumentally to give pleasure. Boyle follows Kant in believing that the experience of such pleasure is an experience of beauty conceived as universal. Far from being an instance of the desire to possess such beauty for oneself alone, the experience is fundamentally communal. After all, the encounter with beauty to which literature affords access is occasioned by language, and language is essentially a means of communication.

Elaborating upon Aristotle's explanation of why we enjoy the representation of things not pleasurable in themselves, Boyle suggests that the enjoyment is dependent on the communal nature of the experience. The pleasure we take in the depiction of tragic events includes a feeling of consolation stemming from the knowledge that our experience of horror or grief is shared with others. This is true whether we are part of a theater audience, are reading a text that is available to others, or are otherwise experiencing a product of language which by its nature is accessible to others. While the bereavement is fictional, the feeling of shared consolation is real and immediate, and therefore constitutes the essence of the experience. And in Boyle's view more than an emotional response to a fiction is shared. There is also a shared emotional encounter with a truth of our common human condition. It is the truth of our fate, and the truth of our fate is very close to Being. In the midst of the encounter with truth we literally or figuratively look one another in the eye and concede that it is a truth that bears upon us all. We witness or read *King Lear* or *Macbeth* and acknowledge that life is real and that it can be wasted. It is a revelation shared.

Essential to this experience of fiction, whether tragic or comic, is the author's feeling sympathy for the characters he or she has created, and eliciting that sympathy from us. This requires that the author enjoys every character in the text and believes they matter. Referencing Hans Frei and Erich Auerbach, Boyle holds that mattering has its source in the Spirit. To enjoy everyone without acknowledging they matter is the ultimately nihilistic attitude of a Don Juan. Boyle asserts that feeling sympathy for a character inevitably inclines one to have a moral concern for them in their circumstances. Such unprescriptive moral concern is the context of sympathy for all victims, and has the quality of prayer. In participating in the work of the Spirit by showing that life matters, literature reveals that life is necessarily moral. It thereby reveals that there is an eternal Law — a Commandment by which life should be lived.

Boyle maintains that literature in which fiction is the dominant mode differs from other literature by its claim to be authorless. Its ambition is to escape the historicist hermeneutic by purporting to present a fictional world free of the constraints of an author's idiosyncratic preoccupations or particular circumstances. The hypothetical postulation of the non-existence of

an author facilitates the aspiration of literary fiction to convey the truth of life by giving us a fictional world we will recognize as a part of the world in which we live. When we judge that a particular literary fiction is “true to life” we affirm that it has succeeded in this aspiration. Again we acknowledge that life is real and can be wasted, but also that it can be fulfilled. For, however dire the truth of the human condition revealed in the fiction, hope of redemption is implicit in its having been deemed worthwhile to put the characters’ circumstances into words that can be shared. However free of contamination by authorship the text which has been the occasion of this revelation may be, we recognize that the particular revelation we have experienced is ultimately dependent upon an author. If we have not had pure Being revealed to us, we have at least been led to acknowledge that such a revelation is possible.

Boyle asserts that the books that constitute secular literature are not created in order to be consumed. Far from being eroded away to the point of dissolution in the process of being enjoyed, they are left unchanged by being read. Such a book exists for its own sake. Like a child it is given a name, and like a child it is an end in itself — the realization of a unique instance of being. After it has been read it continues to appeal to us to return and experience again the world of its text and the particular glimpse of being it affords. While even great secular literature cannot show us the entire truth of life as it is in itself, it can cause us to realize that such a truth exists. And it can bring us to the point of acknowledging the possibility that the revelation of that truth might be conveyed in words. That, for Boyle as opposed to Ricoeur, is as close to revelation as secular literature can approach.

We have seen that revelatory or partly revelatory secular literature shares with sacred writing a good deal of bandwidth on the spectrum that extends from writtenness to orality. Boyle now undertakes to account for this sharing and to determine its limits. Rejecting Ricoeur’s conclusion that the revelation afforded by a written text is exclusively non-theistic, he looks instead to Lévinas for a way forward. Lévinas, who holds that being is always qualified by an “otherwise,” or “*autrement*,” gives primacy, not to ontology, but to ethics. For him, the command to responsibility for the neighbor comes before all else. It is the pre-original certainty from which even the certainty of God is derived. Boyle agrees, and goes further. He identifies and endorses the Christian assertion that there exists a humanly unfulfilled and unfulfillable obligation that has been fulfilled for us by God. God, who is the source of all being, is also the source of the obligation. Literature approached in a Catholic manner therefore reveals pure being as modified, not only by the obligation to responsibility (as for Lévinas), but also by sin and redemption. Being can be revealed to us only as qualified by this threefold condition. We know our Creator God only through the incarnate Son, our Redeemer, whose Spirit is the same as the Father’s. Being is accessible to us only in the interplay of Law, judgment and reconciliation. In the end Boyle asserts that if we accept that the teachings of the Catholic Church about human life are true, we will necessarily expect the truths revealed in secular literature to corroborate them.

Boyle turns next to the question of the limits of secular revelation. Where does the area of

overlap between secular and sacred literature end? He looks to a dialogue between Ricoeur and Lévinas for a starting point for his treatment of the question. Ricoeur hesitates to include the genre of prescriptive writing, or Law, among the distinctive forms of biblical discourse. Lévinas, conversely, finds Law to be the defining characteristic of such writing. Boyle concurs with Lévinas that his reluctance to recognize the category of Law in scripture constitutes a signal weakness in Ricoeur's understanding of revelation. For Boyle, as for Lévinas, secular literature is unable to provide an equivalent of the scriptural revelation of Law. Secular books of law are so utilitarian as to be excluded from the category of non-purposive secular literature. They also fail to meet the qualification of having been written to provide pleasure. Finally, in Kant's terminology, written bodies of secular law are hypothetical, in that they record what one ought to do if one wishes to achieve particular ends or avoid certain penalties. They do not go beyond the hypothetical to state what is, or what Law in itself is. The imposition of Law as a categorical obligation is left exclusively to sacred scripture.

It is because it falls to sacred scripture alone to express the pre-original obligation of responsibility in the words of Law, that such sacred writing is properly called, simply, the Law. The words of the Law are not hypothetical. They tell us how to do many things, for the purpose of fulfilling a single fundamental obligation. While sacred and secular literature may make use of many of the same genres, and may even treat the same subjects, the limit of their similarity is marked by the words, "Thou shalt." Secular literature can depict life lived in response to those words of command. It may afford us a fleeting impression of Being modified by the pre-original ethical obligation. It lacks, however, the authority to impose the command itself. It cannot by its nature break entirely free of human authorship in order to speak the commandment of God. Contrariwise, sacred scripture can never licitly be so exposed to an historical hermeneutic that it comes to be regarded merely as the product of a particular human author.

Boyle suggests that the relationship between secular and sacred scripture is much like the relationship that Kant postulates between the beautiful and the moral. Kant allows that the beautiful may symbolize the moral. However, the very fact that one of the concepts is capable of serving as a symbol of the other reveals that there is a difference between them. If the beautiful were to be simply equated with the moral, the absoluteness of the moral command would inevitably be undermined. There is, nevertheless, a conceptual richness in their relation. Judgments of the beautiful and judgments of the moral alike employ the concepts of immediacy, disinterestedness, freedom, and universality. Even in the language of ordinary conversation, words like "majestic," "innocent," and "cheerful" find application both to what is good and to what is beautiful. There is consequently a gentle passage from the object of sensual pleasure to that of moral esteem "without too violent a leap." In the course of the Erasmus lectures, Boyle applies this Kantian approach to the consideration of secular and sacred literature. Secular literature is symbolic of sacred literature in a manner that is conceptually rich. For example, in applying a term like "revelation" to secular literature, Boyle does not accept

Ricoeur's assertion that such revelation is always and entirely non-theistic. Rather, the sacred sense of the term is learned by gradual transition from the secular sense, without too violent a leap. Secular scriptures are for Boyle the means of access, the prolegomena, to sacred scriptures. They serve as a kind of inspiring commentary that makes the sacred text accessible.

In fact, a great deal of Western secular literature is expressly intended as theological commentary. Boyle employs an historical hermeneutic in his discussion of the presence of this theological content, shedding light along the way upon the historical emergence of modern secularity. Citing Peter Spufford, he traces the origins of secularity to a shift in the understanding of what it is to be human that occurred in European society around 1200 A.D. Beginning then, personal worth came increasingly to be measured not on the basis of inherited status, but according to what one possessed. During the next three centuries a synthesis was achieved, finding its consummate expression in the works of Aquinas and Dante, between the old feudal order and the new individualism. With sixteenth century European economic and territorial expansion, the synthesis failed, the old order expired, and the Reformation ensued.

The Reformation set out to free the new realm of individual economic activity from the claims of old purportedly sacred authorities, and to claim the entire area for God. It sought, in short, to redeem the time. It failed when schism led to institutional, and so intellectual, incoherence. Consequently, modern Being is characterized by a secularity that is forgetful of its origins in God, much as modern capital has forgotten its origins in work. Since the Reformation, and by reason of it, the Church has continued to fail to reconcile modernity to God, so that the boundary between secular and sacred has remained, for the most part, untranscended. The secular literature that constitutes so large a part of our cultural capital has come to depend upon a deliberate repression of its Christian origins. Even the existence of the uncrossed border between secular and sacred can be less than fully recognized.

It is the Christian conviction that Christ's redeeming work in the world is ongoing. Boundaries are continually redrawn as new territory is claimed for the Kingdom of God. Again and again Christ crosses whatever border has been established between the realm of the Law and that which is asserted to be outside its purview. Referencing 2 Corinthians 5: 19, Boyle avers that in Christ God has given us a word of reconciliation to be spoken to the world. What, Boyle asks, is the particular word of reconciliation we are called upon to speak in conversation with our modern secular scriptures? It will be a word that re-opens for secular scriptures the way back to their origin in the God who is the source of the pre-original, humanly unfulfillable obligation to our neighbor, and to the act of forgiveness by means of which that obligation is fulfilled in Christ. It will be a word that seeks out the point of forgetting, and by naming it, makes it a place where God is neither forgotten nor recognized, but is known as hidden. By identifying the limit that makes writing secular, it will cause that limit to be acknowledged as a boundary with something lying beyond it. It will point the way to the Law. The existence of the border between secular and sacred scriptures will not be denied. They will not be equated with one another. Secular scriptures will not be understood as God's word addressed to us.

Rather, the scriptures that lay on the secular side of the boundary will be experienced as our prayer addressed to God — the inarticulate groanings of the Spirit within us. They reveal what it is about ourselves that cries out to be redeemed.

A CATHOLIC APPROACH TO LITERATURE
A HERMENEUTICAL KEY
FOR THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

■
BY MARGARET MONAHAN HOGAN

Introduction

In his work *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*, Cambridge professor Nicholas Boyle presents an understanding of sacred literature and an interpretation of both the relatedness and the distinctiveness of sacred and secular literature. He begins his work with a careful study of early modern and contemporary modern Biblical scholarship — marked by elements of Reformation faith in *sola scriptura*, Deism, and historicist and literary criticism — in order to fashion an understanding of sacred literature; he then articulates his position — a Catholic approach to literature that links sacred and secular; and he concludes by examining several major works of modern literature as if elements within an alembic to be distilled by the catalytic agency of his hermeneutical key.

From the start Boyle unabashedly acknowledges that his pursuit of this study begins from a particular perspective but nonetheless he advances from this perspective in the presence of a gracious and respectful acknowledgment of the presence and contributions of others within the horizon, and a deep and honest hope for the emergent possible. In regard to the particular perspective he claims, in the presence of the pervasive lie of neutrality of discourse in the contemporary academy, that “there is no such thing as a presuppositionless judgment” (Boyle, ix), and he makes public his operational presuppositions as rooted in a particular foothold as Catholic. From this ground he holds out hope that it is possible to be drawn and delighted by “Catholic” truth and “if we can expand our minds enough to guess at the generous dimensions of our Father’s house, we shall be surprised to discover that we all have mansions in it” (Boyle, x). It is within the matrix formed by these claims and this hope that Boyle makes the following assertion:

The revelation at the heart of secular literature is in the deepest sense a moral revelation, and is therefore a revelation of God. Perhaps in the end all I am saying is that if we believe the teachings of the Catholic church to be true statements about human life, then we must necessarily expect literature that is true to life to reflect and corroborate them, whether or not it is written by Catholics (Boyle, 139).

This paper will: (I) examine the critical elements in Boyle’s hermeneutical key to understanding the manifestation of truth in literature at the point of intersection and overlap of sacred and secular as drawn (A) from the theses that result from Boyle’s dialectic with modern and contemporary Biblical scholars about the understanding of scripture — sacred literature, (B) from Boyle’s claim that secular literature meets sacred literature at the point of sameness of effect — as revelation of the Spirit as Holy and the spirit as community — on the acting sub-

ject and, in turn, on the attentive, effective community — and (C) in the extraction and articulation of the underlying principles that provide the heuristic structure for a mind that would be Catholic; (II) disclose a similar hermeneutical key for an understanding of the work of a Catholic university as a place where the sacred and secular meet in the communal and individual discovery of the truth and the appropriation of the good; and (III) approach the task of the Catholic philosopher as an honest laborer in one of the *mansions* in a Catholic university from the perspective suggested by I and II.

I. Boyle on Sacred and Secular Literature

A. Sacred Literature

In the articulation of his understanding — drawn from his dialogue with modern and contemporary scholars — of sacred literature, Boyle presents eight points as crucial to a Catholic reading of Scripture. He presents these points twice in the text. The first is found as he concludes the early modern study, which includes Herder, Schleiermacher, and Hegel, in a dialectic with Hegel by staking out a preliminary position on a Catholic way of reading Scripture as an *Aufhebung* — a synthetic higher viewpoint. This higher viewpoint affirms the partial truths contained by the parties to the debate in the collision of the Reformation faith in *sola scriptura* with the Deist and historicist critique, and rejects the partial errors of the competing parties. Boyle acknowledges six points that are drawn from Hegel and two that he adds as his own. The second time the eight points are presented is as he concludes the study of contemporary Biblical scholarship marked by the contributions of Frei and Ricoeur through a dialogue with Lévinas that recapitulates the Hegelian dialectic. These eight points developed through both accounts include claims in regard to knowledge, tradition, authority, Christ as revelation, the Church in and not in the world, the Church as revolutionary, the unique role of the Christ as the point of continuity between the spirit of the Church and the spirit of Jesus, and Christ as the point of continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In Boyle's own words they are presented in the following:

1. **Knowledge from Faith and Reason:** “God can be known by reason, properly understood, and operating in conjunction with faith, and that there is no true antithesis between reason and revelation (the Bible therefore is to be read as Aquinas read it, as extending our knowledge of God, not as founding it)” (Boyle, 55);

“The reason which Hegel believes capable of achieving this knowledge is a reason realized in history; the reason that Lévinas invokes in his metaphysical writings is practical, that is, moral reason” (Boyle, 79).

2. **Tradition as Ongoing Development:** “[T]he faith of the individual is inseparable from the faith of the church, the *Gemeinde*; the Bible is the book of faith, written in the spirit of the church and to be read in that spirit; therefore there is no true antithesis between Scripture and tradition” (Boyle, 55);

“[I]t is precisely Revelation in the sense that Lévinas, and I think Ricoeur understands too, when Lévinas says that the process of exegesis, of interpretation, of

the novice asking questions of the schoolmaster, is the process of Revelation on Mount Sinai" (Boyle 84).

3. **Authority in Dogma:** "[I]t follows that in the interpretation of Scripture by the church the dogmatic interest is always ultimately decisive" (Boyle, 55);

[I]n interpretation of the Scriptures by the church the dogmatic interest is always decisive. What a text means is to be determined in the end not by historical investigation of what its author ... may have meant ... but by its role in the entire body of written Revelation, taken as a unity. That unity is defined by the Church ... theology and hermeneutics cannot in the end be separated" (Boyle, 87).

"The Bible's essential meaning — the kerygma [ethical kerygma — the command to responsibility ... the unfulfillable obligation to our neighbor] in virtue of which it is Revelation and the utterance of the Word of God — must remain disembodied, invisible, and outside history ... it must remain the voice which comes from no mouth but from an impossible object, the bush that burns but is not consumed ... The Old Testament now appears, not just to mean something, but to begin to form someone" (Boyle, 89-90).

4. **Christ as Revelation:** "[T]he Incarnation is central to the content of Revelation because Incarnation and Revelation are formally the same process: the making manifest and making man, of the Word of God" (Boyle, 56);

"We hear the call of the "ought" not as simple, and with the innocence of the Old Covenant, but as complex, modulated now by the sorrow of loss and the joy of restoration, and as the joy of experience, the experience of a particular moment when a death changed the ethical history of the world and the New Covenant was inaugurated" (Boyle, 91).

5. **Church — In the World and Not of the World:** "[A]s the church has of its nature both a spiritual and a worldly existence, the history of the church as recorded in Scripture is the point of connection between the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of history" (Boyle, 56);

"Because the Word has become flesh — and only because it has become flesh — we can recognize that all along it was the word of God and can recognize in the particular imperatives of the Old Testament the original and ultimate imperative that ... grounds our human existence" (Boyle, 94).

"As the church, as the living Temple, the new people of God could live the life of the Roman state and live it more abundantly for being liberated from domination by it — engaging in the empire's civil and legal, and eventually in its institutional and political structures, in order to consecrate them, but at the same time preparing to outlive and transcend them" (Boyle 99).

6. **Church as Revolutionary:** "[I]f the New Testament is the witness to a spiritual revolution that revolution is to be understood as directed not against the religion of Judaism but against the religion of Caesarism — against the kingdom which is of the world and which contemptuously turns into its tools all partial and specific faiths" (Boyle, 56).

"[T]wo distinct possible relations to the Roman challenge ... the path of denial

and confrontation ... [or] the path of mediation ... “[P]ath of mediation ... [i]nterpreted as fulfilled in the events surrounding the life and death of the prophet Jesus of Nazareth the Scriptures held good news for all subjects of the empire. They were liberated for a life in the Spirit as a reconstituted chosen people, a renewed Israel under a new covenant soon to be called the church. Without seeking to exclude or detach them from the empire the good news engaged with their condition in such a way as to subvert completely the instruments of imperial domination. ... The fearful temptation for the mediator, however, is assimilation: taking on unchanged the unholy characteristics of that which the mediator set out to sanctify” (Boyle, 97-99).

Boyle adds two more principles that he considers crucial to a specifically Catholic reading of Scriptures. They are derived from an understanding of the Temple as an essential element in New Testament Christology. Christ is Temple — the living manifestation of the interaction of God and man. The living Christ is the fulfillment of task of the Temple as locus of propitiation. The Church as the mystical body has the task of the building of the Temple throughout the world and throughout time. Boyle claims that this way of reading the Scriptures moves beyond the text to what the Scriptures contain as well as what they signify. And the Christ — God and man — who contains the reality that is signified is the one who transgresses all boundaries between old and new, between sacred and secular, between Christ and His church. Christ transgresses all boundaries “to save what was lost, to recover what was unclean by bringing it back into the sheep fold” (Boyle, 105). The additional principles, grounded in the power of Incarnation and reconciliation manifested in Jesus, are the following:

7. **Continuity of Spirit:** “[T]he Scriptures must not be read in a way which posits a radical distinction between the spirit of Jesus and the spirit of the Church” (Boyle, 56);

“The Temple is ... a link between the spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of the church, between New Testament Christology and the self-consciousness of Jesus” (Boyle, 101).

8. **Continuity of Text:** “[N]or may the Scriptures be read in a way which posits a radical distinction between the Old and the New Testaments, between Christianity and pre-Christian Judaism” (Boyle, 56).

“The Temple is with and in Jesus himself, the material link between the Old and New Testaments” (Boyle, 101).

B. Sacred and Secular Literature

In his examination of sacred and secular literature, Boyle presents several claims as to the relatedness and the distinctiveness of sacred and secular writings as he explores the limits and overlap of each. The relatedness and distinctiveness are presented in two models — two intersecting circles and a spectrum. While the models are geometrically simple, it would be a mistake to understand them as merely two dimensional. The intersecting circles model has space carved out for the overlap of sacred and secular as well as space reserved for their distinctive domains. The spectrum positions sacred and secular at polar opposites with various

degrees of shading and intensity along a progression that ultimately merges. The distinctive domains of the overlapping circles can be identified as distinctive through authorship. The secular has an identifiable historical finite author; the sacred claims authorship in the divine — the Spirit of God. This divine authorship, that is, the Scripture's being both about God and from God, requires that the Scriptures be regarded as holy. A layer of the domain of the overlap lies in the area where the sacred has been mediated through the agency of an identifiable historical finite author, hence a hermeneutic of authorship is appropriate, and where the secular is the locus of a moral revelation and as moral inclines inquiry potentially revelatory of the ultimate foundation of the moral imperative, that is, it moves beyond the aesthetic moment to the ethical and opens the possibility of ontological investigation whose end is the divine. Here the secular offers a disclosure independent of the intention of the particular author; hence a hermeneutic of revelation is appropriate. The effective focus of the overlap is the experiential subject for whom, at this point, the existential task of meaning — the understanding of the self and the understanding of the world and the reciprocal influence of each — becomes exigent. Truth becomes a possibility. The possibility of this truth as present in secular literature becomes actuality confirmed as revealed in the text of sacred literature which manifests the divine as divine lover — the Word become flesh — whose ethical imperative to humanity is “Love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). The subject as self-reliant intelligence is transformed into *intellectus querens fidem* (Lonergan, *Insight*, 753). The subject as autonomous self is transformed into self — a responsible member of a community — understood as embedded in a variety of relationships which not only enrich the self and at the same time place the self under particular and specific obligations.

C. Operative Catholic Principles

While Boyle's study has a particular focus, namely sacred and secular literature, his work within the enclosure of his affirmations suggests a set of operative principles to be directive in a Catholic context. They are the following. First, the knowledge claim: there is truth. Truth is one and it is accessible by human reason and by faith. Faith is a gift and the gift of faith requires a giver and a receiver. The human capacity to access truth is actually multi-faceted and potentially unrestricted. It may begin with the sensual encounter with the physical world, but it remains open to the world beyond “sights and sounds” as reason is pressed, by its own internal exigency to understand and judge, to sometimes construct and to sometimes discover what lies beyond perception. Revelation can extend the field of human knowledge; constructs, when apt, can extend the field of human knowledge. Second, the understanding of truth, but not truth itself, develops over time. This development of understanding is accomplished in the dialectical pursuit of truth in a community that commits itself to the pursuit of truth; that acknowledges the operation of individual and cultural biases that mark and limit the contemporary historical moment; that remembers the mistakes of the past; and, therefore, moves forward with humility. The development of understanding requires a living community marked by a spirit that values the pursuit of truth and respects the possibility of the operation of the

Spirit. This living community is open to the possibility of revelation of truth from secular and sacred sources. Third, there is authority. There is an authority appropriate to each of the many fields of human study. Each domain of human study and discourse has an authority and a method appropriate to that domain. In the pursuit of truth, each domain recognizes its own limits as limit. The natural sciences have a limited domain and a method in the empirically verifiable which is in constant competition with regnant scientific theories. The scientific community with its internal hierarchy and rules of evidence interprets the debate and issues its judgment as a conditioned judgment, albeit aspiring to be a virtually unconditioned judgment. These hypotheses constitute scientific theory and, if they are correct, direct progress. If they are incorrect, decline follows. The study of the history of science records as many instances of dead ends as it does instances of scientific advance. Revelation as found in the sacred scriptures is revelation — the word of God transmitted by the Spirit to the community. Revelation — both speculative revelation as in the Trinity and the Immaculate Conception, and practical revelation as in the ethical prescriptions of the “Thou shalt” of the Old Covenant and the command of love of the New Covenant — is dogma. The development, interpretation and application of dogma are controlling, and the development is the ongoing task of the Church. Fourth, the Christ is Revelation. God is word and flesh, born, died, and risen. This revelation is *spes unica* — cross and anchor. It carries the promise of suffering in the presence of hope and the expectation of the joy of eternal life because of the Christ. The fifth recognizes that the Church is both in the world and not of the world. Because the Church — as institution and people — is in the world, the task of building and sustaining the physical world and the material social institutions such as business and government require careful tending. This careful tending requires that the physical goods and the social goods be oriented to the service of common good so that all members of the community are capable of receiving the revelation of the good news and all members of the community, in the appropriation of that revelation, are capable of acting to accomplish the eternal good. The sixth is that the Church is the locus and is an agent of revolutionary change. The revolution — a spiritual revolution — directs not the destruction of the physical world and not the social structures that are necessary for ordered life but the destruction of the idolatry of nature, money, and power. In its revolutionary role the Church directs social structures to distribute and use the goods of the physical world in a manner that serves the common good. The seventh and the eighth are simultaneously principles of continuity and development. Text and Spirit are continuous and to be perfected. Jesus is the link between the old and the new — anticipated in the Old Testament and manifested in the New. Jesus, in his life is the fulfillment of the Old and in the completion of his work — death, resurrection, and ascension — sends forth the Spirit at Pentecost. That this task is the ongoing work of the church was articulated by Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical *Aeterni patris* where the Holy Father spoke of the work guided by the Spirit as program in the words — *vetera novis augere et perficere* — the old is to be augmented and perfected by the new. In the appropriation of these principles a mind that would be Catholic

encounters the world from that acknowledged and enriched perspective.

Boyle's hermeneutical key — these eight principles, along with the careful mapping of the intersection and distinction of the sacred and secular in literature — has broader application, that is, the key can be found in institutions — and in its parts, as they are in service to the whole — considered as texts to be understood within the regulative power of the key. To be more specific a Catholic university is a place where the sacred and the secular can meet; the disciplines, although possessing autonomy, as developed within a Catholic university position the community and the members of the community to encounter the sacred. Thus, if a university aspires to be a Catholic university, the meeting of sacred and secular and the possible encounter of secular with the sacred are essential. Moreover, the encounter must be intentionally and carefully cultivated. This intentional cultivation within the Catholic university requires an understanding of the sacred and the secular, an understanding of their appropriate ordering, as an expectation that the meeting serves the good of truth and as well the good itself of those for whom the Catholic university exists. Thus, the next sections of this paper explore: (II-A) the identity of the Catholic University in its most general aspects; (II-B) the ideal of a Catholic University as contained in the papal exhortation *Ex corde ecclesiae*; and, finally (III) a consideration of how philosophy — a particular part — might be pursued within a Catholic university.

II. Boyle's Key as Operative for and in Catholic Institutions

A. University as Catholic

The Catholic university has an identity as Catholic and as university. But it must be simultaneously Catholic and university if it is to fulfill its essential role. As university it must be competent in all of the fields and disciplines that mark an excellent university; as Catholic it must be robustly and transparently Catholic. The sacred — the holy — must be actively present in the life of prayer and worship at the university, and prominently present in signs and symbols of a Catholic university. The Catholic university must be a place of prayer for those of its own tradition. It must also provide spaces for prayer for those of other religious traditions and room for silence for those of no religious tradition. As the Catholic university respects the religious freedom of others in its institutions, it must, nevertheless, insist upon the respect for the Catholic tradition from those who serve the University. Its curriculum must have a place for the examination of sacred texts and it must have a place for many distinct and autonomous disciplines — from scripture study and theology at the distal end of the spectrum designated sacred to the study of computer science and eigenvalues and vectors in mathematics at the secular distal end of the spectrum — that constitute the contemporary university. Despite recognition of the differences of disciplines as sacred and secular, the Catholic university has an essential unity in its pursuit of truth and an essential unity in the subject — whether student or faculty — whose transformation is the work of the university. The transformation of the subject is accomplished in the orientation of the subject toward the capacity to grasp the truth and to love the good. This transformation of the subject cannot be

completed in the university years, but the university years can contribute to the proper orientation of its students. The Catholic university must be a place that respects the study and independence of theology, philosophy, the natural sciences, the behavioral sciences, literature, and the arts and, as well, that respects the development of the professions that serve the individual good and the common good in a manner that is cognizant, at the same time, of the interdependence of the disciplines as parts of a whole that is truth. The intellectual milieu — the spirit — of the Catholic university must be one that is marked neither by irrational religiosity nor by irreligious rationalism. It must be marked by the understanding that if and where the teachings of the Catholic church are true statements about human life, then it should be expected that findings of the disciplines of the university that are true to life reflect and corroborate them. This understanding lends courage, encourages competence, and has the potential to expand the field of the knowable. The Catholic university must be a place where theology, philosophy, the natural sciences, the social sciences, literature, the arts, and practical professions recognize the limits of their respective fields, acknowledge that there are questions that their individual fields cannot answer, recognize the possibility of answers in other fields, and having been made aware of the possibility, even if only as possibility, of the agency of the divine as cause and end, respect the work of the Catholic university as centered in and informed by those beliefs. The contemporary Catholic university must be a place that recognizes that the pure desire to know — the hallmark of a true university — manifests key insights grasped by Augustine in the Fifth Century and Thomas Aquinas in the Thirteenth Century. The former observed in the *Confessions*, “*Fecisti nos ad Te Domine, et cor inquietam est, donec requiescat in Te*” (Augustine, *Confessions*, Liber 1, caput 1) and the latter acknowledged, “*omnia Deum appetunt*” (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 44, A. 4, ad 3.). It must at the same time recognize that the limits of the intellectual horizons operative for Augustine and Thomas Aquinas were restraints on their particular conclusions, and that similar limits — whether in the advancing of understanding or in the presence of bias — are operative within every horizon and, hence the possibility of decline is as real as the possibility of progress. Nonetheless the spirit of the community — here university — in its nusus toward truth and in its challenge of bias, whether the bias be individual, group, cultural or the general bias of common sense, contains its own remedy.

B. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* — the Work of the Catholic University

The papal document *Ex corde ecclesiae*, as an exhortation as well as an explication of the task of a Catholic university, provides a convenient locus to explore the aspirations of the Catholic university. *Ex corde* lays out three particular but related and essential functions that constitute a Catholic university. The three essential tasks are (a) teaching and research, (b) pastoral ministry, and (c) the promotion of social justice. All three of these tasks appear in *Ex corde*, but it is the first that is the central focus of the document and it is in the consideration of the teaching and research role of the university in the service of truth that the isomorphism between the exhortation and Boyle’s work is evident.

In addressing the work of a Catholic university, *Ex corde* claims that the particular work or special kind of service that marks, or ought to mark, a Catholic university – “service as the proclamation of truth without which freedom, justice, and human dignity are extinguished.” Note here the essential service of the university as university is the proclamation of truth – which orders the pursuit of freedom, the accomplishment of justice, and the grounding and protection of human dignity. In its examination and explication of the role of teaching and research as essential to the work of the Catholic university, the document proclaims from its beginning the following as the particular service of the Catholic university:

Born from the heart of the Church, a Catholic University is located in that course of tradition which may be traced back to the very origin of the University as an institution. It has always been recognized as an incomparable center of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity. By vocation, the *Universitas magistrorum et scholarium* is dedicated to research, to teaching, and to the education of students who freely associate with their teachers in the common love of knowledge [Letter of Pope Alexander IV to the University of Paris, 14 April 1255]. With every other university it [the Catholic university] shares that *gaudium de veritate*, so precious to St. Augustine, which is that joy in searching for, discovering and communicating truth [Saint Augustine, *Confessions* X, xxiii, 33 and Saint Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, IX, 1] in every field of knowledge. A Catholic University's privileged task is to “unite existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth (John Paul II, *Discourse to the Institutu Catholique de Paris*, 1 June, 1980)” (*Introduction*, §1).

The themes found in this introduction are claimed as tradition, and are presented as formative of the Catholic university. They are: teaching and research are the distinctive service appropriate to the university; teaching and research aim at truth; the search for, discovery of, and communication of truth are to be work of every field of knowledge; both faith and reason have roles in the pursuit and attainment of truth; the search for truth, in the presence of an acknowledgement of the certainty of truth, is a joy filled enterprise; and the pursuit of truth has as its end the good of humankind. The claim for the university as unified in the pursuit of truth which is accessible by faith and reason is a regulative principle in *Ex corde ecclesiae*. While the richness of the document *Ex corde ecclesiae* can hardly be presented in a few paragraphs, it is nonetheless instructive to see the tasks made explicit in representative texts drawn from the exhortation as containing the set of eight points set forth by Boyle and as containing as well his account of the overlap and distinction of sacred and secular. In the same order these:

1. **Knowledge from Faith and Reason:** “There is only one culture: that of man ... [a]nd thanks to her Catholic Universities and their humanistic and scientific inheritance, the Church, expert in humanity ... explores the mysteries of humanity and of the world, clarifying them in the light of Revelation” §3.

“It is in the context of the impartial search for truth that the relationship between faith and reason is brought to light and meaning ... explore courageously

the riches of Revelation and of nature so that the united endeavor of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity” §5.

2. **Tradition as Ongoing Development:** “[M]eetings ... with the Catholic University communities of various continents ... are ... a promising sign of the fecundity of the Christian mind in the heart of every culture. They ... [are] ... a well-founded hope for a new flowering of Christian culture in the rich and varied context of our changing times, which certainly face serious challenges but which also bear so much promise under the action of the Spirit of truth and of love” §2.

“*Integration of Knowledge* is a process, one which will always remain incomplete ... [A] Catholic University “has to be a ‘living union’ of individual organisms dedicated to the search for truth ... It is necessary to work toward a higher synthesis of knowledge, in which alone lies the possibility of satisfying that search for truth which is profoundly inscribed on the heart of the human person”(19)” §16.

“[A] Catholic University aware that human culture is open to Revelation and transcendence, is also a primary and privileged place for a *fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and culture*” §43.

3. **Authority in Dogma:** “There is only one culture: that of man, by man and for man. And thanks to her Catholic Universities and their human and scientific inheritance, the Church, expert in humanity ... explores the mysteries of humanity and of the world, clarifying them in the light of Revelation” §3.

“Every Catholic University without ceasing to be a University, has a relationship that is essential to its institutional identity ... One consequence of its essential relationship to the Church is that the *institutional* fidelity of the University to the Christian message includes a recognition of and adherence to the teaching authority of the Church in matters of faith and morals” §27.

“The Church ... recognizes the academic freedom of scholars in each discipline in accordance with its own principles and proper methods [AAS 58 (1966), p. 764] and within the confines of the truth and the common good” §29.

4. **Christ as Revelation:** “The invitation of Saint Augustine, ‘*Intellege ut credas; crede ut intellegas*,’ is relevant to Catholic Universities that are called to explore courageously the riches of Revelation and of nature so that the united endeavour of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, renewed even more marvelously, after sin, in Christ, and called to shine forth in the light of the Spirit” §5.

“A specific priority is the need to examine and evaluate the predominant values and norms of modern society and culture in a Christian perspective, and the responsibility to try to communicate *those ethical and religious principles which give full meaning to human life*. In this way a University can contribute further to the development of a true Christian anthropology, founded on the person of Christ, which will bring the dynamism of the creation and redemption to bear on reality and on the correct solution to the problems of life” §33.

5. **Church – In the World and Not of the World:** “Catholic Universities are called to continuous renewal, both as ‘Universities’ and as ‘Catholic.’ For what is at stake is the *very meaning of scientific and technological research, of social life and of culture*, but, on an even more profound level, what is at stake is *the very meaning of the human person*. Such renewal requires a clear awareness that, by its Catholic character, a University is made more capable of conducting an *impartial* search for truth, a search that is neither subordinated to nor conditioned by particular interests of any kind” §7.

“[B]ringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new ... is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or even to greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and, as it were, upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, humanity’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation” §48.

6. **Church as Revolutionary:** “Because knowledge is meant to serve the human person, research in a Catholic University is always carried out with a concern for the *ethical and moral implications*. Both of its methods and of its discoveries. This concern, while it must be present in all research, is particularly important in the areas of science and technology. ‘It is essential that we be convinced of the priority of the ethical over the technical, of the primacy of the person over things, of the superiority of the spirit over matter. The cause of the human person will only be served if knowledge is joined to conscience. Men and women of science will truly aid humanity only if they preserve the sense of transcendence of the human person over the world and of God over the human person’” [AAS 72 (1980), p. 72] §18.

“Through research and teaching the students are educated in the various disciplines so as to become truly competent in the specific sectors in which they will devote themselves to the service of society and of the Church, but at the same time prepared to give witness of their faith to the world” §20.

“They [students] should realize the responsibility of their professional life, the enthusiasm of being the trained ‘leaders’ of tomorrow, of being witnesses of Christ in whatever place they may exercise their profession” §23.

“The future of Catholic Universities depends to a great extent on the competent and dedicated service of lay Catholics. The Church sees their developing presence in these institutions both as a sign of hope and as a confirmation of the irreplaceable lay vocation in the Church and in the world, confident that lay people will, in the exercise of their own distinctive role, ‘illumine and organize these temporal affairs in such a way that they always start out, develop, and continue, according to Christ’s mind, to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer’” §25.

“A Catholic University ... is called upon to become a more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as society. ... [It will be a place for the study] ... of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family

life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing of the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level" §32.

7. **Continuity of Spirit:** "[A] Catholic University, by *institutional commitment* brings to its task the inspiration and light of the *Christian message*. In a Catholic University, therefore, Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles penetrate and inform university activities in accordance with the proper nature and autonomy of these activities. In a word, being both a University and Catholic, it must be both a community of scholars representing various branches of knowledge, and an academic institution in which Catholicism is vitally present and operative" §18.
8. **Continuity of Text:** "A Catholic University pursues its objectives through its formation of an authentic human community animated by the spirit of Christ. The source of its unity springs from a common dedication to the truth, a common vision of the dignity of the human person and, ultimately the person and message of Christ, which gives the Institution its distinctive character" §21.

Recognition of the roles of the separate disciplines as separate but as overlapping at the point of truth as object and truth in the subject, and hence, true good as individual and good as common is a frequent theme in *Ex corde ecclesiae* as it explores and articulates the identity of the Catholic university. Note in the following representative passages the transformative end – individual as well as social transformation – of the Catholic university; the unity of purpose of the Catholic university in the protection and enhancement of human dignity which is served by the academy; the respect for the autonomy of each discipline; in the call for dialogue among the disciplines for the good of the discipline, for the good of the university, and for the human good; in the promotion of dialogue between faith and reason; and, finally, in the animation and advancement of the institution and its members by the Spirit.

Unity of Purpose: "Every Catholic University, *as a university*, is an academic community which, in a vigorous and critical fashion, assists in the protection and advancement of human dignity ... [and] ... possesses that institutional autonomy necessary to perform its functions effectively and guarantees its members academic freedom, so long as the rights of the individual person and of the community are preserved within the confines of the truth and the common good" §12.

Distinctness and Overlap of Disciplines: "A Catholic University, therefore, is a place of research, where scholars *scrutinize reality* with the methods proper to each academic discipline, and so contribute to the treasury of human knowledge. Each individual discipline is studied in a systematic manner; moreover the disciplines are brought into dialogue for their mutual enhancement" §14.

Dialogue of Faith and Reason: "In promoting the integration of knowledge, a specific part of the Catholic University's task is to promote *dialogue between faith and reason*, so that it can be seen more profoundly how faith and reason bear harmonious witness to the unity of all truth. While each academic discipline retains its own integrity and has its own methods, this dialogue demonstrates that

‘methodical research within every branch of learning, when carried out in a truly scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, can never truly conflict with faith. For the things of the earth and the concerns of faith derive from the same God’[AAS 75 (1983), p.690]. A vital interaction of two distinct levels of coming to know the one truth leads to a greater love for truth itself, and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of human life and of the purpose of God’s creation” §17.

Spirit of Christ: “A Catholic University pursues its objectives through its formation of an authentic human community animated by the spirit of Christ ... it assists each of its members to achieve wholeness as human persons; in turn, everyone in the community helps in promoting unity, and each one, according to his or her role and capacity, contributes towards decisions which affect the community, and also towards maintaining and strengthening the distinctive Catholic character of the Institution” §21.

III. The Catholic Philosopher in the Catholic University

Now if the pursuit of truth and good is acknowledged as the distinct service as central to the mission of the Catholic university then what is the role of the Catholic scholar and what are the obligations of the Catholic scholar to that service? Of course that topic — the role of Catholic scholar in the service of truth without which there can be no real freedom, no real justice, and no authentic human dignity is too large a topic so let me narrow it down to a consideration of a more specific role — that of the Catholic philosopher in the Catholic University. And so let me share with you some thoughts that resulted from my reflections on my role as a Catholic philosopher, not a reflection on the role as if it were an accomplishment but rather as a set of objectives as a regulative matrix to guide, direct, and measure the task of my work in philosophy.

The required starting point is acknowledging (as did Boyle) the perspective from which I operate, in service to the truth, that is who I am — as a Catholic philosopher and appropriating that identity. The Catholic philosopher occupies a particular position and operates from a particular perspective. This is said not as some triumphal claim but to acknowledge it as a reality — a reality to be both dealt with and to be enjoyed. I say to enjoy because it is the most liberating of experiences to operate from the confidence rooted in faith and in reason that there is truth and that the pursuit of truth opens the possibility of reaching the Ultimate Truth — God. From this position the Catholic philosopher ought to shrink from no field of study. I believe this realization was at the root of the often repeated exhortation of Pope John Paul II “Be Not Afraid.” And I say “to be dealt with” because this role places certain obligations on me. As a Catholic, the philosopher is simultaneously committed to philosophy and to faith; she has duties to the academy — as discipline and as institution — including contributing to the flourishing of the academy and she has duties to the Church and its flourishing. She may not function as if the truths of her religious tradition may be substituted for expertise in philosophy — there is truth. And she must not function as if the Son of God had not become man in order to redeem us from sin, to send us forth with a mission to teach the truth, with the Holy Spirit to

guide and to sustain us, until we return, at last, to the Father — there is faith and there is the ongoing operation of the Spirit. I've often thought that the prayer of Saint Ignatius of Loyola to be an apt reflection — perhaps a daily exercise — for the Catholic philosopher. It reminds us of the source of our ability to do the work that we do and of the end of that work.

Prayer of Saint Ignatius Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and all that I possess.

Thou hast given all to me. To thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine. Dispose of it according to Thy will.

Give me Thy love and Thy grace; for this is sufficient to me.

Perhaps this might be the prayer of every Catholic scholar.

In delineating the role of the Catholic philosopher, let me cite four distinct roles. They are: (A) the role in teaching philosophy in the university; (B) the role of engaging in our profession with our colleagues in our discipline; (C) the role in practicing our profession among colleagues in the university and in the professions; and the (D) the role of the Catholic philosopher in service to the Church. Since other scholars have written so competently of the first three and very few have written of the fourth, let me just mention some important points in the first three and then turn my attention to the last — service to the Church. As I delineate these roles the perspective acknowledged will become evident as operative and controlling. The role of teaching philosophy in the university requires the understanding of the domain of philosophy and competence in the field. Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom and as the pursuit of wisdom enjoys a double unity — a unity in the object and a unity in the subject. This double unity of philosophy places great demands upon those who would teach philosophy. On the objective side it requires the philosopher to know the end of philosophy, to know the field, to master some part, to understand the relation of the parts to the whole as well as the limitations of the parts, to receive from others their partial contribution to the whole, and to acknowledge that this understanding requires a lifelong pursuit that intends wisdom which must include inquiry into the possibility of first cause and final end. Because the end of philosophy is wisdom and wisdom is a late in life attainment, if attained at all, the philosopher is required to understand the pursuit of this object as an abiding regulative ideal which aspires to “the integration of the ancillary philosophical disciplines and the natural and human sciences into a comprehensive account of reality” (Frodosso, 233-34). This pursuit of wisdom serves to unify the various disciplines within philosophy, that is, they are seen as subsets of the complete set — parts that contribute to but are not equal to the whole. The parts — such as logic, epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of human nature, ethics, metaphysics, natural theology, philosophy of religion, metaethics — have grown in sophistication and complication to such a degree that the particular discipline may require the focused attention of the life of a particular scholar. As a consequence, these parts are sometimes mistaken for the whole. Inasmuch as the goal is wisdom which includes the grasp of the truth and the good —

as full an account of reality as possible — the pursuit of the study of first cause and final cause cannot be excluded at the outset. This would be to place antecedent limits on the pure desire to know. Because of the fragmentation and ensuing appearance of truncation of the field, we must then continue to remind ourselves and each other of the ordering end of philosophy toward wisdom and, as well, of the important contributions accomplished by the parts. John Paul II, philosopher as well as pope, recalled this wisdom understanding of philosophy in the following:

[P]hilosophy needs first of all to recover its *sapiential* dimension as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life. This first requirement is in fact most helpful in stimulating philosophy to conform to its proper nature. In doing so, it will be not only the decisive critical factor which determines the foundations and limits of the different fields of scientific learning, but will also take its place as the ultimate framework of the unity of human knowledge and action, leading them to converge towards a final goal and meaning. This sapiential dimension is all the more necessary today because the immense expansion of humanity's technical capability demands a renewed and sharpened sense of ultimate values. If technology is not ordered to something greater than a merely utilitarian end, then it could soon prove inhuman and even become potential destroyer of the human race (*Fides et Ratio*, §81).

Philosophy aspires to the truth and the good for the sake of Wisdom.

The pursuit of philosophy as united in the subject in the pursuit of its end — wisdom — is to be transformative of the subject whose development requires knowledge and rectitude. And because the subject is rational, affective, moral, and spiritual, the study of philosophy intends the intellectual, affective, moral, and spiritual development of the subject and employs the intellectual, affective, moral, and spiritual capacities and powers of the subject to grasp its end. The antecedent exclusion of any of these capacities or powers disables the subject in the encounter with reality and diminishes the account of the real. The appropriate level of accomplishment of these human capacities is acknowledged from antiquity in Plato to the present in Piaget and Kohlberg to take time, experience, training, and instruction over a period of approximately fifty years. Moreover, the development of these capacities is a function of the operation of polymorphic human consciousness and the rigorous unfolding of its implications. Hence, the account of reality is doomed to failure if it does not acknowledge and direct all the capacities of human consciousness towards wisdom. Faith and reason and affectivity and morality — as properly ordered — have contributions to make to the grasp of wisdom. On this subjective side, the pursuit of philosophy requires the philosopher to pursue wisdom and to manifest in living the integration of the moral, affective, intellectual, and spiritual life in the struggle to attain wisdom — to witness the philosophical life. To paraphrase Aristotle ... and with no apology ... we study philosophy not just to know what wisdom is but to be wise. Moreover, the philosopher as professor has an obligation to witness and to teach so that the endowment of the rich legacy of philosophy is desired in the university as much as the university desires a rich financial endowment. Philosophy as wisdom is revolutionary. The revo-

lution is internal to the field as a challenge to skepticism and relativism; external in the world as a challenge to fundamentalism and materialism; and external to the world as an opening to the possibility of the eternal.

The immensity of the task that faces philosophy is not the occasion for arrogance or pride, but rather the opportunity to acknowledge the dependence of philosophy on others for their expertise in their fields and to acknowledge philosophy as an ongoing work to be accomplished, not as a finished product. This understanding draws philosophers out of the department — and beyond the clever agonistic and sometimes eristic exchanges that occupy center court there — and into the world and into the university. Into the world, their collaboration with physicians, lawyers, lawmakers, and entrepreneurs sharpens their philosophical claims against the hard edge of reality and holds the claims — the sometimes pragmatic and expedient claims — of physicians, lawyers, lawmakers, and entrepreneurs to the fire of truth so that their work may — with a firm grasp of the truth — serve freedom, justice, and human dignity. This reciprocity serves the good of both. A similar collaboration is appropriate to the University. The philosopher leaves the comfort of the department to enter into the university to collaborate with her colleagues — with other philosophers, but also with theologians, with chemists, with biologists, with physicists, with historians, with political thinkers, with economists, with environmentalists, and others. The university, animated by the spirit of Catholic philosophy, becomes the place where the integration of knowledge for the purpose of wisdom — that can be attained no longer by any one individual — is pursued. Just such integration is also called for by *Ex corde ecclesiae*. The work of the ongoing development of each tradition and of Tradition as bodies of received knowledge is acknowledged.

But now let me turn my attention to the fourth — the role of the Catholic philosopher in the service of truth as a service to the Church. This seems to require three things of the faithful Catholic philosopher: (1) our acknowledgement of infallible truth that has been proclaimed by the Church and the taking of those truths into our lives; (2) our attentive listening and generous response to those non-infallible statements by the Church that appear to contribute to human flourishing as we journey toward God; (3) our deep, careful, and respectful examination of those statements by the Church that appear to be problematic or appear to impede human flourishing as we journey toward God and our attentive work to contribute to their clarification and, if necessary, correction so that truth may be accomplished to serve human dignity, freedom, and justice. Of course (1) and (2) are not problematic; it is (3) that holds our attention and is our obligation as Catholic philosophers. There needs to be a reciprocity operative here that is isomorphic to the reciprocity in the respectful exchanges between the philosopher and the world and the philosopher and the University. To forsake this obligation places at risk the very possibility of the necessary development of Church teaching. To take this obligation without clear recognition of the authority of the Church and the source of that authority as given by Christ to serve or to take this obligation without careful study of the issue or document at hand, is to risk hubris and scandal. The words of Pope Leo

XIII in *Aeterni patris* in the Nineteenth Century as well as those in the Twentieth Century by Pope John Paul II in *Ex corde ecclesiae* and those reiterated by Pope Benedict in the Twentieth Century, have surely gestured in the direction of inviting the university to intellectual service to the church. Accepting the invitation and transforming the words into reality has been and is the project of every generation of Catholic philosophers as well as Catholic scholars of other disciplines. Nonetheless, the examination of the history of the interaction suggests caution for at least two reasons. The university in its service to the truth must steer a course between fundamentalism and relativism. There is dogma and there is development of the tradition. This is, of course, not a problem limited to unpacking the corpus of the Catholic tradition and it is not a new problem in philosophy or in the university. Recall, if you will, the position of Socrates between the fundamentalism of Euthyphro and the relativism of Thrasymachus. Recall, if you can, the controversy over the expanding or static nature of the universe between, respectively, Georges Lemaître and Albert Einstein from which Lemaître emerged as victorious, or the controversy over the existence of aether as an account for the relativity of motion denied by Einstein and affirmed by Maxwell from which Einstein emerged as victorious. If science and philosophy can, in the face of such development and correction, and from the epistemological stance that was articulated in antiquity to become foundational for western science to serve human flourishing, remain respected disciplines in the university, then so too can a religious tradition that claims truth in the Ultimate Truth hold respect in the unfolding and development of its dogmas. The service of the university to the Church can move from gesture to reality only if both parties to the desired end have the courage that is born out of the confidence that there is truth; that there is competence of appropriate expertise to guide the pursuit of the truth; that those pursuing the truth acknowledge the limits of their own expertise; and that humility and grace guide the manner of pursuing the truth.

Two elements draw attention here. The first requires the courage to acknowledge the development of doctrine, just as there is development in chemistry, biology, law, and so forth. The second requires the willingness to enlist the competence of the special fields of the university to serve the development of doctrine appropriately, that is, each discipline understanding its appropriate limits. Let me say something first about the development of doctrine and then turn my attention to the role of the Catholic philosopher in the university.

While there is great stability in Catholic teaching, the teachings of the Church have changed over time. It is our failure to acknowledge appropriately both stability and change that has set us adrift as a people. (Professor Philip Gleason once described the contemporary position of the Catholic Church as that of operating in a perfect storm which was allowed to become so destructive because of difficulty with the Church's instruments of navigation. The instruments were frozen at absolute — completely understandable at a particular moment in history — but when the needle was dislodged it went to relativism and got stuck there.) This claim of development of doctrine should present a problem for no one who has studied the history of the church. Change in teaching has, as a matter of historical fact, occurred in both

the speculative and practical domains of doctrine. On the speculative side, early attempts to express and to find appropriate language to express the mystery of the Trinity and to express the dignity of Mary serve as two of the clearest examples. Attempts to give an account, using material symbols, of the Trinity failed. The account of the Trinity proffered by Saint Augustine, based on the understanding of the operations of the mind and the procession of the interior words, was more satisfying. The Augustinian account, while not dispelling the mystery, afforded the mind repose. The understanding of the dignity of Mary has advanced as her role as Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, and her Assumption have been explicated.

On the practical side of theological development, there is an extensive list of changes including the transitions: (a) from the acceptance of slavery to its condemnation, (b) from the prohibition of interest taking on money lent to the acceptance of a capitalist, but not materialist, principle of the right of the individual to use money to make money, (c) from the indissolubility of marriage to the dissolution of certain marriages for the sake of the faith, and (d) from the requirement of the persecution of heretics and from the teaching that “outside the Church there is no salvation,” to the declaration of religious freedom (Noonan, *Development in Moral Doctrine*, 662-69). A most recent change is present in the transition from the acknowledgment of capital punishment as an appropriate societal means of self-defense to the reluctant acceptance of capital punishment in only the rarest of circumstances, that is, circumstances which are “very rare, if in fact they [the circumstances] occur at all” (*Evangelium vitae*, 1995, §56).

How are these changes to be understood? That is, how can it be maintained that, at one and the same time, the Church is the repository of truth and that there is development of doctrine? That these changes represent development in doctrine cannot be denied. However, the advance in teaching is not a change in truth but a change in the understanding of the truth, that is, “Insight grows both into the words and the realities that have been handed on” (Vatican II, *Dei verbum* 8, Second Vatican Council, *Constitutiones* 430). And in that new insight, sometimes the change is development and sometimes the change is correction. Changes in the understanding of interest-taking on money, slavery, marriage, and religious freedom have come about as the core principles regarding their understanding have been replaced by other core principles. John Noonan describes the change in this way.

These principles were replaced by principles already part of Christian teaching: in the case of usury, that the person of the lender, not the loan, should be the focus of evaluation; in the case of marriage, that the preservation of the faith is more important than the preservation of a human relationship; in the case of slavery, that in Christ there is “neither free nor slave” (Gal.3:28); and in the case of religious liberty, that faith must be free. In the course of this displacement of one set of principles, what was forbidden became lawful (the case of usury and marriage); what was permissible became unlawful (the case of slavery); and what was required became forbidden (the persecution of heretics) (Noonan, 669).

Similarly, John Henry Newman in his *An Essay on Development of Doctrine* describes the developmental change not as a matter of deduction but as the result of the hard work of men and women utilizing the powers of the mind to approach a better understanding of truth.

Newman says,

The development then of an idea is not like an investigation worked out on paper, in which each successive advance is pure evolution from a foregoing, but it is carried on through and by means of communities of men and their leaders and guides; it employs their minds as its instruments and depends upon them while it uses them... . It is the warfare of ideas under their varying aspects striving for mastery (John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 1.1.6, p.74).

So as I began to think about this role — the contribution of the Catholic philosopher to her Church. How should I do this and how can I do this? This is not an easy task, even if embraced with joy. Then I began to wonder if I had the courage to do this. After all others have tried and paid a penalty. And here is where I began to wonder about courage and the philosopher. And I thought about something rather strange. Those of us who teach ethics often teach the virtue ethics of Aristotle and in that teaching we often delineate the moral virtues and the particular reference of each as well as the appropriate mean of each moral virtue. When we teach the virtue of courage we take great pains to show that courage is something particular; it is distinguished from temperance and piety and magnanimity and so forth and yet united with temperance and piety and magnanimity in the great souled person. And if a particular situation calls for courage, it is not appropriate to respond piously. One must respond courageously. Now as I remember myself teaching this for some twenty years, I began to wonder about the examples that I use year after year in the classroom to illustrate Aristotle's theoretical point ... the courage of the pilot, the courage of the fire fighter, the courage of the political leader — think of those who have stepped forth in the name of freedom in the determination of our own nation and those who step forward elsewhere in the world and in its history to determine their nations ... and the vices of the pusillanimous and the foolhardy and appropriate examples of each — drawn from current events, I noticed that I never cited the philosopher and the courage of the philosopher as an example. This despite the fact that I would have, just a few classes earlier, told of the courage and integrity of Socrates ... so I began to wonder how to describe that excellence ... and its vices of excess and deficiency.

In addition to my wonderment at the fact that I had never considered an example of courage on the part of the philosopher in my teaching, I was struck by an additional fact. As someone whose work has been in applied ethics — especially medical ethics and business ethics — I have often found myself in the position of enjoining businessmen and women and physicians to be courageous in their vocations. I have told them that they must take courageous stands — sometimes against the advice of corporate attorneys and hospital risk managers — within the corporation and within the hospital and despite the risks — real, professional, personal, and financial that they perceived as theirs. I gave them no quarter when they told me that they found themselves standing in a raging storm with strong winds buffeting them and that they perceived themselves as standing there alone.... I simply and regularly told them that their vocation — their role — required this or that. NO! you may not

allow that family to issue a “stop feeding” order for their family member who suffered a recent stroke; NO! you may not allow your colleague to perform heart surgery on that frail elderly woman and NO! you may not permit the surgeon to badger the family and NO! you may not allow your corporation to enter into a lucrative business arrangement with those who violate human rights in order to keep your company at arms length from implication in the practice ... and on and on.

So, how is the philosopher courageous? Let us look for some clues. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle outlines the essential elements of courage. Courage is, on first pass, the mean between fear and confidence ... but of course that only locates courage in the general theory of moral virtue. Particular marks of the courageous person include “enduring and fearing the right things for the right motive, in the right manner, and at the right time and displaying confidence in a similar way” ... “enduring and acting for an end that is noble”... “choosing and enduring what it does because it is noble to do so or base to refuse” ... choosing the courageous act is motivated by virtue “by the desire for the noble object and by a sense of shame” ... and not by a sense of compulsion. While Aristotle directly applies these characteristics to those quintessential courageous actions and actors — the warrior in battle and the dying as they face death — it seems appropriate, in keeping with Aristotle’s theory of the mean, to find the mean of courage relative to the philosopher.

How does the philosopher fulfill her role — here service to the intellectual life of the church — courageously? How does she choose and endure the pursuit of what is noble — that truth without which freedom, justice, and human dignity are extinguished — fearing not to do so because it would be shameful not to and enduring the task buoyed in confidence in its pursuit because the end is noble?

Now if I am going to make these claims about the obligations of the Catholic philosopher to be courageous in her service to the Church, I had better start with myself. Attend to the beam in your own eye before attending to the mote in the eyes of others. There are many issues that the Church must address today — issues that touch upon freedom, justice, and human dignity. Let me cite just three issues on which the Catholic philosopher might use her skills and enlist the skills of others in the university in service to the Church and in service to her profession. They are (a) the status of the embryo, (b) the role of women in the church and in society, and (c) the nature of marriage. In each of these issues the “what is” question that initiated the rise of philosophy in the western world in ancient Greece is the starting point. It is the first question that has to be addressed before any issue can be resolved. And asking the “what is” question requires that it be directed to the appropriate field of expertise for response. The university is the home of the requisite disciplines. Here the autonomy, as well as the expertise, of the separate disciplines is made evident and the integration of each in the service of fashioning a society committed to the truth and the good as directive of the flourishing of the individual and of the polity.

In regard to the status of the embryo the biological sciences supply the appropriate authority

to respond to the initial question of its status. If the biological sciences answer that it is simply a piece of tissue, then the only significant question that arises is what use has it. But if the biological sciences answer that the embryo is a living developing human being, a whole set of questions arises. The new set of questions include: how should it be described — the question of metaphysics; what is owed to it by others as individual — the question of ethics; and what is owed to it by others as polity — the question of political theory. From the perspective of metaphysics an appropriate general metaphysical account of it that acknowledges the nature of its act and the ordering of its potentialities is required. The answer that it is a potential human being is inadequate in the face of the reality it presents. The answer that it is a living developing human being in act with a particular set of developing human potentialities is closer to the mark. From the perspective of ethics the question is how it should be regarded. The answer is, if Kant's principle of universalizability has coin, then its life would be regarded as every other human life as a fundamental good — the necessary condition for the actualization of any present or future human goods. Hence, it should not be killed without sufficient proportionate reason. From the perspective of law the question is what interest has the government in the protection of this living developing human being. The answer — here from the perspective of American law — its life may not be taken without due process of law. The answers to these philosophical questions — the first from natural philosophy, the second from metaphysics, the third from ethics, and the fourth from political philosophy provide a foundation for the claim of the religious perspective — here Catholicism — for its entering into the public square in defense of the sanctity of human life as a civil rights issue.

What about the role of women in the church — surely there is material enough there to get our passions flowing? We would, of course, have to start with the acknowledgment of the fundamental equality of men and women, and then acknowledge at the same time the real material differences between men and women. The fundamental equality is recognized in the law and in the religious tradition that hears, listens to, and seeks the meaning of the words of Christ as presented by Paul in these words:

It is through faith that all of you are God's sons in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptized into union with Christ, so as to speak, with the life of Christ himself. So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus (Paul, *Galatians*, 3:26-28).

In American law, in American society, and in American culture, the equality claims are so pervasive and pressing that even the appearance of inequality sparks charges of injustice. Nonetheless, the claim of radical egalitarianism has to be met by the recognition of real material difference. The real material difference has its foundation in genetic constitution, in chemical make-up, and in anatomic manifestation. Sex as a noun — what the contemporary world designates gender — is described in the following:

[S]ex is a bias and orientation in a large number of potencies, a typical and complementary differentiation within the species, with a material basis in a difference in

... chromosomes, with a regulator in the secretions of endocrinal glands, with manifestations not only in anatomical structure and physiological function, but also in the totality of vital, psychic, sensitive, emotional characters and consequently, though not formally, in the higher nonorganic activities of reason and rational appetite (Lonergan, *Finality, Love, Marriage*, p. 43).

These real differences with subsequent differences in roles are to be attended to with the same seriousness as the claims of equality are heard. The same Paul who wrote of equality also wrote of difference and the revelation of the Christ as determinate of the role of Christians as servants to each other because of love in the following:

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband (Ephesians 5:21-33).

How we deal with these issues surrounding the role of women in the church will take patience and courage on the part of men and women — lay as well as ordained. But we are a stiff-necked people — neither patient nor courageous. Hence, we give the appearance of institutionalizing injustice. Courage allows us to examine our own tradition without fear; to claim our tradition without bias; and to discriminate based on real distinctions. But we are not patient people and we are afraid to be judged guilty of discrimination even in those instances where discrimination is appropriate and hence just. A starting point here might be an examination of the ancient role of deaconess in the Church. As the role of permanent deacon has been re-appropriated, albeit it modified, in the contemporary church, so courage and humility would seem to call for a re-examination of the role of women in the ancient church. If Christ is revelation, and if the claim of continuity of Spirit has meaning neither the hardness of heart of men or women should be impediments to this possibility.

Finally, we come to marriage and the multiple problems surrounding questions about the nature of marriage. What might the Catholic philosopher contribute to that debate? There are three challenges in the contemporary world that press for the critical examination and articulation of the Catholic teaching on the nature of marriage. They are: the (1) possibility of marriage between persons of a homosexual orientation; (2) the regulation of the reproductive finality within marriage; (3) the possibility of the declaration of dissolution of a marriage by a

decree of nullity or divorce. Responding to these challenges requires antecedent attention to the question of the nature of marriage. And in this critical examination there lies the possibility of the development of doctrine. But we ought not to fear that — we need to have the courage to pursue the truth in regard to marriage so that the correct understanding of the nature of marriage will serve freedom, justice, and human dignity as well as to respond to the challenges presented in (1), (2), and (3).

Let us now turn attention to marriage and suggest an account of the nature of marriage. As a starting point it is important to acknowledge that marriage, in its essential nature, is a union. Now while this is claimed quite often, the notion of marriage as a union is neglected in the examination of the critical questions facing marriage. (Is it the case that the relational aspect of marriage — the union — is more evident if the Catholic philosopher is a woman?) The focus in contemporary church documents centers more on the procreative end — the product produced — of marriage and the personalist ends — the satisfaction of sexual appetites — of marriage. I want to focus on the union itself — a Trinitarian people ought to have the capacity to do that. Marriage is a union between one man and one woman. It originates in a covenant between them. The covenant is promised, that is, ratified in an act of consent. And while a man and a woman are at liberty to consent to enter into marriage, they are not free to define what marriage is. The consent requires the desire and the antecedent capacity to bring into reality the marriage union. Marriage is a reality in the objective order. Marriage is a natural social institution. It is not a social construct. It is an intermediary institution between the individual and the government; it has a good of its own and it serves the good of the individual and the good of the polity. It has an essential nature as a particular type of human relationship. While it has similarities to other types of human relationships, it is *sui generis* — a unique kind of relationship. Within the marriage relationship, other goods including the good of children and the good of sexual satisfaction are to be accomplished.

The marriage union is a particular type of human relationship. It is an intimate community of marital life and love. The consent is spoken in words and signified in action, that is, initially physically consummated, in the normal course of events, in a particular type of act — the marriage act. This giving of consent in word and act marks the becoming of the marriage — the *matrimonium in fieri*. Following the consent, the intimate union — the *matrimonium in facto esse* — begins to emerge as a new being marked as a singularity in being, a singularity in consciousness, and a singularity in conscience. This new being — the marriage — is brought to completion, that is, more fully consummated, over a lifetime. The conjugal act most precisely signifies an intimate personal union which is marked by self-donation and self-acceptance. It is a union — physical, emotional, and spiritual — formed between one man and one woman.

As a reality in the objective order, marriage is an entity constituted in the real relation of subject to subject. The relationship — a union — is established as a nexus or connection between two persons who are, in their nature, mutually ordered to each other. The spouses as the principles of the relationship, are those whose “to be” precisely as spouses is to be ordered to

each other. Each acts in the other; each is acted upon by the other. The spouses are the related complementary principles of the being that is the marriage. The marriage is a being in itself.

Just as marriage, reified in the marriage bond, is the appropriate juridical entity in canon law, that is, it has privileged standing in the legal order, so too the marriage itself is the moral entity in the ethical order. Actions of the related principles of the marriage — the spouses — must be evaluated from within the context of the moral entity — the marriage. It is the marriage, not the partners individually, not the reproductive organs in isolation, that has privileged standing in the moral order.

As a union, the marriage is a personal relationship — a kind of human friendship between a man and a woman, each embodying a particular aspect of humanity. This union of sexually differentiated persons instantiates ontological completeness. The relationship begins on the horizontal plane as a consequence of attraction and desire on the level of sensitive appetite. The essential nature of humanity as male and female includes the inclination of each to desire the other in such a way as to be united with the other. Because humanity, as male and female, has a complex nature that is physical, appetitive, rational, and spiritual, the union has a similarly complex nature that is physical, appetitive, rational, and spiritual. It is a union of persons. It is a personal union that results in a bond that is more fully a union than a physical bond. While the resultant personal unity has characteristics in common with both physical and moral unions, it is, in itself, a unique species of unity. The formation of the love directed union has been described in the following: “Their love tends to a unique union, even in part constitutes it, as a community where two persons constitute a closed union, which can exist only between them. Conjugal love constitutes a relationship in which the regard of each one of the parties is turned exclusively upon the other” (Hildebrand, 6). The appetitive desiring and physical longing press for actualization of the union.

Because the union of marriage is a uniting of human beings the union is marked by the same complexity that is inherent in every human life. The end of the marriage union — the end as final causality — the good — is not accomplished only on the level of physical union. The end is appropriate to the agent. Final causality draws the human agent on the horizontal level to its essential good, on the vertical level to its excellent good, and on the transcendental level to the absolute good. The essential, excellent, and transcendental ends of marriage are, respectively, the union of the bodies of the spouses, the union of friendship, and union with God. On the level of horizontal finality, the union emerges as a consequence of a basic form of appetition in which human beings as male and female are properly attracted to and properly respond to one another. This pleasurable experience acts upon the relationship in such a way that the relationship is more easily disposed to the transforming power of reason. On the level of vertical finality, the transforming power of reason operates within the physical union and brings about the emergence of friendship between the spouses. This integration of reason and intense passion, as habitual and reciprocal, forms the set of conditions which incline toward the emergence of unity of consciousness and unity of conscience. This triple unity of body,

consciousness, and conscience supplies the fertile matrix for the sustained development of the spouses that makes the marital union receptive to the transformative power of grace. This ascent from passion to friendship to total love within marriage was described by Bernard Lonergan in the following:

Not only is it true that man should love other objects in virtue of his love of God; it is also true that he can love God only in an ascent through participated to absolute excellence. Thus love of others is proof of love of God: "God himself dwells in us if we love one another; his love is brought to perfection within us" (John 4:12). ... Now toward this high goal of charity it is no small beginning in the weak and imperfect heart of fallen man to be startled by a beauty that shifts the center of appetite out of self; and such a shift is effected on the level of sensitive spontaneity by *eros* leaping in through delighted eyes and establishing itself as unrest in absence and an imperious demand for company. Next company may reveal deeper qualities of mind and character to shift again the center from the merely organic tendencies of nature to the rational friendship with its enduring basis in the excellence of the good person. Finally grace inserts into charity the love that nature gives and reason approves. Thus we have a dispositive upward tendency from *eros* to friendship, and from friendship to a special order of charity (Lonergan, *Finality, Love, Marriage*, 31).

The correlative movement, the transforming power of the highest level on the lower level, is described by Dietrich von Hildebrand in his essay on marriage. He says,

Conjugal love undergoes a deep, even a *qualitative* change in the living members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Not that wedded love ceases to have the characteristics discussed above: mutual self-giving, the character of an *I-thou* communion, the living for each other, and the formation of a complete unity as a couple closed off from the rest of earthly things. Indeed it does not cease in any way to be conjugal love in the full sense of the word. The supernatural does not dissolve this finest earthly good, but transfigures it (Hildebrand, 34).

In summary, the essential nature of marriage is a particular kind of union; the capacity to establish this kind of union requires a man and a woman who have the capacity to accomplish the union with each other in the life of their marriage. The union may be described as the intrinsic necessary end of marriage. It was so described by Alphonsus Liguori. This language of union is not new in the tradition and this description of marriage is not new. It is at least as old as the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* of Aristotle. There Aristotle offers some observations about the nature of the marriage union itself (and he also describes marriage as the institution for the reproduction and nurture of children). Marriage, Aristotle claims is by nature a joining of two into oneness, that is, marriage is a *physei syndyastikon*. Men and women are brought together in marriage by the natural impulse of sexual appetite. The marital union, Aristotle claims, is, as an institution, prior to the civil community. This priority is temporal as well as necessary.

Thomas Aquinas also wrote of the nature of marriage as a union. In what is now designated as the *Supplement* to the *Summa Theologiae*, he describes the marriage union and its purpose. In his characterization of the kind of joining that constitutes the union that is marriage, he

describes marriage both as a unity in being and a unity of purpose. In regard to marriage as a unity in being, that is, the bond, Aquinas maintains that the bond between the spouses is the reality contained in the marriage. He says, “the bond between husband and wife resulting from those acts is reality and sacrament; and the ultimate reality contained is the effect of the sacrament, while the non-contained reality is that which the Master [Peter Lombard] assigns” (*Summa Theologiae, Supplement Q. 42, a.1, ad 5*). The reality signified but not contained in the marriage is the union of Christ with the church. Aquinas says, “The union of Christ with the Church is not the reality contained in this sacrament, but is the reality signified and not contained” (*Ibid., Q. 42, a.1, ad 4*). Moreover, Aquinas notes the physical and spiritual aspects of the union which contribute to its constitution as a personal union when he says, “the joining together of bodies and minds is a result of matrimony” (*Ibid., Q. 44, a.2, ad 3.*). And again, in describing the marital union, he says, “for the joining of husband and wife by matrimony is the greatest of all joinings, since it is a joining of soul and body, wherefore it is called a *conjugal* union” (*Ibid., Q.44, a.2, ad 3*). Because marriage is, in its essence, a joining together, Aquinas maintains that reference to marriage as a conjugal union is appropriate. In regard to a joining of purpose he says, “by marriage certain persons are directed to one begetting and upbringing of children, and again to one family life in respect of which we speak of husband and wife” (*Ibid., Q. 44, a.1*).

Furthermore, in the consideration of marriage as a relation, Aquinas maintains that every relation has a unity in the cause of the relationship and a diversity inasmuch as the subjects that are related in terms of that cause are diverse subjects. Now inasmuch as marriage has a unity of purpose and a unity of being, there is a cause that relates the diverse subjects in the unity of purpose and a cause that relates the subjects in the unity of being. In regard to the unity of being, the cause that relates the subjects is the marriage bond. The diverse subjects are the man, as inclined to the woman, and the woman, as inclined to the man, as spouses. In regard to the unity of purpose, the cause that relates the subjects is procreation. The diverse subjects are the man and the woman as potential parents.

This focus on the essential nature of marriage as a particular kind of union helps the ordering of the goods of marriage. This human relationship that is marriage is differentiated from other human relations in the following marks: (1) this relationship is the actual personal union of the partners, each of whom represents a partial manifestation of humanity to form a new being, the marriage; (2) within this union, the procreation and education of children are to be accomplished (if there are to be children in this union); and (3) within this union the flourishing — as satisfaction of sexual appetite — of the individual partners, as individuals, is to be accomplished as each helps and enjoys the other. There are, then, three ends to be accomplished within marriage. They are the union itself, the children, and the flourishing of the individual partners. The subjects who constitute the marriage have specific identities as spouses, as parents, and as individuals. The union is the intrinsic necessary end of marriage; offspring an intrinsic contingent end of marriage; and the satisfaction of the personalist

end — the satisfaction of sexual appetite — an intrinsic contingent end of marriage.

Now the point that I am trying to make here is that the understanding of marriage as a particular kind of union is critical to the understanding of the ordering of the ends of marriage, of the possibility of entering into marriage, and of the possibility of the dissolution of what appears to be a marriage by divorce or annulment. If marriage is a union of the kind I described — a natural social institution — then persons of the same sex may not constitute a marriage together. Neither the government nor the church creates marriage. The government, in recognizing the crucial role of marriage for the good of the individual and the good of society, puts structures in place to privilege this institution. The Church, recognizing that marriage as a natural institution and recognizing that marriage between the baptized was raised by Christ to a sacrament celebrates marriage and embeds marriage within a liturgical celebration. If offspring are the intrinsic contingent end of marriage understood as a unity of purpose, then we must turn careful attention to the prudential regulation of this end within marriage. If marriage as a union is not just a physical union, but a union of consciousness and conscience, then the couple who begin a marriage through their consent and physical union — the *matrimonium in fieri* — must, if they are to truly consummate, that is complete, their marriage — accomplish the *matrimonium in facto esse*; they must direct it to the higher levels of unity until at last they rest in union with God.

To conclude: Nicholas Boyle's text seems to suggest a heuristic structure for the operation of a mind that would be Catholic. A similar hermeneutical key is to be found operative in the papal exhortation *Ex corde ecclesiae*. The appropriation of these operative principles presents a challenge and an opportunity to the philosopher who would be Catholic. These considerations — the appropriating of both faith and reason as contributing to the truth; the embracing the role of the Catholic university in its parts as tending toward the whole of wisdom; the claiming of the task of philosophy within a tradition for the good of philosophy and for the good of the tradition; the appraising of contemporary issues as needing to locate the essential elements and the appropriate authorities required for appropriate articulation — are presented as starting points. What is needed now is that discourse begin within the Catholic university by those who love the Church and who love the Catholic university in the quiet of hard and serious and sustained and patient study to serve the Church. In what manner ought this discourse take place — with justice and grace. Let me turn once again to my roots in the Jesuit educational charism to the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins,

... *the just man justifies;*
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

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HOW CATHOLIC?

BY WILL DEMING

In revising his 2002-2003 Erasmus Lectures, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*, for publication, Nicholas Boyle reflects on his work in the following way:

The term “Catholic” in my subtitle is not meant as a sectarian rallying cry but as an admission of the source of my puzzlement. In these matters above all there is no such thing as presuppositionless judgment, yet academic literary theory too often claims a neutrality for its own necessarily tendentious assumptions which is quite at odds with the perspectivism it also professes — Catholicism is bias, for example, but psychoanalysis is just one possible approach. By contrast, I would hope this study might give back to the word “Catholic” something of its original ecumenical meaning.¹

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the degree to which Boyle’s approach — or any approach — to literature can be “Catholic” in this broader sense. We will proceed by first considering the nature of the interpretive enterprise generally. Then we will examine some of the specific interpretive methods used by St. Paul in his Letters. Finally, we will summarize our efforts and offer some modest conclusions.

Boyle is certainly correct to challenge academic literary criticism’s claim to neutrality. As postmodern theory emphasizes, no inquiry or explanation proceeds from a neutral starting point. Everyone works within a context and starts with presuppositions. But it seems to me that we can go a step further. It is not only academic literary criticism’s claims of neutrality that are in question, but also its *sufficiency* as an approach to literature, for two related reasons.

Interpretation, after all, is never just “solving” a problem or “finding” the answer, as in a mathematical equation. Rather, like rhetoric (as Aristotle argued), interpretation becomes necessary when a thing’s *meaning* is under scrutiny. For this reason, interpretation becomes a quest for truth — or truths, both great and small — and as such it has a spiritual component. Likewise, literature — good literature, at least — is an exploration of meaning and truth in life, without providing any simple answers. Any examination of meaning and truth, in turn, requires spiritual discernment, not *just* academic expertise. Indeed, from this vantage point, it seems fair to say that literary interpretation must, in part, be a *spiritual* activity.

St. Paul, a literary critic in his own right (inasmuch as he interprets that body of literature now known as the Old Testament), would have been very much at home with this conclusion. Truth, he states, both in life and in literature, is not discerned by professional scholars — “the wise, the scribe, or the debater of this world,” who have only “human wisdom” (1 Cor 1:20-21). Rather, “no one comprehends what is truly God’s [that is, what is true and meaningful in life] except the Spirit of God. In addition, God bestows this Spirit on Christians so that they can interpret spiritual things (1 Cor 2:11-13). Christians, according to Paul, even have the potential to understand the very mind of God through the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:16).

In light of these bold statements, it is therefore curious that, in practice, Paul does *not* rely

entirely on the Spirit to guide him in his approach to literature. Rather, he also has recourse to certain techniques of literary interpretation, including what would have passed in his day as “academic literary criticism.” Indeed, Paul used many such methods of interpretation to develop his *spiritual* insights. Among these were: typology, a technique called “from the lesser to the greater,” allegory, the practice of creating *testamonia*, and “proof texting.”

By typology we mean Paul’s practice of locating in Scripture people or actions that belong to a certain pattern, or “type,” and then comparing them to other people or actions that he identifies as belonging to this same “type.” In his comparison of Adam with Christ in Romans 5, for example, Paul tells us that Adam “is a type [Greek: *typos*] of the one who was to come,” i.e. Christ. On this basis, he reasons, we can understand the actions of Adam in the light of the actions of Christ, and vice versa (Rom 5:14-21). “If, because of the one man’s [Adam’s] trespass,” he reasons, “death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through that one man, Jesus Christ” (5:17).

In this passage we can also see an instance of Paul’s use of the technique called “from the lesser to the greater.” The assumption in this method of interpretation is that an effect caused by something small (“the lesser”) will be magnified when caused by something big (“the greater”). Thus, whatever harm Adam’s (sinful) actions brought upon humanity, “much more surely” will Christ’s (righteous) actions overcome, since Christ is the greater of the two. Paul can also use this technique to determine the appropriate application of certain norms, for if things are true in a lesser case, then they must also be true in a greater case. If it is true, Paul tells us in 1 Cor 9:9, that you must allow an ox to feed freely while it is treading out the grain (— and it is, since this is a law from Torah), then it is also true that humans beings (such as evangelists), to the extent that they are more important than oxen, must also be paid for their work.

A third method of interpretation that Paul uses is allegory. Here certain elements of one story or situation are identified, point for point, with the elements of a second, more meaningful story or situation. In this way the dynamics and structure of the second are clarified by the first. In Galatians 4, for example, Paul tells us explicitly that the Old Testament narrative of Abraham’s two sons and their mothers is to be understood “allegorically” (Greek: *allegoroumena* ; 4:24). It is not simply a story about two women, but one about two *covenants*, the old Mosaic covenant and the new Christian covenant. According to Paul, Hagar, a slave woman who bore a child into slavery, is to be understood as a personification of the Mosaic covenant. Sarah, by contrast, who is Abraham’s lawful wife and bears a freeborn child, corresponds to Christ’s covenant. The upshot? The Mosaic covenant enslaves; Christ’s covenant frees; and Christians, who, through Christ, can trace their ancestry through Sarah, are no longer under the slavery of the old covenant, but set free by the new.

A fourth interpretive method used by Paul is the creation of *testamonia*. These are texts that are composed of bits and pieces of Scripture from various parts of the Old Testament.

The result is “Scripture,” but organized in a new way. It is in the act of composition that the interpretive activity takes place, for texts that were formerly separated by other texts are now able to be seen side-by-side, their juxtaposition suggesting new meanings and truths. An example of this can be seen in Rom 5:9-18:

There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one. Their throats are open graves; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of vipers is under their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are in their paths, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

This passage, which Paul introduces with the words, “as it is written,” serves to show that *Scripture* supports his view that all people are under the power of sin. Yet it is not a citation of Scripture, *per se*, but comes from six different Psalms and a passage in Isaiah.²

Finally, Paul uses what many modern scholars refer to as “proof texting.” This is the citation of a text from the Old Testament, without regard to its context, as the evidence for an argument. We see this, for instance, in 1 Cor 14:21, where Paul’s larger argument has to do with the spiritual gift of *glossolalia*, or “speaking in tongues.” But since “tongue” (Greek: *glossa*) is also the word used in Greek for “language,” Paul is able to cite Isa 28:11, 12, which refers to *foreign* languages, as a confirmation that God never intended the gift of speaking in tongues to be used in public Christian worship.

Given Paul’s frequent use of these (and several other) methods of interpretation, the question naturally arises: why, if Paul had access to the (universal) Spirit of God, did he feel the need to rely on these (particular) methods of interpretation? To answer this question, let us first examine two popular, but in my judgment, inadequate views.

First view: We might be tempted to say that Paul presents his spiritual insights using these various ancient methods of interpretation because it is a natural or obvious way to interpret Scripture. After all, does it not simply “make sense” to us that Adam (whose name means “the human being”) would be the appropriate counterpart to Christ in the history of salvation? And is it not rather obvious on some level that Sarah and Hagar should be understood as two covenants and not simply two women who give birth to Abraham’s children?

The problem with this view is that it assumes that what is “familiar” to us is also “obvious” and therefore “correct.” But to someone who has not grown up with the biblical tradition, there is nothing “natural” or “obvious” about these interpretations.

Second view: For this reason scholars often criticize Paul’s methods, and consequently his conclusions, as cavalier or arbitrary. For example, E.P. Sanders says this of Paul’s use of proof texting:

Those who know something of modern fundamentalism will understand Paul’s technique ... He had in Scripture a vast store of words, and if he could find passages which had the right combination of words, and stick them together, he scored his point.³

Yet before we conclude that Paul's approach is simply arbitrary, we should consider that Paul was not alone in using these techniques. On the contrary, they were used widely by a variety of literary critics in his day. Typology, for example, was also used by the Gospel writers. Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus strongly suggests that Moses, Israel's great lawgiver, and Jesus are of the same "type."⁴ Likewise, the biblical exegetes at Qumran, whose library is popularly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, were avid users of both proof texting and *testamonia*.⁵ The technique of "from the lesser to the greater," on the other hand, was promoted by Rabbi Hillel in first century BCE, and by the second century CE it was ensconced in a rabbinic canon of interpretative techniques. That alone suggests a broad acceptance of this method in Jewish circles.⁶ But even this generalization is too narrow, for "from the lesser to the greater" was also a standard feature in Latin rhetorical training, at least as early as Cicero, a contemporary of Hillel.⁷

Allegory, finally, was used by Greek scholars for interpreting their sacred texts (e.g., Homer) as early as the classical period. In the later Hellenistic and Roman periods, it was adopted and used extensively by Stoics; and during that time it became popular in Hellenistic Jewish circles.⁸ Thus, Philo of Alexandria, a learned Jewish scholar and theologian, and contemporary of Paul, set about to interpret the entire Torah allegorically, leaving behind an extensive body of writings that would be cherished by later Patristic scholars.⁹

Philo is of particular interest to us because he also shows us that Paul was not the only one to conclude that the Sarah-Hagar story of Genesis was an allegory.¹⁰ Philo, too, interprets it allegorically, although in his version Sarah and Hagar were two educational stages in Abraham's journey toward divine wisdom, not two covenants. Likewise, Philo is important because he makes occasional reference to various schools of interpretation in his day.¹¹ In this way he gives us some sense of the rich and active subculture of Scripture interpretation in Paul's time.

When we inquire into the specifics of Paul's education, moreover, we discover that he was trained as a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a group who held a reputation in Paul's day of being extremely accurate and fastidious in their interpretation of Scripture. Paul, moreover, claims to have been one of the best: "I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors" (Gal 1:14).¹² Pauline Scripture interpretation is thus not *sui generis*, and therefore cannot be dismissed as simply cavalier, or arbitrary, or idiosyncratic.

In assessing Paul's interpretive approach, I would suggest that we need to find a place *both* for his universal *and* for his particular claims to truth, *and* understand them as being in dynamic tension with one another. Paul's reliance on the Spirit stands behind his universal claims to truth, but, as we have seen, he does not stop there. He also employs several standard exegetical methods of his day — e.g. typology, allegory — to determine truth. In the context of postmodern literary theory, these have their own legitimacy inasmuch as they have meaning for a particular group. Hence, just as Boyle can question the monopoly of academic literary theory, one can also question the dismissive views of modern biblical critics with regard to Paul's interpretative enterprise — to the extent that these dismissive views are based

on a presumed academic neutrality. Yet this last move, which legitimates Paul's particularistic claims to truth by contextualizing them within an ancient community of interpretation, at the same time limits his claims to a universal truth.

Let us now return to our starting point, Boyle's claim that his work moves toward a non-sectarian, Catholic approach to literature. I would suggest that we can see the same dichotomy in Boyle as we see in Paul. Whatever "Catholic" identity these authors claim for their respective approaches will be mitigated by their particularistic methods. For Paul these latter were the "quaint," antique methods of typology, proof texting, *testamonia*, and so forth. For Boyle, they include such things as his "curious" notion that a text is, in some sense, a living thing that acts and has self-awareness.¹³ Whether this is more akin to Paul's understanding of Scripture as a "person," who speaks and acts,¹⁴ or to Boyle's own tendencies toward postmodern literary criticism, which sees texts as having a life of their own, it is nonetheless not something we should take for granted. It comes from a particular school of interpretation and is therefore not universal, or Catholic. Likewise, Boyle's agreement with the Kantian notion that literature, both sacred and secular, is characterized by a nonpurposive, noninstrumental use of language,¹⁵ also puts him in a particular camp.

In both Paul and Boyle, therefore, the universal nature of their approaches is qualified by their particular intellectual locations. This will be true, moreover, as long as we practice the interpretive enterprise in a postmodern world. The effect of postmodernism on literary criticism has been twofold. On the one hand, it calls the bluff of western, academic claims to neutrality, and therefore universalism. On the other, however, it questions the position that *any* view can be neutral, and therefore universal. It tells us that universal wisdom and truth, if there are such things, are accessible only through local wisdoms and truths, and maybe not to everyone. Thus Boyle's vision of a "Catholic" approach to literature, whether understood as "universal" or simply "ecumenical," will, in practice, be articulated in a particularistic form. In a postmodern world, interpretation, like politics, is ultimately local.

¹ Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), ix-x.

² Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3, 5:9; 140:3, 10:7; 36:1; Isa 59:7, 8.

³ E.P. Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 66.

⁴ See Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 46-49.

⁵ See Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. Vander Kam, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), vol. 1, pp. 379-81; vol. 2, pp. 936-38.

⁶ *Tosephta Sanhedrin* 7.11; Cecil Roth, ed., *Encyclopedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), vol. 8, pp. 366-72.

⁷ Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 188-89.

⁸ See G.M.A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 55-56.

⁹ E.g., Philo's *Legum allegoriae*.

¹⁰ Philo, *De cherubim* 1-8.

¹¹ E.g., Philo, *De plantatione*, 70-77.

¹² See Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 62-69.

¹³ E.g., Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures*, 181-83.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Gal 3:22; and Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 175.

¹⁵ E.g., Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures*, 125.

IMAGINATIVE INVENTIONS

A PURPOSIVE ACCOUNT OF LITERATURE

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BY CAERY EVANGELIST

In *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*, Nicholas Boyle departs on a quest to chart and explore the region where sacred and secular writings intersect as bearers of truths.¹ His aim, in part, is to offer a foundation for how Catholics readers and Catholic educational institutions might interpret and teach literary works from that unique standpoint. Eschewing any need to present an apologetic for the sake of this perspective, Boyle instead takes it as his task to open up a space for dialogue about how this perspective can fruitfully engage in discovering and interpreting the ethical dimensions of literary works. His quest begins with an historical analysis of the ways in which thinkers including Herder, Hegel, Levinas and Ricoeur understood the Bible itself as a form of literature. Utilizing a number of conceptual tools from these scholars, Boyle then reframes his approach and examines how we might understand literature itself to be a reflection of the Bible. One crucial aspect of this project involves mapping the boundary lines between several types of discourse: between sacred writings and literature, and between literature and other “non-literary” forms of secular discourse. Unfortunately, the definition Boyle provides for secular literature — “secular literature is writing that is non-purposive in nature, whose interpretation is merely to entertain, yet nonetheless, it also seeks to ‘tell the truth’” — raises two serious problems (Boyle, 125). First, it conflicts with our ordinary understanding of the value of literature. Second, it appears to defeat the very purpose for which Boyle seeks to use it in his project. The focus of this paper will be to analyze this definition of literature and the difficulties it seems to produce, and to propose a friendly amendment to this definition that might better serve to promote his project.

In brief, Boyle defines secular literature as writing that is “non-purposive” in nature. The point of this description is to distinguish literature from more utilitarian forms of communication that do not seem to be obvious contenders for “sacred meaning,” such as, law documents, scientific/academic articles, lab reports, etc. Secular literature is further defined as discourse that is designed simply for the sake of giving pleasure to its audience. Boyle regards this feature as the mark that distinguishes secular literature from sacred. My concern with this account is that literary authors often intend their work to be instructional in nature, and readers intentionally regard it as such. When we immerse ourselves in the dissatisfaction and emotional scars of the main characters of Michael Chabon’s *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, or grapple in anger with the foolish decisions of Briony in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, we expect to encounter novel perspectives and ways of thinking that will have an impact on our own views regardless of whether we agree with them or even take pleasure in them. Thus, trying to insist on identifying literature as non-purposive seems to deny to literature an aspect that we ordinarily regard as essential to it: its capacity to teach us about ourselves and others.

This in itself might not be much of a difficulty for Boyle to overcome but it is coupled with an additional, weightier issue. Boyle wants to assert that literature is the site of sacred meaning—in other words, he takes it that one can read literature as a source for learning “sacred truths.” The problem, however, is that this view presupposes that literature is *instrumental* in the sense that readers and authors alike regard literary works as instruments of universal truths and of self-discovery. If Boyle is correct in saying secular literature contains such truths, then we must regard literature as having a purposive nature. Unfortunately, this consequence appears to undermine Boyle’s attempt to differentiate literature from other secular forms of discourse and thereby open up a space where the sacred and “the literary” (as Boyle defines it) might intermingle.

To elucidate the concerns noted above, I will first sketch the ideas that shape Boyle’s account. Several strands of thought influence the final picture he draws. Given the limitations of this paper, I will tease out only those strands that have the strongest impact on his view. The work of Paul Ricoeur, in particular, will play a central role. With that background in place, I will examine the ways in which this account of literature appears to undermine the very project for which it was expounded in the first place. Finally, I will suggest an alternative characterization of literature, one that also appeals to the insights of Ricoeur, which might better promote the project Boyle has in mind. I suggest that Boyle regard literature as “imaginative inventions.”

The Instrumental Divide: Distinguishing Literature from “Non-literature”

To facilitate the integration of sacred and secular literature Boyle attempts to develop a concept of literature that will encompass “both the Bible and what we have normally understood by literature without forcing either into a costume in which they look constrained or ridiculous: Malvolio in cross-garters or Huck Finn in a suit” (Boyle, 5). At the same time, he recognizes a need to distinguish literature, or at least what we typically regard as literature, from more utilitarian types of communication like memos, textbooks, academic articles, lab results or crime reports. To extend Boyle’s metaphor, addressing these as literature would be like draping Jane Eyre in gems. Such forms of discourse seem ill suited to bear the title of “literature,” let alone serve as a site of theology. The working definition of literature Boyle proposes is thus designed to include the Bible (and presumably other sacred texts) but exclude writing that has the primarily utilitarian objective of recording data or conveying information. The concerns addressed in this paper focus on the line demarcating literature from what I will call “non-literature” for lack of a better term. To adequately speak to those concerns while doing justice to Boyle’s own view we need to explore briefly the conceptual pathways that lead to his account of literature as both a sacred and a secular enterprise.

Boyle regards sacred literature and secular literature as mirroring each another; albeit imperfectly. Each form of discourse reflects fundamental truths about human existence, but does so from different perspectives. The interplay between these perspectives and the truths they manifest help guide us in making sense of our place in the world.

My working hypothesis ... is that literature is the site of theology because literature, biblical and nonbiblical, is a place where sacred and secular meet. A Catholic can expect to find in the words of noncanonical and even non-Christian writings something, though not of course everything, of the moral *and doctrinal* instruction to be found in sacred scripture, just as we expect the Bible to illuminate our daily and contemporary lives. Nor would common sense lead us to expect anything else: language is only language, a medium of communication, because all the words in it are secondhand. Even the language of a Christian sacred book is alive and meaningful, even for a Christian, only because it is the common property of Christian and non-Christian alike ... The words of Christian sacred texts are in permanent intercourse with the words of texts that are not sacred" (Boyle, 7-8).

In charting the nature of the interplay between the sacred and secular, Boyle synthesizes the work of numerous scholars, but it is the work of Paul Ricoeur that has a significant formative impact on his understanding of how sacred and secular writings can be thought of as types of discourse that embody or communicate revelation. Literature, or "poetic discourse" as Ricoeur refers to it, seeks to mirror truth through the medium of fiction and metaphor. Boyle appeals to Ricoeur's insight that all literary texts reflect a meaning that lies deeper than the descriptions of actions, thoughts and situations that comprise their subject matter. The texts reflect an implicit cultural and historical context of experiences, assumptions, and expectations that provide the webbing for the ideas explicitly voiced in the text. This context, which Ricoeur calls the "world of the text," shapes the way we understand the text; it is the background of meaning against which the ideas in text are given meaning.

Even the language employed by the text (as opposed to merely the ideas found in the text) is given meaning by the "world of the text." This appears to be the point behind Boyle's description of language as "secondhand," which I take to mean the idea that language itself is theory-laden. The words we use carry multiple connotations, including religious ones. In a close reading of a novel or a spoken dialogue, for example, the meaning a reader discerns in the text depends on the set of cultural assumptions she brings to bear on the words she analyzes. If she employs a religious lens to analyze the significance of words like "parable" or "sheep," she will come up with a very different set of possible readings than if she employed a different lens. (The particular set of assumptions that provide this context for such an analysis is necessarily vague and ill-defined; this vagueness is what that allows a reader to mine a text for new shades of meaning.) Boyle's point is that readers of sacred and secular texts naturally bring those works into dialogue with one another as they search for novel ways of understanding them; the interpretation of the secular text helps shape the meaning of the sacred and vice versa.

In adopting Ricoeur's notion of the "world of the text," Boyle should not be read as adopting a purely *subjective*, relativistic stance toward the meaning of a text, where any truths to be found within it would be merely a product constructed by the interpreter. On the contrary, both Boyle and Ricoeur assume that literary discourse contains universal truths, particularly of a moral nature. It is the presence of such truths in literary discourse that connects secular

writings to sacred works, and permits each to be a vehicle for revealing those truths.

The revelation at the heart of secular literature is in the deepest sense a moral revelation, and therefore it is a revelation of God. Perhaps in the end all I am saying is that if we believe the teachings of the Catholic church to be true statements about human life, then we must necessarily expect literature that is true to life to reflect and corroborate them, whether or not it is written by Catholics (Boyle, 139).

We might regard Boyle as merely claiming that literature contains revelatory truths insofar as the reader and author interpret the language used in a text in certain ways. This would be a mistake, however. Boyle wants to make a much stronger claim: these truths are *objective* in nature. They are moral truths determined by God, a Christian God in particular. Presumably, they are subjective only in so far as they can be said to “be revealed” to us as subjects in the literature we read since we do the work of revealing the truths in question through our reflection on a given text and the “world” it implies.

Boyle also finds inspiration in Ricoeur’s analysis of how different types of biblical writing house different modes of revelation. Ricoeur uncovers five distinct modes corresponding to the five types of biblical discourse he identifies: prophetic, narrative, prescriptive, hymnic and wisdom discourse. It is the last of these that will concern us here because Boyle finds the closest connections between secular and non-secular writings in this type of discourse. Wisdom discourse, exemplified by the book of Job, serves as the arena where “the misery and the grandeur of human beings confront each other” (Ricoeur, 13). It encompasses our reflection on the justice or injustice, the meaningfulness or nonsense, the pain or the pleasure of living in a world we cannot fully comprehend. “Hebraic wisdom,” notes Ricoeur “interprets these situations as the annihilation of humans and the incomprehensibility of God — as the silence and absence of God” (HR, 14). In other words, wisdom discourse explores the dimensions of human suffering that arise in a world where the divine plan is hidden from us. The depth of the suffering caused by the perception of God’s silence (the story of Job being a case in point) and articulated in “the discordance between justice and happiness, so cruelly emphasized by the triumph of the wicked, brings to light the overwhelming question of the sense or nonsense of existence” (Ricoeur, 14).

According to Boyle, the thematic hiddenness of God which binds together the biblical works of wisdom discourse also links sacred literature to its secular cousin. The two share in the charting of human experience, meaning, and moral principles without overt reliance on any special knowledge acquired by revelation of how we ought to construct the meaning and principles that shape our experiences. Indeed, the same idea shadows the background of both sacred and secular literature, namely, how we might make sense of the world given that the divine plan is opaque to us in the absence of any special revealed knowledge. We might say that this idea is part of the “world of these texts.” Giving us a brief example of what he has in mind in comparing sacred and secular literature through Ricoeur’s category of wisdom discourse, Boyle points to Proverbs as articulating universal principles of moral prudence without appealing to any type revealed knowledge. The concepts of suffering and meaning

explored by the secular existentialist philosopher are given a “divine dimension” when viewed from the perspective of Job. “The importance of this insight for us is obvious,” notes Boyle. “It suggests that wisdom discourse is the closest point of contact between sacred and secular scripture” (Boyle, 67).

Armed with a sketch of why Boyle regards secular and sacred literature as reflecting similar truths, we are now in a better position to understand how he attempts to define literary discourse and distinguish it from non-literary discourse. That definition will be shaped by the pressure of several different commitments. On one hand, the definition must accommodate the idea that secular literature contains universal moral truths; otherwise, it would fail to be an appropriate “site of theology.” On the other hand, the definition must be tailored in such a way that clear boundaries distinguish the sacred from the secular, and distinguish the secular from other forms of discourse that do not seem to be appropriate vehicles for communicating universal moral truths. Under the weight of those requirements Boyle fashions the following account: secular literature is writing that is non-purposive in nature, whose intention is merely to entertain, yet nonetheless, it also seeks to “tell the truth” (Boyle, 125).²

Boyle understands both sacred and secular literature as non-instrumental in character; although, how they differ in how they are non-instrumental. Given the focus of our inquiry, it will only be necessary to examine the characterization of secular literature in this regard. According to Boyle, secular literature’s sole “objective” is to give pleasure (presumably, to both reader and author) through the playful manipulation of words and meanings.

The common feature of sacred and secular literature that marks them off from other forms of discourse and makes them capable of becoming a vehicle for revelation is indeed, I believe, their nonpurposive and nonutilitarian use of language, specifically, of written language ... secular literary discourse sets out not to communicate or record information but simply to give pleasure in the written medium — to play with it ... (Boyle, 126).

According to Boyle, it is the non-purposive nature of literature that allows it to serve as a bearer of revelatory truths. Following an insight he takes from Ricoeur’s work, Boyle notes that “the ‘ordinary’ language of everyday communication and ‘scientific’ discourse are too instrumental and purposive to let us experience” the universal truths that can be found in literature (Boyle, 125).

Boyle clearly wants to mark literature off from those forms of writing that seek to describe or demonstrate what the author takes to be factual information about the world, such as lab reports, academic articles, legal briefs, etc. These are works that we might characterize as purely utilitarian in nature. Certainly, we can see why Boyle would identify these forms of discourse as “purposive” and distinct from literature, given the role he sees literature playing as a vehicle for universal truths.

But we might ask why the non-instrumental nature of literature makes it an appropriate medium for conveying truth. Why might the freedom from having a goal open language up to the possibility of revealing deeper moral meanings beyond its mere word-play? The answer to

this question appeals to Boyle's account of "ordinary" and scientific forms of discourse, namely, those forms of communication that he sets up as the contrast class to literature.

Boyle notes that scientific and other ordinary forms of discourse are "too concerned with describing things in the world for manipulative and utilitarian purposes to let us see the world simply as it is, as something that is simply there" (Boyle, 125). I find this characterization of utilitarian discourse odd. A police report strikes me as determined to describe the world as it *is*, "as something that is simply there." Literature, on the other hand, would seem to imaginatively rework the world or investigate it through a particular lens, rather than describing it as "simply there"— as something immediately present to a witness.

Perhaps the seeming "oddness" of Boyle's description of scientific discourse can be removed, though, if we try to understand his account in light of its background context. That context is the distinction Ricoeur draws between the different referential functions performed by literary and non-literary modes of discourse. In "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," Ricoeur observes that ordinary language and scientific language serve different functions than language serves in poetic discourse. Ordinary language and scientific language refer to the world and seek to accurately describe the world we perceive. Poetic discourse, on the other hand, seeks to undermine the ways in which we ordinarily describe and refer to the world we experience.

[Poetic genres] exercise a referential function that differs from the descriptive referential function of ordinary language and above all of scientific discourse.... This function, in turn, is defined precisely in terms of its referential function. What is this referential function? As a first approximation, we may say that the poetic function points to the obliterating of the ordinary referential function, at least if we identify it with the capacity to describe familiar objects of perception or the objects which science alone determines by means of its standards of measurement. Poetic discourse suspends this descriptive function. It does not directly augment our knowledge of objects (Ricoeur, 24).

The fact that literature functions by undermining or annihilating that standard references of our words and the frameworks by which we interpret that meaning of those words gives it the capacity to have dimensions of meaning that we would not look for in a lab report. Reading a story by Borges, for instance, inverts ordinary assumptions we make about the significance of objects like coins and tigers, or the comfortable presuppositions we rely on about the stability of reality. Legal briefs and tax documents make no such effort to subvert our familiar ways of describing and making sense of the world (regardless of all our jokes about lawyers and taxes doing just that!). It is the unique referential function of poetic discourse that makes it "capable of entering into resonance with one or the other of the aspects of biblical revelation" (Ricoeur, 25). Literature, as understood by both Boyle and Ricoeur, may not augment our basic descriptive knowledge of the world, but it augments our ability to understand the world in different ways, including from a theological perspective.³

Malvolio in Cross-Garters

The conception of literature as non-instrumental writing for the sake of pleasure is a principal feature of Boyle's project to link together sacred and secular discourses, while also maintaining a crucial distinction between them. Unfortunately, this appears to be a somewhat ill-fitting garment: an awkwardly tailored category that constrains the notion of literature in a variety of ways. First, I would suggest that neither an author nor a reader would be likely to explain the nature of literature, or the value they find in reading and writing it, solely on the grounds that it brought them pleasure. It unquestionably gives us pleasure, as Aristotle noted in his explanation of our attraction to tragedy. But to identify the defining feature of literature as 'non-instrumental writing that gives pleasure for pleasure's sake' does not adequately capture the nature of our attraction to it. Second, I would argue that characterizing literature as "non-instrumental" does not do justice to Boyle's own project of understanding literature as a vehicle for universal truth. Nor does it seem necessary to his project to characterize it in this way.

When I first read Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, I squirmed, yelled, cursed, and even threw the book across the room at one point. I hated Briony. She disgusted me. I had no sympathy for her behavior or her ignorance even though she was simply a child acting as any child might. (It is sad to admit, but it is true.) Nonetheless, I felt absolutely compelled to read the story I could not stand. Why? The answer lies, I suspect, in the fact that when we read literature, we often do so because it teaches us something, not merely because it elicits pleasure in us. Indeed, we often participate in the story in spite of some discomfort it produces in us, for precisely this reason. The same is presumably true for the author who writes it: pleasure is not the exclusive motivation, nor the only defining goal of their work. Certainly, the experiences we have when we encounter new, sometimes painful, ideas (whether we be author or reader) can bring us a kind of pleasure insofar as we value gaining knowledge, or exposing ourselves to new perspectives, or finding emotional resources to help us deal with traumatic events. Nevertheless, identifying that value as a kind of pleasure obscures its true nature. Literature appeals to us for many reasons, but one of those essential reasons is its capacity to reveal insights about the nature of ourselves and those around us, irrespective of any pleasure (or pain) it might bring. The appeal literature has for us is something more than merely the pleasure that it produces; one of its defining features must also be its goal of teaching us something about the world. If we disregard this purposive feature of literature, then we fail to do full justice to our own commonsense notion of what literature is.

Boyle's definition raises another immediate concern: if secular literature is characteristically designed to "give pleasure" to its audience, then it clearly has an objective it seeks to achieve. That objective suggests literature is fundamentally *instrumental* in nature. If an author's goal in writing some imaginative work is to create pleasure for herself and her reader, then it would seem that literature derives its value from its role as tool for producing that experience. The outcome remains the same even if we disregard authorial intent and consider only the reader's anticipation of pleasure as the objective. In either case, literature still serves

as an instrument for entertainment, and literature must be understood as minimally instrumental on Boyle's view.

The more problematic issue is that characterizing literature as non-instrumental does not do justice to the job Boyle wants it to do as an account of secular literature. He is committed to the idea that literature, whether it be sacred or secular, reveals truth to those who participate in it (either as author or reader). As already noted, this is one of the crucial elements of Boyle's case for identifying literature as a "site of theology." If it is to perform that role, however, literature must serve as an instrument by which universal moral truths are uncovered.

Literature, I think, shows us in words the truth about life. That is not its defining feature, for the defining feature of literature is its noninstrumental use of words, and the defining feature of secular literature is its noninstrumental use of words in order to give enjoyment. But if we deny that the words literature uses tell us truths about things, about individual beings, natural, personal, or cultural, we shall have great difficulty explaining how they tell us the truth about Being in general, how they amount, or are capable of amounting, to a Revelation (Boyle, 128).

If literature seeks to tell the truth, then that certainly constitutes a *purpose* it strives to achieve. Boyle himself obliquely points out the nature of this problem in discussing why Ricoeur appeared reluctant to describe poetic discourse as capable of making true statements about the world. "[I]f literature tells the truth, then there is a danger that what it says might prove useful, either practically or morally; it might help us to understand how things work or what our duties are, and this would seem to be incompatible with its nonpurposive status" (Boyle, 128). And while Boyle identifies this tension as a problem for Ricoeur, he does not seem to regard it as a concern for his own view. Instead, he downplays the tension by stipulating that the didactic role of literature is not an essential characteristic of it. Unfortunately, this move returns us to the issue raised earlier: the idea that literature is defined solely in terms of 'giving pleasure for its own sake' does not adequately capture the reason why we find such works to be compelling, namely, because of their capacity to teach us new ways of understanding ourselves and the world around us.

Given the context of Ricoeur's account of the distinct referential function enjoyed by literature, it is difficult to see why Boyle feels the need to downplay the instrumental nature of literary discourse. If we ground the difference between non-literature and its counterpart in their respective referential functions, then nothing about this distinction implies that literary discourse must be fundamentally non-purposive in nature, while ordinary or scientific discourse must be instrumental in nature. Rather, one has a descriptive referential function and the other operates in such a way as to undermine that descriptive function. Both nevertheless can have the *purpose* of conveying truth to us.

Redressing Literature

In this section, I will offer a few "friendly amendments" to Boyle's account of literary discourse in the hopes of resolving the issues raised above and, thereby strengthen one of the underpinnings of his project. Any alternative definition will still need to distinguish literature from

non-literature, while at the same time serve as a common ground that links sacred and secular literature to the extent that they can both be bearers of revelatory truths.

One might be tempted to suggest (as indeed I was at first) that Boyle try to distinguish literature from non-literature by appealing to Ricoeur's notion of "the world of the text." Perhaps poetic works might be distinguished from non-poetic works by the fact that the former refer to a "world of the text" while the latter requires no such background context. Presumably legal documents and police reports have no such world they are creating or referring to in presenting their descriptions of things. But Boyle points out, quite rightly, that even a piece of writing as utilitarian as a police report must have a set of background assumptions and expectations that it appeals to in reporting an incident in the way that it does: what counts as a law, when are laws bent or broken, who counts as a plausible witness, when is it appropriate to lay praise or blame on someone, etc. Even police reports (and, yes, tax forms) involve a "world of the text," that includes the moral precepts, cultural attitudes and ideals, language and laws that give meaning and context to the experience (or income) being reported and to the meaning of the report itself. This approach, then, will not provide a viable distinction for Boyle's project.

Ricoeur's analysis of poetic discourse may provide the seed for a second, more fruitful alternative. Recalling his insight into the unique referential function of poetic discourse, we might redefine literature as language that has the unique function of undermining the purely descriptive references of "ordinary" and "scientific" language. By inverting the common meanings we ascribe to words and objects, and destabilizing the familiar frameworks for interpreting our experiences, we are forced to recognize or invent new frameworks. We might think of this as reinventing the "world of the text." More importantly, reassessing those meanings and experiences opens a world of new possibilities to us, allowing us to reinvent ourselves and reevaluate our beliefs by envisioning alternative lives and ideas.

Ricoeur himself appeals to this idea of literature in trying to account for the sense in which it can embody truth and why that truth should be understood as an analogue to revelation. The truths that poetic language conveys cannot be understood as *truth* in the typical sense of the word. The ideas and perspectives articulated in a novel or poem cannot be tested, verified or falsified. These are concepts of truth that apply only to the discourses of science and ordinary language. This may be one of the reasons why Ricoeur is reluctant to say that literature gives us "true" statements about the world. Tested by means of our ordinary concepts of truth, poetic discourse fails to provide us with any knowledge other than a few practical pieces of information about concrete aspects of the world. Literature participates in a different conception of truth, one which mirrors revelation by manifesting possibilities to us, as opposed to verifiable facts.

But why call it [poetic discourse] revelatory? Because through all the traits that it recapitulates and by what it adds, the poetic function incarnates a concept of truth that escapes the definition by adequation as well as the criteria of falsification and verification. Here truth no longer means verification, but manifestation, i.e., letting what shows itself be. What shows itself is in each instance a proposed world, a

world I may inhabit and *wherein I can project my own most possibilities*. It is in this sense of manifestation that language in its poetic function is a vehicle of revelation" (Ricoeur, 26, my italics).

Ricoeur treats literature as a manifestation of the world, but not in a literally descriptive sense that the word 'manifestation' might suggest. Literature does not merely record facts and features of the world as they are witnessed by some acute observer. Instead, it manifests the world by *re-describing* it, by transforming it in a way that reveals alternative perspectives and ideas to us. By imagining ourselves in the place of some other character we are given the opportunity to reinvent our well-worn patterns of thought, of moral values, of aspirations, of goals, and of meaning we find in living our lives. In short, we are given the opportunity to reinvent ourselves.

Ricoeur's insights here provide the groundwork for an alternative definition of literary discourse. Literature is *imaginative invention* that seeks to open the door to possibilities about what we think about, respond to, and experience in the world we inhabit. The benefit of this description for Boyle's project is that it avoids the tensions that arise in trying to distinguish ordinary forms of discourse from a literary one based on the instrumental/non-instrumental divide. The view suggested here fully embraces the idea that literature can be as purposive as any instruction manual or scientific article. Indeed, it prioritizes this characteristic. But where ordinary discourses seek to describe the world and present verifiable facts about it, literature seeks to re-describe the world and offer us possibilities for understanding the true nature and significance of the human condition. On this view, the line demarcating secular literature from other ordinary forms of discourse is drawn on the basis of the type of referential function its language employs and the resulting account of truth in which it participates. Moreover, this definition comfortably accommodates Boyle's perception of literature as "giving pleasure for pleasure's sake." That is certainly not a feature we would want to exclude from a robust description of literature. However, it ceases to be *the* essential characteristic.

While this account of literary discourse appears to resolve the problems noted in the previous section, we must assess whether it still does the work Boyle needs it to do in providing a common ground between secular and sacred literature. Although, Boyle holds that the two are radically distinct areas in some respects, the definition of literature still needs to maintain a link between them. The joinery work on Boyle's view is performed, once again, by characterizing both sacred and secular poetics as non-instrumental (what then distinguishes them is the manner in which they are non-purposive: that latter is non-instrumental writing done for the sake of pleasure). Does the idea of literature as "imaginative invention" provide sufficient common ground to replace the notion of non-instrumentality? It would seem that it does as this definition applies as well to sacred writings as it does to secular works, especially if we think about those sacred writings that fall into Ricoeur's category of wisdom discourse. The story of Abraham, for example, compels us to return to it again and again to search out the possible meanings it embodies and what those have to say about how we understand our place in the world and our relation to the divine. Kierkegaard's repeated retelling of the story

of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* illustrates the value of understanding sacred literature as “imaginative invention.” Each successive version of the story opens up new questions, new fears and new ways of understanding the significance and moral lessons of that story.

What I have tried to offer here are some further resources for Boyle to utilize in promoting his exploration of the intersection between sacred and secular writing. I suggested that Boyle redefine literature as discourse whose function is to undermine the purely descriptive reference of ordinary language with the goal of teaching us to envision the world and ourselves in new ways. Its purpose, as Ricoeur puts it is to manifest “a world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my own most possibilities.” For Boyle, these possibilities are universal truths (and because universal consistent with Catholic faith) revealed through the medium of the text, which explains why it is crucial for him to find common ground between sacred and secular literature, while separating off literature from non-literature. Unfortunately, the concept of he initially develops — non-instrumental writing produced and read solely for the sake of pleasure — does not due full justice to that project. My alternative proposal of literature as “imaginative invention” is tailored to comfortably fit the idea that literature purposively seeks to expand our understanding of ourselves and the significance of our place in the world. At the same time, it leaves room to include additional characteristics, such as ‘pleasurable word-play,’ to a most robust description of literature. Hopefully, we are left with a concept of literary discourse that accommodates sacred writings and what we typically take to be secular literature and “without forcing either into a costume in which they look constrained or ridiculous: Malvolio in cross-garters or Huck Finn in a suit.”

¹ Boyle, N. (2003). *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

² There is an obvious tension here between the depiction of literature as *non-purposive* and at the same time as having an *intention* to entertain the reader and speak the truth. I will examine this tension in the section on “Malvolio in Cross-Garters,” but for the moment, I will place it on the back-burner.

³ I do not wish to insinuate that Boyle and Ricoeur share the exact same conception of literary discourse. The latter speaks of “poetic discourse” as involving a dimension of revelation that is fundamentally “nonreligious, nontheistic, and nonbiblical” (Ricoeur, 25) For Boyle, literature involves a dimension of revelation that is fundamentally religious, theistic and biblical.

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BETWEEN TRUTH AND TRUTHS:

NICHOLAS BOYLE'S
"CATHOLIC APPROACH TO LITERATURE"
IN THE CLASSROOM

■
BY MOLLY HIRO

I begin by confessing that when I first picked up Nicholas Boyle's book about a year ago, I found myself attracted more to its subtitle than to its title. The poetic (or at least alliterative) title — *Sacred and Secular Scriptures* — confronts readers immediately with the connection that animates the book, a crucial continuity Boyle sees between secular and Biblical texts. Yet the more functional subtitle — *A Catholic Approach to Literature* — drew me in more powerfully because, quite simply, I "approach" literature on a daily basis, and I do so in a Catholic context. As an English professor at the University of Portland, I have the good fortune of spending my days reading, contemplating, writing about, and, most importantly, teaching works of literature both canonical and contemporary. Since I came to the University of Portland four years ago, I have thought much about the significance of the Catholic nature of this institution, and the way in which it has, will, or even ought to shape my pedagogy. While Boyle's "Catholic Approach to Literature" turns out not to address the specifics of how one might translate that approach into the classroom, some of the contentions his book makes, I hope to show here, can help to articulate a compelling way forward for teachers not just in Catholic institutions, but any who seek to impart to their students the value literature has in transforming students' perspectives on their beliefs, on their world, and on their place in that world.¹

The term in *Sacred and Secular Imagination* that has the most bearing on these questions is "truth," which is fundamental to Boyle's definition of literature as "language free of instrumental purpose [that] seeks to tell the truth" (125). Yet as my own title suggests, his book seems at times to oscillate between two competing versions of this truth: one version, multiple and changing (what we sometimes think of as truth with a little "t") and the other version, singular and universal (capital-T truth). One of the reasons, then, that Boyle's book has such bearing for an investigation of pedagogical approaches is that this contest between Truth and truths has been at the heart of debates around the meaning of literature for at least a century and perhaps longer. Should literary texts be thought of as imparting a single, transcendent meaning to everyone in every generation? And is the professor's job then to reveal to students that individual meaning? Or should those same texts be taken to signify differently depending on context, readership, and historical moment? In this case, the professor's role would be to offer some tools and then stand aside and let each individual student do her own job of finding the truth of the work. As for the relevance of this debate to a Catholic campus, while the former understanding of truth would allow, indeed demand, a professor to point out certain *sacred* truths embedded in a work, the latter would see such truths as relevant only to those

who come prepared to understand and desire them. I will investigate these implications more in what follows, but more broadly, the acts of reading *Sacred and Secular Scriptures*, discussing it in a vibrant interdisciplinary context, and contemplating its implications in the light of other recent works on the purpose of studying literature have, overall, helped me better to grasp what is at stake in negotiating these versions of truth. I hope here to propose a fertile middle ground between them upon which to build a lasting foundation for students of literature, one that preserves the classroom as an open space, yet also invites something like a sacred experience of reading. And because “reading” and “texts” are themselves widely interpretable concepts, my hope is that the following investigation will be of interest to those in fields outside of English, as well.

To begin, it will be helpful to sketch out Boyle's argument about what is entailed in a Catholic approach to literature. Or, perhaps better put, what he determines *might be* entailed in such an approach; he opens the book admitting that he is on a sort of “romantic” quest, “try[ing] to find a Catholic way of reading the Bible” and “seek[ing] a Catholic way of reading secular literature” (6). Boyle follows up this statement of intent with a provisional definition: that “the Catholic reference of a work” can be measured by “the greater or lesser extent to which it embodies truths” (7). While even early in his argument, Boyle implies that such truths are connected to a specifically Christian theology, his more general phrasing, including the making plural of “truth,” leaves open the possibility that a Catholic approach to literature can reveal differently and multiply depending on who is doing the reading. Later in the book, when Boyle shifts from a focus on the Bible as literature to “literature as Bible,” he takes up Paul Ricoeur's notion of what “poetic texts” (read: literature) can do for the reader. Ricoeur argues, in Boyle's words, that “[a]ll poetic texts ... communicate and constitute a revelation, manifest a world, the world, to us, and what they reveal could not be constructed by any process of reasoning however subtle or prolonged” (115).² Here, again, we find that literature has an immense capacity for leading readers to new discoveries, to new senses of the world—but not necessarily to a single, absolute truth. We professors of literature tend, in our more idealist moments, to imagine that we can facilitate these sorts of discoveries, these sorts of world re-orderings, in our students. According to this perspective, reflected here by Ricoeur, the value of literary study lies in its prompting of myriad existential revelations that can't be accessed through simple empirical reasoning.

Yet soon after Boyle considers Ricoeur, he makes it clear that his Catholic approach will ultimately locate in literature a more circumscribed truth, for such an approach “requires a discrimination of revelations” (118). The best literature, Boyle implies, shows us “that life matters,” and since a Catholic believes that “[m]attering ... comes from the Spirit,” a Catholic approach to literature will look for evidence of that Spirit (130, 132). A few pages later, Boyle states more explicitly what sort of truth his approach seeks:

What supreme works of secular literature reveal is ... not some ultimate and homogeneous eternal moment, as Ricoeur's terminology might seem to suggest, but the permanent interaction of Law, judgement, and reconciliation which is the

source of our existence insofar as it is open to us to know it. The revelation at the heart of secular literature is in the deepest sense a moral revelation, and therefore it is a revelation of God. Perhaps in the end all I am saying is that if we believe the teachings of the Catholic church to be true statements about human life, then we must necessarily expect literature that is true to life to reflect and corroborate them, whether or not it is written by Catholics (Boyle, 139).

And so, in these narrower terms, it would seem that a Catholic approach entails discovering in literature the truth central to Catholic theology; as Boyle puts it later, “works of secular literature [read in this way] show the world as forgiven, as reconciled with God thanks to God’s own action through the incarnation of his Law in Christ” (187).³ Part Three of *Sacred and Secular Scriptures* then goes on to make good on these premises, finding in works of secular literature as diverse as Goethe’s *Faust*, Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, and Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* living evidence of these theological truths.

Boyle does admit that the literary terrain he chooses to seek God’s presence seems at times unfavorable, yet avers that “[e]ven in the works and words that seem to hide God’s face, or to spit on it, we can see God revealed” (145). And indeed, in the case of *Moby-Dick*, he has to work hard to find God, for Melville’s masterpiece would surely count as one of those books that seems more to “spit on” than embrace Christian truths. The novel is dominated by Captain Ahab’s obsessive quest to find and destroy the storied “white whale,” a quest Boyle describes as “hate-filled” for its purely annihilative intent (190). Boyle’s final analysis of Ahab’s story is that it equates God with “Nothing”; for Ahab, “and probably [for] Melville too,” “to hear and respond to [the] voice,” a voice “that imposes responsibility,” is ultimately impossible, and so *Moby-Dick* has “no place for Christ” (197). It would seem to follow from this that Melville’s novel therefore has no place in the project of reading in a Catholic way. But Boyle digs more deeply, and finds in a relatively marginal scene of the whaling ship’s crew squeezing spermaceti a “counter ... to Ahab’s monomaniac destructiveness, a universal love embodied in the fellow feelings of the male crew” (200). As a scholar of American literature, and one who has often stood in awe at the artistry of Melville, I was cheered by Boyle’s ultimate recuperation of *Moby-Dick*; but I was also surprised that a book that seems so explicitly to reject Christian theology could yet be put forward in a demonstration of reading in a Catholic way.

This reader found something else surprising in Boyle’s interpretation of *Moby-Dick*, and here we will return to the question of truth vs. Truth. In building his case for the depravity of Ahab’s quest, Boyle points to the doubloon, straightforwardly interpreting it as a symbol of the ship’s drive toward profit with no higher end in mind (194). In short, then, the doubloon — a reward Ahab offers for spotting the whale and then displays on the mast as motivation — symbolically supports the larger argument made here about the novel. Here Boyle diverges from standard readings of the doubloon’s significance by not considering it in context. For in the chapter “The Doubloon,” Melville describes not just the coin and Ahab’s strategy in offering it, but also the meaning several different crew members attach to it as a symbol. And no man interprets it the same, each seeing it differently depending on his age, background,

beliefs, and intelligence. Thus, for most critics, the doubloon becomes not symbolic of *any* particular thing; its status as an endlessly interpretable object instead highlights the multiplicity of meaning and, as such, the impossibility on ever agreeing on a single meaning, or truth.

The point here is not to quibble with Boyle's reading of one classic American novel, of course, but to suggest how his Catholic approach to literature is rather at odds with the contemporary conventional wisdom about the status of truth and its place in literary analysis (and I should add that this is an opposition of which he is fully aware). Melville's foregrounding of the men's *perspectives* of the doubloon has been read as presciently postmodern, as it anticipates that epistemological worldview whose basic premise is that human subjectivity precludes the very existence of objective truth. In claiming not only that there is a single absolute truth, but, more importantly, in undertaking to *find* that truth in a diverse set of texts, Boyle's approach rejects this postmodern account, but it also seems to fit the mold of the crewmate who finds what he aims to find in an ambiguous text. As Robert Paul Lamb argues about teaching *Moby-Dick*, in Melville's "method of symbolism in which characters project their own meaning ... the meaning [they find] reveals more about them than it does about the thing they are trying to interpret" (10). Indeed, I see similar such cases in my own classrooms quite often. A student reads Lewis Carroll's "The Walrus and the Carpenter," and because one of the figures is a carpenter and said carpenter persuades little oysters to follow him, and because there's a recurrence of the number "7" and of loaves of bread, the student interprets the poem as being about Jesus and his disciples. Another student, having taken a psychology class before my introductory literature course, determines that Hamlet's soliloquies develop according to the Kübler-Ross model of the stages of grief: in the first soliloquy, Hamlet's clearly in denial, and because there are five stages of grief but only four soliloquies, he never makes it to the final stage of acceptance. Each of these interpretations has its merits, but one senses that they all share the tendency Lamb notices to project their own interests, proclivities, or favored theories onto the text.

In his preface, Boyle seems to acknowledge as much, but insists that approaching literature through his Catholic lens is hardly different from doing so armed with any other theory, as when he objects that, for some, "Catholicism is bias...but psychoanalysis is just one possible approach" (x). This strikes me as a completely fair comparison. Yet I would argue that the main shortcomings of many such approaches — and to psychoanalytic we might add feminist, or Marxist, or any number of others — is that readers equipped with them often do find in texts little more than what they are looking for (or they do not find what they are looking for; in which case they likely don't spend much time interpreting said texts). English professor Tamar Katz suggests that even those students not well-versed in literary theory tend to

[S]ubstitute what they generally think a text should be saying for what it actually says, and lack a way to explore the intricacies and interests of the words on the page. Sometimes the historical knowledge and generic concepts actually become problems when students use them as tools for making texts say and do what students think they should, generalizing that all novels do X or poems do Y. Usually

the result is that they want to read every text as saying something extremely familiar that they might agree with (Katz in Scholes, "Transition," 165).

To be sure, Boyle's own analyses of literary works through a Catholic lens are more nuanced than programmatic, but my own experience with undergraduate English students bears out Katz's point. To return to my earlier example, the project of reading a work like *Hamlet* with Kübler-Ross in mind may advance the student's grasp of the five stages of grief, but because it involves fishing in Shakespeare's language only for what fits with Kübler-Ross, it risks blinding that student to the particular human struggles uniquely rendered by Hamlet's words. Being open and attentive to such words would mean, for example, needing to come to terms with the strange suggestion Hamlet seems to make in his famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy that "thought" and "conscience," two human qualities we tend to prize highly, could also be regarded as impediments of a sort. A book like *Moby-Dick*, similarly, when read carefully and with curiosity, forces us to reconsider our definitions of a quest, of good and evil, even of something as basic as a whale. Reading with openness to such possibility in literary texts, because it entails accepting that there might be multiple, even conflicting, ways of understanding concepts like good and evil, goes hand in hand with a sense of truth as multiple, perspectival, and elusive, rather than singular, absolute, and easy to access.

This little "t" truth, promulgated by postmodern theory in multiple disciplines, is a concept that has by now been around long enough to have filtered down to the student level as well. So while Katz's point that students presume that "all novels mean X" would seem to suggest that students tend to come to reading with that absolute sense of truth, I've also encountered many in recent years whose writing reflects a sort of conversion to the more postmodern, perspectival version. Take, for instance, this sampling from my students' informal response papers on poetry:

1. This poem is a free verse poem and does not have much rhyme, rhythm or meter but, as I said earlier the diction in the poem gives the poem a very unique feel to it. ... [R]eading the poem in different ways gives it a different feel and made me think that there could be more than one meaning in this poem. It gives the poem a variety of ways it can be read making it intriguing to see the alternate meanings in the text.

2. Ultimately Blake's language creates imagery, which in turn creates tone, all of which is held together by the structure of his poem. Without these elements acting together the poem could have portrayed a very different meaning. Like the placement of a comma, the smallest changes in the way the poem was written would result in drastic changes to its meaning.

3. The speaker articulates about a day dream or vision that one feels in their mind and body, of a funeral.... This poem is feeling provoking, and those feelings are of a funeral. Whether that funeral is a literal or metaphorical funeral remains to be seen and is up to the interpretation of each reader.

Rather than imposing their own pre-set notions of truth onto these poems, we can see, each of these students seems to embrace the inevitability of multiple interpretations based on

differences in anything from punctuation to perspective. Still, it's hard to see how these readings present much of an improvement over that of the student who wished to read *Hamlet* as exemplifying Kübler-Ross's theory of grief. Whereas the latter imposed a too-narrow and pre-determined meaning on literature, the former seem to have relinquished the very possibility of meaning. If a work's meaning is always "up to the interpretation of each reader," then where can we find common ground?

Indeed, it is this very potential for ultimate meaninglessness that pushes many to shy away from, or even reject outright, a thoroughly postmodern account of truth. In his introduction, Boyle articulates such an account as a clear problem for religious faith; once one accepts that there is no such thing as a universal truth, one must ask: "Why should one set of religious insights be privileged over another?" (15). And in the classroom, a similar suspicion of the value of studying literature threatens to take over once "this is what the poem means" gets replaced by "the poem means something different for everyone." Robert Scholes contends in *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline* that such displacements have produced a crisis in literary studies. "Powerful voices in our field have taught us to be embarrassed by the word *truth*," Scholes argues, and so "we are in trouble ... because we have allowed ourselves to be persuaded that we cannot make truth claims but must go on 'professing' all the same" (39). And while my students, as quoted above, seem to have internalized and accepted the notion of truth as elusive or even unavailable, several recent scholars of pedagogy suggest that such a worldview finally serves to make the study of literature seem like an exercise in futility. As one diagnoses the problem, "the rest of the world thinks what we do and what we study is fake. English ranges anywhere from 'entertainment' to 'therapy,' but it seldom enters the realm of the real ... meaning a productive contribution to society yielding tangible results" (Van Engen 6). The danger, in sum, is that a discipline that insists upon a multiplicity of truths might finally come to be seen as leading one to little more than fakery and emptiness.

If the two paths down which most students travel in their interactions with literature, as described above, constitute the principal options for the undergraduate study of English, then one cannot imagine much more than a dismal future for the discipline. As I have argued, the imposition of an approach such as Boyle's, in which one aims to locate in literature reflections of one's already-established beliefs, seems to short-circuit the act of reading — of being open to the other things the text might say. At the same time, it certainly does not serve students well to indoctrinate them in a belief in the impossibility of truth, which would seem tantamount to denying that the truths they hold dearest might be shared by a literary work. What is to be done, then? Is there a way that students' deeply-held beliefs and a commitment to reading closely, with the radical questioning that often entails, can co-exist?

As one might suspect, my answer is an unequivocal yes; and my very commitment to teaching literature is based on such a conviction. In fact, in thinking about these questions after reading Boyle and contemplating the implications of his Catholic approach to literature,

I have come to believe that the value of studying literature lies in its power to provoke the kind of analysis of one's beliefs that can ultimately lead to the construction of a firmer foundation upon which to set those beliefs. The recently published book *Why Read?* by Mark Edmundson, a professor of English at the University of Virginia who also publishes widely outside of scholarly contexts, speaks compellingly to this very power of studying literature, and so I will refer to it quite a bit in what follows. Edmundson's inquiry begins by quoting from a familiar poem by William Carlos Williams:

It is difficult to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there (Williams in Edmundson, 1).

Indeed, Edmundson argues, what literature can offer is "something that is new — or, one might say 'truth' — that makes significant life possible. Without such truth, one is in danger of ... the kind of death that can come from living without meaning, without intensity, focus, or design" (2). Boyle contends that we can look to both sacred and secular texts to show us the fundamental God-given truth "that life matters"; I would add that a dynamic, active approach to reading (texts sacred *and* secular) can demonstrate as well *how* life matters and how to contribute to that "mattering."⁴

To begin with, then, a better way of reading than the two we have seen so far requires a starting attitude of openness, curiosity, and humility. As Edmundson describes it, our present culture is one that values and inculcates quite a different attitude: one of cool knowingness — and it is this knowingness that leads to readings that merely reproduce what we already know. Edmundson argues that literature professors can and should inoculate against such cycles of knowingness by encouraging a "sense of hope [that] when we confront major works ... they will tell us something we do not know about the world or give us an entirely fresh way to apprehend experience" (46). One cannot simply demand that students become humble and open and thus make it happen, of course; and so teachers of literature must model such an outlook. The first text I teach in my Introduction to Literature class is Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," a very short story about a woman, Mrs. Mallard, who rejoices, rather than grieves, after the sudden death of her husband. Noticing the date (1894, the heart of the Victorian period) and some of them knowing Chopin's novel *The Awakening*, readers — myself included — typically first presume that the story's moral is a standardly feminist one: that the protagonist's reaction reflects the fact that wives are inherently oppressed by husbands. Yet when we look carefully at the way Chopin expresses her character's thoughts, this turns out to be not the case at all:

There would be no one to live for her during those coming years: she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination (Chopin, 67).

Mrs. Mallard's description of marriage as the "impos[ition] of a private will" seems like what we expect from a feminist condemnation of masculine oppression; but then again, she makes it clear that both "men *and* women" impose in this way. Moreover, here marriage — or one might infer, any sort of relationship, since she does not specify marriage — is equally "a crime" no matter if the intention behind its participants is "kind" or "cruel." To return to the issue of modeling humility and openness, then: when I teach this story, and lead my students through this reading, I tend to pause and say something like, "Okay, isn't this strange? I, for one, am married and have been for a long time. I consider myself a modern woman, my marriage a partnership of equals; but in Mrs. Mallard's terms, am I not a perpetrator of oppression?" They might shift a little in their seats at both my personal admission and the implication of my interpretation: but my students are, I like to think, awakened to the possibilities that reading can productively defamiliarize the tenets we take for granted.

As my Chopin example shows, reading in this way is fundamentally *close* reading, attentive to detail and actively posing questions of the text. What is the significance of the word "crime" here? Why does Chopin describe people's persistence as "blind"? And so on, and so forth. This emphasis on close reading *can* lead to such dubious responses to literature as the ones we have seen (such as "[l]ike the placement of a comma, the smallest changes in the way the poem was written would result in drastic changes to its meaning"), as well as to setting up English in general as sometimes the object of mockery by some outside the field (*does* every comma really have to mean something?). But at bottom, what needs to accompany a commitment to close reading is a belief in the value of its results. For one, it honors the author's process of creation to attend carefully to the finer points of her choices of language and form. More importantly, however, what we can learn from close reading is far from trivial, especially if we insist on, as Edmundson urges us to, "ask[ing] the question of belief. Is this poem true? Can *you* use this poem? Or are you living in a way that's better than the poem suggests you might live?" (60). English professors — myself included, I will admit — often shy away from inviting students to share or even consider personal details, out of concern that it will constitute a detour from the text at hand, or will elicit banal parallels. But in the case of Mrs. Mallard, making her contention personal — once that contention is discovered through close reading — serves as an entrée into interrogating the very nature of human relationships.

And answering Edmundson's question — can *you* use this text? Or are you living in a way that's better than what it suggests? — requires the final piece of the way of reading representing a compromise between a programmatically Truth-reflecting one and a loose truth-denying one. That piece is self-awareness, and for all that our students seem to claim to know their "true selves," I think this is the hardest component for an English professor to teach. Here's Edmundson again: "The student [and I would add, the teacher] must be willing to become as articulate as possible about what he has believed — or what he has been asked to believe — up until this point. He must be willing to tell himself who he is and has been, and, possibly, why that will no longer quite do" (34). A student who hears me inquire about "The Story of an

Hour,” “is it true that all human relationships involve the imposition of one’s will? And if so, is that automatically a bad thing?” will ideally be moved not only to consider the philosophical question at hand, but also to inwardly analyze her own relationships. I say ideally, of course, for while I have methods of evaluating the close reading of a poem, I do not know how to — nor do I think I should — evaluate the close reading by a student of herself. If we cannot exactly goad students into these sorts of self-evaluations, though, my hope is that we can model them by teaching close reading of literature. Another way of saying this is that the sort of analytical reading I am espousing is portable; its instruments can and should be turned upon the self now and again.⁵

In sum, then, these components of reading — openness, humility, curiosity, attention to detail and nuance, self-aware, and ruthlessly questioning — ought to get one closer to the truth. Here, by truth, I mean neither one of many possible, equal truths nor a singular, master truth. This truth is something in between, but it is perhaps most importantly a *construction* actively produced through multiple and reiterative acts of reading — what I described earlier as participating in the “mattering” of life. Normally, to say that truth is constructed is tantamount to saying it does not exist — in the sense that it’s “just” a human creation, not objective or God-given. But what I want my students to grasp instead is that even if truth is a construction they have a hand in producing, that we have a deep ethical responsibility to do our part of this construction in a way that takes seriously the truth that is its final goal. A simple way to say this is to repeat what I say to all my students before they write their first paper (based on their close reading of a story): you really ought to be invested in, care about, what you’re writing about. But I will close this essay by speaking of this same imperative in a different context, one that will bring us back to Boyle’s *Sacred and Secular Scriptures*. The one “secular scripture” that Boyle finally rejects as incompatible with a Catholic approach to literature is Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, but this same novel (which I also teach in my Introduction to Literature class) strikes me as very poignantly illustrating my conviction about the enormous stakes involved in the construction of truth.

Atonement, published by British novelist McEwan in 2001, tells the story of Briony Tallis, the youngest daughter in a wealthy English family. The novel’s plot is intricate and full of rewarding twists, so one hates to spoil it, but suffice it to say that as an adolescent, Briony believes she witnesses a crime, and her testimony lands Robbie, the alleged criminal, in prison, which then leads to his enlisting in the British army in World War II. Such a fate for Robbie also tragically separates him from Cecilia, Briony’s older sister; the two — Robbie and Cecilia — had just discovered their budding passion for one another before the “crime” occurred. The rest of the novel traces both the traumas Robbie faces at war, and the fallout from Briony’s accusation, as she comes to terms with the fact that the accusation was hastily made and probably untrue. A nurse and a writer as an adult, Briony attempts to atone for her act by both throwing herself into the care of wounded soldiers and writing stories that correct her original account of what happened on that fateful day. The latter act — writing the truth of what hap-

pened — is what she promises, near the end of the novel, to Cecilia and Robbie, lovers reunited but both deeply damaged by their wartime experiences and long separation.

The novel concludes with a short coda, which rushes forward in time to 1999, when Briony is 77. Narrated by Briony herself, this section tells of the fates of several of the characters as well as the Tallis country estate, but ends with a chilling revelation. While part three of the novel told of Briony's relief in finding Cecilia and Robbie reunited (and thus, she determined, her own crime in falsely testifying didn't entirely destroy their relationship), here Briony confesses the real truth: Robbie died at war and Cecilia was killed in a London bombing, and so the two never shared more than fleeting exchanges of their love. The story we have just read has been not the truth of the characters' lives, but Briony's creation, which gives them a better, happier fate and gives the readers, Briony insists, what they want as well: "Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love?" (McEwan, 350). Most of all, Briony has meant the reality her novel has presented to serve as a kind of atonement; if she destroyed Cecilia and Robbie's love by falsely accusing Robbie, she intended her substitute reality to put them back together again. Yet she admits that such atonement may be elusive, since, "with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God" (350). While Boyle will later find fault with McEwan's portrayal of England, his preliminary objection to *Atonement* springs from this very proclamation of Briony's. On one hand, Briony's failure ever to tell the truth of what happened when those who could benefit from that truth were alive is only made worse by her substitution of a fairy tale ending (Boyle 244-45). More to the point for Boyle, though, Briony is simply wrong to believe she is God, and is lost to his forgiveness for so believing:

At best [authors] are faithful scribes — describing and transcribing the world that God has made and called and bought again when it was lost — and their contribution to God's atonement for their sins is the fidelity of their transcription, which imitates, and so shares in, his love (Boyle, 245).

Boyle's judgment of *Atonement's* end, though more sophisticatedly articulated, strongly resembles the reactions of my Introduction to Literature students when they read the novel. We read and discuss the book over several weeks, and on the last day, when they've been assigned only the 20-page coda, my students coming in looking sort of shellshocked. How is this possible, they wonder? Why on earth did Briony do this? Those who've moved on from shock express frustration or even outrage: This is horrible — she lied to us. Saving her characters by creating a happier ending for them only makes her original sin worse, they often conclude. She lied about the crime, and so her lying again at the end cannot serve as the atonement she desires. She pretended to be God by controlling the characters' fates. Many of them want to think more about these issues in their final paper, and they often do so with great thoughtfulness.

To my mind, then, these intense discussions — about the nature of truth, about who can and should control truth, about epistemology, about what it means to atone and to be forgiven — make *Atonement* a work of deep value for getting at the questions of how life matters, and how

to contribute to that mattering. It is certainly possible to read Briony's admission that she has created an alternate reality for Robbie and Cecilia as a kind of flippant disregard for the truth (and an endorsement of the uber-postmodern delight in the meaninglessness of "truth."). But it is hard to do so in context of Briony's life as McEwan has sketched it. After all, this is a woman who has spent her entire life wrestling with the truth, and looking for ways to atone for her initial lapse in truth-telling. Moreover, the parallel she draws between her role as author and that of God constitutes to me not a megalomaniacal ploy, but a deeply self-conscious realization of the power and responsibility involved in any construction of the truth. And so my students finish reading, discussing, and writing about *Atonement* well-schooled, I believe, in the notion that truth is dynamic rather than static, complex rather than simple, and, above all, something in which we as humans must recognize our own ethical involvement.

Precisely how all of this ties back to a particularly Catholic approach to literature is something I am not finally sure about. But I do want my students to come to see that their duty to participate in the construction of truth does not invalidate, trivialize, or secularize that truth. Edmundson's articulation of the relationship between faith and reading actively is valuable to ponder as I conclude:

My sort of teaching assumes that a most pressing spiritual and intellectual task of the moment is to create a dialogue between religious and secular visions of the world. Many of my students leave class with their religious convictions deepened and ramified. They're more ardent, more thoughtful believers than when they arrived. The aim is not conversion. The aim is encounter between the transcendental and the worldly (Edmundson, 136-37).

I have not been teaching at the University of Portland long enough to proclaim, with Edmundson, that my students leave my class with their religious convictions strengthened, but I think such a question is of serious relevance to my teaching and intend to continue considering it throughout my career. Rather than seeing the classroom and its activities as both delimited to a rectangular space and a fourteen-week span, and isolated from their faith, I hope my students come to believe that reading, analyzing, and constructing truth are life-long undertakings that they only begin to use in English class.

¹ I should add that I'm not sure whether Boyle would even understand his Catholic approach to literature as translatable into a teachable method. As I will suggest later, his readings tend to be nuanced and idiosyncratic, and his motivations often quite personal, which suggest that his book means more to demonstrate than to disseminate this approach.

² Moreover, this revelation is "nontheistic," according to Boyle's reading of Ricoeur (138).

³ Of course, it could be argued that these are more properly termed "Christian" truths, and, indeed, a good deal of our discussion of Boyle's book came out of some puzzlement on the group's part about how his approach is specifically Catholic, rather than more broadly Christian.

⁴ Van Engen finds a similar virtue to reading in his article "Reclaiming Claims: What Students Want from English Profs," p. 10.

⁵ While imagining ourselves in the place of the character is part of what this self-awareness can enable, it's also important to remember that literature's power lies equally in its introduction to readers of people very different from them, with whom we may not be able to identify. Scholes, in "Transition," argues that improving reading skills also entails learning to recognize a different subject position and being open to that difference.

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THE BELL
OUR SYMBOLS AS BRIDGES
BETWEEN SACRED AND SECULAR

BY LAURETTA CONKLIN FREDERKING

A bell is made to speak out. What would be the value of a bell which was never rung? It rings out clearly, it bears witness, it cannot speak without seeming like a call, a summons. A great bell is not to be silenced. Consider too its simplicity. There is no hidden mechanism. All that it is is plain and open; and if it is moved it must ring.¹

In *Sacred and Secular Scriptures*, Nicholas Boyle invites us to consider literature beyond its written text and through a Catholic point of view. In his words, “the hope, the prayer, it contains is that the good it symbolizes may be effective, may be done — that the revelation it contains may make the world a better place.”² Iris Murdoch’s *The Bell* affords a rich opportunity to explore the text through a Catholic lens which emphasizes a consciousness about traditions as well as scripture. In particular, the story centers around Imber Court and Imber Abbey with a lake as well as a wall dividing a Benedictine monastery of nuns on one side and an associated lay community on the other. With the secular in the shadow of the Abbey, *The Bell* raises provocative questions about the purpose of religious orders, and most especially the cloistered contemplative communities. Independent of spiritual calling and church legitimacy, Murdoch compels the reader to consider whether religious orders serve moral purpose for the modern secular world and similarly, whether the secular world offers anything of moral value to the religious order.

The reader confronts the possibility of sharply divided and contained parallel worlds of religious order and associated lay community, which raises even more difficult questions from a Catholic perspective. Among believers, are there perceived circles of holiness or spiritual goodness that circumscribe boundaries to define exclusion and hierarchy? In other words, do we preach about humanity and equal access to God and His teachings, but live with well-tuned sensibilities that some are closer to God than others? Indeed, given that individuals in a cloistered community (or any religious order really) devote much more time of every day and commit themselves to many more acts of devotion and sacrifice, how can it be otherwise? And if those in a religious order are closer to God in these ways, what spiritual and moral purpose do the rest of us have for them?

This paper presents *The Bell*’s perspectives of the relationship between a religious order and an associated lay community. Amidst the narrative which conveys each perspective there is some provocative insight — perhaps most especially for those of us who work where a religious order and a lay community collide and cooperate on a daily basis. First, the narrative introduces the idea that if a religious order is closer to God through its ritual and commitment, at least on a more regular day to day basis, then it is the responsibility and privilege of an associated lay community to be at the service of the order. A bolder version of this perspective

of difference also emerges and emphasizes a spiritual hierarchy within which the lay community continually reinvigorates a cautionary tale of the lowly possibility of humanity. And most prevalent is the perspective throughout the narrative that our parallel worlds quite simply draw out the very worst of the other — religious orders, cloistered in particular, are desperately daft while lay communities are doomed.

Murdoch provides rich narrative and character development to accentuate the division and distance between these parallel worlds, but she also gives us Gabriel — a bell — which becomes a central bridge for the commingling of the two worlds. Erecting a bell in Imber Abbey becomes the cause for Abbey and Court, sacred and secular, to collide and cooperate. The bell brings forward very human dramas of frailty, betrayal, and power within both the religious order and lay community. But the bell also brings revelation, mystery, and transformation for both the religious and lay community. This is not a story of idealism but humans struggling with their spiritual failings and potential in the shadow of ideals. Ultimately, Gabriel does not save anyone from his or her very human predicaments, but becomes our symbol of unity and the union of religious community with lay community.

Imber Court: at the Service of the Abbey

Imber Court has been in Michael Meade's family for generations and after Michael's failed attempt to become a priest and a disastrous run as a schoolmaster, he returns. When there is discussion about selling Imber Court, he meets with the Abbess who "imparted to Michael the idea of making the Court the home of a permanent lay community attached to the Abbey, a 'buffer state,' as she put it between the Abbey and the world, a reflection, a benevolent and useful parasite, an intermediary form of life."³ From its recent beginning, the Court is at the service of the Abbey as an "unofficial guest house" for the Abbey, and the fledgling associated lay community of fewer than ten adults takes responsibility for growing its food with an additional production for modest sale. They are the Straffords (husband and wife on the verge of breaking up), Peter Topglass (a college friend), Patchway (a local farm labourer — not so much religious as tied to this same land that his father worked), James Typer Pace (a missionary who comes from a military family and who is suffering with health breakdown from overwork), Catherine (young woman preparing to enter Imber Abbey) and Nick Fawley (her brooding brother). They will be joined later by the Greenfields — Dora and Paul — and Toby Gashe. Together they are a motley crew — kept together by the schedule of prayer and Mass and community meetings only.

The narrative builds around the unveiling of a modern bell which is to enter Imber Abbey and which is meant to replace Gabriel, a bell which mysteriously disappeared during medieval times. The Abbey gates open only to admit new postulants and so the bell will enter with Catherine — the beautiful, yet solemn Catherine who intends to commit her life to the Abbey. Through the preparations for the bell ceremony, we are reminded of the many ways that the lay community is at the service of the Abbey as the responsibilities extend beyond the logistics of the ceremony. At first reticent of pomp, the Abbess begins to prompt Michael

to consider the opportunities around the bell. "I wonder what sort of publicity our bell will get? That might help in some quarters, mightn't it? I see no harm in the world being reminded, very occasionally, that we exist!"⁴ An unassuming ceremony for Catherine's welcome into the cloistered community becomes a grand event with publicity, and invitations to the Bishop, a London city reporter, and many friends of the Abbey in attendance. In its isolation and exclusion, the Abbey is completely dependent upon the willingness and capabilities of the lay community for its sustenance, its recruitment, and its acceptance in the modern secular world.

The responsibilities of the lay community become increasingly apparent at the same time as their human struggles limit the community's ability to perform the tasks well. Their meetings evolve into serious debates about their mission and the good life, and end with revelations that emphasize the challenges of a good life outside of the Abbey. The privilege of the nuns is clear while the struggles of the secular world appear to be part of a burden necessary for their protected existence. Within the lay community, they debate whether to shift toward adopting better technology to improve their farming which raises the question whether the community wants more efficiency to provide for the Abbey or more simplicity to live like those in the Abbey. They debate whether to allow some of the members to shoot pests on the property which forces them to weigh their responsibilities to the Abbey against their moral obligations to a wider circle which includes respect for animals as well. Finally, they vigorously debate the extent to which they should use the bell as a tool to raise money for the Abbey. Their service is not questioned, but how to maintain their own spiritual integrity in that service is an ongoing challenge.

In the midst of creating the lay community and struggling with its progress the cloistered nuns are conspicuously evasive in terms of the members' personal struggles. In the joy of putting himself at the service of the Abbess, Michael is desperate to confess his sexual predatory crimes of the past. Again and again, he perceives that she diverts attention away from his needs in order to return focus to the needs of the Abbey. As it happens, Nick Fawley (Catherine's brother) is a victim of Michael's past and when Michael receives the request from Catherine that Nick come to the Court as well Michael looks for guidance from the Abbess. Without a confession, he nevertheless expects that the Abbess knows everything and believes that she should provide the judgment best for everyone. Instead,

[S]he replied with a sort of feminine vagueness that almost drove Michael into a frenzy that she was in favour of the plan on the whole, but that since he knew, and must know, far more than she did about how it was all likely to work out she must leave the final choice to his wisdom, in which she had, she said, a perfect confidence.⁵

Ultimately, Michael cannot be saved from his actions by the Abbess or his service to the Abbey but at the same time she suggests that he remain calm. In her words, "Good is an overflow"⁶ and by this claim she raises the possibility that those tarnished by sin may be cleansed by the goodness of those around them. *The Bell* continues to probe further whether proximity to goodness can make us better and heal sin. If so, then the importance of cloistered communities for the lay community and the secular world is more concrete and obvious. Catherine

conveys that, Nick who seems haunted and savage, “with prayer, and with the proximity of that great storehouse of spiritual energy across the lake, one might hope perhaps for more than that.”⁷ More generally, readers wonder if cloistered communities remind us that we are far removed from their spiritual goodness or if somehow we might even be better and less full of sin because of our own communities.

In the midst of Michael’s self justifications he shifts from worrying about the sin’s affecting his spiritual strength and instead reinterprets the confluence of the two as a blessing:

[H]e had formerly felt that his religion and his passions sprang from the same source, and how this had seemed to infect his religion with corruption. It now seemed to him that he could turn the argument about; why should his passions not rather be purified by this proximity? ... During this time he prayed constantly and felt, through the very contradictions of his existence, that his faith was increased.⁸

Here, Murdoch’s interpretation of the cloistered community is not satisfying. The lay community is at the service of the Abbey, but quite incompetently. Its struggles to implement the Abbey mission emphasize the luxury of ‘pure spirituality’ and the singular focus on God that exudes from the cloistered community seemingly because of the subsistence, fundraising, and commitment – the ‘dirty materialist’ – work provided by the associated lay community. In return, individual members of the lay community seek guidance and understanding from the Abbess but receive little more than pedestrian policy and abstract platitudes. The most significant compensation seems to be delusional: lay members convince themselves that life in close proximity to the cloistered community maintains their spiritual development and somehow weakens the lapses of faith that dominate their behavior.

Division of Labor or Spiritual Hierarchy?

Of course, Scripture and Catholic tradition emphasize our special gifts that make each of us unique to God and yet equally cherished by Him. Among believers in particular, we are available to God similarly and ready for a call to change our life’s path and to follow His will. It is our responsibility as Christians to pursue our path for spiritual fulfillment. For some this can mean a vocation within a religious order and for some this can mean a life within a contemplative community. Ideally we see our path, whichever our path, with integrity and spiritual potential. In describing contemplative communities Fr. Bob Antonelli, archivist for Congregation of Holy Cross at University of Portland, provides clarity about the appropriate interpretation of the difference in our spiritual path:

The cloistered contemplative life forgoes everything except God. There are few physical comforts, few distractions from a daily routine, few psychological comforts, few emotional comforts. Its focus is single and clear. Such a life forgoes any kind of possession, power or purpose except the constant search for God. In short, it is the heroic ideal that is proposed by God through Jesus to all Christian believers: love God above all things and love your neighbor as yourself. As Teresa of Avila put it: God Alone Suffices. Just as few people are called to be neurosurgeons, so few people are called to be cloistered contemplatives ... some folks

would take that to mean that such a life is BETTER than any other. But that goes against the 11th Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Compare. Love (= God) does not compare things or persons. ... We are *different from* one another, not *better or worse than* one another.⁹

Fr. Antonelli's words articulate the beauty of the contemplative life and a Truth in Christian terms. Contemplatives (and religious orders more generally) are not better by a measure of spirituality — just different. While they may be experts in 'spiritual' or religious practices they do not own a better spiritual connection with God. For most within the secular world, this acceptance of different but equal is fraught with tension and contradiction. Murdoch's narrative is far removed from supporting Christian Truth here and instead, focuses on a much less generous reality. Her narrative emphasizes the extent to which religious individuals within a secular world live by hierarchies and spirituality is not exempt in this regard.

The narrative continues as the Greenfields arrive at Imber Court. Paul's archival work brings him to the Court but his failing marriage and Dora's extramarital affair push him toward this retreat without her. At first, Dora Greenfield stayed in London while her husband retreated to the archives of Imber Abbey and Court. After brief correspondence it is decided that Dora will come to Imber Court with the expectation that they will repair and resume their relationship. Dora is a cookie cutter version of the secular world. She makes decisions without much consciousness of consequences, sins without remorse, and yet she remains incredibly endearing by her simple passions and empty-headed fumbles in human interaction. She arrives at Imber Court insecure about her place among them and entirely uncertain about her own religious beliefs and her husband's. In a description of Dora, "[S]he had never in fact been able to distinguish religion from superstition, and had given up her own practice of it when she discovered that she could say the Lord's Prayer quickly but not slowly."¹⁰ It seems as though they slipped through courtship and marriage to become embroiled in this drama of adultery without ever having discussed God, the Church, or faith.

From her arrival at the Court, Paul presents the righteousness of a betrayed man. The lay community shores up his goodness with the cavalry of judgment on her character. Dora's character is particularly important in drawing attention to the superior airs of the lay community which simultaneously amplifies the perceived distance between the lay community and the cloistered nuns. While Dora conveys a complexity of sinful behavior and ignorant sincerity, her character is sharply juxtaposed with Catherine who exudes all-knowing calm and goodness. As the Abbess describes Catherine to Michael, "she commended Catherine to him, spoke of her as a 'specially favoured child,' a person, potentially, of spiritual gifts."¹¹ Of course, Dora's husband not so subtly reveals his admiration for Catherine, and all in the lay community hold her up as their own as she represents the successful realization of their community. The contrast is awakening for Dora:

A vague sense of social inferiority, an uneasy lack of *savoir faire*, was normal to her. But what she felt at Imber fit deeper, in a way which she at times resented. Often it seemed to her that the community were easily, casually even, judging her,

placing her. The fact that so little was expected of her was itself significant. This was distressing. The sense that the judgement occurred without their thinking about it, that it happened automatically, simply as it were by juxtaposition, was still more distressing."¹²

She struggles to define herself within her new surroundings, and as she searches for her place, the rigidity of hierarchy within the community becomes apparent. Her willingness to explore her potential and to accept each of the members of the community changes the weight of the contrast. Instead of the goodness of Catherine juxtaposed with the sinfulness of Dora, the reader settles into experiencing the openness and sincerity of Dora against the exclusionary righteousness of the community. The parallel exclusion of the cloistered community in relation to the lay community intensifies through the lens of Dora's initial experiences at Imber Court.

Toby arrives at Imber Court at the same time as Dora. Like Catherine, the image of his goodness precedes him, but he carries more innocence and openness that prepares the narrative for his central role in the pending scandals. In the midst of his emotional maelstrom he moves toward the wall that separates the Abbey from the Court. For the reader it is refreshing comedy as the strapping man-boy climbs the forbidden wall in search of comfort, but the escapade ultimately defines the distance between the two communities. He falls over the wall and into the middle of the nuns' activities of gardening and tending the cemetery. With unflappable certainty, Sister Clare approaches him and introduces herself and offers him a moment in the garden swing. Rather than comfort, in the company of "the spiritual ruling class,"¹³ it is felt as searing humiliation. Toby is reduced to infant caricature and escorted to the unlocked gate — indeed, there was no need to climb the wall to get to the other side.

Like everyone at the Court it is clear he does not belong among the calm and spiritually collected. Murdoch is unrelenting in drawing attention to the second tier status of the lay community. Michael failed to follow his path as a priest. James is a failed missionary. While intrigued by priesthood Toby fails to enter. Paul and Dora have failed their sacrament of marriage and each remains spiritually lost in the shadow of the Abbey. And in the end, Catherine fails to enter the monastery. "They are a kind of sick people, whose desire for God makes them unsatisfactory citizens of an ordinary life, but whose strength or temperament fails them to surrender the world completely."¹⁴ Unable to embrace the frivolity and moral ambiguity of the secular world, each perceives the burden of his or her religious incapacity as an inability to follow through on the higher spiritual path. In fact, one of Michael's sermons emphasizes the importance of realizing spiritual hierarchy for individual fulfillment.

What he had failed to do was accurately to estimate his own resources, his own spiritual level: and it was indeed from his later reflections on this matter that he had, with a certain bitterness, drawn the text for his sermon. One must perform the lower act which one can manage and sustain: not the higher act which one bungles¹⁵...We must not arrogate to ourselves actions which belong to those whose spiritual vision is higher or other than ours.¹⁶

It is the responsibility of the lay community to know their limits and incapacities in order to preserve equanimity within themselves but also between themselves. The harsh divide between lay community and religious order is circumscribed by Murdoch with the wit and rancor of their frailties.

Cultivating Our Worst Selves

Murdoch's story deteriorates from conveying the tension between the two communities and the pedestrian perceptions of higher orders of goodness toward an emerging caricature of cloistered communities. Through sharp quips and vulgar revelations that emerge from greed, envy, and insecurity of the other, there is an underlying sense that the lay and religious communities are willing to uncover and instigate the worst aspects of the other. Among believers there is a perceived hierarchy that tortures those unable to achieve its heights, but among the non-believers there is blatant dismissal of the cloistered community. Dora and Michael are both relieved that Catherine will soon enter the enclosure and be safely 'stowed' inside. Her presence challenges them and irritates them and while the lay community cherishes her participation they resent her holiness as well. Dora celebrates Catherine's pending departure but in the process articulates a secular caricature of the monastic life.

Upon hearing that the Abbey held an enclosed order of nuns Dora responds "Do you mean," she said, "that they're completely imprisoned in there?"

Mrs Mark laughed. "Not imprisoned, my dear," she said. "They are there of their own free will. This is not a prison. It is on the contrary a place which it is very hard to get into, and only the strongest achieve it. Like Mary in the parable, they have chosen the better part."

They walked on.

"Don't they *ever* come out?" asked Dora.

"No," said Mrs Mark. "Being Benedictines, they take a vow of stability, that is, they remain all their lives in the house where they take their first vows. They die and are buried inside in the nuns' cemetery."

"How absolutely appalling!" said Dora.¹⁷

And later she declares to Catherine, "You can't really want to go in there!" ... "To shut yourself up like that, when you're so young and so beautiful."¹⁸

In this moment, the secular world exists for young and beautiful while the monastery must be solace for the ugly and unaccomplished. Dora has been hurt by the religious judgment of the others but she is very willing to offer her own unsophisticated attack. In many ways, these moments throughout the novel are the most jarring in their blatant unkindness toward the cloistered community but Murdoch is not willing to settle for the subtle. She weaves her tale to confront the pervasive images of cloistered communities, religious orders more generally, by the secular world. The images are obviously different in terms of believers and non-believers. Among the tight circle of the religious lay community, the Abbey embodies the best

of spirituality and becomes an inspiration. However, as living ideals they simultaneously chip away at the insecure selves of those who see them as better but who are unable to join their path. Then among the vast open spaces of anti-religious secularism, cloistered and religious communities are an eccentric island of self-imprisonment. Dora's lover in London, and the reporter who comes to write a story about the bell, responds to her increasing insecurities to provide admonishments: "If people want to stop being ordinary useful members of society and take their neuroses to some remote spot to have what they imagine are spiritual experiences I'm certain they should be tolerated but I see no reason why they should be revered."¹⁹ At this point, the story reaches its lowest judgments about both the secular and religious world, and the propinquity of one to the other seems to exacerbate the negative images into caricature. Secularism is a world of power, vulgar sexual antics, and faithless relationships while the religious world is self-indulgent, isolated, and incapacitated.

Reconciliation by Symbols

Paul Greenfield arrived at the Court with the intention to research and write about the Abbey from an historical perspective. It had flourished until the Reformation when much of the contents were destroyed throughout the dissolution period. Left in ruins the Abbey was a romantic appendage to the Court until it was rebuilt for the Anglican Benedictines around 1900 and at this time they acquired manuscripts of interest to Paul's medieval studies of art. He spends his days in the archives uncovering the relevance of the great political and social moments for the Abbey property and society. In the process, he uncovers details about the underbelly of life at the Abbey and within the Benedictine community. While the scandals were not uncommon for the time, his revelations bring forward the humanity and frailty of the religious community. They may not be so far removed spiritually in terms of human struggles, challenges, and disappointments. These revelations emerge from Paul's research and focus on his study of the myth surrounding a bell on the property.

Around the 14th century, one of the nuns had an affair with a young man who fell while climbing the very high wall surrounding the Abbey. No one confessed to the relationship, leading the Bishop to bring a curse onto the Abbey. While the young man ended up with a broken neck from the fall, the existing bell "flew like a bird out of the tower and fell into the lake,"²⁰ and the nun drowned herself.

The story follows that Gabriel the bell is at the bottom of the lake and rings in order to announce an imminent death. With the pending arrival of a new bell and the anticipated ceremony of its entrance as postulant into the Abbey, the community is filled with references to its meaning for their spiritual lives as individuals and community. One of James's sermons focuses on the relevance of the bell for their ideals: "And what are the marks of innocence? Candour — a beautiful word — truthfulness, simplicity, a quite involuntary bearing of witness. The image that occurs to me here is a topical one, the image of a bell."²¹ Bearing truth to James's claims, this bell does bring forward truth to members of the community. And in a different sermon, Michael offers that "[T]he bell is subject to the force of gravity. The swing that takes it

down must also take it up. So we too must learn to understand the mechanism of our spiritual energy, and find out where, for us, are the hiding places of our strength."²² The story also brings relevance to Michael's wisdom as the bell becomes the central force driving the respective communities toward honesty and in honesty, toward greater unity.

Dora finds herself at the center of moving the revelations forward when Toby confides that he found a huge bell at the bottom of the lake. Immediately she decides upon a scheme to pull Gabriel out of the lake and replace the new bell. She bubbles with innocent enthusiasm for its potential impact: "Think of the sensation when they find the medieval bell underneath the veil! Why, it would be wonderful, it would be like a real miracle, the sort of thing that makes people go on pilgrimages!"²³ Dora reveals her overarching desire to bring passion to life and she sees spiritual potential with the bell. Her focus on the bell meets the religious community as well as the Court on its own terms but in a way that will bring new joy to their lives both individually and as a community.

Paul becomes suspicious of Dora during her midnight absences to meet with Toby. Michael becomes frantic around Toby's sudden absences shortly following their uncertain intimacies. Nick becomes frenzied around Toby's absences and suspicions of Michael as well; the nightly mysteries of bustling activity in the woods drive him to confront his own guilt and anger about Michael. Catherine is quietly preparing during her final days of life outside the Abbey and seemingly removed from the tangle of emotional eruption. Toby, tormented by an increasing intensity around his embraces with Michael, and caught in Dora's determined exercise to secretly draw up the bell from the bottom of the lake, hurls himself toward her and their passionate romp sets Gabriel ringing loudly enough to waken everyone in Abbey and Court. All are summoned and come to the bell for the precipitating events that lead to their shocking revelations but ultimately, lead to healing as well.

The story picks up the next day amidst the shocks and unraveling confusions of the night before. Dora is whipped into panic by the arrival of Noel who comes to the Court under the guise of a London reporter but who really wants to move from the casualness of their affair to try a more committed relationship. At the height of human drama, the Bishop arrives with splendor. His presence evokes a welcome emotional constraint by the others. Through the expectation of strict protocol it seems as though he provides relief and opportunity for order. Quite to the contrary, at the moment the Abbey gates open and the robed new bell (not Gabriel) is guided forward, there is a lurching and release. The bell will not yield to any human efforts to stop the dangerous leaning and instead, it escapes down the hill to tumble to the bottom of the lake again.

In the panic of its loss, Catherine defies all strength and subdued appearances of her past and sprints toward the bell and toward her apparent demise by drowning in the lake. It is Dora who finds Catherine and tries to save her. Ultimately, however, it is Sister Clare high above in the Abbey who saves them both. Side by side, nun in her undergarments and Dora with her best self share the crisis and survival. Dora and Clare meet soon after Dora's recov-

ery: "This is Mother Clare," said Mark. "You two seem destined to meet after all."²⁴ The bell brings crisis to lay person and cloistered nun the same, and together their effort brings the miracle of Catherine's survival.

Catherine's recovery includes the harbored revelation that she loves Michael. While this relationship is obviously impossible, her declaration nonetheless leaves Catherine outside of the Abbey. Noel's arrival to provide a newspaper report on the bell and his subsequent confession of longing to establish a commitment with Dora seem to make her future with Paul impossible as well. And finally, the passionate interactions surrounding the drama of the bell drive Toby to seek emotional refuge through confession. The bell transforms each one of these lives. It seems as though they cannot avoid honesty in the face of its symbolic importance and the spiritual energy that it invokes. Their lives are not made easier by any means. Nick confronts the truths about his hurt and anger toward Michael and his lost abilities to connect with others. His revelations end with suicide. As a consequence of Toby's confession, James and the Abbess support Michael through his own recovery and toward the dissolution of the Court. At last Michael's secrets are revealed and at last he is connected to those around him in a way that prepares him for healing. Each one of their lives reveals so many frailties, and these frailties affect the others in their midst. Whether within the lay community or behind the wall within the Abbey they are together in sharing the human condition. As Sister Clare announced during her first introduction to Toby after he fell from the wall: "[A]lthough we never meet, we seem to know each one of you, as if you were our dearest friends."²⁵ Sister Clare's human connection with the community, first with Toby and then with Catherine and Dora, is very powerful in building a bridge to replace the divide between the communities. It violates the rules of the order but it is part of the mystery of the bell that she is brought together with them.

In the process of revealing truths, everyone is available for transformation. Sister Clare saves Catherine for a life outside of the Abbey and Sister Clare saves Dora for a life that is more fulfilling than her past but also outside of the Abbey. Dora returns to her love for art and takes up teaching. Toby returns to his studies. And the Abbess heals Michael to prepare for dissolving the Court. The Abbey will continue but the Court will now become part of the Abbey more directly and not available for a lay community in the future. In spite of the shared emotional exhaustion, all seems to end well.

On the one hand, it seems clear that if there is a broader message about the coexistence of religious orders and lay communities it seems to reinforce division. The exercise of living in the midst of the other, with a wall in between, appears to foster bitterness, insecurities, and sin. It was a miracle of the bell that provided communion. But how can we expect miracles like these? And since we likely cannot expect the regular occurrence of miracles, perhaps Murdoch's statement is the impossibility of bridge building and healing between communities.

I think not. Murdoch's narrative does reinforce a separateness. After all, these are very different lives — the religious order (cloistered in particular) and the secular (believer and non-

believer). However, the separateness in the end of *The Bell* is not the same separateness suggested by the discussions around hierarchy. In the conclusion of the drama, all are brimming with spiritual fulfillment and the fulfillment comes from their connection with the other on the other's own terms. There is a clear sense that we must strive to be conscious of each other, and strive to be understanding of the other, but we need not be each other. Even more profoundly, it may not be necessary to meet each other physically to be aware and to be understanding. We do have symbols around us everyday. When we approach our symbols with awareness and openness, spiritual transformation is possible and spiritual communion can be inevitable. Through our symbols — our bells, our Mass, our prayers — we reach over walls and across lakes and find our spiritual fulfillment as individuals and our union as human community.

Conclusion

While Murdoch begins with a sober presentation of the gulf between cloistered community and lay community, Gabriel resolves much of this distance and brings mutual understanding and healing. Whereas Murdoch conveys the perceived spiritual hierarchy she settles on shared spiritual strength from recognition of our shared human frailty. This resolution is much more comfortable with Fr. Antonelli's spiritual interpretation of different and equal, rather than different and better or less.

According to Pope Benedict XVI (in a recent Angelus address)

Indeed, these brothers and sisters of ours bear a silent witness to the fact that in the midst of the sometimes frenetic pace of daily events, the one support that never topples is God, the indestructible rock of faithfulness and love. "Everything passes; God never changes," the great spiritual master Teresa of Avila wrote in one of her famous texts.

And in the face of the widespread need to get away from the daily routine of sprawling urban areas in search of places conducive to silence and meditation, monasteries of contemplative life offer themselves as "oases" in which human beings, people, pilgrims on earth, can draw more easily from the wellsprings of the Spirit and quench their thirst along the way.²⁶

And with our different, distinct spaces respectfully carved between sacred and secular we need to be available for one another and provide shared places of meeting between the sacred and secular.

Within Catholic tradition, symbols are opportunities to connect past, present and future into a seamless moment. Symbols call forward the known as well as the unknown. And symbols are uniquely capable of bringing us together in shared communion while simultaneously respecting individual differences. For Nicholas Boyle spiritual revelation from secular literature, if it is true, makes the world a better place. According to Boyle, "The hope a book contains — its author's prayer — is most completely fulfilled if the book becomes part of lives already in-formed — given form and substance — by the sacred books, the books of the Law."²⁷ From Iris Murdoch we see that revelation, mystery and forgiveness are not necessarily from

the two worlds of religious order and lay community colliding and cooperating. Rather we learn that the strength of this spiritual goodness for each respective community comes from the effort to build bridges between one and the other. Certainly, this call to engage the other does not relegate cloistered service to irrelevance but rather invites those within and outside to think about engagement in nontraditional ways. Unintended physical contact between the two worlds becomes the way of engagement defined by her narrative, but Catholic tradition also emphasizes prayer, meditation, and faith. Symbols can be concrete cues and central guides for these prayers, meditation, and faith. For those who are not in close proximity to a cloistered community, and for those who are not inclined to climb the walls of a monastery reading *The Bell* can be a call to consider the importance of prayer, meditation, and faith not as practices defining the uniqueness of a cloistered community but rather as vehicles for engaging with the other. In the words of Pope Benedict, “[t]hus, these apparently useless places are, on the contrary, indispensable, like the green ‘lungs’ of a city: they do everyone good, including those who do not visit them and may not know of their existence.”²⁸

At University of Portland, where we shall soon receive the gift of bells, we welcome our bell as the outcome of lay and religious working together. Our bell will be an invitation to consciousness of who we are. As a physical reality the sound of the bell has specific definition. As symbol, each one of us hears a different answer to the questions of who we are and of how we are in relation to the sound. Its sound can be heard as a clang or call; it can comfort or it can spur to action; it can hold us steady or it can open us to transformation. The bell will be different for each one of us. As a symbol it permits our different moments and personal meanings, but as shared symbol it reminds us that we are together in searching for moments and meanings. We are better because of our own Gabriel most especially if we hear this symbol as the call to consciousness of our communion and community.

¹ Murdoch, Iris. *The Bell*. (New York: Penguin Group, 1958), 123.

² Boyle, Nicholas. *Sacred and Secular Scriptures A Catholic Approach to Literature*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 168.

³ Murdoch, 71.

⁴ Murdoch, 216.

⁵ Murdoch, 101.

⁶ Murdoch, 219.

⁷ Murdoch, 100.

⁸ Murdoch, 94.

⁹ Antonelli, Robert. Written correspondence. (Portland: University of Portland Archivist, 2008).

¹⁰ Murdoch, 7.

¹¹ Murdoch, 99.

¹² Murdoch, 121.

¹³ Murdoch, 179.

¹⁴ Murdoch, 71.

¹⁵ Murdoch, 186.

¹⁶ Murdoch, 189.

¹⁷ Murdoch, 55.

¹⁸ Murdoch, 125.

¹⁹ Murdoch, 246.

²⁰ Murdoch, 34.

²¹ Murdoch, 123.

²² Murdoch, 189.

²³ Murdoch, 183.

²⁴ Murdoch, 261.

²⁵ Murdoch, 163.

²⁶ Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, Saint Peter's Square. November 19, 2006.

²⁷ Boyle, 168.

²⁸ Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, Saint Peter's Square. November 19, 2006.

SACRED IMAGINATION AND HISTORY

BY BRIAN J. ELS

If Christians can read secular literature in a way which allows for a discernment of the sacred, even in non-sacred settings, if literature could be the “place where sacred and secular meet,”¹ then perhaps that principle should be expanded outward, beyond the realm of literature and art, and into the realm of history. Historians, especially those working in a Christian context, should be willing to take this aspect of their research seriously. This is particularly true in the history of social welfare and charity, where so many of the actors driving policy, or carrying out the charitable work, were themselves profoundly motivated by ideas of Christian welfare and love for one’s fellow human being. The theology underpinning religiously-inspired reform movements should not simply be buried under a class-based analysis, even if the class origins of the reformers lend credence to such an analysis. We must be open as scholars to an interpretation of the past which allows the theological aspect of reform to be evaluated in a nuanced and honest manner. To illustrate this we can use two examples from the 19th century, one from Protestant Prussia and the other from Catholic Austria, to expand upon the interpretation that secular historians have brought to the study of social history, and hopefully bring a more nuanced appreciation of the importance of faith, perhaps of “the sacred,” to our understanding of the development of systems of social welfare in the industrial era.

The notion that social welfare activists in the 19th century were motivated by feelings of religious ardour is, of course, not revolutionary. Both in Europe and the United States, systems of social welfare arose as a result of the strains of industrialization, urbanization, and pauperization; in both places, many of the early drivers of social welfare efforts were religiously motivated. The influence of the Social Gospel movement in the United States is well known, and the theological impulse driving reformers like American Walter Rauschenbusch to action is recognized as significant. Similar movements in Germany and Austria had also been at work addressing the social dislocations of the 19th century.

At the same time, however, religious and charitable efforts to meet the miseries of the emerging modern industrial society were almost everywhere inadequate to the challenge. Churches and people of faith did what they could, often with some support from state institutions, but nowhere were their efforts fully equal to the challenge. The development of the modern welfare state, with its overwhelmingly superior material resources, was the result. The modern welfare state, especially in central Europe, was also largely a project of the later 19th century, an era which saw considerable tension between secularizing forces within society, and religious establishments (the Evangelical Church in Prussia, and the Roman Catholic Church in Austria) which were seen as defenders of the conservative social order and (in the case of Prussia) virtually an arm of the State. Socialists and medical professionals alike could

condemn the existing hodgepodge of religious charitable organizations as politically retrograde and unprofessional. However justified the criticisms of such systems might have been before 1914, the strains of the First World War clearly demanded the establishment of more comprehensive, more professional, and more secular state organizations to meet the needs of a war-strained social fabric.

Thus, when the modern welfare state emerged from the chaos of 1918, it was born into a radically secularizing environment. The state began to take over responsibility for the weakest in society, and the role of organized religious charitable work began to be eclipsed by the centralized bureaucracies of welfare. The welfare state was characterized by professionals in white lab coats, rather than clerics and charitably-minded society ladies. Bureaucrats of the 1920s and 1930s tended to look down upon the well-meaning (and often, well-heeled) types who had been so important to social welfare provision in the years before 1914, and in many cases usurped the role that had been played by charitable organizations.²

This criticism, coming as it did on the heels of political and social upheaval, became something of a dominant narrative in the field of social history in the later 20th century. For example, Richard J. Evans, in *Death in Hamburg*, painted a picture of “philanthropy ... turned into an instrument of social discipline.”³ This view, of an upper bourgeoisie using “not just ... the police and the forces of coercion, but also of a whole battery of moralizing institutions, from the prison and the primary school to the Elberfeld system and the Lutheran church” against the labor movement,⁴ is hardly wrong on its face. However, it does injustice to a more nuanced appreciation of what was really happening in many aspects of the social welfare movement in the 19th century.

Reading history through a prism which allows a fair judgment of the motivations of historical actors might prompt us to examine a few of the religiously-motivated people responsible for those charitable efforts which were overshadowed by later developments in the field of social welfare. The mobilization of private charity, indeed, represents a moral response to societal suffering which deserves a serious examination when historians look at the social history of Western society. Especially when one examines the work of social welfare activists in the early to mid-19th century, the role of religious motivation is impossible to ignore. The Pietism of central European reformers coincided with a general religious renewal in the Western world in the early 19th century — one thinks for example of the Methodists in England, the Second Great Awakening in the United States, and many forms of Catholic renewal in France. An examination of the social manifestations of these renewal movements is incomplete, if the historian fails to credit the theological and personal aspects of the phenomenon, and to take those religious motivations seriously.

One such example can be found in the work of Johann Hinrich Wichern, theologian and social activist in Northern Germany. In the mid-1820s, Wichern worked among the poorest slums in Hamburg, first teaching Sunday school, and then trying to patch together charitable help for the most desperate among the poor. Wichern was particularly moved by the plight of

abandoned and neglected children, and in 1833 with the help of Amalie Sieveking, daughter of a prosperous Hamburg merchant, he established the *Rauhes Haus* ("rough house") settlement home for boys, in a leafy village a few kilometers from Hamburg. This establishment, Wichern believed, would re-create the stable family environment that these children of the streets had lost. The boys were housed in small cabins, and each of the cabins was headed by an older boy. The entire campus was staffed by Protestant ministers and seminarians, who were to provide Christian instruction, strict discipline, and moral example to the boys. Wichern also appealed to a growing nostalgia for the preindustrial past; the boys were to perform agricultural labor, as well as learn artisanal skills for later employment.

The *Rauhes Haus* model proved successful; so much so that it inspired a wave of support from the burgeoning Protestant middle classes of North Germany. Wichern's keen sense for publicity also helped this *Rettungshaus* ("Rescue home") movement spread; his broadsheet, the *Flying Letters from the Rough House*, quickly gained a large following, and by 1847 there were sixty-four *Rettungshäuser* across Germany. By 1848, Wichern's efforts had also resulted in the formation of voluntary kindergarten societies, charitable day schools, and an outreach organization to young journeymen (the *Jünglingsverein*). In the same year, largely because of Wichern's advocacy, the Central Committee for Domestic Missions (*Innere Mission*) was formed by the Evangelical Church in Prussia, and provided a headquarters and institutional support for these charitable efforts. The *Innere Mission* quickly acquired imitators in the other Protestant state churches; as one measure, by 1867 there would be 335 church-supported *Rettungshäuser* across Germany.⁵

Wichern's success at building this system of Christian social charity was considerable. The influence of the *Innere Mission*, supported as it was by the State church in Prussia and the other Protestant provinces of Germany, was undeniable even if poverty and dislocation remained serious social problems. However, Wichern's political outlook was staunchly conservative, and this, combined with the fact that the Evangelical Church was seen as a pillar of the Hohenzollern state, colored Socialist reactions to his work in the 19th century, and has affected the way the *Innere Mission* has been viewed by modern social historians, as well. The fact that Wichern's *Rettungshäuser* generally emphasized a patriarchal family model, and promoted a premodern model of social organization, also affects modern views of his work. This tends to obscure his own theological argument for social involvement and hide the nuances of his religious viewpoint.

Wichern's theology of service to his fellow human being is, however, important enough that it should be given a more serious reading by historians of social welfare. One example of this is his view of the importance of social work and involvement in social welfare on the part of ordinary Christians as well as their churches. Wichern referred repeatedly to the notion of diaconal service (*Diakonie*), the organized and applied charitable efforts of congregations to address social suffering. The suffering of the urban poor was challenging people's faith in their government and sparking the growth of state-sponsored charity at the same time.

Neither of these developments had much room for Christian spirituality. Diaconal service, inspired by Christian faith, would be Wichern's moral response to this impending disaster.

Given the current state of affairs the call has gone out for diaconal service to arise in the church again. ... As such, it manifests the grandeur and fullness of love to the poor in its intended role as an integral part of parish and church. Diaconal service perceived in this way, viewed not in opposition to but in harmony with civil and private service, appears to us to be the only possible mediator for the entire field of loving care in state, church, and private life.⁶

This idea, combined with Wichern's schema of social activism on the part of the middle and upper classes, represents a significant model for replying to the dislocations of the industrial era.

Wichern's model — not just of boys' towns, but of poor relief in general — proved to be quite influential in Germany. By the turn of the century, most German cities had extensive systems of poor relief, health care for the indigent, and assistance for poor pregnant and nursing women. These systems had serious flaws, of course, and in the case of Berlin, there was an undeniable aspect of social control associated with the social welfare assistance. Yet, to understand the growth of these systems and the way they functioned, we cannot discount the theological and social aspects of their foundation. By the same token, Wichern's reform school at the *Rauhes Haus* became the model for youth reform schools all across Germany by the 1870s.⁷ Johann Hinrich Wichern and the model of social engagement he inspired were much more than the caricatures that settled into the historical discourse in the years after 1918, and to fully understand his role in social welfare activism is impossible without a more comprehensive understanding of his theology.

Similarly, in Austria, society was wracked by the ills of industrialization and urbanization. In Upper Austria, the area stretching roughly from east of Salzburg to about halfway between Linz and Vienna, the economic situation remained backward for a good portion of the 19th century. Yet this region, situated on the major trade route between the Adriatic and Bohemia, was exposed to serious economic stresses and social strains. While agriculture remained relatively primitive until after the Second World War, the cities were growing and drawing in ever-larger numbers of workers and domestics from the countryside. One inevitable result was a large number of parents (often, unmarried mothers) who, because of their menial occupation and poverty, had little time to supervise their children. Already in the 1830s this provoked critical comments from the authorities in Linz and Vienna; police officials feared the implications of "street urchins" rambling about without supervision, education, or medical care.

One response, beginning in the 1830s, was a movement to provide day-care and education to the children of the urban working classes. *Kleinkinder Bewahranstalten*, or, roughly, "Kindergartens," were opened in several Upper Austrian cities — entirely funded by the bequests of wealthy and middle-class Austrians. No state money was used, although in some cases the Habsburg bureaucracy oversaw private donations and bequests, and helped administer the organizations, and usually the Catholic Church helped provide staff and direction.⁸ These were privately-financed day schools which cared for a few dozen children each. Yet their reach

was surprisingly wide; by 1871, in all of Upper Austria, these Kindergartens were providing daily care and feeding for some 2,600 children; by 1906 that number was approaching 10,400.⁹

The motivations of the people who funded these Kindergartens were varied, but the theme of Christian charity comes to the fore over and over again. Many of these Kindergartens were funded by bequests of wealthy society women, and indeed the first of these dated back to 1838. In that year, a wealthy heiress, Anna von Lopez, donated an entire townhouse in the city of Linz for the purpose of providing day care for children aged two to eight. Within a year the house and the charitable foundation which supported it were caring for 120 children per day — children of the working classes, whose parents were working outside the home.¹⁰ By 1873, the demand for daycare among the working classes of Linz led to the opening of a second facility, and the formation of a formal “Kindergarten Union” to mobilize the charitable efforts of the well-off in Linz society and to support the work of the kindergartens; by this point, too, the sisters of the Order of the Holy Cross had been brought from Munich to act as supervisors. Not only were these sisters providing childcare, they were providing training for themselves and volunteer women from Linz in *Kindergartenwesen*. Over the next ten years, the two facilities would train sixty-three Linz women and twelve sisters of the Order, and would provide childcare for over 1,100 Linz children.¹¹

To be sure, the provision of free childcare was not sufficient to address all the problems which faced the children of the working classes of Upper Austria. However, this voluntary work did go some way toward alleviating the problems faced by (especially) working-class mothers. Just as significantly, this phenomenon spread to virtually every city in Upper Austria; there were similar voluntary foundations in Wels, Steyr, Freistadt, Gmünden, Schärding, and more. Taken together, this meant the mobilization of thousands of Austrians of middling- and upper-class origin into charitable work on behalf of vulnerable children. The motivation for this work came not just from the Austrian government, but also from inner feelings of Christian charity, as many of the testaments providing the initial capital prove. Clearly, the story of the mobilization of the middle classes to the tasks of social work must include an appreciation of their personal motivation, especially in the field of child welfare.

In the end, these two examples suggest ways in which the sacred impulse can inform our understanding of the historical record. Theology and history obviously complement one another, and especially in the field of social welfare there is much yet to be gained by a serious reading of the religious motivations of historical actors. Central Europe in the 19th century was a place where the Christian religion, while being questioned as a system of social organization, was still providing a vibrant and vital set of values for a vast majority of the population. The story of social welfare, charity, and social care is incomplete without an expanded understanding of the religious motivations and theological justifications which drove these people. To chart the course of social welfare, charity, and child welfare in Central Europe in the 19th century, is to examine the fullness of personal motivations as well as state policy and class mobilization. The problematic relationship between the established churches and state power

should not distract us from a greater appreciation of the importance of personal, religious motivation in spurring social activism. The story of charity in the 19th century is incomplete without a fuller appreciation of the sacred motive.

¹ Boyle, p. 7.

² Though the reality was somewhat complicated: as Andrew Lees points out in *Cities, Sin and Social Reform in Imperial Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002), the tradition of “Wohlfahrtspflege,” or “welfare work” still contained a large role for voluntarism among the middle classes, and even after 1918 was still an important aspect of middle-class social activities, even if it was overshadowed by the growth in welfare bureaucracies.

³ Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg. Society and Politics in the Cholera Years* (New York: Penguin Group, 1987, 2005), p. 487.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁵ Edward Ross Dickinson, *The Politics of German Child Welfare from the Empire to the Federal Republic* (Boston: Harvard University, 2003), p. 13. Dickinson also points out that the *Innere Mission* helped to drive a similar Catholic response to social problems, for both defensive and imitative reasons.

⁶ Johann Hinrich Wichern, *Gutachten über die Diakonie und Diakonat*, 1849. Quoted in and translation by: David Crowner, et al., *The spirituality of the German awakening* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2003), p. 319.

⁷ Lees, p. 178 ff.

⁸ See for example the letter, dated 16 November 1852, from the *Bischöfliche Konsistorium Linz*, to the provincial school authorities of Upper Austria, detailing the lessons the children are being taught by the priests and sisters in the house at Freistadt: “the children learn to sit, to walk, to use their tender limbs correctly, and they learn to speak correctly, and the correct way to reckon and count, and ... to learn to make the sign of the Cross and the first prayers, and those who are entering their 5th or 6th year of life are also learning their letters and some small manual skills, as for instance with the girls some knitting ... a great blessing for these children is the habit of cleanliness with which they become used to the habit of being clean ...” Oberösterreiches Landesarchiv, Marckhgott-Select, „Schulschwestern und Kinderbewahranstalt in Freistadt,“ Staathalterei allgemeine Reihe, n. 80.

⁹ Oberösterreiches Landesarchiv, Bestand 2: Statthalterei Allgemeine Reihe. A/11, 10/42: Markhgott-Select. They would also all have their assets seized by the Nazi state shortly after the *Anschluss* in 1938, as part of the process of “Co-ordination” (Gleichschaltung), and their assets transferred to the Nazi “NS-Volkswohlfart e.V.”

¹⁰ “Hundert Jahre Kinderbewahranstalt in Linz,” n.a., p. 296 in: *Sonderabdruck aus Heimatland*, 1938.

¹¹ *Linzer Tagespost*, November 4, 1882, p. 12.

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT: A CATHOLIC READING

BY RICHARD S. CHRISTEN

Embedded within the dense theory and analysis that characterizes much of Nicholas Boyle's *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* is a relatively simple premise: that secular literature can have spiritual value. Secular works differ from sacred texts in significant ways, Boyle admits. They are authored as opposed to divinely inspired, and lacking the "original 'Thou shalt,'" they can "utter ... the desire for a moral effect," but not cause it.¹ Yet secular literary works, like sacred texts, "can speak to us about the relation of the modern world to God," Boyle writes. Using a religious lens to interpret Goethe's *Faust*, *Moby Dick*, *Mansfield Park*, and other secular works, he discovers enduring sacred themes — from corporate identity and obligation to the presence of God in the everyday. For Boyle, secular works, even those "that seem to hide God's face, or to spit on it," allow us to "see God revealed at the heart of our world and in our culture."²

Building on Boyle's insights, this essay looks for "God's face" in a non-literary cultural expression — the arts and crafts movement that flourished from the 1880s to the 1920s in England and the United States. Remembered primarily as a style that applied simple designs, sound techniques, and natural materials to the objects of daily life, the arts and crafts movement was, at its core, a response to modern industrialization, a loose network of individuals and organizations committed not so much to a specific aesthetic as to the premise that a revival of handicrafts could remedy at least some of what was wrong in the modern, industrial world.³

The arts and crafts movement anticipated a fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching, another retort to nineteenth-century industrialization. Both proclaimed that work plays a central role in shaping who we are as persons and that industrialization, because of its approach to work, has debased humans and stunted their growth. The arts and crafts movement and Catholic social teaching proposed different reform agendas, however. The Catholic response focused on restoring workers' rights, while arts and crafts promoters attempted to improve the quality and appearance of material objects as well as the work lives of those producing them. The arts and crafts movement was unable to balance material and human goals, and the story of this failure, Boyle might agree, both confirms the Catholic vision of work and warns against the false promise of materialism.

The arts and crafts movement originated in Great Britain, inspired by attacks that Victorian romantics John Ruskin and William Morris leveled against the nineteenth-century industrial revolution. A professor of fine art at Oxford and the leading art critic of his era, Ruskin favored the natural aesthetic of Gothic architecture and rough, uneven handcrafted objects over industrial symmetry and regularity. Convinced that virtue beget beauty, he also praised the morality of the pre-industrial processes, workers, and workplaces that generated these build-

ings and goods. In his idealized vision of the medieval shop, Ruskin imagined artisans working as both designers and makers in pleasurable, stimulating, and unfettered environments, using their intellects as well as their hands to create attractive products. Industrialization destroyed the moral-aesthetic harmony of medieval work, according to Ruskin. Factories separated designer from maker and divided production into a series of minute tasks, denying workers opportunities to use their minds and express their creativity. "Only by thought ... can [labor] be made happy" and only a happy worker can create beauty, Ruskin asserted. When machine operators displace inventive, self-reliant artisans, it is inevitable that a society's material goods will devolve.⁴

A poet and painter who turned to traditional crafts after reading Ruskin, William Morris expanded on his precursor's theories. Like Ruskin, Morris admired medieval techniques and handicrafts, and protested that industrialization had trampled two invaluable and interdependent notions ruling the pre-industrial workshop. These notions are: first, the belief that beautiful, simple, and unique objects enhance daily life; and second, an allegiance to work that is joyful, dignified, and personally satisfying to the laborer.⁵ Ignoring these principles, industrialization, according to Morris, had flooded Victorian England with unattractive and unreliable mass-produced objects and dramatically diminished the worker's pleasure, self-respect, and social status. Only a revival of pre-industrial tools and processes would counter these trends, he believed. It would insure that beauty permeated everyday life and that laborers would again do work "worth doing ... of itself pleasant to do, and ... done under such conditions as would make it neither over-wearisome nor over-anxious."⁶

The son of a wealthy stockbroker, Morris had the means to test his and Ruskin's theories. Collaborating with friends, including pre-Raphaelite painters Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones and the architect Philip Webb, Morris first used traditional crafts techniques to decorate Red House, his new family residence in Kent. Encouraged by the results, in 1861 he founded Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Co., an interior design firm where artisans applying traditional tools and processes produced wallpaper, glass, furniture, and other decorative objects. Employees at the firm's Merton Abbey workshop worked in a garden setting and both designed and crafted their products, which quickly became the vogue among Victorian professionals and the well-to-do. By the 1870s, Morris was the acknowledged master of British decorative art, with patrons throughout Europe and America purchasing his firm's handcrafted products and lending support to his assertion that "beauty is a marketable quality, and that the better the work is all round ... the more likely it is to find favour with the public."⁷ Businesses and other organizations inspired by Ruskin's and Morris's ideals began to appear in England during the 1880s and a decade later in the United States.

The Roman Catholic Church, like Ruskin and Morris, has often been critical of modern industrialization. Beginning with Pope Leo XIII's ground breaking encyclical *Rerum novarum* in 1891, a series of Roman Catholic social teachings have addressed the plight of the worker and other problems generated by nineteenth- and twentieth-century economic changes. *Rerum*

novarum endorsed labor unions and called for limited state intervention to support workers. Later, Pope Pius XI's depression-era *Quadagesimo anno* (1931), Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra*, Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, and other church documents expanded on these themes. More recently, John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem exercens* (1981) grounded the arguments found in earlier Catholic social teaching in a carefully reasoned "theology of labor."⁸

Reflecting John Paul II's personal experiences with the Solidarity labor union and as a quarry worker in Nazi-occupied Poland, *Laborem exercens* highlighted the dignity of human work and its vital connection to a person's self-realization. Work, John Paul II proclaimed, is the primary way humans participate in God's creative mission and develop their potential. While the Pope acknowledged that work has objective meaning in the sense that it transforms resources into products for human use, he insisted that this objective character must always be secondary to work's subjective dimension — the role that it plays in the development, actualization, and dignity of humans. Work's sweat, toil, and suffering, the diligence it demands, and the strong familial and community ties that it builds all help humans to subdue the earth, according to John Paul II. But more importantly, they mark work as an activity that "corresponds to [personal] dignity, that expresses this dignity, and increases it." "Work," John Paul II wrote, "is a good thing for man — a good thing for his humanity." Through labor, a person "achieves fulfillment as a human being and in a sense becomes 'more a human being.'"⁹

For John Paul II, the central problem of modern industrial society was its inversion of work's objective and subjective dimensions. Both capitalism and Marxist socialism position workers as tools in the production process, alienating them from their humanity and employers, according to the Pope. With the desire to maximize profits and material standards of living — not human growth and dignity — governing labor policy, workers operate as the servants of capital rather than vice versa. For John Paul II, the use of technology in modern industry offers a vivid example of this labor-capital reversal. "As a whole set of instruments that man uses in his work, technology is undoubtedly man's ally," John Paul II wrote. It "perfects, accelerates, and augments" human work. But technology can also become "almost the enemy." When capital takes priority over labor, when production, profits, and economic growth are exalted over human needs, mechanization strips workers of "the incentive to creativity and responsibility," reduces them to "the status of its slave," and ultimately, "supplants" them.¹⁰ Ruskin was prone to anti-Catholic tirades and Morris ignored organized religion altogether, yet both would have supported key elements of the theology of work outlined in *Laborem exercens*. Like John Paul II, they underscored the innate value of each person and the ability of work to nurture one's self-realization. And like the Pope, they complained that industrialization's valuing production over workers and profits over humane labor practices too often ignored human worth. While Ruskin and Morris stressed the superiority of the pre-industrial workplace over the isolation and routine of the mechanized factory, John Paul II opposed industrialization's excesses rather than its nature. Still, all three agreed that industrialization had denied laborers the intellectual stimulation, solidarity, and respect that they deserved

and, in the process, had obstructed their personal growth.

Despite this accord, the arts and crafts movement and Catholic social teaching recommended divergent solutions to “the labor question.” The split is rooted in fundamental differences over the relative importance of work’s objective dimension — the way production is done and the goods that it produces. *Laborem exercens*, as we have seen, located the source of the modern worker’s problems in the exaggerated worth that industrialists attach to material processes and goods. These objective elements of work, John Paul II declared, must never be valued more than the laborer and his or her opportunities for self-realization. When this happens, as is often the case in modern industrial society — when the worker is valued as a maker of objects and a cog in a production line rather than as a human creating him or herself — the drive for power and profits overwhelms the needs of the worker.

As a remedy, *Rerum novarum* and subsequent Catholic social teaching consistently urged employers and governments to promote workers’ rights to employment, a just wage, and to organize unions. These immutable human rights make work, regardless of type or perceived productivity, more conducive to personal growth and respect, according to *Laborem exercens*. Full employment gives humans opportunities to participate in God’s creative activity while fair wages validate the dignity of work and the humans who do it. Unions, John Paul II stressed, are another means to just employment practices, wages, and work conditions. They also are an “indispensable element of social life” in an industrial society, sites promoting worker solidarity to counter industrialization’s often divisive workplaces. Finally, John Paul II called on “indirect employers,” i.e. consumers, to shape employment practices, wages, and work conditions through their buying habits. Consumption is of limited direct value for personal fulfillment, the Pope advised, but it can promote labor policies consistent with human dignity and self-realization.¹¹

In contrast to Catholic social teaching, Ruskin and Morris gave equal status to work’s subjective and objective dimensions. They, like John Paul II, were deeply committed to laborers and their self-realization. But they also contended that work processes and products were relevant to human development. Foreshadowing John Paul II’s concept of the indirect employer, Ruskin and Morris acknowledged that consumption patterns influenced working conditions. They went further, however, arguing that the demand for beautiful products was essential to worker fulfillment. Everyday lives surrounded by well-crafted, attractive objects were both certain indicators of just working conditions and, as Morris wrote, “the true secret of happiness.”¹² Because industrialization, by definition, used machines to mass produce goods, it was irrevocably harmful, according to Ruskin and Morris. John Paul II believed that extensive mechanization could be the worker’s ally, but for Ruskin, it was always anathema. And for Morris machines must be used only for the most onerous tasks.¹³ On the other hand, they proclaimed that non-mechanized production and handmade goods would enrich any worker’s life, freeing him or her to become, in the words of John Paul II, “more a human being.”¹⁴ So while Catholic social teaching focused its attention on regulating industrialization to insure

that it supported human dignity, Ruskin and Morris demanded a return to pre-industrial techniques and handcrafted goods.

Morris took a step toward a pre-industrial ideal with his design firm, which was successful at building an appreciation for craftsmanship, especially among sophisticated consumers. But the goods produced by the firm were expensive, and few manufacturers adopted its production methods. Eager to correct these limitations, Morris plunged into politics. He formally allied with socialism in 1883 and over the next two decades gave hundreds of public lectures pressing for an economy comprised of small egalitarian cooperatives where the worker “made his wares from beginning to end himself, and sold them himself to the man who was going to use them.”¹⁵ At the same time Morris continued promoting a handmade aesthetic through his design firm and other ventures such as Kelmscott Press. He was convinced that beautiful objects would serve two ends: they would brighten everyday life, and, more importantly, their appeal would press manufacturers to adopt more humane policies toward workers. A revived interest in handicraft, although “contemptible on the surface in the face of the gigantic fabric of commercialism,” was moving society, albeit slowly, toward the reconstruction of labor, Morris wrote; “as a protest against intellectual tyranny, and a token for change which is transforming civilization into socialism, it is both noteworthy and encouraging.”¹⁶

Morris's fragile synthesis of the objective and subjective dimensions of work unraveled when the arts and crafts movement travelled to the United States. His concern for the worker, mode of production, and aesthetics could be found in most if not all of America's early arts and crafts societies. But these aims, which had been inseparable for Morris, often functioned as competing platforms within the infant institutions.¹⁷ For example in Boston's arts and crafts society, members interested in supporting professional artisans battled with those who favored aesthetic education. One faction advocated a cooperative workspace similar to Morris's idealized shop, a place where independent artisans could design, make, and sell their work. The other pushed for public exhibitions and lectures to promote good taste and an interest in buying well-crafted objects. The “tastemakers” won out in Boston, signaling a victory for middle-class consumerism over support for the worker within the American arts and crafts movement. As disgusted labor advocate Mary Ware Dennett wrote in resigning from the Boston governing council, the primary interest of the movement had become “things,” not “the man — his freedom — his industrial independence.”¹⁸

Other American arts and crafts organizations mimicked and broadened Boston's abandonment of workers. Founded in 1907 by “people of taste and means,” the Arts and Crafts Society of Portland (Oregon) had little interest in slowing the city's industrial growth or improving labor conditions. The society saw its mission as aesthetic education — sponsoring exhibitions, classes, lectures, and a sales shop that encouraged Portland citizens to fill their domestic lives with well-designed products. And for arts and crafts devotees in Portland and across the United States, these goods no longer needed to be handcrafted.¹⁹ By the early- twentieth-century, Roycroft, Stickley, and other American decorative arts firms had developed mecha-

nized techniques that manufactured relatively inexpensive imitations of the handmade. With these new production methods, factories were no longer the enemy. Although still acknowledging the onerous workplaces for many workers in the United States, the American arts and crafts movement now deemed the consumption of a factory's attractively-designed products as an effective antidote to the problems posed by industrial labor.²⁰

Craft hobbies in the home were another source of happiness and self-actualization according to American arts and crafts leaders. While jettisoning Ruskin and Morris's commitment to better labor conditions, American arts and crafts leaders never let go of their enthusiasm for pre-industrial processes and tools. Hand craftsmanship was an unrealistic way of producing large quantities of household goods, according to Julia Hoffman, the driving force behind the Arts and Crafts Society of Portland; but as a means of stimulating imagination, creativity, and personal growth, it was an ideal leisure activity. "In all of us there is a divine spark of creative energy," Hoffman wrote, "[and] no man is so happy as when he finds a means of expressing himself in it." Handicraft hobbies, she contended allowed any person, no matter how talented, to express this spark: "great artists and musicians we can not [all] be but we can put the stamp of individuality on simple things."²¹ This fervor for home hobbies completed the arts and crafts movement's break from Catholic social teaching. For Hoffman and other American crafts leaders, the home, not work, was now the primary site for personal growth.

If one accepts, as Nicholas Boyle does, the teachings of the Catholic Church as "true statements about human life," then the early arts and crafts movement, like the best secular literature, reflected and corroborated this truth.²² Ruskin and Morris had taken a Catholic perspective in key ways, emphasizing the innate value of each human and the important role that work plays in a person's self-realization. But they also veered from the vision of work found in Catholic social teaching. Work, for the two Victorian reformers, had not one but two indispensable and inseparable functions: to provide creative and intellectual opportunities that would nurture personal growth and to produce beautiful objects. While Boyle might suggest that in emphasizing the importance of both the subjective and objective dimensions of work, Ruskin and Morris articulated another truth — the continual tension between material and spiritual that permeates the human experience, he might also see the history of the arts and crafts movement as a cautionary tale, a warning that efforts to integrate an appreciation for material objects with a commitment to self-actualization through work will inevitably go astray. This, in the end, reveals the false promise of the American arts and crafts movement — that the loss of dignity one may experience at work can be overcome by beautiful domestic settings and interesting leisure activities.

¹ Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 169.

² *Ibid.*, 145.

³ Richard Guy Wilson, "Divine Excellence': The Arts and Crafts in California," in *The Arts and Crafts Movement in California: Living the Good Life*, ed. Kenneth R. Trapp (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 16. Also see Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 6-8.

⁴ E.T. Cook & A. Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1903-12), XVII: 423; XX:93. Also see "Characteristics of Gothic Architecture," in Chauncey B. Tinker, ed., *Selections from the Works of John Ruskin* (New

York: Houghton Mifflin, 1908), 164-199. For more on Ruskin, see Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 3-7; John Ruskin: *The Argument of the Eye* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119-47; & J.A. Hobson, *John Ruskin: Social Reformer* (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, 1898), 29-68).

⁵ Eileen Boris refers to these principles as the "craftsman ideal." Boris, *Art and Labor*, xi.

⁶ May Morris, ed. *The Collected Works of William Morris* (London: Longmans, 1910-15. 22:342-74; 375-90; 23:175-77, 194. For more on Morris, see Boris, *Art and Labor*, 7-12; & E.P Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955).

⁷ William Morris, "Testimony Before the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction, March 1882), in May Morris, ed., *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), I: 290. For a discussion of Morris's design accomplishments, see Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1971), 96-112.

⁸ For an overview of Catholic social teaching, see Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 1-27. For a discussion of the need for a theology of labor, see Marie Dominique Chenu, "The Theology of Work," in *The Catholic Tradition: Social Thought, Vol. II*, eds., Charles J. Dollen; James K. McGovern; & James J. Megivern (Willmington, NC: McGrath Publishing, 1979) 271-87.

⁹ *Laborem exercens: Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II*, Appendix in Gregory Baum, *The Priority of Labor: A Commentary on Laborem exercens* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 112. Another useful commentary on *Laborem exercens* is Patricia A. Lamoreux, "Commentary on Laborem exercens (On Human Work)," in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Hines, O.F.M. (Washington D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 389-414.

¹⁰ *Laborem exercens* in Baum, *The Priority of Labor*, 103-104.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 126-37.

¹² Morris, *Works*, 23:94. The full text of Morris's famous quote is "the true secret of happiness lies in taking a genuine interest in all the details of daily life."

¹³ Boris, *Art and Labor*, 3, 9-11.

¹⁴ *Laborem exercens* in Baum, *The Priority of Labor*, 112.

¹⁵ Morris *Works*, 22:304.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 341.

¹⁷ Boris, *Art and Labor*, 32-52.

¹⁸ Mary Ware Dennett to the Chairman of the Council, 27 January 1905, in BSAC Papers, Roll 300, 446-50, cited by Boris, *Art and Labor*, 41.

¹⁹ Julia Hoffman to Margery Hoffman, March 1908, Margery Hoffman Smith Papers, 2660:5, Oregon History Center. For an account of the Arts and Crafts Society of Portland, see Richard S. Christen, "Julia Hoffman and the Arts and Crafts Society of Portland: An Aesthetic Response to Industrialization," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 109:4 (Winter 2008): 510-535.

²⁰ For more on Roycroft and Stickley, see Boris, *Art and Labor*, 146-55.

²¹ Julia Hoffman, undated speech draft, Smith Papers, 2660:6.

²² Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures*, 139.

SECTION 2:
ENGAGING SACRED IMAGINATION
AND CULTURE

REDEEMING CULTURE

BY NICHOLAS BOYLE

Culture is a term with a complicated history and many meanings¹. At the risk of exemplifying Lichtenberg's aphorism — "Many writers, after giving their material a rude blow, say that it falls naturally into two parts"² — I shall try to simplify the complexity and reduce the multiplicity by distinguishing two main senses which reflect two rather different histories. The cleaver with which I shall undertake this operation is provided by English grammar, which allows that a noun be either singular or plural and offers no third possibility.

First, then 'culture' may be a singular noun, which has no plural. In this usage 'culture' has a sense which goes back to antiquity³, as a metaphor taken from farming — and I propose to say nothing whatever about these literal, agricultural, horticultural and latterly bacteriological senses of the term (of which, incidentally, many have a plural). *Cultura animi* was known to Cicero and 'culture' (Engl.) 'culture' (Fr.) and 'Kultur' (Ger.) still today have meanings related to Cicero's term. Very roughly, we may say those meanings are of two kinds, individual and collective. 'Culture' as the process or result of the education of an individual, is their bringing on from a state of infancy or savagery — parents know the two terms are virtually synonymous — to a state of adulthood or refinement, their becoming 'cultivated', acquiring skill, knowledge, or urbanity. Now those who are 'urbane' are etymologically no different from those who are 'civilised' — they are all town dwellers — and we do of course speak of a civilised person, meaning someone of refined manners and sensitivities, as well as someone educated and knowledgeable about matters unfamiliar to a ploughman. But 'civilisation' on the whole corresponds to the collective sense that the word 'culture' can also have when it is used in the singular, indeed in French 'civilisation' was used until the twentieth century where English or German speakers might, in the nineteenth century at least, have used 'culture' or 'Kultur' — 'Kulturvolk' is still sometimes used in German by contrast with 'Naturvolk' to mean a civilised people as opposed to a primitive people, a people in a state of nature, and 'the growth of culture' in the eighteenth and nineteenth century meant the development towards the standard of civilisation enjoyed by the writer and his or her contemporaries understood as a universal human norm⁴. 'Culture', as a synonym of 'civilisation', is something to which all human beings aspire and to which at varying speeds they progress and though its detailed manifestations may vary it is in essence the same everywhere — whether that essence consists in socialization, urbanization, literacy and education, or tools, fire and industrialization. This sense of 'culture' in English is now rather old-fashioned — if the sense is needed at all, 'civilisation' is more likely to be used — but in the nineteenth century it was the main sense of the word along with that individual sense that is evidenced in such usages as 'self-culture' or 'culture of the mind', or 'of the heart'⁵. One of the reasons the collective sense of 'culture', as a synonym for 'civilisation', may have faded from view is that the individual and collective

senses were brought close together in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* of 1869 and in the controversy surrounding it: the refinement of the individual sensibility now seemed to be the culmination of the collective progress of humanity. A large part of what we mean in English by 'culture' today derives from Arnold's perspective⁶ and no doubt from the German ideas of 'Bildung' on which he was drawing.

But not all. Probably the most influential and most common sense of the term 'culture' today derives not from that uncountable singular culture, whether individual or collective, but from the sense of the word in which it has a plural and may be preceded by the indefinite article or be specified as the culture of a specific group, time, or place. 'Cultures' nowadays are everywhere, whether cultures of innovation or cultures of deference, whether imperialist, capitalist or post-colonial: cultures, like civilisations, are clashing, and while multi-culturalism has become the new goal of all progress it remains uncertain whether we will not all go down together in denial of our cultural Other. On one thing alone we can bet: 'cultural studies' will survive, at any rate until the next fashion. Culture in this sense has a curious relationship to the concept of religion: either it refers to the non-religious forms of behaviour — cuisine, dress, life-expectations, art forms — that are associated with a group that is largely or even exclusively defined by its religion (Jewish, Sikh, Rastafarian, Armenian) or else it refers to some non-religious phenomenon which is assumed to exert over a group the same all-encompassing influence that a religion might and be the centre of gravity round which otherwise quite disparate features are assumed to organize themselves: as when a football culture is opposed to a cricket culture — or an SUV culture is thought of as determining people's attitudes to food and drink. Plainly, if we are going to try to re-imagine culture in a Christian way we will need to return to this special relationship with religion. For the present, though, it is important first of all to note that all these senses of culture presuppose its possible plurality, and unlike the singular culture that goes back to Cicero, plural cultures, and 'culture' as the species of which individual cultures are examples, are remarkably recent. The first book in Cambridge University Library to contain the word 'cultures' in the plural in its title was published in 1911⁷ and the earliest example of culture 'with *a* and *plural*' in the OED is an isolated and not wholly certain specimen from 1867⁸ — the unambiguous cases date from over twenty years later. In 1968 the great historian of Victorian anthropology, G.W. Stocking Jr., set himself the task of identifying the moment of origin of plural cultures⁹. Thirty years later he confessed the task was still uncompleted. But he did not find what he was looking for because he was looking for it in the wrong place. As so often in matters of the Victorian mind, he should have been looking in Germany¹⁰. The crucial period seems to lie between 1860 and 1880. I have found no trace of the plural usage in a highly systematic and comprehensive racialist taxonomy of what we would now certainly call cultures by Karl Vollgraff published in 1853-4¹¹. In 1878 however Nietzsche makes extensive use of 'Kulturen' in a completely modern sense in the first work of his mature middle period, *Menschliches Allzumenschliches*¹². Let us look more closely at this period of transition. In 1860 Adolf Bastian, the first director of the ethnographic museum in

Berlin, used the plural of the German word 'Kultur', 'Kulturen', for the first time, to my knowledge, in something like the modern sense¹³. His use is a little ambiguous, it is true: he denounces the pride of Europeans who regard themselves as 'the ideal of humanity' and who ignore the 'innumerable peoples' of other continents who have developed their 'own independent cultures', 'ihre selbstständigen Kulturen'. But the sense of 'Kultur' here is evaluative — these 'Kulturen' are being judged by standards outside themselves, they are examples of the advanced level of the common human civilisation which it is possible for non-Europeans to achieve. Also in 1860, however, Nietzsche's mentor, the Basel historian Jakob Burckhardt, published an epoch-making work, the title of which teeters on the brink of modernity in this matter. *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* is usually translated into English as 'The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy' and on his first page Burckhardt treats the words 'Zivilisation' and 'Kultur' as synonyms¹⁴. Having called his topic a 'Kulturepoche' — an 'epoch of culture' — he then calls it a civilisation, 'Zivilisation', which is 'the immediate mother of our own', 'die nächste Mutter der unsrigen'. The shift is of crucial importance. If an 'epoch of culture' might be merely one step in a single process of general human perfection, a civilisation that is as distinct from our own as a mother is from a child is a historically independent unit, as different from other civilisations as one human individual is from another, however closely related. Indeed the whole purport of Burckhardt's treatise is to demonstrate how all aspects of Italian life in his chosen period belong together in a single unit — the varied political structures and issues; the conceptions of the individual, publicity, and posterity; literature, historiography, and the educational system; travel and science; language and gender; morality, religion, and superstition. They all together amount, not to a stage in human development, but to a unique historical phenomenon, with its own distinctive character, and explicable in its own terms, without appeal to any larger process of which it might be a part — the *culture* of the Renaissance in Italy. Not until 1868 however do we find Burckhardt beginning to use 'Kultur' with something like this sense in the plural, in his notes for his lecture course on world-history, in which he refers to 'all ages, peoples, and cultures'¹⁵. In 1869 plural 'cultures' also appear in a work by Bastian¹⁶ but still as an 'ornament' reserved for those few peoples who have risen to the level of having a written history and historical self-awareness — Bastian, it will be clear, was something of a latter-day Hegelian.

As a historian with a strong moral and aesthetic sense, Burckhardt when he spoke of 'cultures' still had in mind 'high' cultures comparable with the Italian Renaissance¹⁷, but his usage was already in advance of that of the founder of English anthropology, Edward Burnett Tylor, who famously began his study *Primitive Culture* of 1871: "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"¹⁸. Tylor had been using the concept of culture as a 'complex whole' at least since 1865¹⁹, but neither in 1871 nor subsequently did he give the noun a plural²⁰. For him culture was still synonymous with civilisation. Tylor retained the belief that human culture was

single and unitary: there was a single standard of civilisation to which all might eventually progress. Indeed the thesis of *Primitive Culture* was that as physical circumstances and human nature varied but little round the globe, the human race went through much the same technical, mental and moral phases in its progress towards civilisation everywhere. In this respect Tylor was more inflexible than the German anthropologists to whom he acknowledged his indebtedness, above all Adolf Bastian. For in the 1870s in Germany things had begun to change decisively. Bastian had a penchant for Hegelian terminology and when in 1875 he was asked to contribute to a collective volume of advice on how to conduct explorations intended for the newly-founded German Empire's newly-founded Imperial Navy, he defined 'Cultur' as "the freely creative activity of the spirit which has sought to make itself independent of the immediate impression of the environment"²¹. This definition still subscribes, if perhaps equivocally, to the view of 'culture' as that which distinguishes the advanced or civilised peoples of mankind — the 'Culturvölker'— from the savage, the 'Naturvölker', who still live in immediate contact with nature. But in the same collection of 1875 we find another contributor making a decisive break with that old, normative, and essentially singular conception of 'Kultur'. Rudolf Virchow, anthropologist, biologist, politician, pioneer of public health and winner of the Royal Society's Copley Medal, in his own advice to the Navy, refers in the plural to the early cultures, 'Culturen', of the Far East and America²², a usage which is possibly still slightly ambiguous, though less so than its precedents in Bastian. But when he goes on to say that, "it is one of the most solemn duties of our time to determine as precisely as possible the characterisation of the surviving uncivilized peoples ('Naturvölker'), to collect with the greatest care all the surviving remains of their culture"²³, it is clear that a watershed has been passed. 'Culture' here cannot possibly mean 'that which marks off a 'Culturvolk' from a 'Naturvolk' since it is being expressly attributed to the 'Naturvölker'. 'Culture' here must mean 'the complex whole' of practices characteristic of particular peoples, in their *uncivilised* state. If 'Cultur' here meant the same as it does in the compound 'Culturvolk', Virchow's sentence would be self-contradictory. A 'Cultur' is now something that a people can have even if it is explicitly *not* a 'Culturvolk'.

We may assume that Virchow, of all men, was the most likely to be sensitive to shifts in the meaning of the word 'Cultur' for an interesting reason. On 17 January 1873, in the Prussian Parliament, he, as a liberal member of the Progressive Party, had spoken in support of Bismarck's recently introduced repressive policy towards the Catholic church, about to be intensified in the so-called Falk Laws, enacted in May of that year. Virchow had described Bismarck's campaign of persecution — expulsion of Jesuits, suppression of other orders, gagging of preachers, deposing of bishops, confiscation of church property and so on — as a 'Kampf für die Kultur' — a struggle for civilisation. The compound noun 'Kulturkampf' came to be used by both parties to describe the conflict which lasted with its greatest intensity until 1878, though Bismarck's final acknowledgement of defeat came only in 1887. When Virchow coined his phrase the *Kulturkampf* was a fight for a singular culture, the normative civilisation which

Protestant Prussia saw as the human ideal and as most nearly embodied in itself: the Catholic church was merely obsolete, obscurantist, and barbarian, at best a lower stage of civilisation that would of its nature be only an enemy of the higher. As the conflict wore on, however, it became clear that the Catholic church was not simply a stage in human development destined to be superseded by the higher stage that was the State of Prussia, or the German Empire: it was a power in its own right, on an equal footing with its Prussian adversary. The *Kulturkampf* subtly changed its character — a change already signalled in the disappearance of the original phrase ‘Kampf für die Kultur’: it ceased to be a battle for culture and became a battle of culture, a battle on the cultural battlefield and eventually a battle of, or between, cultures. The two sides accommodated each other: Bismarck gradually dropped his repressive legislation and the new Pope Leo XIII made a concession on the notification of episcopal appointments to the state authority. By the end of the 1870s the German public had come to see the parties to the *Kulturkampf* as themselves autonomous and to a great extent mutually impermeable cultures, different complex wholes that would have to live alongside each other since they could not establish a single order of precedence between them. German Catholics certainly could not accept that there was such a thing as the singular *Kultur* to which Virchow had originally appealed once it had been roundly denounced by Pope Leo in his first encyclical, *Inscrutabili dei consilio* promulgated at Easter 1878, in the words ‘that kind of so-called civilisation [= culture, in Italian ‘civiltà’], however, which would be at variance with the doctrines and laws of holy Church, cannot be regarded as other than a mockery of true civilisation, a mere name without a substance’²⁴. But German Catholics and Protestants alike might accept that there were two cultures²⁵ of more or less equal standing between which relations did not have to be hostile, and, as the phrase of the day had it, a *modus vivendi* was possible. The momentous implication of this compromise was that the Prussian state itself withdrew from the cultural field and presented itself merely as the political framework within which cultures could compete. With such powerful political and public reinforcement of the semantic shift that was anyway being gradually necessitated by the development of anthropology and archaeology it is no surprise that by the end of decade so quickly responsive and well-read a mind as Nietzsche’s should have been making frequent use of the concept of the plural word ‘cultures’ with no evident sense that it reposed on a neologism — as when he remarked that “different cultures are different intellectual climates” or that poets are “bridges to quite remote ages and ideas, to dying or dead religions and cultures”²⁶. The usage may even have been intended as a provocative challenge to the triumphalist Prussian use of the singular term: in 1873 he had spoken contemptuously of the belief that the recently concluded Franco-Prussian War was a victory for German ‘Kultur’²⁷. Burckhardt, whose influence on Nietzsche was at its zenith in the early 1870s, had used his lecture-course on world-history as a means of indirectly criticizing the overweening German nationalism of the period 1866-1871, and it may be that Burckhardt’s example had first alerted Nietzsche to the possibility that ‘culture’ might have a plural. From the end of the 1870s onwards we find German orien-

talists, philologists and even local historians publishing on this or that particular 'Kultur' — not just such usual suspects as Greece, Germany, or for that matter Switzerland, but ancient India and Babylon, eastern Iran²⁸, and the Turkic and Tartar peoples. In 1885 a German archaeologist (translating a Swedish original) could refer to the 'Hallstatt-Kultur', while his English translator could manage only the 'Hallstatt period'²⁹. Also in 1885 a pupil of Bastian and of Virchow at the Berlin Ethnographic Museum, who had emigrated to the U.S.A., Franz Boas, began his first experiment in living with the Inuit of Baffin Island, an event which may be regarded as the inauguration of modern American anthropology, characterized by its belief in the equal value of all cultures³⁰.

Perhaps that word 'Kultur', susceptible of plurality and the indefinite article, established itself so readily in Germany because the concept had been in existence for a good hundred years before the word became available. The notion that cultures were autonomous, mutually impermeable, complex wholes — so to speak, historical monads — was in Germany as old as Herder, who had at his disposal only the terms 'peoples' or 'nations', or 'national spirits': 'Völker', 'Nationen', or 'Volksgeister'³¹. Hegel too used 'Volksgeist', in the singular or plural, and felt no need for the word 'Kultur' at all³². A century before Bastian, Herder denounced the 'pride' of Europeans in what they called their 'culture': 'so arrogant a thought [as that of some superior "European culture"] would be a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature'³³, 'every people has the centre of gravity of its own happiness in itself'³⁴. Herder's reason for asserting the coherence and autonomy of the ways of life of different nations — the mutual implication and dependence of language, economy, geography, forms of government, religion, art, technology and literature — was ultimately a theological reason. He wanted to defend the Hebrew and Christian scriptures against the deist challenge that neither ethically nor intellectually did they measure up to the standards of an eighteenth-century rational European, standards which proclaimed and indeed evidenced themselves to be universally applicable. So he argued that God did not reveal himself in universal and permanent abstract principles but in the spirits of different human groups in different places and times and in the religion that proceeded from and expressed their entire way of life. The spirit of eighteenth-century Europe was only one such spirit, and the spirit of ancient Israel, like that of ancient Egypt or Phoenicia or Greece or Rome, was another, and they should not be measured by standards extraneous to themselves. The Hebrew scriptures were poetry, using a picture-language, *Bildersprache*, a language of images, drawn from the life their authors knew, and to read the Scriptures properly was to recover the vividness those images had for their originators and their original audience in their original context, not to subject them to analysis in a different context and language, in which the images had become unfamiliar or even alien. Herder's problem of course was how to account for the fact that as a Christian, indeed as a Christian prelate, he nonetheless claimed a universality for the picture-language of Hebrew or Christian poetry which he did not attribute to the poetry of other ages and peoples, not even of Greece and Rome. The meaning of history might indeed be, as he said, the passage of God over the nations — "*Gang Gottes über*

die Nationen"³⁵— but why was Christianity uniquely qualified to map that passage and what did the Christian map actually show? Faced with that challenge, Herder threw in the towel. Christianity could claim a unique authority because in first-century Palestine there arose a preacher who proclaimed, he wrote, "the most philanthropic form of deism" — "*der menschenliebendste Deismus*"³⁶. Given the choice between the rational universality required by the spirit of his own age and the historical particularity he attributed to the spirit of any age, and unable to reconcile them, Herder sided in the end with the forces he had set out to criticize. Having given the world the concept of a national spirit, a *Volksgeist*, as a complex, autonomous whole, he left unresolved the question of the relation of those wholes to one another and to the deeper concept of God as the Lord of history with which he had begun.

If therefore as Christians we wish to re-imagine culture, at least in the sense of that word in which it can have a plural, we need to be aware that that concept of a 'culture' already comes to us with a double theological imprint. Perhaps we should call it a cloven hoof-mark. Firstly it bears the mark of Herder's original, and failed, attempt to conceive of a folk-spirit as a self-sufficient totality but within a theological scheme, a totality therefore in which religion plays a crucial, perhaps even a defining role. Secondly, it bears the mark of the moment when that Herderian concept acquired its modern name and attendant grammatical features, the moment of self-consciously 'cultural' conflict in Germany between the Prussian Protestant state and the Catholic church. By the time that conflict was over it had become possible to conceive of multiple 'cultures', not only as mutually impermeable but as coexisting, perhaps in a condition of armed neutrality, within a state structure that, in direct contradiction of Herder's principles, claimed to be above cultures (and so above religion) altogether.

Let me conclude by considering in turn these two respects in which Christianity must find the theological implications of the concept of culture problematic — not unacceptable, but in need of re-imagination.

Firstly, the concept of a culture as 'complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, etc.' is clearly inadequate to a Christian view of human life if it involves, as it plainly does for Tylor, the implication that beliefs, like art or customs are simply characteristics of particular groups whose existence and peculiarities are to be explained by the same causes that are held to determine their other characteristics. Religion cannot be seen by a Christian as a mere part of the complex whole and it was Herder's original intention, which he was unable to realize, that it should be seen rather as the culminating expression of a group's identity and the means of characterising its unique contribution to the progress of the human race. But Herder's failure points to a deeper problem than the inadequacy of any view of 'belief' which treats it as a mere epiphenomenon of 'culture' or the 'Volksgeist'. The deeper problem lies with the concept of the complex whole itself, whether that whole is limited to a particular group or embraces the entire human species. The implication of the concept 'complex whole' as used in anthropology, whether Herder's or Tylor's, is that a 'culture' or a 'Volksgeist' is not merely a system of thoughts and actions coherent in itself, the parts of

which mutually explain each other, but that for the human beings involved it constitutes a coherent representation of all that is and a coherent way of dealing with all the contingencies of life. But if the human beings involved have a religion — let us be more precise: if they have a conception of God — it will be their God, not their culture, which determines for them what is, and what they have to do. The concept of ‘culture’ contains an aspiration to totality — an aspiration to represent the *whole* of human life — which puts it in direct competition with the concept of ‘God’, for how we think about God is how we think about everything. All three Abrahamic religions, for example think of God as the creator, that is, they think of everything as created — natural things and social things, human things and non-human things. Christians go further: they think of everything as created, and redeemed, and glorified, that is, they think of God as Father, and Son, and Spirit. To think of everything as cultural is therefore, for a Christian, to set up Culture as a false god, or at least as a false image of God. To re-imagine Culture would, for a Christian, be to reconfigure it as a true image of divine activity, a true way of seeing everything as created, redeemed, and glorified by God. ‘Knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom’ all would need to be seen as created by the God who created human beings with the capacity for them. But if ‘knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom’ are to be re-imagined in a Christian, not simply an Abrahamic, way, then they must also be re-imagined as redeemed, that is, as fallen through human fault and bought back by God. And if the Christianity of re-imagined ‘knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom’ is to be truly catholic and universal they must be understood as suffused by a spirit that through His church brings them all into relationship with the God who made and redeemed them. Re-imagining what has been idolatrously categorized as ‘cultural’ means seeing it anew as related to the true God through being natural — that is, created — through being moral — that is, fallen and redeemed — and through being historical — that is, sustained by the spirit that has vivified God’s people through the ages.

As a little example of this process take a conventionally ‘cultural’ object — in most senses of that term — Hogarth’s *Portrait of the Graham Children* of 1742. Christians cannot see this simply as an icon of an alien culture, to be deconstructed into the codes and conventions of an age or place with which we have nothing to do. Rather we see this as first an image of God-created nature through its delight, say, manifest in the sharp detail of the cat’s face, fur and claws, or through its representation of the boy’s pleasure in the sounds of the cheeping, fluttering bird, so present in their absence for us. But we also see — rather miraculously, I think — a deep, even tragic, moral meaning, hinted at by the image of time in the background. For in the faces of these children we can half glimpse the adults they will grow up into — the earnestness of the elder daughter, the relaxed character of her younger sister, the boy’s sensual eagerness for life mirrored in the bird struggling to get out of the cage — and we can see also the cat that awaits all little birds when they leave the nest: the world, the flesh, the devil. And in the helpless baby, reaching out to enjoy the fruits of existence, but already dead when the portrait was painted, we sense our own helplessness before life and death. But at the same time our

heart is warmed by the humanity of the artist who can see and paint all this and we are touched by the thought that we are not only created by God but redeemed by Him too. In reflecting on this artist and on his world we cannot but think too of the Englishness of this masterpiece of English art, which in its combination of realism and moralism reflects some of the solidest virtues of eighteenth-century Anglicanism, given perhaps their greatest expression by Hogarth's contemporary, Handel. The 'culture' that made this painting possible is a part of the history of God's Church. Father, Son, and Spirit are all glorified by this 'cultural' object, and the Christian re-imagining of culture has to be a Trinitarian re-imagining, of a kind which Herder's deism prevented him even from conceiving.

Secondly, and finally, as the Hogarth example shows, a Christian re-imagining of culture cannot allow that cultures are mutually impermeable monads. What matters about cultural products, whether their source is near or distant in time or place, is their relation to God and we are alive to that through our own relation to God. Anthropology is the study of humans by humans and so it is never simply a study but always a conversation. The notion that cultures are multiple and autonomous became established in Germany at a time when it was politically convenient, in order to put an end to an injurious and unwinnable conflict, to stress both the distinctness of cultures and their independence of the state. But in fact states are social artefacts too and belong in the history of the one true culture whose permanent and indivisible nature was underlined by Leo XIII in *Inscrutabili dei consilio*:

We know with certainty, Venerable Brothers, that civilisation has no firm foundation unless it rests upon the eternal principles of truth and upon the unchangeable laws of right and justice; and unless true love binds the wills of men together, and harmonises by its sweetness their mutual relations and duties to each other.³⁷

The harmony of mutual relations and duties is as much an economic and political as it is a cultural concept. The notion that cultures are discrete, even watertight, entities whose integrity is damaged or contaminated by interchange with others is false to the realities of global economic and political interaction, and to the extent that the notion is false it is actively mischievous. Multiculturalism is an illusion if it is allowed to conceal from us the one culture to which we all belong, which is transnational and bound to no state and whose artefacts are constructed in that ungraspably complex interchange of need and service which we call the global market, and in which the only abiding institution is the Church of God.

¹ The most authoritative discussion of the early development of the concept is Jörg Fisch, 'Zivilisation, Kultur', in: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. O. Brunner, W. Conze, R. Koselleck, vol.7 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 679-774. I have also profited greatly from Raymond Geuss's essay 'Kultur, Bildung, Geist' in his *Morality, Culture, and History. Essays on German philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29-50.

² G.C. Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe* ed. W. Promies, vol.1 (Munich: Hanser, 1968), 275 (D272).

³ W.H. Bruford, 'Culture and related ideas from Cicero to Herder', in *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar 1775-1806* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 432-40.

⁴ J. C. Adelung, *Versuch einer Geschichte der Cultur des menschlichen Geschlechts* (Leipzig: C.G. Hertel, 1782).

⁵ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Loose hints upon education, chiefly concerning the culture of the heart*, (Edinburgh: John Bell and John Murray, 1781); W.E. Channing, *Self-culture* [...] (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1838).

⁶ 'much of the vision embodied in *Culture and Anarchy* has been transferred directly into relativist anthropology',

James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 235.

⁷ E. A. Ross, *The Changing Chinese. The conflict of Oriental and Western cultures in China* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1911).

⁸ The quotation is from E.A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England, its Causes and its results*, vol 1, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1867), 167: 'This absorption [of the Danes] into a kindred nation [the Angles and Saxons] is less remarkable than the fact that the same people should, with not much greater difficulty, have adopted a language and culture which was wholly alien to them. For, as the Danes who settled in England became Englishmen, so the Danes who settled in Gaul equally became Frenchmen.' 'Culture' here may be synonymous with 'a high level of [probably literary] culture'.

⁹ See his formulation of a "'testable hypothesis": the appearance or non-appearance of plural usages of the word "culture", G.W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York : Free Press ; Oxford : Maxwell Macmillan, 1987), 302.

¹⁰ As Stocking himself recognized: 'If a [...] review of German anthropological sources produced more instances of plural usage, this is not inconsistent with the argument that the modern concept emerged in the work of early Boasian anthropologists, whose debt to the Germanic tradition is indisputable', *ibid.* p.303.

¹¹ K.F. Vollgraff, *Ethnognosie und Ethnologie oder Herleitung, Classification und Schilderung der Nationen nach Maassgabe der Cultur- und Race-Stufen* (Marburg: Elwert, 1853-4).

¹² E.g. *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I*, §§43, 268, 292, 632; *II*, 'Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche', §179, 'Der Wanderer und sein Schatten' §215, in: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden* ed. K. Schlechta (Munich: Hanser, 1954), vol.1, 482, 612, 624, 726; 807, 962. See also footnote xxvi below and Geuss, p.37. Geuss comments: 'Only in the 1870s [...] does the term *Kultur* begin to be used to refer to a plurality of nationally distinct ways of living, thinking, and valuing'.

¹³ A. Bastian, *Der Mensch in der Geschichte. Zur Begründung einer psychologischen Weltanschauung. Bd.1. Die Psychologie als Wissenschaft* (Leipzig: O. Wigand, 1860) p.230: 'Ein übermüthiger [...] Stolz hat lange den Europäer verleitet, sich als das Ideal des Menschen anzusehen [...] Er denkt weder an die weiten Continente, die noch den Globus bedecken, und wo unzählige Völker ihre selbstständigen Culturen entwickelten; er erinnert sich nicht der vielen glänzenden Geschichtsepochen, die entstanden und vergingen, wenn noch kein Lichtstrahl der Civilisation in die Barbarei seiner Wälder gedrungen war.' It is however not quite correct to speak, as Fisch does, of 'das Fehlen des Plurals in übertragener Bedeutung' until about 1868 ('Zivilisation', 747). Goethe not infrequently uses the plural form 'Culturen', most prominently in Book 8 (1796) of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, where the Abbé says: 'deßwegen finden wir so viel einseitige Culturen, wovon doch jede sich anmaßt über das Ganze abzusprechen' (Weimarer Ausgabe, I, 23, p.250). In all these cases, though, the reference seems to be to an individual's self-cultivation or to the standard of politeness prevalent in a particular circle. This is probably also the sense of the word in the Italian example from 1843, 'le speciali culture', cited by Fisch, p.759.

¹⁴ J. Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* ed. H. Günther, (Bibliothek der Geschichte und Politik, 8) (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989), 11.

¹⁵ 'aller Zeiten, Völker und Kulturen', J. Burckhardt, *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* ed. R. Marx (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1969), 68, cp. Fisch, 'Zivilisation', 747. For the date 1868: p.748.

¹⁶ A. Bastian, *Die Voelker des Oestlichen Asien. Studien und Reisen*, vol. 5. *Reisen im indischen Archipel* (Jena: Costenoble, 1869), xiv: 'die Ethnologie [...] zu den im Schmuck ihrer Culturen strahlenden Geschichtsvölkern emporsteigt'

¹⁷ He makes his 'high' sense of 'Kultur' clear when he writes: 'wir beschränken uns auf wirkliche Kulturstaaten und sehen ab z.B. von Nomaden, welche sich stellenweise, an einzelnen Tauschplätzen, Küstenplätzen usw. mit der Kultur einlassen, und ebenso von Gefolgsstaaten mit einer Art Halbkultur, wie sie z.B. die Kelten hatten' (*Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, 85). Even though Burckhardt uses the plural (e.g. pp. 210, 211, 213, 229), the word stands alongside — and in a dialectical relation with — the State, and Religion, those other manifestations of a people's sense of their own totality (which, following Hegel, he still calls 'Geist', p.57). Not every social group therefore has a 'Kultur', but groups that have risen to having a state and a religion may have different 'Kulturen'.

¹⁸ E. B Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom* (London: John Murray, 1871), vol.1, p.1. Raymond Williams regards this definition as the moment when a new, plural and pluralistic, sense of the word 'culture' 'was decisively introduced into English': R. Williams, *Keywords : a vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana, 1976), 80. In fact, however, Tylor's further argument makes it clear that for him 'civilisation', i.e. 'culture', was unitary, and 'es gehört zu den Mißverständnissen des 19. Jahrhunderts durch das 20., daß Tylors Definition meistens ohne diese Erläuterungen rezipiert worden ist', Fisch, 'Zivilisation', p.758.

¹⁹ E.B. Tylor, *Researches into the early history of mankind and the development of civilization* (London: John Murray, 1865), 1: 'the complex whole which we call Civilization'

²⁰ 'Tylor's actual usage [...] lacked [...] — most symptomatically — plurality', Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 302.

²¹ A. Bastian, 'Allgemeine Begriffe der Ethnologie', in: G. Neumayer (ed.) *Anleitung zu wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen auf Reisen mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Bedürfnisse der kaiserlichen Marine* (Berlin: Robert Oppenheim, 1875), 516-33, pp.525-6.

²² Rudolf Virchow, 'Anthropologie und prähistorische Forschungen' *ibid.* 571-90, p.572.

²³ *Ibid.* 573.

²⁴ Leo XIII, *Inscrutabili dei consilio*, §6, quoted from *Encyclical letter of our Holy Father by divine providence Pope Leo the Thirteenth [...] Authorised Translation* (London: Robson, 1878), 6-7.

²⁵ By the end of the struggle the German Catholic press was giving the term 'Kulturkampf' a meaning diametrically opposed to Virchow's — a battle for the European culture defended for centuries by the Church: Josef Lange, *Die Stellung der überregionalen katholischen deutschen Tagespresse zum Kulturkampf in Preußen (1871-1878)* (Bern: Herbert Lang; Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1974), 298.

²⁶ Nietzsche *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II*, 'Der Wanderer und sein Schatten', §188, I, §148, *Werke*, ed. Schlechta, vol.1, 950, 546-7.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen I*, §1, *Werke*, ed. Schlechta, vol.1, 138-9.

²⁸ W. Geiger, *Ostiranische Kultur im Altertum*, (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1882). The English translation of 1885 has the title *Civilization of the eastern Iranians*.

²⁹ Oscar Montelius, *Die Kultur Schwedens in vorchristlicher Zeit*, translated [into German] by Carl Appel, (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1885). 'Hallstatt-Kultur' and 'La Tène-Kultur' appear in the page-headings on pp.89 and 91, though 'Hallstatt-Periode' and 'La Tène-Periode' are used in the main text. The English translation (by F.H. Woods, 1888) uses 'Civilisation' to translate 'Kultur', and refers only to the 'Hallstatt Period', p.91.

³⁰ 'In the anthropological vision of Boas' generation, "cultures" were of equal value', Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 234.

³¹ Raymond Williams goes too far in asserting: 'It is then necessary, [Herder] argued, in a decisive innovation, to speak of "cultures" in the plural', *Keywords*, 79. Fisch is more exact: 'Jedes Volk hat seine Kultur [...] Dennoch kennt Herder die Pluralform nicht', 'Zivilisation, Kultur', p.711.

³² Geuss, p.36. Geuss rightly, I believe, suggests that the term 'Kultur' (singular or plural), could make no progress in the first half of the nineteenth century in Germany, because that conceptual niche was already filled by Hegel's concept of 'Geist', and that the rise of 'Kultur(en)' is to be associated with a decline in the authority of the Hegelian scheme. However, this should not be taken to imply that Hegelianism somehow smothered a worthwhile development that was struggling to emerge: Hegelianism had little influence at this time in England, France, or Italy, yet none of these invented plural 'cultures' to account for human variety. As we have seen, in the first two thirds of the nineteenth century the term 'Kultur' (and 'culture') implied that contemporary European civilisation provided the standard for all human achievement, and Hegel's failure (or refusal) to use it indicates rather that he had no time for so blinkered an account of what constituted the unity of the human race. When the plural form 'cultures' took over from Hegelianism, the attempt to describe that unity, begun by Herder, was in effect abandoned, and when Troeltsch tried in the 1920s to resume it, in his accounts of the 'crisis of historicism', he does not seem to have thought of looking to Hegel for advice. It may of course be that the unity of all cultural forms, each of which aspires in its own way to universality, cannot be expressed in any particular cultural form (such as a language), but that is precisely the problem of which Hegel's account of 'Geist' shows him to have been aware.

³³ J.G. Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, ed. W. Pross (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), 1, 305 (VIII, 5). My translation adapts the much looser version in Williams, *Keywords*, 79.

³⁴ J.G. Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit in Schriften zur Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst und Altertum 1774–1787*, ed. Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher (= *Werke*, ed. Günter Arnold et al., 4; Bibliothek deutscher Klassiker, 105) (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), 9–107, p.39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.88.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.47.

³⁷ Leo XIII, *Inscrutabili*, §5: *Encyclical letter*, 5.

As for this finding of God, we cannot even look
for Him unless we have
already found Him, and we cannot find Him
unless He has first found us.



"AS FOR THIS FINDING OF GOD...", THOMAS MERTON. PEN & INK, GOUACHE, HAND-MADE PAPER, ARTIST CHARLES LEHMAN

ART: CELEBRATION OF THE SACRED

BY CHARLES LEHMAN

There is a saying that describes the working of a culture in simple terms: “People make holy what they believe and they make beautiful what they love.” This is what an authentic culture does. So too Catholics express their sacred beliefs and their love for them, by reliving them *verbally* in stories and rituals. And this is what Catholic artists have done *visually* from the era of the catacombs until our present time. Artists made beautiful works of art to celebrate their Catholic faith because they came to love what they believed to be holy. They were craftsmen, people who made things well. Through contemplation they were opened by love and inspired to make visible the invisible in new forms.

Authoritative writings of both Christian and Oriental cultures consistently point to “spiritual enlightenment” of the soul as the source of the artist’s inspiration for new forms. Catholic authors such as Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Bonaventure hold — just as traditional Hindu and Buddhist authors — that only two things are required to be an artist: *become a contemplative and develop skills*. They all say it is interior silence, meditation and simple prayer of the heart that open artists to enlightenment, to be literally “in-spired”, i.e. “breathed in-to” by supernatural help, and with the help of skill, to be of service to the inspiration. Thomas Merton described the process of the spiritual life in similar terms, “The mystery of Christ is a dark cloud into which we enter that the Spirit may teach us with His lightning.” He also wrote in *The Sign of Jonas*, “It is not much fun to live the spiritual life with the spiritual equipment of an artist” (p. 241).

The form of the art to be made then rises naturally in the wisdom of an artist with the help of the Holy Spirit or what Oriental cultures call the guardian deity, the “daemon” (and they add, “whom you ignore at your own peril”). An artistic insight leads slowly in time — a quiet, undisturbed development, deep within, that is complex and intimate and cannot be hurried. The German poet Rilke wrote, “Everything is gestation ... and patience.” It is said by Asian calligraphers that their very brushstroke gestures resonate the creative act of the Heavenly Breath, the Spirit of God. Inspired by that Spirit, they see a blade of grass as a gesture. Trees act out what has happened to them. The shape of a flower petal is the sigh of relief as it finally opens. They know you cannot pick a flower without shaking the farthest star.

To give material life to the new form to be created, the artist must learn how to be a skillful worker. This deals with much more than the mechanics. Of course an artist must become proficient with the tools, techniques and designs of the chosen craft, but also learn about the history of the work, as well as “learn how to learn” — the “perennial pedagogy” (get the idea, practice carefully, become self-correcting). Finally, to become a master, the artist is required to give the gift away — to teach. And mastery is not an end in itself but merely an opening to

new authority and qualities.

One scholar wrote “An artist is not a special kind of person. Rather, every person is a special kind of artist.” When you formed your intention to come here, to this exhibition, today, to put aside other concerns, perhaps it was because, in your own way, you recognize making things well is the form life already tends to take for you — you are a craftsman; and perhaps even an enthusiast. You are “God- possessed;” your heart holds the gift of a unique form, one that flows from the joy or sorrow of your life. You must know it is urgent to express it, and perhaps you are already a special kind of artist — with words, or music, or dance, or paint, or glass or wood — perhaps even calligraphy. If not, then begin at the beginning — develop your skills. And with interior silence and simple prayer, listen in the emptiness patiently for the arrival of your inscrutable daemon, your guardian deity. When that happens, do not ignore her; you do so at your own peril! According to Thomas Merton, Saint Thomas Aquinas held that we can only come to know the presence of God dwelling within us through experience of an activity such as interior quiet, the taste of the divine sweetness, the performance of good works, or an act of kindness. I believe, in your case, the interior silence of contemplation and skillful making of your inspired art will provide that same kind of experience and the same result. I believe this is the function of art in a life of faith.

This exhibition offers words with images — possibly the best way to address the human spirit — sometimes in a way that is painterly and sometimes more calligraphic, but never in a way that is perfect. My art is what it is — soft edged colors with hard edged lines, imperfectly made — because I am what I am, a person only *hoping* to make things well and express what I love. But it is all right to like art even if it is not yet near perfect. It’s like loving someone with a crooked nose. Meanwhile, the calligraphy can be viewed but should also be read. See how the edged pen is used to create the writing. The tool defines the result and demands a respectful approach as the scribe learns to write at the edge of the edged pen. It becomes a viewing instrument to see this particular artist in the rhythm of his hand, in the process of movement involving touch and non-touch. Everything else, the power of the literary forms or a well-made letter, is a bonus. Calligraphy is meditative — so for a view of the writer’s soul, watch between the lines of writing to see what moved the scribe to write. Understand and accept the artist’s point of view which made the work necessary. Bring the subject to life in yourself to know how he judged it for his new forms. It is all to be taken personally.

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ICON AS IMAGE OF ASCETICISM AND DEIFICATION

BY DAVID W. FAGERBERG

The subtitle, or alternative title, for this paper could be “ascetic aesthetics.” Besides affording the pleasure of trying to say it rapidly several times in succession, this phrase affords another advantage: it connects the good with beauty as constituent of truth. That is what the icon images through the coordination of asceticism and deification. Let me first state my thesis as concisely as possible, and then we will unpack the idea more slowly.

The ascetical struggles for the good, which is beautiful, and the aesthetic manifests this truth. Plato said beauty is the splendor of truth (from *splendere*, “to shine”). When truth shines, there is beauty. But Paul Evdokimov cautions that splendor such as this “is inherent in truth which does not exist in the abstract. In its fullness, truth requires a personalization and seeks to be enhypostazied [sic], that is, rooted and grounded in a person.”¹ Truth will be fully splended only when it is manifested at the highest created level, which is personhood. In other words, the highest truth, the fullest beauty, the greatest good must shine forth from a person, an *imago Dei*, because the God of which the person is an image is tri-personal himself. Now, iconography deals with personal images. Icons are images of persons become light by participation in the life of the Trinity. Abstract truth is splended in the person. But, alas, before we even begin to attain this, we must deal with the fact that our personhood is wounded. Our humanity must be healed first, then find its completion, and then, when its goodness is recovered, beauty will be revealed. Something is called good, says Thomas Aquinas, when “it has the perfection proper to it.” For example, sharp vision is the good of the eye. So what is a good person? What is the perfection proper to a human being? It is to be deified: to grow from the image of God into the likeness of God. This growth in goodness, by which a human being attains his end, is an ascetical process. Asceticism is the personalization of truth, by the pursuit of goodness, which results in a true person, and iconography is an aesthetic which displays this human splendor. Ascetic aesthetics is the splendor of truth in a deified person.

That is the thesis of this talk in the most condensed language I could manage. We have only to unpack it. To start with, we can be helped with a marvelous illustration that comes from Pavel Florensky’s remarkable book, *Iconostasis*. Here is the passage in its entirety, with a couple of interruptions by me.

Consider. If an artist in depicting a magnet were to be satisfied with showing merely the visible aspect (I mean, here, visible and invisible in the common way of speaking), then he would be depicting not a magnet but merely a piece of steel; the real essence of the magnet — that is, its force-field — would go not only unrepresented but also unindicated (though undoubtedly we would simply imagine it into the representation). Furthermore, when we speak of a magnet, we *mean* the force-field along with the piece of steel — but we don’t mean the opposite: a piece of steel and, secondarily, a force-field.²

In other words, suppose I told you to draw a picture of a bar of steel in the corner of your notebook right now. Those of you who can remember how to make two overlapping rectangles connected by an angle line at the corner points will produce a pretty good looking three-dimensional bar of steel. But have you drawn a magnet? Florensky asks. The essence of a magnet is its force-field; that is what distinguishes a magnet from an ordinary bar of steel. But how do we draw magnetism? On the one hand, we cannot leave out drawing the force field, because that is what makes the magnet a magnet. But on the other hand, we would be “fashioning a visual lie” were we to draw the force field.

Now consider the other approach. If an artist were to use some physics textbook in depicting the force-field as something visually equal to the steel of the magnet, he would thereby be mingling thing and force, visible and invisible, in his representation, and in doing so he would be fashioning a visual lie about the thing as well as misrepresenting the definitive characteristics of the field (i.e., its invisibility and its activating power); hence, he would be showing two untruths about the magnet in his depiction, none of which is the magnet.³

I can draw a bar of steel because it is a visible thing, but how can I draw “magnetism”? This is an aesthetical problem. The word comes from *aisthetikos*, meaning “sensitive,” from *aisthanesthai*, meaning “to perceive, to feel.” Something aesthetic is something perceptible. A melody can exist in my head, but it is not aesthetical music until I am humming it aloud; the form of a sculpture can exist in my head, but it is not aesthetical until I cast that idea in bronze and you can perceive it with both your eyes and your fingertips. The problem here is how an invisible force could be given aesthetic, perceptible expression. To make the force visual would be a falsehood. So Florensky concludes:

Clearly, in depicting a magnet both the field and the steel must be shown; but their depictions must also be incommensurate, showing that the magnet’s two dimensions belong to two different lanes. ... I dare not try to instruct the artist in how actually to represent this unmingled mingling of two planes of existence; but I am entirely certain that figurative art has the capacity to do it.⁴

Since I lack that artistic capacity, I would have to ignore Florensky’s caution and go ahead and add some squiggly lines on each end of the steel to indicate an invisible force. But it would have to be clear that the lines drawing the bar, and the squiggly lines representing an energy, are incommensurate lines; they are different kinds of lines; the straight lines are drawing an object, the squiggly lines are representing something.

Now, Florensky’s point in all this is that an iconographer faces the same — if not an even greater — challenge. The artist was faced with the dilemma of drawing neither steel nor magnetism, but magnetized steel. The iconographer is faced with the challenge of drawing neither a person nor divinity, but a deified person. As Leonid Ouspensky says “The icon indicates holiness in such a way that it need not be inferred by our thought but is visible to our physical eyes.”⁵ But how can one draw “holiness” any more than one could draw “magnetism?” The latter is at least a physical force, a created energy, while the former is a supernatural energy, an uncreated light. This brings Florensky to conclude that we seek:

[T]he representation of the invisible dimension of the visible, the invisible understood now in the highest and ultimate meaning of the word as the divine energy that penetrates into the visible so that we can see it. ... Analogically, then, we can say this: the form of the visible is created by these invisible lines and paths of divine light.⁶

The form of something makes it what it is. The icon is what it is because divine light has made it so. An icon is neither the natural image of a person, nor an abstract representation of glory; an icon is an image of glorified nature. This is what causes the unusual look that an icon has: the iconographer is dipping the bristles of his brush in divine light, not in paint, in order to write the face of a person who has been illuminated by the light of Mt. Tabor, not by the light of the sun.

Hypostasis is the Greek word for person, and the totality of Christian doctrine is summarized in two statements about persons. First, the doctrine of the Trinity states that God is one nature and three persons — one *ousia*, three *hypostases*. Second, the doctrine of the Incarnation states that Jesus is one person and two natures — he is a *hypostatic* union, a union at the level of person. The two natures, says the Council of Chalcedon, remain without confusion, without separation, without change, and without division, and the two natures are united at the level of the hypostatic, the person. The entire battle with the iconoclasts was a matter of getting this straight (which is why the restoration of icons is called “the triumph of Orthodoxy” to this day).

The iconoclasts thought that icons were being used idolatrously, and thought so for one of several reasons. If the icon represented the divine nature alone, it was in violation of the Biblical prohibition of idolatry. If the icon represented both the human and divine natures of Christ, it was because the natures were confused, as the Monophysites did when they said the divine nature absorbed or supplanted the human Jesus. If the icon represented only the human Christ, then the two natures were separated, as the Nestorians did when they would call Mary the mother of Jesus but not the mother of God. What was at stake in the controversy with the iconoclasts was the correct understanding of the incarnation, on which depends the correct understanding of our salvation. Did God become truly man, or not? Was Jesus truly God, or not? The question about what can be written in an icon pressed for a clarification about nature and person.

Ouspensky very helpfully points out that the two sides never could reach agreement because they started with different premises. The iconoclasts understood an image to be of the *same nature* as the thing it represents. They thought the image should be the same as its prototype, and therefore sought to overcome any essential difference between them. By this definition, the only proper icon of Christ is the Eucharist. To the complete contrary, the Orthodox iconodules started from the assumption that the icon is different from the prototype. The iconoclasts thought the Eucharist is an icon because the transubstantiated bread is Christ; the Orthodox thought the Eucharist is *not* an icon because it is truly and substantially Christ, and not an image. If an icon is different from its prototype, then an icon is the painted

image of the person of Christ who exists in two natures. "This is why the Orthodox and the iconoclasts could come to no mutual agreement; they spoke different languages and all the arguments of the iconoclasts missed the mark."⁷

Two theologians arose to address the errors of the iconoclasts. First, Theodore the Studite gave a reply to the charge that iconography is idolatry. He totally agrees that the Bible forbids images of God, the ineffable and invisible One, but says things have changed after the Incarnation. Theodore writes,

Insofar as Christ proceeded from a Father who could not be represented, Christ, not being representable, cannot have an image made by art. In fact, what image could correspond to the Divinity, the representation of which is absolutely forbidden in divinely-inspired Scripture? But from the moment when Christ was born of a representable Mother, he clearly has a representation which corresponds with the image of his Mother. And if He had no image made by art, that would mean that He was not born of a representable Mother, that He was born only of the Father; but this contradicts His whole economy.⁸

The uncircumscribable God became circumscribable. Iconography was not possible until after Christmas.

For He who is uncontainable was contained in the Virgin's womb; He who is measureless became three cubits tall; He who has no quality was formed in a certain quality; He who has no position stood, sat, and lay down; He who is timeless became twelve years old by increasing in age; He who is formless appeared in the form of a man; He who is bodiless, when he had assumed a body, said to His disciples, 'Take, eat, this is my body.' Therefore, the same one is circumscribed and un-circumscribable, the latter in his Divinity and the former in his humanity — even if the impious iconoclasts do not like it.⁹

Iconography is the profession of a true incarnation. And in the incarnation the Son of God became a human being, while losing nothing of his divinity. "When anyone is portrayed, it is not the nature but the hypostasis which is portrayed. For how could a nature be portrayed unless it were contemplated in a hypostasis?"¹⁰

The second theologian to weigh in was John of Damascus, to whom it fell to give a more adequate definition of image. He says simply "An image is a likeness of the original with a certain difference, for it is not an exact reproduction of the original."¹¹ An image is neither an exact reproduction (it is not a clone or a photocopy), nor is it an abstract representation such that no likeness between the image and prototype adheres. Rather, an image is a likeness ... but with a difference.

To make his point, John points to a series of six examples of images. The first is most surprising, so we will go in reverse order, and begin with the last. "The sixth kind of image is for a remembrance of past events" either for honor or shame. "This image is of two kinds, either through the written word in books, for the word represents the thing, ... or through a visible object." The words in Scripture which tell the story of Aaron's rod that blossomed is a verbal remembrance of a past event, and the rod itself inside the ark of the covenant is an object remembering the same events. (This is a concession to the human mind which perceives

immaterial things clothed in analogical material form, so it would be an interesting thought experiment to consider analogical theology as an iconic activity.) The idea of icon in Scripture is also behind the fifth and fourth kinds of image that John mentions. “The fifth kind of image is that which is typical of the future, [for example] the bush and the fleece, the rod and the urn, foreshadowing the Virginal Mother of God ...” Biblical typology that examines the similitude between the Old and New Testaments is iconology in action. And “The fourth kind of image is of the figures and types set forth by Scripture of invisible and immaterial things in bodily form, for a clearer apprehension of God and the angels.” (The relationship between testaments is iconic, so would be an interesting thought experiment to read Scripture iconically, instead of didactically or inspirationally or historically.)

The next kind of image John mentions is known in the west by a Latin phrase: *imago Dei*. “The third sort of image is that by imitation which God made, that is, man.” Recall that an image is a likeness of the original but with a difference, and about man John says, “how can what is created be of the same nature as what is uncreated, except by imitation?” A person has a created human nature, not an uncreated divine nature, yet a person is an image of God by imitation. And the second kind of image gets us into the very mind of God. An artist has an image of the statue in his head before he goes to the marble. In a similar way, “The second kind of image is that foreknowledge which is in God’s mind concerning future events, His eternal and unchanging counsel.” God is immutable, John says, and his counsel has been determined from all eternity. He carries out his plans out at the time preordained by Him, and we can call the figures of what He is going to do in the future, as well as the distinct determination of each of us, images. (It would be an interesting thought experiment to think of theological anthropology in iconic terms, and to iconically think about providence, predestination, and the ordinances of God.)

But the fullest image — the likeness with the least difference from the original — concerns the hypostatic persons of the Trinity. It is different from the other, instituted images, because this is a natural image.

There are different kinds of images. First there is the natural image. In every case it is necessary for a natural image to come first, and only later those images which are made by words or artistic representation. First we have a human being; only then can we have words or pictures. The Son of the Father is the first natural and precisely similar image of the invisible God, for He reveals the Father in His own person. “No one has ever seen God,” (Jn 1.18) and again, “... not that any one has seen the Father” (Jn 6.46). The apostle says that the Son is the image of the Father: “He is the image of the invisible God,” (Col 1.15) ... When Philip says to Him, “Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us,” Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me? Philip, he who sees Me sees also the Father.’ (Jn 14.8-9). The Son is the natural image of the Father, precisely similar to the Father in every way, except that He is begotten by the Father, who is not begotten. For the Father begets, but Himself is unbegotten, while the Son is begotten, and is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the image of the Son for no one can say “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit (I Cor 12.3).¹²

The Son is the image of God the Father, and we can be made into images of the image of God. Iconography is not based upon an artistic theory of representing the transcendent, it is based on a soteriological therapy whereby we become Christoform. When the saint is conformed to the image of the Son of God, it is something more than the third kind of image (the created *imago Dei*). We do have a human, created, religious relationship to God, true; but now we are to receive the Son's own filial relationship to the Father. This is *theosis*, or deification. A block of marble is carved by the artist according to the image the artist has in his mind; that is one kind of image, John of Damascus said, and God had that image in his eternal mind when he created us. But what if the statue were to come alive? What if the created *imago Dei* were now to come alive in full likeness of God? Asceticism is that growth from image into likeness.

The fathers saw this economy slowly unfold across the history of humanity, as well as across individual lives, as a progression from slave to servant to son. Humankind was once obedient in the way a slave is, then dutiful the way a servant is, but now we are invited to the relationship with the Father that the Son has with the Father. It is a movement from the pagan light of conscience, through Mosaic revealed law, to John 15: "I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father" and Romans 8:15: "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." This is not the perfection of a natural human capacity, it is a supernatural gift of grace accomplished through the mediation of Christ, in whose hypostatic union God and mankind are unified. The agent who communicates this to us is the Holy Spirit, which is why the Christian life is called "spiritual." Both the Son's incarnation and humanity's deification are accomplished by the Holy Spirit, as the Nicene Creed professes: the Son was "incarnate by the Holy Spirit" and the Spirit is the "Lord and Giver of Life." This is not religion, it is liturgy.

Now, asceticism is nothing else but the hand of God writing the Son's countenance on our face by the Holy Spirit, so I have taken to calling this process *liturgical asceticism*. "If liturgy means sharing the life of Christ (washed in his resurrection, chrismated with his anointing, eating his body), and if *askesis* means discipline (in the sense of forming), then liturgical asceticism is the discipline required to become an icon of Christ. His image is made visible in our faces."¹³ Asceticism is cooperation with grace's intent for each person. We commonly associate the word "asceticism" with struggle, and there is struggle involved, true, but is struggle with sin in order to attain life, and more life. Asceticism is a struggle to dismantle whatever would hamper the Holy Spirit in us, who is life. Asceticism should not be primarily associated with discomfort, but with growth, in the same way that athletic exercise is not primarily about pain but strengthening. Indeed, that is the root of the word itself. It comes from *askein*, which means "work," in the sense of exercise and practice, and *askesis* came to mean "training," aptly illustrated by the sort of discipline that an athlete undergoes to prepare for a competi-

tion. Hence the monks in the desert were called “spiritual athletes.”

In his *Conferences*, Cassian records a conversation with Abba Moses who patiently explains that “All arts and sciences have some immediate goal or destination (*scopos*); and also an ultimate aim, a *telos*.”¹⁴ The farmer’s immediate goal is to dig out the weeds, but it is toward the *telos* of having fertile crops and living well; merchants purchase stock and risk storms at sea in the hope of profit; the soldier withstands hardships of training, but with the ultimate end of winning glory. So it also is with asceticism, Abba Moses explains.

The ultimate goal of our way of life is, as I said, the kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven. The immediate aim is purity of heart. For without purity of heart none can enter into that kingdom. We should fix our gaze on this target, and walk towards it in as straight a line as possible.¹⁵

Paul uses the very term in Philippians 3.

In Greek the words for ‘press forward to the mark’ are *kata scopon dioko* ... It is as if [Paul] said: ‘With this aim, whereby I forget what is behind — the sins of the old man — I strive to attain to the prize of heaven. ... Then whatever can guide us towards purity of heart is to be followed with all our power: whatever draws us away from it is to be avoided as hurtful and worse. It is for this end — to keep our hearts continually pure — that we do and endure everything.’¹⁶

Asceticism is pressing forward to this mark. Every baptized Christian is placed under this ascetical discipline — it is part of their discipleship — but some Christians live that asceticism in an intensified way (just as all persons should exercise for health but the athlete exercises in an intensified way). My point is that asceticism is not a masochistic term, it is a term for the negative cost of our positive sanctification.

Why is there a cost at all? Because the vices hinder the spiritual life. A person is unresponsive to the Holy Spirit’s movement if the vices have deadened that person, as a dead body is unresponsive to the movement of a soul. The vices obstruct spiritual life by misdirecting a person’s faculties. These faculties were understood in the ancient world to be three in number. A human being is able to think — this is the intellective faculty; a human being can be moved to action by having his ire stirred up — this is the irascible faculty; and a person has appetites that generate desire — this is the concupiscible faculty. These faculties were created good, as all creation is good, but they are capable of corruption if they break out of the order that comes from God. When these faculties are directed to incorrect ends, or operate with improper measure, or are bent (as C. S. Lewis calls our fallen state), then they do not operate in a healthy manner, and the eastern Christian tradition called them “passions.” Evagrius of Pontus summed up the wisdom of the desert by identifying eight evil passions, and organizing them around the three faculties. The concupiscible passions are gluttony, lust and avarice; the irascible passions are dejection, anger, and despondency; and the intellective vices are vainglory and pride. Like a cough is a symptom of tuberculosis, these passions are each a symptom of sinful estrangement from God. St. Isaac the Syrian says that when we say “the world” we simply mean the passions in total. “When we wish to give a collective name to

the passions, we call them *world*. And when we wish to designate them specifically according to their names, we call them *passions*.¹⁷ Asceticism is the name of the struggle that Scripture talks about as overcoming the world — not in its good sense of cosmos, but its fallen sense of rebellion. The struggle is made possible by God's grace, but it is conducted conjointly with a human will that wishes to break free of anything that alienates us from God. The Holy Spirit moves with initiating energy, and asceticism is the person's cooperation. Asceticism comes of the Spirit's energy and our synergy.

If one thinks of each of the passions as a poison, then the opposite virtue can be thought of as an antidote. Puffed up vainglory is deflated by humility; anger thrashing about is restrained by still stronger meekness; the swamp of avarice is drained by poverty and compassion for the poor; and so on. I shall not consider each of these pairings — although the middle ages found great profit in correlating the vices and virtues — but I would like to give a few examples. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (which include women, like Abbess Syncletica or Abbess Sarah) read like a physician's prescription pad about what antidote will cure what passion. For example, avarice is desiring something more than befits its value.

Abba Macarius, when in Egypt, found a man who had brought a beast to his cell and was stealing his possessions. As though he was a traveler, who did not live there, he went up to the thief and helped him to load the beast, and peaceably led him on his way, saying to himself: "We brought nothing into this world; but the Lord gave: as he willed, so it is done; blessed be the Lord in all things."¹⁸

Take despondency, as another example. It is described by Evagrius as "the noonday demon" because,

He presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the soul until the eighth hour. First of all he makes it seem that sun barely moves, if at all, and that the day is fifty hours long. ... Then too he instills in the heart of the monk a hatred for the place, hatred for this very life itself, hatred for manual labor.¹⁹

The cure requires stability, one of the vows of Benedict. As Saint Syncletica admonished:

If you live in a monastic community, do not wander from place to place; if you do, it will harm you. If a hen stops sitting on the eggs she will hatch no chickens: and the monk or nun who moves from place to place grows cold and dead in faith.²⁰

And when a new monk who says he cannot find peace as a hermit, or in community, Abba Theodore encourages him with patience.

Tell me, how many years have you been a monk?" And he said: "Eight." And the old man said: "Believe me, I have been a monk for seventy years, and I have not been able to get a single day's peace. And do you want to have peace after eight years?"²¹

Take gluttony, as a final example. John Climacus calls it "hypocrisy of the stomach" and recommends that you "control your belly before it controls you."²²

An old man said: "One man eats a lot and is still hungry. Another eats a little and has had enough. The man who eats a lot and is still hungry has more merit than the man who eats a little but enough for him."²³

Most of the stories are about the struggle, because most of the time we are struggling. But sometimes a story is included about the successful controlling of a passion. That is a state called *apatheia*. The passions are called *pathein* and dispassion is *apatheia*. Here is a story presented in simple, charming form by Helen Waddell's translation which I think describes a state of calm *apatheia* in the face of avarice and vanity:

There were two old men living together in one cell, and never had there risen even the paltriest contention between them. So the one said to the other, "Let us have one quarrel the way other men do." But the other said, "I do not know how one makes a quarrel." The first said, "Look, I set a tile between us and say 'That is mine,' and do thou say, 'It is not thine, it is mine.' And thence arises contention and squabble." So they set the tile between them, and the first one said, "That is mine," and the second made reply: "I hope that it is mine." And the first said, "It is not thine: it is mine." To which the second made answer, "If it is thine, take it." After which they could find no way of quarreling.²⁴

The Desert Fathers portray the joyful ascetical struggle for purity of heart, understood to mean "to will one thing." And blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. These ascetics went into the desert to perform an experiment upon the human heart and find out the cost of *apatheia*, and they share their discovery with us.

One ministry of the monk is to be a human sacrament of the eschatological truth that runs through world history, like a current runs through the center of the river, moving all the water forward. The monk is a walking billboard for this eschatological dimension; that is why monasticism is essential to the Church. The monk's drastic resignation from temporal things witnesses to those of us who have obligations in the temporal order so that we will not forget the eternal. John Climacus says "The poverty of a monk is resignation from care." The resignation that the spiritual athlete makes in the desert is more dramatic, but the secular Christian has more cares to resign from, since he or she has been entrusted with responsibilities from God, and must carry them out without being sidetracked from the Kingdom. We are charmed in fairy tales by the idea of a mirror by which we could see into the future: the monk is a mirror of the eschaton, and when we look at the face of a saint in an icon we are looking into our future.

This involves a lifetime because persons are a *homo viator*: a being-on-the-way. There is an unfinished quality to each person, an infinite potential. By God's design we are incomplete so that we can cooperate with God in our own self-development. The power to do this is called the virtue — coming from "virtu" meaning "power." As we write our lives we either color our character with the virtues, or smear our character with the vices. We are created with the power to cooperate in our growth into the likeness of God. Patristic theologians expressed this with an interesting metaphor. An artist painting a portrait of the king will usually sketch an outline in charcoal first. When you look at this charcoal silhouette, you will be able to tell it is the king, but the portrait will exhibit a much greater resemblance when the colors are painted in. Gregory of Nyssa describes the painters transferring "human forms to their pictures by the means of certain colors, laying on their copy the proper and corresponding tints, so that the

beauty of the original may be accurately transferred to the likeness.” Now, a person is said to be created in the image of God insofar as he is a charcoal sketch, but our Maker wants “the portrait to resemble His own beauty, by the addition of virtues, as it were with colours.”²⁵ Here is how Methodius speaks of it.

Man had indeed been brought forth “after the image” of God, but he still had not yet achieved such “likeness” itself. In order to complete this task, the Word was sent into the world. First he assumed our human form, a form marred by the scars of many sins, so that we, for whom he took this form, would be enabled on our part to receive his divine form. For it is possible to achieve a perfect likeness of God only if we, like talented and accomplished painters, depict in ourselves those traits that characterized his human existence, and if we preserve them in us uncorrupted, by becoming his disciples, walking the path he has revealed to us. He who was God chose to appear in our human flesh so that we could behold, as we do in a painting, a divine model of life, and thus we were made able to imitate the one who painted this picture.²⁶

This “filling in” by the life of the virtues is goodness coming to be. Remember that Thomas defined the good as being when something has the perfection proper to it. A pen is good when it writes, a knife is good when it cuts, a table is good when it is sturdy and holds the weight it is meant to bear. So what is a good person? I submit that the perfection proper to a human is to join in the life of God. Between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit flows an exchange of love that tradition has called perichoresis. It is a composite Greek word: *peri* and *choreia*, which means to dance around. The Holy Trinity is a divine movement in which each person of the Holy Trinity exists in a mutual, loving indwelling with the other two. Deification involves being taken up into the perichoresis of the Trinity, and becoming a participant in that personal communion of love. (To write out the prescriptions of the moves would be a *choreia-graphē*: asceticism is the choreography of agape.)

This perichoresis has been extended to invite our participation. This has been my operating definition of liturgy, of late: *liturgy is the Trinity's perichoresis kenotically extended to invite our synergistic ascent into deification. It is the prolongation of the Son's agapic descent to simultaneously enable humanity's eucharistic ascent.*

This is a liturgical anthropology, and its aesthetic depiction is the icon. An icon is liturgical art — not meaning in this case that icons are only found inside a church building, or carried in processions, or painted by pious people. An icon is liturgical art because it is the aesthetic expression of a human being's liturgical end, namely sanctification, holiness, sainthood. There is only one sorrow, and that is not becoming a saint. There is only one good for a human being, and that is being filled with the love of God and joining in the choreography of love. Then we become true persons. Our true humanity is a liturgical posture in which the Son's love of the Father becomes ours, and the Trinity's love for every creature becomes ours, as well. Then we look upon the poor not with human sympathy but with divine compassion, we look at our enemies with the same urgent desire for reconciliation that God has when he looks upon us sinners, we look at suffering and feel the same willingness to embrace the cross

that Christ felt. That is when a true personhood will shine forth, and then that one will be a beautiful person. His truth, rooted in this good, will splendor in beauty. When Dostoevsky said "The world will be saved by beauty," he did not mean that humanity will be distracted from its sorrows by pretty things, the way Marx thought religion would distract the masses as an opiate. Dostoevsky meant that the liturgical beauty of a living icon will tell the world the truth about what a good human being is: he is someone who is finished, completed, and has found perfection.

But now we are back to Florensky's problem. How is this ascetical holiness rendered aesthetically visible? C.S. Lewis dealt with a similar question, though not concerning icons, in his essay on "Transposition." It is written as an apologetic reply to critics who say that religion merely arises out of our animal nature: from a projection of our primitive fears, from dreams about the dead, from a Freudian sexual complex, from our animal wonder at the force of life in an ear of corn. The critics say that the mystical sensations religious people claim are the same kind of sensations we have for ordinary feelings. Lewis replies: of course. "The resources are far more limited, the possible variations of sense far fewer, than those of emotions. The senses compensate for this by using the same sensations to express more than one emotion."²⁷ The same feeling may express more than one emotion, because feelings are a lower system and emotions are higher system. "Transposition occurs whenever the higher reproduces itself in the lower."²⁸ For example, the same bodily sensation of butterflies in the stomach, or the hair standing up on the neck, might accompany the higher emotion of either joy or fear. There is no one-to-one correspondence. Transposition is when a richer system is represented in a poorer system, and the only way this is possible is by giving each element in the poorer system more than one meaning. It is like transposing a full orchestral score to be played with only ten fingers on only one instrument, the piano. So we see how the skeptic reaches his conclusion, and where he has made his mistake.

We now see that if the spiritual is richer than the natural ... then this is exactly what we should expect. And the sceptic's conclusion that the so-called spiritual is really derived from the natural, that it is a mirage or projection or imaginary extension of the natural, is also exactly what we should expect, for, as we have seen, this is the mistake that an observer who knew only the lower medium would be bound to make in every case of Transposition. The brutal man can never by analysis find anything but lust in love; ... the physiology never can find anything in thought except twitching of the grey matter.²⁹

To make his point Lewis offers an imaginative illustration. Suppose there was a woman thrown into a dungeon who there bears and rears a son. The son grows up seeing nothing but the dungeon, and perhaps a bit of blue sky through the slant of the window. The mother does not give up hope, so she constantly teaches her son about the outer world which he has never seen. She does so by drawing pictures. "With her pencil she attempts to show him what fields, rivers, mountains, cities, and waves on a beach are like." The son listens carefully, and nods at his lessons, until one day he says something that gives his mother pause.

Finally it dawns on her that he has, all these years, lived under a misconception. "But," she gasps, "You didn't think that the real world was fully of lines drawn in lead pencil?" "What?" says the boy. "No pencil marks there?" And instantly his whole notion of the outer world becomes a blank. ... He has no idea of that which will exclude and dispense with the lines, that of which the lines were merely a transposition. ... The child will get the idea that the real world is somehow less visible than his mother's pictures. In reality it lacks lines because it is incomparably more visible.³⁰

So also with us, Lewis concludes. "If flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom, that is not because they are too solid, too gross, too distinct, too 'illustrious with being.' They are too flimsy, too transitory, too phantasmal."³¹

The mother's challenge was to use two dimensional pencil lines to draw a three dimensional real world. The iconographer's challenge is to use two dimensional brush strokes to draw an infinitely more real world. How can we make the infinitely more real world perceptible on the board of the icon? What technique is required to transpose the higher spiritual reality into a lower artistic medium? What will make ascetical holiness aesthetically perceptible? The tradition has standardized a canon of aesthetic symbols to operate like the squiggly lines around a magnet. We know that the two types of lines are incommensurate: the straight lines depicting the steel represent a visible object, and the squiggly lines depicting a force represent an invisible force. Artistic conventions enable us to perceive of what cannot be seen, can only be felt. Similarly, the iconographic aesthetic canons enable us to perceive what cannot be seen, can only be felt in the company of a saint. The lines on the icon are also incommensurate to the representational art. Some brush strokes are supposed to depict a real person, but some brush strokes are symbolic of a divine energy in that person. There is a large palette of iconic convention to choose from: color selection, a layering from dark to light, geometric circles and triangles and rectangles, proportionality from nose to head to body, facial features of thin lips and large foreheads, a frontal face, halos, architectural convention of buildings, unusual folds in robes that defy gravity, inverse perspectival vanishing points, gold leaf, light that casts no shadows, and always those penetrating, inviting eyes. It is not my place to speak about these aesthetics, for one who comes after me will be able to give you much better insight.

My purpose has only been to suggest that these canons of iconography are the aesthetics of the divine energies. My purpose has been to say that before the iconographer can write the image of the saint on the board, the Holy Spirit must write the countenance of Christ upon the saint. God is the first iconographer. *Graphe* means "to write," as you know from "biography." Biographers write down the life (*bios*) of a person. With every moral act we make, or fail to make, we are each of us writing our own lives (an *auto bios graphe*). But God is the first iconographer, and the God who wrote the law upon two tablets of stone with his finger of fire can write a new life upon hearts of stone with the finger of his Holy Spirit. Then the saint becomes, himself, an autograph of God: *auto-graphe*, written with God's own hand. Liturgical asceticism is *theography*: God writing himself upon us. Before the aesthetical must come the ascetical.

- ¹ Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Redondo Beach: Oakwood Publications, 1990) 24.
- ² Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996) 127
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol 1 (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992) 162. The tenth chapter, "The Meaning and Content of the Icon" is the one of the finest things written on the correlation between the theological basis and the artistic canons of iconography.
- ⁶ Florensky, 128.
- ⁷ Ouspensky, 32.
- ⁸ Theodore the Studite, Refutation 3, ch. 2, sec. 3. This translation is from Leonid Ouspensky's article, "The Meaning and Language of Icons" in *The Meaning of Icons*, Ouspensky & Lossky (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983) 31.
- ⁹ Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981) 82.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.
- ¹¹ John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980) 73.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 75
- ¹³ David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, LTP, 2004) 233-34.
- ¹⁴ Cassian, *The First Conference of Abba Moses*, in *Western Asceticism*, ed. Owen Chadwick (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958) 195.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, Homily Two, trans. by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Boston, 1984) 14.
- ¹⁸ *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, in Chadwick, 177.
- ¹⁹ Evagrius, *Praktikos* 6, *The Praktikos & Chapters On Prayer*, translated, with introduction, by John Etudes Bamberger, OCSO (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981) 18.
- ²⁰ *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, in Chadwick, 85.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 83.
- ²² John Climacus *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (New York: Paulist Press, The Classics of Western Spirituality, 1982) 165.
- ²³ *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, in Chadwick, 128.
- ²⁴ Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972) 142.
- ²⁵ Gregory Nyssa *On the Making of Man*, chapter 5, section 1.
- ²⁶ Found in Schonborn, *God's Human Face* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994) 56.
- ²⁷ Lewis, "Transposition" in *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1980) 63.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Lewis, 64.
- ³⁰ Lewis, 68-9.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*

READING AN ICON: ICONOGRAPHY AS PRAYER AND ART

BY LYNNE BISSONNETTE-PITRE

Iconography as prayer and art



The icon's unique purpose is to generate a dialogue of prayer and communion with The Lord. The icon is a revelation of God created in collaboration with God. Used in the Eucharistic celebration, the icon is the visual Presence of the Word of God and the illumination of sacred scriptures. The icon has three forms: the fresco, the painting on a wood panel, and the mosaic. All forms of the icon are used to teach salvation history and theology.

The icon is not like other art. It is not meant to be a high representation of artistic form and beauty. The icon is not sensual or sentimental. It does not stimulate our emotions or tell us how to feel. The icon is humble, modest, and shyly inconspicuous in imitation of Jesus who was born in a cave in Bethlehem.

The icon represents Christ and the saints from the perspective of the Kingdom of God. Our natural perspective is contaminated by the sin of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve said "No" to God. They thought that acting in opposition to God would give them liberty and self-fulfillment. The Gospel perspective is the inverse of the *natural perspective*. Christ overcame the natural perspective of His human nature and united His will with His Father's will. Jesus shows us that obedience to the Eternal Father is liberty and joy. In imitation of Jesus, the iconographer must overcome his natural perspective and learn to see as God sees.

A holy icon expresses the mystery of the incarnation: the hypostatic union of Christ's divine and human natures. In the incarnation the Eternal Word of God entered time as a human person. Jesus, the image of the Eternal Father assumed our human flesh and became one of us. "The icon represents the Person of Jesus, the God-Man who unites in Himself the two natures without confusion or division" (Ouspensky, 153).



This is an ancient icon of Christ the Lord dating back to the 4th century. It shows the person of Jesus as a humble man with the confidence and authority of the Almighty God. Christ, who is the Word of God, holds the sacred scripture in His left hand. He invites us to know Him in the scriptures. The Lord's right hand is raised in a gesture of blessing. He intends to bless us. As we meditate with this icon we experience the intensity of His joy and love. He invites us into a dialogue of love and offers us His divine assistance to become one with Him.

Contemplation of the icon of the Lord leads us to a consciousness of the Lord's perspective and His purpose for our lives. He wants us to partake of His Purity, and His Holiness. If we say "Yes," His Holy fire penetrates our flesh (Mal 3:2-3) and cleanses it. Eventually we lose the imperfection of our fallen nature and receive the garment of holiness. We are sanctified and become one with Him. This is *deification* and it is the purpose for which we were created.



Jesus said, "I have given to them the glory you have given to me" (*Jn* 17:22). St. Peter in his second letter wrote, "According to The Lord's Divine Power He has given to us new life and godliness; through knowledge of Him, we are partakers of His divine nature; we escape from the corruption of concupiscence" (*II Pet* 1:3,4). The transfigured and deified saint bears the mark of Christ.

The theology of deification and the theology of the incarnation are central to iconography and also to iconoclasm. The Byzantine iconoclasm of the 8th and 9th centuries was a controversy over the reality of the Incarnation and deification. Iconoclasm destroyed the vast majority of the icons made in the first 700 years after Christ. Iconoclasts questioned how Christ, a divine spiritual being with a human body could be represented in the icon. They believed that the only true image of Christ is Christ's Eucharistic body and blood. They argued that art cannot show the divinity of Christ because art can only show the humanity of Jesus. They accused iconographers of heresy and those who venerated the icon of idolatry. In reality it was the iconoclasts who were the heretics because they believed that the person of Jesus is divided into two separate entities, the spirit and the body.

The Orthodox Christians responded to the accusations of the iconoclasts with great clarity. They said the Eucharist is not an image of the body and blood. It is the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. There is a difference between the image which is the icon and the prototype who is Christ. The image — the icon — is distinguishable from the prototype — Christ. The icon of Christ resembles Christ but it is not Christ. The icon does not represent the nature of Christ as divine or human; it represents His Person. His person is a union of His two natures.

Iconoclasm culminated in 730 A.D. when Emperor Leo III of Constantinople ordered the destruction of the Icon of Christ that hung above the Chalke Gate of the Imperial Palace. As Emperor Leo's servant was climbing the ladder to remove the icon, a crowd converged at the gate to stop the destruction of the beloved icon. They shook the ladder and the servant fell to his death. Emperor Leo was enraged. He ordered all icons from homes, monasteries and churches to be confiscated and destroyed. Orthodox priests and bishops were sent into exile for refusing to give their icons over for destruction. Many people were tortured and killed.

In 775 Leo IV, the grandson of Leo III became Emperor. He, like his father and grandfather, upheld the ban on icons. He was even ready to banish his own wife Irene when he learned that she was venerating icons in secret. Leo IV died in 780 and Irene became the regent of the Byzantine Empire. Irene immediately reinstated the veneration of icons and freed the exiled bishops and priests. She also called for an Ecumenical Council.

In 787 A.D. the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, the Seventh Ecumenical Council, reaffirmed the dogma of icons as an essential element of faith and liturgy in the Byzantine Empire. Iconoclasm was condemned as the sum total of all heresies and all iconoclasts were excommunicated. The Council stated,

The icon makes God himself known to us. In the icon of Christ, we contemplate His Divine Person in the glory with which he will return, that is in His glorified,

transfigured face. The images of the saints and above all the Mother of God represent like the image of Christ, a visible prefiguration of the future, the Kingdom of God, a manifestation of His glory in man (Ouspensky, 214).

The victory was short-lasting as a second iconoclastic period erupted twenty-seven years after the Council and continued from 814 - 843. Iconoclasm finally ended in 843 when Theophilis the last iconoclastic emperor died. His Orthodox wife, Theodora proclaimed the restoration of icons. Since then The Orthodox Church celebrates the *Triumph of Orthodoxy* on the first Sunday of Lent. The feast day celebrates the victory of the icon and the triumph of the dogma of the incarnation.

How is it possible to create an icon that demonstrates the theology of the incarnation and generates prayer and communion with God? There are several essential elements and one of them is the iconographer. The iconographer is called to live an ascetic life of prayer and fasting. He must purify himself of everything that blocks the transfiguring light of Christ. His passions, unruly thoughts, and emotions must be brought into the light of Christ through self-examination, confession, and penance. The iconographer must practice chastity of the senses especially chastity of the eyes, and refrain from looking at anything that would mar the purity of sight. To perceive the light of God the iconographer's spiritual eyes must transcend his physical eyes.

The iconographer's life must be focused on the sacraments, the liturgy, and the study of theology and sacred scriptures. The iconographer must be humble and submissive to divine grace. Every aspect of the process of creating the icon must be done in prayer and collaboration with the Holy Spirit. The spirituality of the iconographer is always apparent in his icon. If an icon is of high artistic quality but does not manifest the Presence of God, the icon has no soul and is lifeless. In contrast an icon of lesser artistic quality but created by intense prayer and humility may have great spiritual beauty and impact.

The iconographer consults an ancient icon in order to learn the vision seen by the ancient iconographer. The icon is the fruit of a tradition reaching back 2000 years. When an icon is painted today it follows the tradition patiently worked out by generations and generations of iconographers. An iconographer does not copy an old icon; she prays and meditates with the icon; she studies it to understand its structure and the vision of the Kingdom of God. Then she creates a new and living icon — a new generation from the vision learned from the ancient icon. Little by little the iconographer learns to see the vision of God without the help of the ancient icons. Here are several generations of the icon of Christ



To the left is an icon of Christ the Lord from the 4th Century.

It is one of the few icons from the early centuries that survived the Byzantine iconoclasm. For many years I prayed with a picture of this icon and then in 2003 I created this icon of Christ on the right.





On the left is a 14th Century Russian Novgorod which was the model for the icon on the right that I completed in 2002.



The technique used by the ancient iconographers is the technique best suited to creating holy icons with God's perspective. The rigors of this ancient technique transform the iconographer and are his path to deification. The ancient

technique is so difficult and so humbling that the iconographer must rely on the Holy Spirit. In the beginning I painfully struggled with every aspect of the technique. My teacher said, "There are no technical problems — only spiritual problems." He was right. My problems were pride and impatience. I still make mistakes that are heartbreaking but I can bear them with greater patience and humility than I could ten years ago.

What is the ancient technique? It is egg tempura on wood. The ancient technique uses only natural products. Wood is covered with a cotton cloth and then layered with thin coats of gesso made from rabbit's hide glue mixed with marble or alabaster chalk. The preparation of the gesso requires great care and experience. In the end the quality of the icon depends upon the gesso. Many of my early icons cracked because of my inexperience with the ancient gesso technique.

In order to make a good drawing the iconographer studies ancient geometry because geometry and proportion govern every icon. The square, the triangle, the circle dictate the spatial arrangements within the overall dimensions to create a harmonious design and perfect unity.

The ancient iconographers kept their drawings in order to use them again and again. By the 9th century the drawings were collated into pattern books and passed on to students. The Stroganov family of Russia kept in their possession a pattern book dating from the 17th century. This book contains not only the drawings but also the traditional colors for the garments of each of the saints. This is one of the important reference books for modern iconographers.

Once the drawing is transferred to the gessoed board, the areas to be gilded with gold are painted. Gold leaf is gilded to the haloes and in some icons, to the background. Then the painting begins. The pigments used in painting are finely ground stones, minerals and organics derived from the earth. The pigments are mixed with egg yolk as the tempering medium. Iconographers make the egg tempura by washing the yoke of an egg and then extracting it from the yolk sac. The use of egg tempura is a difficult technique to master but it is considered the only way to attain the luminosity essential to the icon.

Light in an icon is one of the most important dimensions contributing to the icon's transcendent nature. The icon is painted so there is no illusion of three dimensions. There is no illusion of a source of natural light which would shine on all the elements of the icon and cast shadows. The image of the Lord and light are not separate; they are one. The light emanates

from the interior of the Lord and from the Saint and moves toward the viewer. Without this aspect of emanating light, the icon is reduced to an illusion of reality.



To create the emanating light, a special technique of highlighting is used. On the faces and garments four layers of lighter and lighter color are painted culminating with white lines. The white lines are called “Ozivki” meaning “living features.”

Gold also is used to show the light of God. Gold perfectly reflects light and is the symbol of holiness and of God’s Presence in the icon. To emphasize the life of God, gold is used on haloes, clothing, thrones, and sometimes as the background.

When the icon is finished the name of the saint or of the Lord is painted on in calligraphy. The icon must dry for several months and then it is varnished with hot linseed oil according to the ancient technique of “olifa.”

The proper occasion for the blessing of the icon in the Roman Catholic Church is the liturgy of the Eucharist. The icon is placed on and remains on the altar throughout the liturgy. Just after the Penitential Rite the priest recites a blessing for the icon. Then the priest incenses the icon while an antiphon appropriate to the mystery represented in the icon is sung.

To experience an icon, it is necessary to be still and receptive. To read an icon requires knowledge of sacred scripture and of iconic signs. We discussed how light is used as a sign of God’s Presence. Color is also a sign. From antiquity each saint was assigned a specific color for the tunic and for the robe. These colors are seen in the ancient icons and are in the pattern book handed down to us. For example, St. Peter wears a blue green tunic with a yellow robe. Archangel Gabriel wears a red tunic and a blue robe. St. John the Baptist wears a blue green tunic with an olive robe.

Another sign used in icons is perspective. One of the unusual features of the icon is the strangeness of its perspective. Often it is remarked, “They sure don’t have the perspective figured out.” But in fact iconographers do understand how to use perspective; they just do not use the natural perspective. They do not use the three dimensional perspective that we are used to.

The perspective in the modern way of painting is three dimensional or linear perspective (attributed to Brunelleschi who died in 1446) where two parallel lines converge in the distance at a point called the vanishing point and objects in the background diminish in size. This draws the viewer towards the horizon. Perspective in the icon is not the natural perspective. The Kingdom of God is ruled by the Holy Spirit and not by our conventional ideas of what is natural perspective. In the icon this is accomplished by using a variety of perspectives. They are as follows.

1. The linear perspective is used sparingly in the icon and never exclusively.
2. Isometric perspective, used extensively in icons, is drawn with parallel lines remaining parallel. This reduces spatial depth. There is no horizon and objects do not diminish in scale.

Without the illusion of three dimensional space, the event appears to take place in the foreground.

3. The inverse perspective is used in all icons and is the dominant perspective. Parallel lines converge on the viewer. Inverse perspective also includes drawing objects in the foreground as same size or smaller than what is in the background. Noses on the face are smaller than in the natural perspective. The person in the background is often drawn as the same size or larger than people in the foreground. This is in contrast with the linear perspective in which the person in the background is always drawn as smaller.

4. Scenes which take place inside are represented as taking place outside.

With this brief introduction to iconic signs, let's look at several icons and discuss how to read them.

Christ among the Doctors



The icon, *Christ among the Doctors*, from 14th century Russia illuminates the Gospel of Luke 2: 41-52. "And the child Jesus grew and became strong and full of wisdom. The grace of God was in Him. When He was twelve years old He went with Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. After the feast his parents left Jerusalem to return to Nazareth without realizing that Jesus had stayed behind. When they realized he was missing, they looked for Him for three days and finally found Him in the Temple sitting in the midst of the doctors hearing

them and asking question. All who heard Jesus were astonished at His understanding and His answers to the elders' questions. His mother asked, 'Son why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you in great sorrow.' Jesus answered, 'Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?'"

The perspective in this icon seems bizarre unless you can read the signs. Jesus is a boy of twelve years yet He is drawn as much larger than the elders. The walls of Jerusalem on the left are drawn with isometric perspective as is the footstool of Jesus. The scripture says Jesus was teaching inside the Temple but the scene takes place outside the Temple and outside the walls of Jerusalem.

The footstool of Jesus, His throne, the building on the right, and the walls of Jerusalem are all seen as from above. The lines of the building on the right are drawn in inverse perspective so that the lines on the roof of the building, if projected, pass through Jesus and converge in the space in front of the icon on the viewer. These are the signs that God the Father is carefully attending to the event taking place in Jerusalem and especially to His Son and to the viewer.

The roof of the Temple directly behind Jesus is drawn with linear perspective with size diminishing in the background. The Temple of the Hebrews diminishes in size because the Temple foretold of Jesus and now that Jesus has come, the Temple ritual must end.

The mixed and opposing perspectives force us to consider that this is not an ordinary event and Jesus is not an ordinary twelve year-old. The stature of Jesus even as a child is far superior to the doctors and priests in the temple. We are challenged to consider that something

supranatural is occurring.

Notice the faces of the elders of the Temple. In an icon three perspectives of the person's face are permitted: face forward, face in three quarter view, and face in profile. The person is never shown without a face or without eyes and ears. If the person's back is to the viewer, his face will be turned to the three quarter perspective. This is because from God's perspective the person is a communal being — a person in relationship with others and with God. To represent communion of persons and to allow a silent communication with the viewer, the faces must be seen. The eyes and ears are always prominent as the sign that The Lord is always looking into our hearts and listening to our conversations. The saints and angels are also attentively looking and listening to our intercessions and are alert to the action of the Holy Trinity.



The face in profile does not allow communication with the viewer. The face in profile is reserved for those who have broken communion with God and have separated from community. Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ is always seen in profile.

Our Lady of the Sign



Our Lady of the Sign is an ancient type of Marian icon that has been found in the catacombs in Rome. *Our Lady of the Sign* is the iconic representation of the words of Isaiah 7:14, "The Lord shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and His name shall be called Emmanuel." The Virgin's pregnancy with Emmanuel is the promised fulfillment of the prophecy first given to Adam and Eve after their disastrous fall into sin. Genesis 3:15 records, "The Lord said to the serpent: 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed. She shall crush your head and you shall lie in wait for her heel.'" For over 4000 years (as calculated by ancient Hebrew scholars who studied the genealogical records) Adam and Eve and their children longed for the restoration of their relationship with God. They prayed for the woman to be born who would crush the serpent's power over them.

Seven hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah told the Hebrew people that they would know their Redeemer because a virgin would conceive and bear a child and the child would crush Satan's head. After Isaiah's prophecies and until the Annunciation, the prophets and holy families prayed for a female child to be born who would be the virgin to conceive Emmanuel.

According to the Protoevangelium of James, Mary's parents, Anne and Joachim, were very pious people from the tribes of Levi and Judah who had given their lives in service to the Temple and in ardent intercession for the coming of the Redeemer. Their daughter Mary was conceived immaculately and was given by her parents at a young age to be raised in the Temple in Jerusalem. In the Temple Mary was tutored by holy women. Perhaps Anna the prophetess

at the Presentation was one of her tutors. Mary learned the sacred scriptures, the prayers of her people, as well as the art of spinning. Mary left the temple at age fourteen when she was espoused to Joseph of the tribe of Judah.

The sign in *Our Lady of the Sign* is the Incarnation. Mary is pregnant with Emmanuel — “God is with us.” Isaiah prophesied that Emmanuel would be, “The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Wonderful Counselor, and The Prince of Peace” (Is. 8:14). Jesus is shown enfolded in Mary’s robes not as a baby in the womb but as the Son of God. Jesus is clothed in majesty with garments full of light and covered with gold. The Lord’s hands are extended to bless all who look to Him.

Mary’s arms are outstretched to glorify God and to praise Him for sending the promised Redeemer. Her gestures and face express her joy and gratitude for what the Lord has done. She is surrounded by the seraphim who with their fiery red wings behold the Incarnation with great joy. The presence of the seraphim in the icon emphasizes Mary’s stature as more highly honored than the angels and more glorious than the seraphim. Mary receives her glory from her Divine Son and Jesus receives His human nature from His mother. Mary shows us our vocation — to enthrone Jesus in our hearts and to become one with Him.

MP ΘΥ written on Mary’s halo is the abbreviation for “Mother of God.” IC XC next to Jesus is the abbreviation for Jesus Christ. Ο ΩΝ as it appears on the halo of Christ is the Old Testament name of God, *I AM WHO AM*. Mary is always clothed in a robe of reddish brown and a tunic of blue. Mary has three stars on her robe — the sign that she is virgin before, during, and after Christ’s birth.

The Annunciation



The icon of the Annunciation is one of the most ancient festal icons. A fresco of the Annunciation was found in Rome in the catacomb of Priscilla dating to the early 2nd century. The form of the icon has remained basically the same throughout 2000 years. Newer generations of this icon have changed only in details. The icon illuminates the events written in the first chapter of St. Luke’s Gospel (*Luke 1:26-38*).

The book is open before Mary — the sign that Mary has been praying the sacred scriptures. Archangel Gabriel descends from heaven in a posture of running. He holds a staff — the sign that he is the messenger of the Lord Omnipotent. His head is bowed toward the Virgin in recognition of the honor given to her. His facial expression is one of a determined servant of the Most High come to extend the blessed salutation from the Eternal Father and to propose the most solemn and important question in history. His right hand is extended with purpose and strength as he expresses the Divine Blessing, “Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.”

Mary is surprised by the angel’s appearance and his greeting and she asks, “What manner of salutation might this be?” Archangel Gabriel responds, “Fear not Mary for you have found favor with God. You shall conceive in your womb and shall bring forth a son and you will call

him Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord shall give to Him the throne of David his father and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever. And His Kingdom shall have no end." Mary is confident and self-assured. She knows the scriptures especially the prophecy from Isaiah — "A Virgin shall conceive and bear a son who shall be called 'God with us.'"

Mary wonders — is Gabriel simply announcing that she and Joseph in the union of the marriage act will soon conceive a son? Or is Gabriel speaking about the virgin birth prophesied in Isaiah. She asks, "How shall this be done because I am a virgin?" Gabriel's answer contains the profound mystery of the incarnation. Gabriel says, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. And therefore the Holy one born of you shall be called the Son of God." Mary now understands that the Lord is asking her to be the Virgin of the Isaiah prophecy. She bows her head in submission and covers her heart with her right hand in a gesture of joyful acceptance. She submits to the will of God and gives her informed consent, "Be it done to me according to your word."

The fathers of the church were fond of saying, "In the book of Genesis the Lord God said 'let there be ... and the universe was created.'" Mary utters the words, "Let it be" and the Creator came down from heaven and became an infant in her womb. In this joyful icon the supernatural events irrupt into the visual space. The joy is in the colors, the festivity of the details, and the gestures of Mary and the Archangel.

Many signs and types of perspective are used in this icon. The red veil on the baldachin is the sign of the veil that hung in the Temple of Jerusalem — the veil that covered the entrance to the Holy of Holies where the glory of God and the Ark of the Covenant were hidden from all except the Hebrew High Priest. When Jesus was crucified on the cross, the hand of the Lord ripped the temple veil in half. What was once hidden and forbidden is now open to all. The red veil in the icon is the sign that the hidden mystery of redemption is now revealed. Heaven and earth unite in Mary's acceptance of the Will of God and the relationship between God and man is reconciled through the blood of her Son Jesus Christ.

Mary is sitting — the sign of her superiority over the angel. She is the Mother of God and our mother. Her left hand holds the spool of yarn — the sign of honor given to her in the Temple to spin the crimson yarn for the priest's garments. In contrast to the bright, festive colors, and movement of the archangel, Mary is shown with great reserve and restraint. We can rest within the security of her presence.

The blue sphere at the top is the sign of the Eternal Father. The blue stream of light is the sign of The Holy Spirit descending upon Mary to effect in her womb the incarnation of the Son of God.

The archangel does not run through three dimensional space. He alights on a platform painted with isometric lines. The isometric lines push the event into the foreground. Mary's throne, her footstool, the pedestal under her footstool and the pillars holding the baldachin above her are seen as though from above. The Lord is looking down upon Mary with great

favor. The baldachin and the buildings above the archangel are drawn with isometric lines and are seen from below. Mary is looking into heaven. The dynamic interplay of lines and perspectives is the sign that heaven has penetrated earth. The natural perspective is overcome through the Incarnation.

Our Lady of Tenderness



It is said that St. Luke who knew Mary, painted the first icon of *Our Lady of Tenderness*.

In this type of Marian icon only the head and hands of the Mother and Child are seen. This emphasizes the intimacy between them. Their faces are tightly pressed against each other. The Mother and Child are distinct yet inseparable. The Child's full attention is towards His mother as He clutches her veil in his left hand and gazes up at her in childish love and expectancy. He seems to be pulling her towards Himself.

Grace, truth, and omnipotence are hidden in this helpless child cuddling His mother. Mary's gaze is thoughtful and tender as she hugs Him with her left hand. The Child who is the Word of God holds in His right hand the scroll which contains the mystery of redemption. Mary knows Jesus is the Son of God who must suffer for the Redemption of the world and she knows she will not always be able to protect her precious Son. Her right hand is open in a gesture of prayer and adoration. Mary prays for her son and for us and invites us to honor and worship the Christ Child, the promised Redeemer.

The Transfiguration



In iconographic tradition the icon of the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor has the place of honor. Iconographers pray for the Taboric light to transfigure their vision so they can create holy icons.

The icon of The Transfiguration illuminates the scriptures from Matt 17: 1-9; Mark 9:2-9; and Luke 9:27-36. In the historical event of the Transfiguration, "Jesus led Peter, James and John up into a high mountain apart by themselves to pray. Upon reaching the top of Mt. Tabor the disciples were tired and lay down to sleep. When they awoke they saw the glory of His divine nature. His countenance was changed; His face shone like the sun; and His garments were exceedingly white and glittering. Two men, Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about the exodus that He would accomplish in Jerusalem" (Luke 9).

In the icon Jesus stands on Mt. Tabor conversing with Elijah and Moses concerning His coming exodus, His crucifixion at Jerusalem. Why is Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah? There are several reasons. Moses and Elijah are residents of heaven. Moses died, was buried and was taken into heaven by the Sovereign Power of God. Elijah never died but was assumed directly into heaven on a fiery chariot.

Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the prophets who foretold the coming of Christ into the world. Both Moses and Elijah led an exodus of the Israelites. 1500 years before Jesus was born, Moses led the exodus of his people out of slavery in Egypt. He established the children of Israel in the covenantal relationship with God through God's Law. Elijah the prophet lived 870 years before Christ. Elijah led the exodus of the Hebrew people out from slavery to idolatry and back to the covenantal relationship with God.

On Mt. Tabor Moses and Elijah talk to Jesus about the coming exodus of His cross that will make all things new. The crucifixion of Christ will liberate men and women from slavery to Satan and lead them to the highest and best God has intended for them: sanctification and deification. Moses is on the right holding the Book of The Law given to him on Mt. Sinai. His right hand is extended in adoration towards the Son of God. Elijah on the left extends both hands and bows his head in praise and adoration.

The transfiguration of Jesus reveals the Holy Trinity. Jesus stands within the mandorla of Taboric light which is the splendor of the Holy Trinity. Three rays of light — the sign of the Holy Spirit — emanate from the outer circle of the mandorla and fall down upon the three apostles to bless and illuminate them. The Father's voice is heard saying, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him."



The mandorla is black in its center — the sign of the unknowable and invisible essence of God. St. Timothy wrote, "No man has seen or can see God who dwells in inapproachable light" (Tim 6 15-16). The essence of the One Eternal God is hidden and inaccessible, unknowable and inconceivable. As the light emanates out from the dark center of the mandorla it is transformed into a light that is visible. The Metropolitan of Nafpaaktos Hierotheos said, "God is light, not according to His essence but according to His energy" (Saint Gregory of Palamas

in Williams, 69). God is knowable in His energies. His energies are His manifestations, actions, and revelations. By His energies He created the universe and the beginning of time out of nothing. He reveals Himself in His energies while simultaneously remaining a mystery in His essence. Jesus had hidden the glory of His divine nature from His disciples until now. On Mt. Tabor, Jesus reveals Himself as the union of two natures, God and man.

Below Jesus are James, John, and Peter who have been struck by fear. The event is too astonishing, too supranatural to assimilate. His countenance was altered; his face shone as the sun and his eyes were like flames of fire (Rev 1:14). His garments were as white as snow (Matt 17:2). On the left is the apostle James, the son of Zebedee. James is so overcome by the light of Christ's glory that he falls backward. He holds his head in both hands as a gesture of extreme consternation. His mind is reeling but he doesn't take his eyes off Jesus. James's younger brother John is in the center. He too has fallen. John covers his eyes. The light is too bright; the experience too terrifying. He cannot look at the face of Christ

Peter, on the right, has already recovered from his fall. He kneels and gazes in astonishment. His right hand is outstretched in a gesture of prayer and adoration. Peter realizes that Jesus wants him to participate in this event and Peter wants to obey but he does not know what to do. Peter says to the Lord, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tabernacles — one for you and one for Moses and one for Elias. But Peter didn't know what he was saying because he was struck with fear" (Luke 9:4-5).

Peter, James, and John were the only disciples chosen by Jesus to attend His Transfiguration. Because of the Transfiguration they knew that Jesus is in His Person the union of both God and man. This prepared them for the Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and for His passion in Jerusalem.

The Taboric light of the Divine Presence spills out upon Moses and Elijah, upon the disciples and upon the rocks and moves out towards the viewer. Christ's redemption affects all of creation. The historical event from 2000 years ago enters the present moment and the viewer is caught by the astonishment of Christ's glorious transfiguration. The icon becomes the place of a dynamic encounter between the viewer, the Lord and the saints.

Praying with icons unveils the power of the Gospel and facilitates our experience of the Lord's Presence. When we experience the Lord's Presence, an intuitive knowledge arises within us that we can't attain through intellectual studies. Pope Benedict XVI refers to this knowledge as face to face knowledge. Pope Benedict said, "We must learn to see Christ So that we know him not only in words and not only because we have heard others speak about Him but truly know Him face to face. Being struck and overcome by the beauty of Christ is a more real, more profound knowledge than mere rational deduction. To reject as a true form of knowledge the impact produced by the response of the heart in the encounter with the beauty of Christ would impoverish us and dry up our faith and our theology" (Ratzinger, 2002).

The icon is generated in prayer and the icon inspires prayer. Praying with icons purifies our vision and our heart and leads us to a deeper knowledge of God. When we study and meditate upon an icon, our understanding of theology, sacred scriptures, and salvation history is enlivened.

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THE IMPACT OF MORALITY, SELFLESSNESS, AND JUSTICE

IN EMILE ZOLA'S *LADIES' PARADISE*



BY ELISE MOENTMANN

On the surface, Emile Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*, or *The Ladies' Paradise*,¹ is pure secular literature, a novel about unbridled capitalism and consumerism, and their social, economic, and cultural impact on Paris in the 1860s. Religion is barely mentioned in the novel, its most prominent role being the participation of the archbishop of Paris in the opening of a new department store. Zola describes the blessing of the store in crass terms, as an admirable ploy to gain publicity for the new store, but in no sense as having any real spiritual significance. In fact, organized religion, department store employees, and consumers alike are all treated as pawns in the game of money making. Furthermore, no characters ever discuss religion or even God, and on their free Sundays, the shop clerks enjoy a day frolicking in the countryside or playing music, never mentioning the possibility of attending a church service. The bells of St. Roch peal in the Parisian neighborhood which surrounds the store, but no character ever seems tempted by the bells to enter the church. Likewise, immorality runs rampant throughout the novel, especially in terms of seemingly rapacious consumer and sexual desires.

Despite this seemingly godless world that Zola creates in *The Ladies' Paradise*, it is possible to find some revelation of the sacred within its pages. The main character, Denise, the provincial shop girl who hopes to find a better life for herself and her brothers in Paris, consistently rises above the milieu of immorality and injustice in which she finds herself, despite periodic persecution and hunger. Eventually, through Denise's obstinate refusal to compromise her morality and dignity, as well as her ability to remain true to the golden rule and turn the other cheek, she transforms the world around her, and the world of the "Ladies' Paradise" becomes more moral and just. Thus, in the anti-clerical atmosphere of early Third Republic France, Zola offered a novel that revealed the importance and impact of key Christian values while rarely mentioning religion itself.

Almost from the beginning of the novel, as Denise arrives in Paris from the French provinces and begins working at "The Ladies' Paradise," Zola presents her as different from those around her. For fellow shop clerks and store managers alike, Denise becomes an object of derision, ridicule, petty jealousy and regional prejudice.² Her co-workers make her the subject of idle gossip. They critique her dress, hair, shoes, and even her facial beauty and figure, or lack thereof, and actively disrupt her work. Her fellow saleswomen attempt to keep Denise from waiting on customers, determined to have the new girl "do her time" before gaining commissions and ridiculing her for nervous attempts to be useful.³ With one or two exceptions, such treatment continues for Denise well beyond her first few weeks at the store. Similarly, the store's upper-middle-class customers treat Denise as someone beneath them and unworthy of

even basic kindness. Madame Desforges, in her jealousy over shop owner Mouret's growing affection for Denise, is especially cruel.⁴

While Denise is wounded by such persecution from both her fellow employees and the store's higher-class customers, she is never defeated by it and never resorts to retribution. Denise stands out in the novel as the one character to transcend what Zola seems to view as the easy, even instinctive response to return cruelty with cruelty. Rather, Zola portrays Denise as rising above the pettiness that surrounds her, following the moral injunction to turn the other cheek, and treating others with the respect that she wishes for herself. In fact, by the end of the novel, Denise even seems to have forgiven her fellow employees for their earlier treatment.

Likewise, even after coming to Paris, Denise continues to live a chaste life, never succumbing to the temptations that surround her. Zola's department store workplace is filled with interpersonal intrigue, less romantic than sexual in nature, including and especially store owner Mouret himself. The first time that Zola has the reader meet Mouret, he arrives at the store one morning before it opens in the same clothes in which he had left the previous evening, having stayed up all night in entertaining pursuits.⁵ So commonplace is such behavior that when Denise's financial situation grows precarious, her one female friend in the store, Pauline, encourages Denise to take a lover to ease her burden.⁶ Thus, for many working women in Paris, involvement with a male companion seems to have had the practical value of enhancing financial stability. Reflecting the hypocritical morality of the second half of the nineteenth century in much of the western world, the so-called Victorian Age, Zola describes the department store itself as a paternal protector of its female employees and their virtue by providing living quarters above the store and setting strict rules for their social behavior within these quarters. No regulation was possible, however, for their behavior outside of these residences, and Zola details the sexual affairs of much of the department store's staff, both female and male. Zola was criticized by many in the French literary world for depicting such sexual liaisons in his novels, but Zola believed himself to be the conscience of his time, revealing what he saw as an increasingly immoral and corrupt French society.⁷

Despite the overwhelming personal and practical advantages of taking a lover, Zola keeps Denise virtuous throughout, eventually even resisting the propositions of Mouret himself. Denise's continual refusal to accept his offer to be his mistress confuses the store owner, as she "was the first one who did not yield."⁸ Zola writes that Mouret asked Denise twenty times to be his mistress, increased his offers of money, and offered her a better position in the store thinking that she wanted influence and power. The singularity of Denise's righteousness is exemplified not only in Mouret's bafflement, but also in the shocked reaction of the store employees upon learning that she had resisted the owner's continual offers.⁹ So surprised are they that many shop clerks question Denise's motivation for refusing Mouret, and even her friend, Pauline, expresses anger at Denise's stubborn, seemingly impractical, righteousness. Throughout the final quarter of the novel, as Denise's influence in the store grows, her fellow

employees continue to suspect falsely that she has given in to Mouret, seemingly unable to comprehend that any woman could or would resist the lure of power and wealth that might come with such a relationship. Thus, Zola suggests that Denise's moral fortitude was a rarity not only in the milieu of the department store itself, but even in the broader Parisian society at large.

Beyond Denise's virtuous personal qualities, Zola also uses his protagonist as a mouthpiece for regulated capitalism that emphasizes justice and fairness in the workplace. Through much of the novel, Denise is torn between the practices of her employer and the old ways of commerce practiced by her uncle Baudu and his fellow small shopkeeper Bourras, who lament not only the loss of their businesses to the larger department store, but also what they believed to be a more just, personal relationship with both their employees and their customers. Baudu, in particular, focuses his wrath on the unjust treatment of employees at the larger store.¹⁰ Such criticism seems more than valid as Zola describes a complete lack of job security through the department store's practice of dismissing employees during the slower months of summer. He also relates the employees' ever-present fear of being summarily dismissed for the slightest mistake. In short, while the environment of the department store may have been cleaner and less arduous than a factory, the shop clerks' existence was no less precarious.

Despite the problematic situation of the department store workplace, however, Zola seemed to accept that the newer business practices were not going away. He often describes Denise as enthralled by the large store and its displays of merchandise, and she attempts in vain to explain to her uncle and Bourras the value of the new commercial practices. Despite her ultimate embrace of the new ways, Denise works to improve the unjust employment practices as soon as she realizes that she has the influence to do so. Denise advocates for higher salaries, holidays granted during the slow season instead of dismissals, accommodations for pregnant saleswomen, and an employee savings plan.¹¹ Similarly, Denise helps to improve the work environment itself through enhancing the lives of the employees. These enhancements include the formation of leisure areas for the employees, the establishment of a store library and evening classes in such subjects as languages and geography, and the hiring of a store doctor who would offer free services to employees. Thus, instead of treating those who persecuted her in kind, when Denise eventually acquires power and influence within the store, she advocates for key policies that would make life better for the very people who tried to defeat her.

Based on such characteristics, it seems clear that Zola used Denise as a model for moral human behavior and an advocate for more just social policies. Zola was well-known, however, for his critique of the Catholic Church and his support for the anti-clerical policies of the early Third Republic.¹² The question that begs to be asked, therefore, is whether Zola intended for Denise's moral behavior, forgiving spirit, and concern for justice in the workplace to be synonymous with basic Christian ideals both for the individual and society.

In attempting to answer such a question, one must recognize that Zola was a product of his time in regard to experience of and overall thoughts towards religion. Like many nineteenth-

century French intellectuals and artists, Zola was raised in the Catholic Church and even attended Catholic primary and secondary schools in Aix and in Paris.¹³ Following the typical pattern of the age, however, Zola seemed to fall away from practicing Catholicism by his late teens. As he grew older, he increasingly saw established religion generally as problematic, but the Catholic Church in particular drew his ire for what Zola deemed as too much emphasis on tradition, dogma, and the power of the Church and too little emphasis on God, spirituality, and the growing issues of social justice in the modern age.¹⁴ Furthermore, as a staunch Republican, he strongly condemned the Catholic Church's support for Louis Napoleon's coup in December, 1851 and became an avid supporter of anti-clericalism in France for the rest of his life.¹⁵

Such an assessment of the Catholic Church eventually developed into a critique of organized religion as a whole, and Zola more and more put his faith in science and a belief in scientific determinism.¹⁶ As is evidenced in his *Rougon-Macquart* series of novels, to which *The Ladies' Paradise* belongs, Zola struggled with an understanding of the impact of heredity and environment on people's lives. In many respects, Zola's emphasis on determinism throughout much of his middle years is reflected in many of his novels through a prevailing pessimism toward the ability of human beings as individuals to overcome their circumstances and toward the ability of French society as a whole to pull itself out of what Zola saw as its physical, social, and moral decline, especially after the loss in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the divisions created by the Paris Commune of 1871.¹⁷ Based on such evidence, it seems unlikely that Zola would have intended for Denise to reflect basic Christian values.

As several Zola scholars have pointed out, however, to understand Zola solely as a pessimist regarding human will and as thoroughly disconnected from issues of faith and spirituality would be a serious misreading of Zola's complex struggles with questions of meaning and purpose in life. In particular, Zola vacillated considerably throughout his adult life between pessimism and optimism about the nature of human beings, often combining the two in his writing.¹⁸ *The Ladies' Paradise* certainly reflects both, as Zola saddles most of his characters with such vices as gossip and harsh judgments of others, immoral behavior, and uncontrollable consumption. In contrast, the virtuous and selfless Denise seems to be among those of Zola's many characters who most reflect optimism about humanity. In fact, Denise escapes Zola's typical deterministic emphasis, as she seems to have little heritage to influence her. All we are told about Denise's past is that she came from the provinces where she worked in a small dress shop, was orphaned as a young adult, and brought her two younger brothers along to Paris to search for their uncle.

Similarly, Zola scholar Philip Walker explains that even throughout what might be considered the most irreligious phase of his life, Zola continued to believe in the idea of finding a connection to God through science and nature.¹⁹ Furthermore, in all of his works, he emphasized moral behavior and the search for human truths. Ultimately, however, after the death of several key people in his life, especially his mother, Zola found his particular form of Deism

unsatisfying in providing a spiritual connection to something beyond himself and an answer to the purpose of life and death. Thus, Zola's lifelong struggle with spirituality, the nature of God, including Christ, and his own connection to a higher purpose suggest that theological, even Christian themes were ever-present in his mind, even if he was not writing about them directly. In fact, his last two series of novels, *Les Trois Villes* and *Les Quatre Évangiles*,²⁰ dealt specifically with such themes, even as they continued to reflect Zola's critique of the Catholic Church as an institution.

Thus, whether conscious or not, Zola's ever-present quest for Divine truth and its revelation in the world around him are reflected in *The Ladies' Paradise* through the character of Denise. Her unwavering virtue, selflessness, and capacity for forgiveness represent the ideal for human behavior. Had he followed a more pessimistic view of humanity, Zola might have had such ideal behavior be superceded by the prevailing immorality and injustice that surrounded Denise. Instead, Zola ends the novel on the optimistic note of the triumph of the ideal behavior, especially as Denise is able to redeem and transform the micro-society around her into a more just place to live and work. Thus, in *The Ladies' Paradise*, Zola uncovers a truth about human life in general, that moral decisions and the just treatment of others can transform human lives and reveal the existence of a power greater than ourselves.

¹ Emile Zola, *The Ladies Paradise* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

² Zola, 50-51.

³ Zola, 80-84; 100-103.

⁴ Zola, 228-229; 275-285.

⁵ Zola, 30.

⁶ Zola, 115-116.

⁷ Alan Schom, *Emile Zola: A Bourgeois Rebel* (London: Queen Anne Press, 1987), 101; 138.

⁸ Zola, 265.

⁹ Zola, 296.

¹⁰ Zola, 23.

¹¹ Zola, 316-317.

¹² Schom, *Emile Zola*; See also Philip Walker, *Germinal and Zola's Philosophical and Religious Thought* (Philadelphia: Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984).

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¹⁸ Przybos, "Zola's Utopias," 169-187.

¹⁹ Walker, *Zola*, 150.

²⁰ Emile Zola, *Les Trois Villes: Lourdes, Rome, Paris* (Paris, 1894-98); *Les Quatre Évangiles* (Paris, 1899-1903).

SACRED IMAGINATION
IN MICHAEL MCLAVERTY'S
THE POTEEN MAKER

■
BY DAVID SHERRER, C.S.C.

Michael McLaverty's short story, *The Poteen Maker*,¹ gives us a picture of a small school in County Down in what would become Northern Ireland. The time of the story is, perhaps intentionally, vague. The teller of the story, though apparently an adult at the story's end, sees the events as he did when a young student in Mr. Craig's classroom. He is perhaps ten years old and, consequently, aware of his greater surroundings (including what we would think of as the historical setting of the story) simply as a world to be taken for granted. The reader sees the details of the story from a different perspective, but the method of the story indirectly supports this more sophisticated viewpoint lest the reader overlook precisely the issues that are important.

The title of the story itself tends to emphasize this dual perspective and its implicit double set of values. An Irish reader readily understands the implications of the title and is undoubtedly struck by the increasingly ironic setting and its characters. A reader unfamiliar with the Irish term in the title, even if otherwise sophisticated, enjoys the more limited perspective of the narrator and his classmates. The story is richer precisely because, at one level, these young boys do not know what is going on.

The characteristics of the setting emphasize the innocence and lack of experience enjoyed by the young boys in Mr. Craig's class and immediately establishes a distinction between their view of their teacher and the one commonly held by their elder neighbors. That the boys are young and unaware of the ways of the world is simple enough in itself. They recognize some of the quaintness of their schoolroom and of their schoolmaster's habits, but this recognition does not ascend to judgment. The school is ramshackle, a two-room building unimproved by the conveniences of the day. It not only has characteristics of an era earlier than that in which the boys themselves live, it is a place they find instinctively more comfortable, precisely because of its primitive character. The names carved in the trees surrounding the building suggest a continuity of community with earlier generations that the boys do not find, perhaps, in their own families.

Moreover, the limitations of the old building demand a certain solidarity among the students themselves. They need to help in protecting themselves and each other from the drafts, from the intruding raindrops, and from the winter season itself (the season of the school year). The narrator clearly finds privilege in being asked to fetch an occasional bucket of coal from the town. And Mr. Craig emphasizes this privilege by his contribution of a small tip that allows the boy to purchase a treat for himself. When the increasing harshness of the winter is accompanied by the theft of the school's supply of coal, there is a faint implication of increasingly difficult times in the world abroad.

The schoolmaster, Mr. Craig, is both a natural part of this detached and privileged life the boys enjoy and an enigma. They cannot understand his motivation in withdrawing on occasion from the schoolroom to spend a few minutes in the harsher climate outdoors, and they take advantage of the absence of his controlling presence to engage in noisy behavior that brings an admonition from the neighboring schoolmistress, but neither do they seek pernicious motivations for his absences. They seem to concede to him the mystery that belongs by right to adults.

Into this setting the narrator introduces the stories of the “lessons of Science,” the presentation of the Bunsen burner with its gas-fed flame, and the project that Mr. Craig refers to as “*Evaporation and Condensation*.” This lesson, which Mr. Craig repeats over and over again to the delight of the boys, becomes, of course, for the informed reader the revelation of the significance of the title of the story. Mr. Craig supposedly teaches his class how to produce a draught “as pure as crystal” from “the dirtiest of water,” and demonstrates his achievement by drinking the product in front of the class. This is the central part of the story’s irony. What Mr. Craig has produced, of course, is a liquid known in this country as “white lightning,” an unflavored and undiluted potable alcohol common among those who make whiskey free of government regulation and taxation. In Ireland the product is known as “poteen.”

The height of the irony seems to come when the school inspector arrives. The reader might be immediately reminded of William Butler Yeats, who held a position as a school inspector at almost exactly the time of this story. This story does not exploit that identity, but there are implications about the incident that suggest a division in public judgment in Ireland about the evils or benefits of alcohol.

The story itself, however, seems not to be focused on the regulation of alcohol or its abuse but on a community that is associated with the school, the schoolmaster, and on his use of his talents to draw his class together in an environment in which they feel at home. The boys not only love their ramshackle school but, in the best sense of the word, they love their teacher. By implication they love the kind of learning that brings them together. Mr. Craig and his poteen-making suggests a sacrament through which he saves the lives of the young committed to his care, and leads them not only to love learning but to love one another (and himself).

The final paragraph of the story reverses the irony that has dominated the narration thus far. The time of this part of the narrative remains as vague as what we had known in the main part of the story, but now it is later and the narrator has returned to the village of his youth to attend the funeral of his old schoolmaster. One assumes the narrator is now an adult, and consequently Mr. Craig, whose death was prematurely being predicted in the opening of the story, has survived more years than expected. The narrator passes the old school, somewhat renovated now, but it is a school from which “home-going children” have to be prevented by a barrier “from rushing headlong on to the road.” The new, young teacher has “an array” of fancy colored pencils in his breast pocket, a sign of the more modern educational technologies that fail to draw students into the community of life. The story affirms that the older, quainter

cultural values represented by Mr. Craig transcend the more superficial technological advances suggested by the colored pencils of the new teacher. Despite improvements in the school building itself, school children of this new world are eager to be free from its influence.

¹ This story is found in *Collected Short Stories* by Michael McLaverty (Poolbeg Press Ltd., 1978). It is also conveniently available in *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories* edited by William Trevor (New York: Oxford University Press [1991], pp. 382-387).

POPE BENEDICT AND DANTE: LOVE IN THE MODERN WORLD

■
BY REV. STEPHEN C. ROWAN

On Christmas Day 2005, Pope Benedict signed his first encyclical, which he entitled “God is Love.” With respect to the Holy Father, the title does not sound too promising. To say “God is love” may not seem to be saying anything extraordinary at all. It seems too much like old news, even if it is good news. Pope Benedict himself acknowledges that this may be the case when he says that the word love is “so tarnished, so spoiled, and so abused that one is almost afraid to pronounce it with one’s lips” (Zenit.org 1/23/06).

And yet, he claims, the insight that “God is love” is needed now more than ever. It can enlighten our path through a world that seems torn apart with greed and violence, and “in which we [even] witness the abuse of religion [itself] to the point of culminating in hatred ... [w]e are,” he says, “in need of the living God who has loved us unto death.” And that is why Benedict offered the world his first encyclical — an extraordinary analysis of love in our time. A month after publishing the encyclical, Pope Benedict explained to a meeting in Rome that a major influence on his thinking had been the 13th century poet Dante Alighieri: “I wished to express in our time and to our existence,” he said, “something of what Dante audaciously recapitulated in his vision”: namely, the transforming insight of faith that God is love.

We do not need to know Dante’s *Comedy* to understand the Pope’s letter, but the two texts illuminate one another in wonderful ways. For that reason, it is interesting, illuminating, and even exciting to consider the thoughts of a 21st century pope and an early 14th century poet on the topic of love, presented in three parts: the first, a summary of Benedict’s and Dante’s idea of love; the second, some ideas about love from contemporary culture that compromise or even undermine an authentic understanding of love; and the third, Benedict’s reflections on how Christian love must seek to show itself personally and practically in the world today. Throughout his letter, the pope emphasizes how love makes a difference to human existence — how it is what he calls “transforming” love. Benedict’s philosophical bent is existential — an outlook that emphasizes human belief and human choice, exercised in the course of human encounters in such a way that as they are exercised, a person grows or diminishes as a person. What we do in deed affects who we are and what we become. Since Benedict’s philosophy is a kind of Christian existentialism, he ponders above all the human encounter with God — made possible because of God’s encounter with humans — and he claims that the way into a meaningful and authentic life, a life lived through the service of love, is made possible through love of the loving God that one encounters in faith. But what does it mean to love? Can we look again at a word that has become so tarnished, so spoiled, and so abused and recover a fresh and authentic understanding of it?

For Pope Benedict, as for Dante, there are two movements to love. The first movement is called “Eros” or “ascending” love — the movement of attraction toward someone other than

ourselves. Eros takes us out of ourselves sometimes in a moment of ecstasy — and makes us into a new person. Suddenly we are no longer keeping to a set schedule or following a dull routine or even eating regularly or sleeping soundly. We are in love and, friends might even say, we seem ridiculous.

Erotic love is the kind that Dante felt at first for Beatrice — a woman one year older than himself — whom he encountered one day on the streets of Florence, and who so impressed him with her graciousness and beauty that it took all that he had in him to go home, fall on his bed, and moan about it.

Years later, writing about his encounter with Beatrice in his book *La Vita Nuova*, Dante admits that he cut a ridiculous figure. The very sight of Beatrice made him weep, lose sleep, and become distracted. He wrote poems about his feelings, but he kept his love secret, not wanting to force himself on her or risk rejection. Dante was a new man, but hardly of any use to himself or others. Erotic love held him firmly in its power, and while Dante was no longer the man he used to be, while he could tell that Beatrice held out the promise of a new life for him, he was still a man who focused only on his own feelings, and those feelings were making him merely miserable.

Pope Benedict calls erotic or ascending love “an indeterminate or searching love” (§6). It is a longing for something beyond the self, but so long as it focuses merely on the needs of the self, erotic love will be not much more than an itch that needs scratching. Erotic love is close to what St. Augustine calls concupiscence — the desire to assert the self outside of the self merely for the sake of the self. Eros can start a person on the road to true love but Eros alone leaves a person unsatisfied and always on the search for something more, like those paragons of the restless libido — Don Giovanni or Casanova — or like the two lovers in Dante’s *Inferno* — Paolo and Francesca, who are blown about by the winds of lust, always in search of what is next — a never completely, or contentedly, embracing what is.

The remedy for Eros is “agape” — the name for love when it descends toward the other in a freely-chosen act of self-giving. Agape, also known as oblation or sacrificial love, focuses not on the self but on the other — the good of the other — and seeks to serve the good of the other in deed. That is what Dante discovered that he had to do if his love for Beatrice was to become life-giving for him. Instead of sighing or moaning about her — depending on whether she smiled at him or not — Dante decided that he could do something within his power to show his love for Beatrice, and whether she returned his favors or ignored them, he could praise her beauty and her virtues for their own sake. In this way, Dante sacrificed his talent by devoting it to Beatrice and, in sacrificing it, he brought it to life under her influence. He wrote the *Divine Comedy* for her so that, as he promised himself, he could say in praise of her what had never said of any woman.

The wisdom of Pope Benedict is to show that Eros and agape belong together. They complement one another. As Benedict says,

Eros and agape — ascending and descending love — can never be completely separated. The more the two in their different aspects find a proper unity in the one re-

ality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if Eros is at first mainly covetous and ascending, fascinated by the great promise of happiness, as it draws near to the other and freely chooses to give itself for the other, it becomes less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the good of the beloved, bestows itself and wants to “be there for the other” (§7).

Eros and agape are essentially related to one another — two movements of the same symphony. More than that, Benedict issues a wise reminder about love — something unusual for a Pope or any moralist, I think: “Man,” he says, “cannot live by oblation, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift” (§7). And then quoting Jesus from the gospel of John, he says, “Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow. Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God” (§7).

Love, then, is a reality with two different but complementary dimensions. Each is necessary for the other. Biblical revelation is radical because it shows that God is love in both of these senses. God goes out of himself, electing Israel and through Israel all people, to become a people who love him in return. God seeks the love of what is not himself, and for that reason his love can be called erotic. And yet the love of God is also fully and simultaneously oblation, shown especially in the act of forgiveness, when God continually renews the covenant with his people, Israel, who forsake him many times in their history. Above all, God’s forgiveness of all humanity — his desire that we find our way back to him — is shown in the death of Jesus on the cross. And that forgiving love is communicated to us even now in the Eucharist, through which we share in the oblation love of God by sharing in his body, given for us, and his blood, shed for us.

As Pope Benedict says, unlike the unmoved mover of Aristotle, our “God loves, and his love may certainly be called Eros, yet it is also totally agape” (§7). Because God’s love is personal, focused on each person in his or her unique identity, and definitive, never wavering, God’s love serves as the model of Christian marriage — a monogamous union of man and woman who complete one another in a unique, definitive, oblation, and life-giving way. The vision of Pope Benedict gives new importance to love as a fact of human life — as essential for human existence. His analysis of love cannot be taken for granted, especially when we consider other views, opposed to his, which he names in his encyclical, and which we consider in the second part of this reflection.

The philosopher Aristotle held to a view of a distant and unmoved god. This god makes sense to reason as an account of the phenomenon of motion, but Aristotle cannot understand a God who goes beyond reason in surprising and even extravagant ways. His god is the “unmoved mover” — the great good implicitly and ultimately desired by all creation. God is certainly beyond the limits of anything we can know or desire. God is always transcendent, as the theologians say, “out there,” beyond us in some sense, not even able to be named in a way

that would make God's identity completely clear to us. This is all true enough, but the unmoved mover, the merely transcendent god, cannot by definition go out of himself in love of the other — in a kind of Eros. Biblical revelation corrects Aristotle and deepens the mystery of God even more, proclaiming God-with-us as well as beyond us and witnessing to the engagement of God with the human person through encounters that are personal and transforming. It is no accident, I think, that to counter this remote and unengaging view of God Pope Benedict signed his letter on Christmas day.

The philosopher Descartes held another view with unfortunate consequences for a fully-human and authentic idea of love. Seeking to overcome skepticism by ignoring the unreliable evidence of his senses and relying only on undeniably clear and distinct ideas, Descartes ended up making a sharp distinction between the body and the soul: the body was weak and subject to error; the soul or spirit was free through reason to know the truth. Starting with the clear and distinct idea that he was a thinking person and therefore alive ("I think, therefore I am" was how he put it), Descartes reasoned his way by sure steps back to the existence of the world, of his body, and of God.

But the price he paid was a heavy one. His philosophy is a kind of dualism like many that have cropped up over time and have also influenced some Christian thinkers. Dualism distinguishes the body from the soul and ends up saying, in effect, that the body is less important. You can do with it what you will — deny it through abstinence or indulge it in promiscuity — and it makes no difference to the good of the soul.

"Yet," says Pope Benedict, "it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is [the human person], a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does [a person] attain ... full stature. Only thus is love — Eros — able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur" (§7). In other words, if Eros is only a matter of the body's sexual activity, then sex can quickly become a material commodity, bought and sold, used or exploited at will — as if it had no connection with human freedom and the human ability through freedom to become more fully and authentically human. Again, the Pope's existential viewpoint comes to the fore: the person becomes fully human through freely chosen and rightly ordered human activity, including sexual activity — reason, will, and body working together.

A third viewpoint that endangers authentic love is that of Nietzsche, the late nineteenth century thinker, very influential today, who accused the church of trying to kill Eros altogether. In his severe reaction to what he perceived to be the restrictions of the church against the pleasure principle, Nietzsche sought to create his own, willful criteria of right and wrong. He wanted to be a kind of superman — to go beyond the categories commonly called good and evil and, as we would say, to seek fulfillment in doing his own thing — and whatever that "thing" was, he would be the judge.

In Dante's *Inferno*, we meet a Nietzsche-like character in the person of Ulysses. As Dante tells the story — and it is entirely his invention — Ulysses grows tired of his settled home life

after the Trojan war and, neglecting the claims of his wife, his son, and his father, rallies his former comrades and returns to the sea, urging his men to sail beyond the horizon, to pursue experience and excellence for their own sakes, sailing even beyond the bounds of the known world — the pillars of Hercules — in search of them. Ulysses, like Adam, is a transgressor — someone who recognizes no binding antecedent claims on his freedom. He is his own law. And while this attitude may sound exciting to a world that thinks of the church as a mere kill-joy, Dante knows better. He knows that human freedom thrives on having a purpose that is other and greater than one's own. Dante's realism locates the journey of Ulysses — and of every person — within the realm of objective moral choices. It is the will of another, not one's own will merely, that sets up the target for attainment and the boundaries that make transgression possible. As Pope John Paul II used to say, "The purpose of freedom is love." Love, objectively speaking, is the goal of life, given to us at birth, and not entirely of our own making. Since this is so, the human person will find life exciting and ultimately satisfying through love — a love that is both erotic and oblation — a love that is also a journey out of the self and onto the path of self giving. This journey is an exodus from the slavery of sin, whose sole focus is the self, to freedom for love of the other through which the promise of life is fulfilled. Ultimately, the path of love is the path of Jesus's own death and resurrection — "the path of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, and in this way bears much fruit" (§6).

Throughout his encyclical, Benedict draws implicitly on what Dante knows about love, especially love that had the power to deliver him from a very dark and tangled time in his life. And so it will be helpful now to consider Dante's vision more closely as a way of illuminating Benedict's thinking. The first lines of the *Divine Comedy* have caused many people to recognize in Dante someone who has "been there" and knows what life has been like for them:

In the middle of the journey of our life
I came to myself in a dark wood
Where the straight way was lost (*Inferno*, 1-3).

Dante had been active in Florentine politics, especially in the years 1298-1302, when, thanks to the complex and interminable conflicts of political life in Tuscany he found himself an exile — banished from Florence forever, forced to wander the earth, seeking refuge with whoever would take him in. It made him especially bitter that the pope of the time, Boniface VIII, had played a key part in engineering his exile, and as he set out on his journey throughout Italy, he had a great deal to mull over about injustices in church and state; he had time to ponder remedies that would restore social order and true freedom.

Dante laid out his thinking in three canticles, set in the regions of hell, purgatory, and paradise. These, in turn, correspond to the three stages of the exodus: Hell is like Egypt, the land of slavery and, morally speaking, the state of sin. Purgatory is like the desert of Sinai, where people learn to become free by separating themselves from their slavish and sinful past, learning what the law requires of them, and by disciplining their will so that it more easily chooses the good. Paradise is the goal of the journey — the land of Canaan, the land of promise, and the place where people can be fully themselves.

In Dante's analysis, Florence is like hell itself — a city influenced, as he says, by pride, envy, and avarice (three vices that could well describe the motivating forces behind the recent world-wide financial collapse). As Dante describes it, hell is a loathsome place, dark, cramped, cacophonous, foul-smelling, because it is full of behavior that has made people love-less: they are turned in on themselves through various kinds of incontinence, violence, or fraud. They have allowed their intellects to become the slaves of their desires, and, at their worst, they have willfully used their minds and their power to harm and deceive others and, in that way, to subvert the life of the city.

Hell is what Dante himself has come to — he does not say exactly how — and he comes to himself in the dark wood, wondering how he will get out. (Reading the *Inferno* is like reading the daily newspaper or watching the evening news. Dante's hell is life as we know all too often that it can be and, like Dante, we might well wonder, "How are WE to get out?") Dante tells us that he got out because the Virgin Mary took pity on him and asked his favorite saint, Lucy, whose name means "light," to send Beatrice to him, and she in turn, sought the help of Virgil, Dante's favorite poet and the voice of reason, who came to guide him out of the woods. All of this is to say that Dante was saved through love — the love of God, mediated for him by a tag-team of powerful women and a Roman poet.

In his journey out of hell and into God, Dante is guided immediately by reason but ultimately by what he sees in and through the eyes of Beatrice his first love — and whose very name means "the one who makes happy." Dante was at one time truly caught up in the allure of evil and by the scandal caused by the fact that all of the bright and beautiful people seemed to think that incontinence, violence, and fraud were the way to get on and to get ahead. Only his memory of Beatrice, his first love, gives Dante reason to think and to hope that there must be another way: that life will be found through love, love that draws him out of himself and causes him to choose not only Beatrice but the one whose love she mediates to him.

In the *Paradiso*, Beatrice guides Dante, drawing him into the mystery with ever-changing variations of her smile and her eyes. This is not a sentimental love. Beatrice rebukes as evil the behavior that makes life a hell. She mentors Dante into the mysteries of divine providence, causing him to trust that even the evil of the crucifixion was not beyond God's power to turn to good. She reminds him to be humble, to consider at all times that something other than what he takes to be the case may be. Above all, Beatrice turns Dante's eyes to the truth, to the splendors of heavenly life, saying at one point, "Not in my eyes alone is paradise." Look around; learn to know the truth and to love the good when they are right before you — as the souls in heaven do. And so Dante meets the saints, like Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Peter, James, and John, and then St. Bernard, who shows him the whole communion of saints, and finally, shows him the Virgin Mary herself, and pleads with her that Dante be allowed — at last — even to see God.

In *Paradiso*, people see what is true and good, love what they see, and then glow with the happiness of what they know and love. Throughout his *Comedy*, Dante presents a journey at

the end of which is perfect freedom, freedom to be fully oneself through love that is drawn to the good and then chooses the good and gives oneself for the sake of the good. This is the vision that Benedict XVI says he wanted to translate for our time. It is a vision of the love of God that seeks us out wherever we are and draws us into God the more we know what is true and choose what is good.

The analyses of Pope Benedict and of Dante show that the world today largely misunderstands the need to love and what it means to love, and because we misunderstand, we wander as if in a dark wood, very much like the one from which Dante sought deliverance at the start of his *Comedy*. The pope wrote “God is love” not as a pious exercise for the feast of Christmas but as a service to the human family — to show the way to authentic freedom and lasting happiness. And that leads to the third and final part of this reflection: Pope Benedict’s reflection on the “practice of love by the church as a community of love” — which is the second part of his encyclical.

There are three points in *Deus Caritas Est* that stand out for special comment, all of them connected to one another. They are:

1. Charity is not optional; it expresses the church’s very identity;
2. Through teaching what justice requires and by doing works of charity, the church has a role to play in a post-Marxist social order;
3. People will always need people who love them in personal ways, not just through social programs.

Pope Benedict summarizes the traditional three-fold responsibility of the church, namely, to proclaim the word of God (*kerygma* or *martyria*), to celebrate the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and to exercise the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). And then he adds: “For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but it is part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being” (§25). That is why “The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word” (§22). Again, Benedict shows his existential way of thinking, in that he emphasizes charity as essential to the very existence of the church — without love, the Church would have no reason to be at all.

The Pope insists on charity as a necessary work of the Church because he is aware, especially in a European context, of the challenge from Marxism: namely that charity may temporarily relieve the suffering of the poor, at best, but it does nothing to relieve the conditions that cause the suffering in the first place. Marxism may have lost something of its political influence in recent years, but the argument does not go away: What good does mere charity do, when what the poor need is a just society?

The Pope’s reply is direct and honest: “There is admittedly some truth to this argument, but also much that is mistaken” (§26). The truth is that the Church in the 19th century had been caught off guard by the rise of modern industry and of the creation of a new, salaried working class. The Church had to move quickly, starting with Leo XIII, to develop principles for a social teaching that recognizes the rights of workers and the rights of private property

within the larger concern for a social order that guarantees to each person a just share in the common good (§26).

A just society is the direct aim of politics, which is why Pope Benedict makes it unmistakably clear that,

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the state. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper (§28).

In words that recall Dante's own view on the distinct roles of Church and State, Benedict teaches, "A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply" (§28).

The Church's role, then, is to teach what justice and the common good require; the role of the state is to strive to create a just society for all. Marxism was correct, then, to criticize the Church of the 19th century for its failure to teach and to emphasize the demands of justice. Marxism was mistaken, however, to think that charity is merely optional or even ineffective just because it is concerned with each person, one by one. As Benedict teaches, "[w]hoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate [the human] as such" (§28). "The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person — every person — needs, namely, loving personal concern" (§28).

Benedict suspects the tendency of Marxist-inspired governments to create big plans for the future of society that impose slave-like sacrifices on people in the present — sometimes violently. In words that express his existential emphasis, the Pope claims: "One does not make the world more human by refusing to act humanely here and now. We contribute to a better world by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity" (§31).

Love, then, is the way that each person and the Church itself becomes itself in the world. Love is the way to authentically human existence, and so it was a service to humanity that Benedict XVI took the time to explain the often-quoted but poorly understood words: "God is Love."

In Dante's vision, the love of God is at the heart of the universe, calling each person to love in return, thanks to which people find life. Pope Benedict, who wanted his encyclical to express in our time something of what Dante expressed in his, closes by saying,

Love is the light — and in the end the only light — that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practice it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world — this is the invitation I would like to extend with the present Encyclical (§39).

DEPARTURE AND RETURN: WHAT I LOVE ABOUT TRAKL

■
BY LAURA MCLARY

Georg Trakl in a bathing suit is entirely my idea of a pin-up. This image of him, looking perfectly, enticingly goofy, adorns my office door. Though, if I had to vote on the goofiest picture of Trakl ever, it would be the one of him linking arms with Paula Schmid, an apparent Amazon of a woman, striding forth in the right half of the picture, a goat gamboling at her feet. Trakl appears to be shorter than Paula Schmid, and while she is clearly moving forward, he appears to be standing still. His left arm links behind her right, he holds his right arm toward his back, what appears to be a characteristic gesture. Is she propelling him forward? Has he stopped to pose for the photographer? He looks as if he *might* be trying to smile. His eyes are just dark slits in his face, he's squinting. In another pleasantly nerdy picture of Trakl, he actually looks a little sick, and it's the hat that makes him look that way; it's the goofiest part of his appearance. It's just a stocking cap, pulled down over his head like a sock. The edge of the cap is rolled and uneven, his head is tipped to the right, quizzical. His arms are restricted behind his back. He's wearing the same jacket as the picture with Paula Schmid, double-breasted, striped, large pockets, held together at the waist with one, two buttons, the buttons look a little bit under strain, maybe he's gained a little weight, and the jacket is getting a little tight.

When I was nineteen and getting ready to study abroad in Salzburg, Austria, I knew that nothing was perfect, but I also knew that my year abroad was going to be perfect because I was leaving Ohio. I would meet people; I would be a different person; and when that all failed, I was primed to meet a maladjusted dead poet like Georg Trakl.

"Salzburg ist eine Stadt für sich allein, und alles darin ist friedlich und ausgeglichen. Die Stadt hat königliche und religiöse Hintergründe und ist mit beide jungen und alten Leuten gefüllt. Es ist farbenfreudig und ruhig und ist mit Lied in die gleiche Zeit gefüllt. Es ist ganz und perfektioniert fast in seiner Schönheit. Ich denke nicht, dass Perfektion existiert, aber wenn etwas fast perfekt ist, will es immer mehr sein wollen" (student essay, fall 2008).¹

Georg Trakl was born in 1887 in Salzburg, Austria. His father was a businessman and owned a hardware store. Together his parents raised six children. Trakl also had a half-brother, his father's son from a previous marriage. The family was well off and hired a French au pair to care for the children when they were still in school. Georg Trakl developed an especially close relationship with his younger sister, Grete, who like her older brother had a taste for the arts. She studied piano and composition in Vienna and Berlin when she was older. Georg Trakl, as a teenager, starting hanging around with the bohemian crowd, founded a literary circle and had soon gained a reputation as Salzburg's *enfant terrible*, perhaps not a difficult accomplishment in the quiet little bourgeois town. Flunking out of high school left but one career path open if he wanted to study at the university, the only choice for a respectable *Bürgersohn*, so Trakl left for Vienna to study pharmacology. For a while both siblings lived in Vienna at the

same time, and together they developed a dangerous passion for drugs and alcohol, both readily available to Georg once he began working as a pharmacist. Between the fits and starts of Trakl's attempts to earn a university degree and to earn a living as a pharmacist, he wrote poetry. His earlier verse is epigonic, but Trakl's particular poetic idiom was fully developed by the time he was twenty-four. When Trakl moved to Innsbruck in 1911 to begin a career in the military, he attracted the notice of Ludwig von Ficker, editor of a relatively new but already well-respected literary magazine, *Der Brenner*. Although the military career did not offer Trakl the stability he was seeking, the relationship to Ficker and *Der Brenner* was key. Trakl's poetry was now being read throughout the German-speaking world, and his readers and critics were enthusiastic. They were stunned and moved by what they read. It was completely new, completely its own. His poetic visions seemed to come from a place of enchantment but the surety of his voice made them concrete. Despite the security the connection to Ludwig von Ficker and *Der Brenner* offered Trakl and the publication of his first monograph *Gedichte* (1913), he continued to slip. He was drug-addicted, alcoholic, maybe psychotic, suicidal. Grete Trakl was no better off. She was married to a much older man in Berlin, also addicted and alone she had never finished her music studies. Then World War I started, and Trakl volunteered right away to be sent to the front as a military pharmacist. After a suicide attempt after the battle at Grodek, Trakl was moved to a military hospital in Krakow. Ludwig von Ficker visited him there once. Ficke received news of Trakl's death at age twenty-seven — an apparent suicide through cocaine overdose — a few days after his return to Innsbruck in November 1914. A second monograph of Trakl's poems *Sebastian im Traum* (*Sebastian Dreaming*, 1915) appeared posthumously. Grete Trakl struggled on a few years longer, using up her entire inheritance from her brother, a large grant from Ludwig von Wittgenstein, which Georg Trakl never used, and earnings from the volume of poetry. She shot herself while at a party in Berlin in 1917. She was twenty-six.

“He is a kind person, quiet, inscrutable, shy, very introverted. Looks strong, powerful, but is sensitive, sick. Has hallucinations, ‘off his rocker’...When he wants to express something mysterious here and there, he has such a tortured way of speaking, holds the palms of his hands open at shoulder height, his finger tips lifted, cramped inward, head to the side, shoulders lifted slightly, with his eyes directly questioningly toward the listener.”²

When I read Trakl for the first time, I was nineteen years old. I was studying in Salzburg, my first time, really, to be away from home — a home in Ohio that I was ready to leave. I was looking for any way to escape. I really hadn't been anywhere else, but I knew there had to be more out there. I read a lot to escape before I could make a physical departure. I imagined that the intensity of experience that came with reading could be actually, truly be an EXPERIENCE but only if I went somewhere else, took my body out of that place. It wasn't that it was too small, it was just too boring. More accurately: I felt too powerless. My family had blown apart years before I was able to leave. My father — is this a surprise? — wrote poetry. I'd read some of it clandestinely, and I knew it was good and full of intensity, but he did not care to

share any of that with me. I don't think it even occurred to him that he might. My siblings and I were not allowed in to love him, and he would not have known that this was even an option. He had only one model: if you're the kid, stay out of the way, because Dad is always allowed to let loose and hit. Or, more accurately, boys get walloped and yelled at; girls get yelled at too, but we girls learned a little faster and controlled our actions better than my brother. We learned how to stay out of the way. That was indeed intensity, but I was powerless to predict when it would happen or to control it. It happened to me, near me but I could not decide to turn it on or off.

Trakl was baptized a Lutheran (Evangelisch), but his mother was Catholic. The city of Salzburg has an important Catholic history, and images from Catholic Christianity are a part of daily life Austria. The presence of death is inescapable. When I am in Austria, Salzburg especially, the particularly graphic representation of suffering and death — something by rights unknowable, maybe even unrepresentable — impresses me. The tortured details of St. Sebastian's martyrdom in the Linzergasse, the sculptures depicting the stations of the cross on the way up the Kapuzinerberg, the carved crucifixes along paths through the fields surrounding the city. The weathered wooden Christ figures are rigid and stringy, anguished. In one of Trakl's poem, "Ein Frühlingsabend" ("A Spring Evening"), the one that begins with a bush full of larvae ("ein Strauch voll Larven"), a bare tree mimics the torture: "Ein kahler Baum krümmt sich in schwarzem Schmerz."³ The landscape is full of an unspeakable pain: "O Einsamstehn vor Wassern still und weiß./Unsäglich ragt des Nußbaums Traumgestalt."⁴ The "O" is a cry that goes to the wounded place that is bleeding so prodigiously and luxuriantly, all the eros pouring out in a giant, mysterious swell of *Leidenschaft*: "Unsäglich ist das alles, O Gott, dass man erschüttert ins Knie bricht" ("Unterwegs" 1912) (Trakl I: 81).⁵

I left home when I was still a minor, seventeen years old, and delivered myself into the benevolent arms of Bowling Green State University and my older brother, who was studying fine arts there. (I went just twenty miles down the road, while a few members of my fractured family moved a few hundred miles away to New York. Who was leaving whom?) At the time, it never occurred to me that anyone but me was responsible for me, but now that I am responsible, to an extent, for the safety and well-being of my students, a few of them as young as I was when I left home — I'm dumbfounded by how young and vulnerable I was.

In buildings in Austria, I discovered, electric lights run on timers, so there were times when I got caught on a staircase in the dark and had to feel my way back to my room, or figure out where the next button was.

I arrived in Salzburg wise and scared, precocious and unprotected. I was housed in a dorm for students studying at the Mozarteum. The dorm was actually a small, slightly decrepit *Lustschloss*, Schloss Frohnburg in the Hellbrunner Allee, better known in recent times for serving as the front façade of the von Trapp family villa in *The Sound of Music*. I was disappointed. I had requested to be placed in the "cool" dorm in the city center, but instead I was living with the nerdy music students out in the country, and the fit was better than I wanted

to believe. My first night in the dorm, I flung open my window and the next morning, woke up still heavy with jetlag and my face covered in mosquito bites.

I encountered my first Trakl poem with an Austrian teacher, who patiently led us through “Die schöne Stadt” — “The Beautiful City.” Her voice was soft, round and dark. Later when I was in graduate school, I realized that she sounded just like Ingeborg Bachmann. My German poetry professor invited us to her house to listen to a recording, a record on a turntable from the 1960s, of Bachmann reading her poetry. In that intimate little circle, as we held our cups of tea on our knees and sat up straight, I was hearing the voice of my Austrian literature professor again.

The more I found out about Trakl, the more I wanted him or some piece of him. He strove not to fit, he didn’t want to fit, like me, I imagined, but in the end, I now realize, his poetry is entirely of his place and his time. His poetry evokes all kinds of longings. There were ones I could identify: the lust part, like days when anything in the landscape could make me feel desiring — the radio antennae, the mist in the trees, the scrim of golden light on the hills. There was one day in November of my year in Salzburg when the longing was unclear, and I wandered down the Hellbrunner Allee to Schloss Hellbrunn and looked for the Steintheater, ended up at the Monatsschlössl and looked down at the line of the Allee heading away from me. Once in the spring, I returned from the Gastgarten at the Schloss after an afternoon of drinking with two friends, musicians. Everything, all of it, I could find in a Trakl poem:

Zu Abend mein Herz

Am Abend hört man den Schrei der Fledermäuse.
Zwei Rappen springen auf der Wiese.
Der rote Ahorn rauscht.
Dem Wanderer erscheint die kleine Schenke am Weg.
Herrlich schmecken junger Wein und Nüsse.
Herrlich: betrunken zu taumeln in dämmernden Wald.
Durch schwarzes Geäst tönen schmerzliche Glocken.
Auf das Gesicht tropft Tau. (Trakl I: 32)⁶

I didn’t really need her coaxing to see why the title, “Die schöne Stadt,” might be saying more than “Take a look at the beauty of this city.” Once I understood the imagery, I knew this was how I was experiencing Salzburg. It is a beautiful city, but it is so full of mournful places. My Austrian literature professor showed us: “Look, do you see how he turns images of beauty upside down?” I read and read, and as the meaning started to emerge from the thicket of so many new words, I started seeing the Salzburg I had been experiencing for the few months I had been there. Spring was arriving as I read the poem, and the aggressive “Blütenkrallen” in Trakl’s poem reminded me of the chestnut trees lining the Hellbrunner Allee outside Schloss Frohnburg, where I lived with the music students. It made perfect sense to me to think of these blooms as claws. The spring was beautiful but tricky. It arrived with my twentieth birthday, with *Schnürlregen* and hail and graupel, and getting drunk with a few friends, one of whom gave me a bouquet filled with florist flowers I had never seen before, maybe because

no one had ever given me a bouquet before. It seemed so European, and I took pictures of it sitting in my window looking out onto the Untersberg.

Trakl's poem is full of frames and scrim. I recognize the contained energy. I feel how the intensity of experience is inhibited. The poem moves only in vibrations. It circles back upon itself. It's that same boredom, the helplessness I felt as a child.

"Trakl sagt, nichts kann absolut gut oder ganz schlecht sein. Die Stadt und die Welt sind zwischen Gut und Schlecht. Wir müssen die Einzelheiten sehen, um die Wahrheit herauszufinden" (student essay, fall 2008).⁷

Then I was done with graduate school and looking for a job. I was attracted to the University of Portland's German program with its links to Salzburg. I had written my dissertation on Trakl. I was about to publish an article on Trakl. He and his poetry had become by then a shape and a color that fit perfectly into a Trakl-shaped part of me, but I was reluctant to teach his poems. There is some aspect of my interest in him that is purely a feeling one. I've struggled for a long time with the role this part of me should play in my teaching, but I've never been a very good rational thinker. I feel and intuit. It was a stretch to get at how to work through the poem without stripping it naked. So we read "Die schöne Stadt," my first Trakl poem, and I started out the lesson by confessing my passion for Trakl. It could have only been eros that drove me to buy a ridiculously expensive — *sündenteuer* — first edition of *Gedichte* (1913) and *Sebastian im Traum* (1915) when I was in Vienna a couple of years ago. They needed to love him, too, or at least to join me in the fun I was poking at myself. I passed around the first editions for them to touch, making clear these were my treasures. Handle with care! We looked at my Facebook friendship with Georg Trakl: "Ich wollte schon immer deine Freundin sein," I wrote him.

Many of my students have studied in Salzburg, and they, just as I did the first time, work through the poem in search of images that are familiar to them. They often see the churches first and the historical references: "Aus den braun erhellten Kirchen/Schaun des Todes reine Bilder,/Großer Fürsten schöne Schilder" (Trakl I: 23).⁸ But I realize as they talk about their experiences going into the Dom, participating in mass there, that I never went into the Salzburger Dom the entire year I spent there. I did not want to and I did not even know if I was allowed to go in. I did not know its history; I knew little about the "Fürsten" and their role in the founding and development of Salzburg's unique history as a *Fürstentum*. What I saw, what I felt in the poem was the music and its vibrations in the poem. It wasn't just the specific references to music ("Glockenklänge" and "Orgelklänge" and "Helle Instrumente singen"—"sounds of bells" and "organs pealing" and "bright-toned instruments are singing"). In fact, the poem contains just as many references to silence and reduction of sound ("schweigen" and "leise" and "hauchen"). The dynamic between the two creates the vibrations, just as Trakl's choice of words whir and hum around a few repeated tones. It was the experience of reduction and confinement that I recognized.

So we go slow: What is the poem about? What is its narrative? What are some new words?

What do they “mean”? Can you describe this word in German without using any English so that your classmates understand it? Behind the scrim, they are translating into English, I know. But for a few, maybe it is a picture that comes to mind first and then a web of associations. I’m hoping for them to be able to tap into an experience. I’m thinking of the way the poem is full of traps and restrictions even if it is beautiful. It’s not just a list of sentences marching across the page. I see Trakl’s particular style. It does seem to line up image after image, no apparent relationship between them, until they are read time after time next to each other, with each other, against each other.

We begin with this poem because, unlike many other Trakl poems, it seems to offer a story in miniature or even a flimmery, flickering silent film, and the reader’s imagination fills in the color and sound it describes. The sun is shining in the beautiful old city. The squares are silent. The beech trees create deep, shimmering shadows in the heat. Nuns hurry by, dream-like. Images of the city’s founders — “große Fürsten” — look out of dimly lit churches, and their mementos — crowns — shimmer in the scant light. Horses dive out of the fountain — one is reminded of course of the fountain on the Residenzplatz, from which mythical hippocampi spring. The aggressive thrust of the sea-horses is echoed in the threatening claw-like flower trusses in the trees but fully contrasts with the dreamy, quiet boys at play near the fountain. Girls stand and wait in doorways, their lips are trembling.

“Die Form ändert sich nicht, aber der Inhalt ändert sich. Die Mädchen haben feuchten Lippen und stehen an den Toren. In diese Strophe hat der Inhalt nichts wunderlich. Die Mädchen erscheinen fast hoffnungslos warten. Aber worauf warten sie?” (student essay, fall 2008).⁹

Bells toll, and their tones hang quaveringly in the air. The tolling is echoed by the rhythm of the marching and calling of watchmen. Above it all in the blue air is music: organ music, bright instrumental music, singing of mothers, the laughter of beautiful women. The time frame shifts between past and present, just as the tones quiver in the air, and the images of people shimmer through scrims and lacy window coverings. Trakl also evokes the smells of the city, a mixture of incense, tar, and lilac. The scents are both fleeting and heavy and blend disharmoniously.

“Die Disharmonie zwischen Form und Inhalt in diesem Gedicht bringt eine unheimliche Stimmung hervor. Zwei Abbildungen von Salzburg kommen im Text zum Vorschein. Eine stellt die schöne Stadt vor, nach der das Gedicht genannt ist, und die andere stellt eine Atmosphäre von Ängstlichkeit vor, die scheint, die Stadt versenkt zu haben. Es kann von dieser Disharmonie geschlossen werden, dass ein ominöses Gefühl in der Stadt vorherrscht” (student essay, fall 2008).¹⁰

Tired eyes flickering behind the scrim of flowers at the window is the final image. The scents, the rhythmic sounds, and shimmering heat overlaid with the cool decay effusing from the dark interior of the churches evoke a narcotic heaviness. The city is a beautiful, sensuous opiate.

My students notice right away the rhyme structure. Each four-line stanza begins and ends with the same word, so it is not really a rhyme but a repetition.

“Trakl möchte uns zeigen, dass Salzburg und seine Leute fröhlich sind. Das Reimschema umgarnt

*uns mit guten Ton, sodass er die traurige Wörter von uns verstecken kann" (student essay, fall 2008).*¹¹

The repeated words line up down the right side of the page: Schweigen, Kirchen, Brunnen, Tore, Glockenklänge, singen, Fenstern—silence, churches, fountain, doorways, sounds of bells, singing, windows. The contours of the city are right there, a synecdochic city arises from the repetition of these few words: silence, churches, fountains, tolling of bells, singing, windows. Repetition is an essential component of the poem's structure, which — as a structural element — is repeated on many different levels: repetition of motifs, words, phonemes and even letters, such as double consonants (-nn-, -ll-, -rr-, -pp-, -tt-, -mm-). The frequent repetition of doubled consonants lends the poem an oddly crisp movement, almost a drivenness, which is at odds with the vibrations it creates by restricting movement between two closely spaced images or closely spaced letters and words. The sounds bounce off the bars of the cage but do not ever move outside of it. The spatial imagery is similarly composed of both inward and outward movement. The spaces are all thresholds or intermediary spaces: public squares, doorways, steps, windows.

*"Die Stadt scheint geschützt, aber es gibt eine Unruhe in der Atmosphäre der Stadt. Von der Außenseite, die in die Stadt anschaut, ist alles schön, aber es gibt eine zugrundeliegende Sorge" (student essay, fall 2008).*¹²

I can't get enough of Trakl in photographs. They are all that is left to replace him. It is possible to possess in a way through looking. We are so object-oriented. We want things to belong to us, and it's even better when we can even integrate them into our own objects, into our bodies by touching them, so that the boundary between our subjectively experienced bodies and the other thing, the other body is temporarily lifted. The glory of the other rubs off. The incorporation is however never fully realized and the BECOMING of the other remains provisional, representational, or, in the end, disharmonious and destructive. These are all rituals that are continuously moving TOWARD but never REACHING the object, it is a ritual of continuous remembrance of both presence and absence.

It's an unusually hot summer in Europe. My students and I stand in the shade of the courtyard and wipe sweat from beneath our eyes. It's momentarily cool here, the Georg-Trakl-Forschungs- und Gedenkstätte, Trakl's place of birth. We've reached our destination, and I point to a stone tablet affixed the wall:

Georg Trakl
Die schöne Stadt

Alte Plätze sonnig schweigen.
Tief in Blau und Gold versponnen
Traumhaft hasten ernste Nonnen
Unter schwüler Buchen Schweigen.

Aus den braun erhellten Kirchen
Schaun des Todes reine Bilder,
Großer Fürsten schöne Schilder.
Kronen schimmern in den Kirchen.

Rösser tauchen aus dem Brunnen.
Blütenkrallen drohn in Bäumen.
Knaben spielen wirr von Träumen
Abends leise dort am Brunnen.

Mädchen stehen an den Toren,
Schauen scheu ins farbige Leben.
Ihre feuchten Lippen beben
Und sie warten an den Toren.

Zitternd flattern Glockenklänge,
Marschtakt hallt und Wacherufen.
Fremde lauschen auf den Stufen.
Hoch im Blau sind Orgelklänge.

Helle Instrumente singen.
Durch der Gärten Blätterrahmen
Schwirrt das Lachen schöner Damen.
Leise junge Mütter singen.

Heimlich haucht an blumigen Fenstern
Duft von Weihrauch, Teer und Flieder.
Silbern flimmern müde Lider
Durch die Blumen an den Fenstern.
(Trakl I: 23-4)¹³

I feel self-conscious as we stand it read it quietly. Like someone is reading out of my diary.

"Ach, kommt doch! Gehen wir Eis essen. Ich lade euch ein!"

They agree readily. We've walked the half hour from the University of Portland's dorm on the other side of the Salzach in the sweaty heat, so we're all ready for ice cream. We cross the Waagplatz, then the Mozartplatz, and go into the café there, where Trakl's father ran his hardware business. The Trakl family lived upstairs but I don't tell them. We order ice cream.

I allow myself a *Viertel Rotwein*. When the ice cream is gone, I excuse myself. I look out the open doors of the café and listen: "Glockenklänge," "Wacherufen." The fountain is splashing. I turn and fly up the stairs as if I were coming home.

WORK CITED

Trakl, Georg. *Dichtungen und Briefe: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*. 2 vols. Eds. Walther Killy and Hans Szklenar. Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1969.

¹ "Salzburg is a city of its own, and everything in it is peaceful and harmonious. The city has imperial and religious backgrounds and is filled with both young and old people. It is colorful and peaceful and is filled with pane [sic] at the same time. It is complete and perfect in its beauty. I do not think that perfection exists, but if some is perfect, then it will evermore be that way." (my translation)

² "Er ist ein lieber Mensch, schweigsam, verschlossen, scheu, ganz innerlich. Sieht stark, kräftig aus, ist aber dabei empfindlich, krank. Hat Hallucinationen, spinnt` ... Wenn er hie und da irgend etwas Geheimnisvolles ausdrücken will, hat er eine so gequälte Art des Sprechens, hält die Handflächen offen in Schulterhöhe, die Fingerspitzen angehoben, eingekrampft, Kopf etwas schief, Schultern etwas hochgezogen, die Augen fragend auf einen gerichtet." (Franz Zeis, my translation) (Trakl II: 713)

³ "A bare tree buckles over in black pain." (my translation)

⁴ "O lonely contemplation at the water's edge still and white./Unspeakably the nut tree's dreamy figure looms." (my

translation)

⁵ "Unspeakable, all of it, o God, that one falls shaken to one's knee." (my translation)

⁶ Toward Evening My Heart

At evening one hears the cry of bats.
Two black horses leap on the meadow.
The red maple rustles.
To the wanderer the small inn appears along the way.
Glorious taste the young wine and nuts.
Glorious: to stagger drunk in the dusking forest.
Through black branches grievous bells sound.
Dew drips on the face.

(<http://www.lochravenreview.net/retrospectives/GeorgTrakl/trakl15.html>)

⁷ "Trakl says nothing can be absolutely good or absolutely bad. The city and the world are between good and bad. We must see the details in order to find truth." (my translation)

⁸ "Out of brown illumined churches/Gaze pure images of death/Lovely scutcheons of great princes."

(<http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=12772>)

⁹ "The form does not change, but the content does change. The girls have moist lips and stand in doorways. In these [sic] stanza, the content is not strange. The girls seem to wait almost hopelessly. But what are they waiting for?" (my translation)

¹⁰ "The disharmony between form and content in this poem create an eerie atmosphere. Two images of Salzburg appear in the text. One presents the beautiful city, after which the poem is named, and the other presents an atmosphere of fear, which seems to be inherent in the city. One can deduce from this atmosphere that an ominous feeling dominates the city." (my translation)

¹¹ "Trakl would like to show us that Salzburg and its people are happy. The rhyme scheme enmeshes us with a pleasant tone so that he can hide unhappy words from us." (my translation)

¹² "The city seems protected, but there is disquiet in the atmosphere of the city. From the outside, looking at the city, everything is beautiful, but there is worry at its core." (my translation)

¹³ The Beautiful City

Ancient squares in sunlit silence.
Deep engrossed in blue and gold
Dreamlike gentle nuns are hastening
Under sultry beeches' silence.

Out of brown illumined churches
Gaze pure images of death,
Lovely scutcheons of great princes.
Crowns are shimmering in the churches.

Horses rise out of the fountain.
Claws of blossom in trees threaten.
Boys confused in dreams are playing
Still at evening by the fountain.

Young girls standing in the gateways,
Shyly look upon life's gayness.
Their moist lips are ever trembling
And they wait beside the gateways.

Fluttering sounds of bells are pealing,
Marching time and cries of watches.
Strangers listen on the stairways.
High in blueness organs pealing.

Bright-toned instruments are singing.
Through the leafy frame of gardens
Purls the laughter of fine women.

Quietly young mothers singing.

Secret breath by flowering windows,
Smell of incense, tar and lilac.
Silvery tired eyelids flicker
Through the flowers by the windows.

(<http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=12772>)

SECTION 3:
THE ECLIPSE OF
SACRED IMAGINATION

TO IMAGINE OTHERNESS
INSIGHTS FOR POST-HOLOCAUST CHRISTIANS
FROM CLAUDE LANZMANN'S *SHOAH*

■
BY MICHAEL CAMERON

What, will these hands ne'er be clean?
—*Macbeth, Act V scene 1*

I. Introduction: Thinking after the Holocaust

The Holocaust continues to haunt the human conscience. Conferences and books, memorials and museums continue to proliferate, and “Never again!” sounds out from them all. But the nearly successful attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe is a stain not easily removed. Many millions suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis. But they reserved a special portion of their landscape of death for a special zone of degradation, a kingdom-within-a-kingdom where the value of Jewish human life was reduced to zero. A spectral vision of utterly worthless life that turned human beings into soap and lampshades appeared in history for the first time, and its crimes crossed a previously unimaginable line. The Nuremberg trials after the war featured a Polish guard at Auschwitz, S. Szmaglewska, who testified to the logistical difficulties presented to the S.S. by the huge numbers of Jews arriving in the camp in the summer of 1944. Space was limited, time was short, and costs were high, so new tactics were necessary. The following exchange appears in the trial transcript.

Witness: When extermination of the Jews in the gas chambers was at its height, orders were issued that children were to be thrown straight into the crematorium furnaces, or into a pit near the crematorium, without being gassed first.

Smirnov (Russian prosecutor): How am I to understand this? Did they throw them into the fire alive, or did they kill them first?

Witness: They threw them in alive. Their screams could be heard at the camp. It is difficult to say how many children were destroyed in this way.

Smirnov: Why did they do this?

Witness: It's very difficult to say. We don't know whether they wanted to economize on gas, or if it was because there was not enough room in the gas chambers.¹

How may the human species think clearly about itself in the face of such extermination of a portion of itself? The challenge is great enough on the human philosophical level. But the Holocaust is inextricably linked to religion, and the challenges for thinking religiously are even greater. Many thinkers cast the study of the Holocaust in religious categories. Arthur Cohen's *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (1984) borrows the language of Rudolf Otto's famous work, *The Idea of the Holy*, to portray the Shoah as the unholy of all mysteries. Some Jewish thinkers do not hesitate to see the Holocaust as the anti-Revelation, the malevolent twin of the covenant revelation at Sinai. Christianity follows Judaism in find-

ing the reality of the Holocaust profoundly threatening. Both faiths build upon a fundamental conviction that every human being, having been made in God's image, has intrinsic and irreducible value. But the Holocaust's assault on the human person was an irruption that tore the fabric of creation. Irving Greenberg wrote solemnly that "the Holocaust poses the most radical counter-testimony to both Judaism and Christianity," and its relentless demands upon thought "stretch our capacity to the limit and torment us with irresolvable tensions."²

The cruelty and the killing raise the question whether even those who believe after such an event dare to talk about God who loves and cares without making a mockery of those who suffered ... Let us offer, then, as a working principle the following: No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.³

But a further burden weighs unbearably on the Christian conscience because of the baptized church members who were active perpetrators and indifferent bystanders, compared with an infinitesimal number of resisters. The Holocaust happened in the heart of Christian Europe on soil soaked by baptismal waters and Christian teaching for more than 1500 years. Many of the killers had abandoned formal participation in Christian faith, but others had not. On Christmas Eve in 1943 "the *Einsatzcommando* IIb received an order to kill 3000 Jews and Gypsies in Russia. The order was executed doubly quick in order to enable soldiers to go to Midnight Mass."⁴ The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum recently published an album of photographs entitled, "Auschwitz through the Lens of the S.S.: Photos of Nazi Leadership at the Camp." One series of photos show an S.S. officer in Auschwitz lighting a Yuletide tree at Christmas 1944, three weeks before the camp was liberated.⁵ Christian and non-Christian thinkers alike have observed that this historic faith has entered an unprecedented crisis of credibility, and some have openly wondered whether the bludgeon of such scandalous contradictions might have dealt Christianity its deathblow.⁶

The aftermath of the Holocaust has shocked Christian communities of all kinds into re-viewing the Church's history of anti-Judaism. The Roman Catholic Church began to reverse its perspective on Judaism in paragraph 4 of the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)*. A turning point of relations between Christians and Jews appeared in the pontificate of John Paul II, who personally witnessed Jewish suffering in the Shoah and brought it to the forefront of his papacy. In 1987 he initiated talks toward developing a statement of the Catholic Church on the Holocaust. After ten years of work, the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews produced *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (1998). As the turn of the millennium approached, the Pope wrote in the preface that he hoped this document would "help to heal the wounds of past misunderstandings and injustices."⁷ The Church sought to make amends for Christian acts of wrongdoing, to the Jews through the centuries and especially in the Shoah. "At the end of this Millennium the Catholic Church desires to express her deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age. This is an act of repentance (*teshuva*), since, as members of the Church, we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of all her children."⁸

The document made some positive moves. It expressed hope for serious conversation with Jews, and invited all people of good will to reflect on the diabolical evil of the Holocaust; it recounted the tortuous history between Christianity and Judaism, and foreswore erroneous interpretations of the New Testament that had fomented anti-Jewish sentiment through centuries; and it asked candidly to what extent Christians had contributed to the atmosphere of indifference that made the Shoah possible. But Jewish reaction mixed appreciation with puzzlement and disappointment, welcoming the gains but also expressing concern about the way some things were expressed and others were omitted altogether. *We Remember* regrets the anti-Judaism “of which, unfortunately, Christians have also been guilty,”⁹ but fails to analyze or even mention the church’s historic “teaching of contempt” that made that possible.¹⁰ Nor does it refer to the centuries of episcopal legislation passed against Jews since the time of Constantine. It magnifies a few individual bishops who spoke out against the Nazis, even though their words did not become official church teaching. Some considered a religious reflection on the Shoah an inappropriate place to carry on the defense of papal policy during the war. The document repeats the stereotype of Jews as defined by their devotion to the Law and, even as it forswears Christian anti-Judaism, it decries “anti-Christian sentiment among Jews,” as if the two were on a historical par. It dubiously discriminates on the theoretical level between theological anti-Judaism and racial anti-Semitism, which may be included in the Church’s frequent denunciations of racism. Observers were puzzled by the document’s subtle distinction between “the Church as such” that does not sin, and the links to sins of her sons and daughters. The Church makes its act of repentance not in its own name but in the name of its sinful members. The document made a start, but much remains to be learned about how to be Christians after the Holocaust.

In response to this, Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, head of Vatican Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews that produced the document, reminded readers that although no new documents were on the horizon, *We Remember* “is not to be seen as the final word on all the questions raised in this reflection.”¹¹ This seems to signal that now is the time for reflection and discussion. Much remains to be done to make Christians worthy of even the beginning gains of *We Remember*. Our first task in this long journey would seem to be learning how to make a proper act of contrition. By what practical ways can ordinary Christians learn to repent of the deeply embedded sin of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism that they may not at all personally and consciously perpetuate but nevertheless carry as part of their tradition? How may Christians overcome the blindness and paralysis inflicted by looking directly at that Medusa’s head that stares back at us from within in our own history?

This paper explores director Claude Lanzmann’s monumental cinematic evocation of the Holocaust, *Shoah*, for stimulating the Christian “sacred imagination” toward achieving a more fruitful mode of Christian repentance. *Shoah* is not a religious film per se, but my claim is that its moral framework, combined with its aesthetic craftsmanship, makes *Shoah* a type of “secular scripture” that can stoke fresh thinking among Christians after the Holocaust.¹² The film

can function like Nathan the prophet's artful story about the poor man's ewe lamb that helped King David to become aware of his treacherous adultery, murder, and lying (2 Samuel 12:1-7), or Jesus' masterful parable of the Good Samaritan that mirrored back to a self-justifying inquirer his narrow spiritual vision (Luke 10:25-37). So this film's moral rigor and artistic mastery project astonishing images of unimaginative and unfeeling ignorance among Christians that allowed and in some cases perpetrated the Holocaust. Processing these images might help Christians to find models for new modes of consciousness that are not anti-Jewish. The lens of *Shoah* can help us to detect resources within our own tradition that we have forgotten or suppressed that could further the Church's convalescence from this malady and its devastating history. Then perhaps we can make an act of repentance that has credibility "in the presence of the burning children."

II

As work was being completed on *We Remember*, the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications issued an unusual and interesting document. On the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of cinema in 1995, it offered a list of what it considered forty-five "great" films, divided into three categories, "Religion," "Values," and "Art." The list includes three films that pertain to the Holocaust. The choices are revealing, because they open a small window upon the Church's self-perception in connection with the Shoah. The three films are *Open City* (1945), *Au Revoir les Enfants* (1988), and *Schindler's List* (1993). Critics have noted that these films tend to portray the Church in the best possible light.¹³ The first two show Catholic resisters to the Nazi onslaught, mostly priests, and treat collaboration with the Nazis as an aberration of outsiders who were attempting to gain wealth by collusion with the authorities. The choice of *Schindler's List* comes in for heavy criticism on several fronts. Though director Steven Spielberg is Jewish, his film Christianizes the Holocaust by portraying Oskar Schindler as a Christ figure, a fallen Good Samaritan from Christianity, a fallen figure who saves himself by saving the helpless Jews.

Instead of Christianity's being charged with evasion of responsibility during the war or even being held accountable for laying the doctrinal groundwork for the murderous rage against the Jews, Christian faith is depicted in the film as a force that makes for deliverance. Being identified with a process of redemption in the context of the Holocaust is the way Christians, I take leave to imagine, would most like to see themselves; and Spielberg's film allows them to do that.¹⁴

Christians might feel unease that the same problem lies at the heart of *We Remember*, that despite its positive features it, like *Schindler's List*, leaves the Christian reader feeling "vindicating, comfortable, redeemed in a way that an authentic reckoning would not."¹⁵

But another film that is conspicuous by its absence on the Vatican list, one not likely to leave anyone feeling comfortable, least of all Catholic Christians, is Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. This titanic nine-and-one-half hour film testimony, more than ten years in the making, has been the subject of intense review and study to the present day. By many accounts it is

"likely to remain the most important film made on the memory of the Holocaust."¹⁶

Shoah as Secular "Scripture"

Lanzmann denies any intent to sacralize the Holocaust. A French Jew, but non-religious, Lanzmann trained in modern philosophy and associated most with anti-religious thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre. He explicitly shares the historical-critical methodology of historian Raul Hilberg, whose work *The Destruction of European Jews* was Lanzmann's constant companion in researching the film (he called it "my Bible").¹⁷ Hilberg appears in the film as an authoritative interpreter for the viewer, and articulates his historical approach this way:

In all of my work I have never begun by asking the big questions, because I was always afraid that I would come up with small answers; and I have preferred to address these things which are minutiae or details in order that I might then be able to put together in a gestalt a picture which, if not an explanation, is at least a description, a more full description, of what transpired.¹⁸

This is also Lanzmann's cinematic approach. He focuses with single-minded intensity on images that capture details and particulars of places and people, constantly asking the witnesses to describe the small moments of their experience. Lanzmann approaches his "characters" looking for small facts to serve as parts that suggest a greater whole. This near obsession with the concrete and the particular makes *Shoah* remarkable as what cultural anthropologists call a "thick description" of the human event of the Holocaust.

Nevertheless, critics and Lanzmann himself use religious categories to describe his work that trade on the quasi-religious awe that surrounds the Holocaust. One analyst compared its stockpiling of images to the book of Lamentations for the way it "intones sorrow and loss again and again in a hundred different ways, through various images, each a variation on the same theme."¹⁹ Nevertheless, *Shoah* has no counterpart to the middle section in Lamentations 3:21-39, where the prophet reclaims hope in God by remembering that "his mercies are not spent ... the Lord's rejection does not last forever" (vv. 22, 31). The opening credits provide a biblical caption for the project: "I will give them an everlasting Name" (Isaiah 56:5). God spoke these words through the prophet to people after the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE. But *Shoah* quotes Isaiah ironically. Against the backdrop of the Holocaust, it recalls people who will not return and whose voices are silent. The voice speaking the word "I" is not God's, but Lanzmann's and this captures the post-religious secularity at the heart of the film. For this perspective, the biblical god abdicated his role as the Lord of the covenant by his absence in the Shoah; Lanzmann uses the modern invention of celluloid to assume the role that God vacated when he would not or could not save his people. Furthermore, Lanzmann says his film attempts an "incarnation" that takes "Holocaust" out of the abstract, and a "resurrection" of the voices of the dead. Yet the "incarnation" serves only to concretize the disincarnating murder that took place; and the dead revive only momentarily in order to give testimony about their demise. For instance, the film "resurrects" Adam Czerniakow, the head of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw, by reading from his journal as a way of setting the context for his suicide just as the Jewish deportations began. The film in no way celebrates redemption.

The film nevertheless evokes a biblical and religious framework. Analysts have noted how the moral vehemence of *Shoah* recalls the thought of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995).²⁰ Levinas was a Lithuanian Jew who lost most of his family in the death camps. Though not his main subject, the Holocaust decisively shaped Levinas's thought. The dedication of his major work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translates from Hebrew as follows:

To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-semitism.²¹

Levinas's thought concerns that "other man," often capitalized to express the phenomenon of absolute difference in the human experience, "the Other." For Levinas, the human person as such is constituted primordially and absolutely by "responsibility to care for 'the Other.'" This care lifts humanity out of its merely natural state and into human existence properly considered. This perception cuts across the grain of typical Western thought that thinks about the self philosophically in terms of ontology and Being. For Levinas, typical philosophical thought about the absolute self initiates a process of objectifying or "thematizing" the existence of the other person as someone that "I" relate to as a thing, and who is subject to "my" power of choice, and upon whom "I" may choose to take compassion — or not. This way of self-understanding, according to Levinas, cannot see the other person as a manifestation of the transcendent Other to whom I owe care as a fundamental obligation. Choosing not to care for the Other is therefore choosing to fail to be human. Ethics is not one more category of philosophical thought, but the foundation of philosophy as such: ethics is "first philosophy" as well as "first theology."²²

Levinas particularly opposes the thought of Martin Heidegger, who embodies the deep-seated Western anxiety about death by understanding the self as constituted by the will to self-assertion. Levinas thinks it no accident that the brilliant Heidegger supported the Nazi regime. Heidegger's thought, according to Levinas, shows the will as objectifying reality external to the self in order to dominate it. Objectification turns the free being of the other into property or chattel to be utilized as the will sees fit. Levinas includes in this the aspiration to objective knowledge that one might own as a possession.

This problem of the campaign to "possess" knowledge and the other stands at the heart of Levinas's philosophical appeal to the Second Commandment, that is, the prohibition against images. For him this commandment is much more than a simple negation. It denounces our tendency to reduce what is seen to an object that can be manipulated, that thereby shapes the transcendent Other to one's thought as "an intelligibility that one would like to reduce to knowledge."²³ That objectification reduces "the Other" to "the Same" — an extension of self. Therein lies the snare of idolatry. But the commandment against images protects the transcendence of the Other, which cannot give itself to any representation because of the "uniqueness of the unique that is expressed in the face." "The face," a major category of Levinas's thought, does not refer to individual human faces, but to an "epiphany of infinity,"

the inbreaking of the transcendent Other that appears in the command to take responsibility for the one who is irreducibly not-myself.²⁴ The prohibition suggests that limitless, “infinite” opposition of transcendence that inscribes upon the face of the other person the supreme command against killing.

This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial expression, is the first word: “you shall not commit murder.” The infinite paralyzes power by its infinite resistance to murder, which, firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of his defenceless eyes, in the nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent. There is here a relation not with a very great resistance, but with something absolutely *other*: the resistance of what has no resistance — the ethical resistance.²⁵

Shoah draws its dramatic power from setting the Holocaust’s murderous nihilism in an ethically charged universe: the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not commit murder,” haunts the “ethos” of the entire project, and provides the subliminal caption of every scene. But Lanzmann is not simply looking to find culprits in order to render obvious judgments. More ambitiously, he wants to examine as closely as possible the elements of the uniquely dreadful “de-facing” of the human person that occurred at this nadir of Western history.

The obvious objection to linking Levinas with Lanzmann is that *Shoah* violates, as it were on its very face, the prohibition against images, and reduces “the Other” to an object of perception and therefore “the Same.” But Lanzmann’s film, part of “an ongoing ethical inquiry informed, like Levinas’s writings, by the traumatic legacy of the Holocaust,”²⁶ resists this claim. First and most decisively, *Shoah* never directly represents the subject that it studies. It forswears the grainy black-and-white archival footage of jackbooted soldiers, emaciated stripe-clad prisoners, and bodies bulldozed into open pit graves. For Lanzmann such images precisely fit the objectification process that Levinas describes: they detach events as past, turn them into something understood and managed, whose obscure but traceable causes can be researched and described, and whose effects, though frightening, can be understood and measured. Objectifying the Shoah makes it something from another time and place, a result of special conditions and primitive thinking, still abstractly possible perhaps, but highly unlikely precisely because it has already happened once, and because we witness the pictures with such revulsion (so the logic goes), we are insured against it happening again. Humanity learns from its past, the viewer thinks, just as I am learning at this moment. But Lanzmann thinks this is a false hope. That it has happened makes the next one easier, because only “the first Holocaust is the hardest.”²⁷ In contrast *Shoah* consists principally of people talking and places resting from the horrors of death, photographed in the present day. Lanzmann opts for filming victims, bystanders, and perpetrators as present witnesses of a living past. His camera often focuses tightly upon faces, searching for non-verbal clues to their experience. Such close-ups, however, reveal the “habitual impregnable passivity” of their faces, which are often “inexpressive, deadpan, at once unreadable and available to a multiplicity of readings”; each such scene “strips the face of spectacular qualities and re-maps it instead as a trauma site.”²⁸

So the images claim no final interpretation, but point beyond themselves to something unaccountable and mysterious that brings viewers near but offers them no hope of increasing understanding of the Holocaust, much less of reducing it to knowledge and so to “the Same.” *Shoah* refuses a story whose linear progression might suggest that this event obeys a law of development or rationality that can be learned and surpassed. Lanzmann’s film instead circles around the same people and the same sites repeatedly, irregularly, obsessively, and finally escapes the illusion of intelligibility.²⁹

Analysts like Dominick LaCapra have looked negatively on the “displaced, disguised, and often denied religious elements in Lanzmann’s approach.”³⁰ But I would prefer to call *Shoah*’s religious framework “ironic.” Lanzmann addresses the unimaginable by the classic trope of indirection, irony, which jarringly juxtaposes starkly contrasting or even contradictory fields of meaning as a way of exposing truth that we cannot master. In Lanzmann’s hands, the medium of film not only replicates but even transfigures the process of irony found in works of literature.

Like Levinas, Lanzmann looks for the disclosure of Otherness in the exchanges of oral discourse. Spoken words often sound over images of the landscapes that witnessed the killing. The clash of foreign languages, especially for those who speak no Polish, heightens the strangeness. People speak, faces move, and silent spaces insinuate rather than blurt their story. The ironic clash between the peaceful scenery and the imagined violence moves viewers from being mere observers to listeners and interlocutors. The ordinary faces of those who witnessed spectacular evil resist being reduced to objective images that can be assimilated and forgotten. They call the listener to participate in an encounter with the Other that forgoes the cheap illusion of participation conjured up by the hypnotic effects of archival footage.

Lanzmann collapses the past into the present by building his film around present day interviews with participants in the drama.³¹ He visits sites of the events of 1941-1945, the placid open fields where bodies were burned, and tranquil snow-covered stones that honor the dead. He films cities as they look now and every day, shows companies that built the infrastructure of death still operating on modern streets, and visits the village squares where the homes that Jews once occupied now house people who profited from their deaths. At the center of the film is an ironic “presence of an absence,”³² the silhouette of the dead, their future that never was, their children never conceived, their grandchildren never born.

Shoah’s assiduous artistry shows that it is no mere description or chronicle. Juxtaposition of voices and landscape, splicing of faces that hide with others that speak openly, arranges cinematically an otherwise impossible meeting between people and places. Lanzmann ironically turns participants who were the victims, perpetrators, and bystanders during the Shoah into characters in a drama wherein they play themselves. This brings the former participants out of their repressed detachment from the awful events to become true witnesses to them. Lanzmann converses with Abraham Bomba, a barber who cut the hair of people about to enter the gas chambers at Treblinka, while Bomba cuts a man’s hair. Lanzmann staged this

barbershop scene just in order to be able to turn Bomba into a character in the reconstruction of his own story. Similarly, Lanzmann found an engineer who brought carloads of Jews to the place of their death still living near the village of Treblinka; so he rented a locomotive at great expense for a day so that the man might re-enact his work. In the film the viewer rides the locomotive into Treblinka along with the ghosts of the Jews about to be killed. Remarkable scenes emerge in the process of these re-enactments, as when the engineer looks out his window and mysteriously runs his finger across his throat in imitation of a gesture that local people used—whether sadistically or compassionately is not clear—to signal to the Jews their fate. The act was unscripted, and caught Lanzmann off guard; but he found it a precious moment for the film. However staged in the present and distant in time from the actual event, such moments bring the awful reality of the Holocaust into the present. In an interview Lanzmann uses an ironic phrase to describe this approach, *fiction du réel*—“fiction of the real.”³³

Lanzmann involves himself as interlocutor with his characters and openly abandons the pretense of detached observation and reporting. This candor helps to frame viewers as participants. The irresistible power of the images implicates viewers as eavesdroppers, de facto voyeurs of the events they show. Nowhere is this more evident than in the clandestine interview with Treblinka S.S. guard Franz Suchomel. Lanzmann shows us the inside of the van parked outside Suchomel's house, with all the recording equipment inside. Suchomel does not know he is being filmed, and Lanzmann promises that his name will not be used. But viewers not only learn his name, they also hear his voice, see his face, and behold his reprehensible life, which will endure as long as the film endures. Suchomel too receives “an everlasting Name.” Whatever theoretical objections viewers might have to this procedure, they implicate themselves by the act of viewing. One cannot but admire Lanzmann's masterful manipulation of the medium.³⁴

Encounter at Chelmno

One haunting portion of the film stalks the conscience of Christian viewers. It takes place in front of a Catholic church that served as one of the killing sites. A display of excruciating cinematic irony snaps a viewer's attention to the history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism embedded in the Christian tradition. First, the setting: the “Final Solution” began at Chelmno in Poland, about fifty miles northwest of Lodz. On 7-8 December 1941 (as Catholic villagers celebrated the Feast of the Immaculate Conception), the killing process began with the use of gas vans. Jews were brought to Chelmno from all around this area of Poland where there was a heavy Jewish population; they came from nearby villages like Grabow, and then from ghettos in cities like Lodz. Everyone, including the elderly and children, were told to strip for delousing. Instead, the groups were herded into large cargo vans outfitted for killing people by carbon monoxide poisoning. When the doors closed, the engine started, and the fumes poured into the cargo bay. Screams were audible in the town, along with those praying the *Sh'ma* (“Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one”; Deut. 6:5), the traditional Jewish prayer for times of mortal danger. The van drove slowly through the nearby forest while its fumes

suffocated the people. The bodies were burned in great ovens, and their ashes spread in the Narew River. About 400,000 Jews were murdered in this way. During one phase the Jews were herded and locked overnight in the Catholic Church; in the morning the vans took them by lots to be killed.

Only two Jews survived the extermination process at Chelmno. One was Simon Srebnik, a boy of thirteen at the time who helped clear bodies from the vans. The S.S. favored his athletic ability and sweet singing voice; the people of the village thought of him as "the child who sang while his heart wept." Early in 1945, as the Russian army approached, Srebnik was shot; but by chance he survived his execution, and regained his health. Lanzmann found Srebnik in Israel, a man in his late 40s, and persuaded him to return to Chelmno for his first visit since the war. Srebnik's return serves as the opening sequence of the film.

Scene Summary

As the sequence begins, Simon Srebnik stands with the villagers before the same doors of the church where the Jews had been trapped. On this day the church is celebrating the Feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary. The people are surprised and pleased to see Simon Srebnik still alive after all these years. Lanzmann asks if they remember when the Jews were locked inside the church. They all nod in agreement. All day long and into the night, they remember, Jews were brought into the church. Then in the morning "big armored vans" backed up to the same church doors we see behind them, and took the Jews into the woods to be killed. "Did they all know these were death vans for gassing people?" asks Lanzmann. Yes, they say, they could not help knowing. The Jews screamed and moaned all night long in the church for food; but no one was allowed to give them anything or even look at them. Asked to describe the cries of the Jews, a lady in a babushka says they cried out to Jesus, Mary, and God. Simon Srebnik looks on quietly.

Then bells ring as a procession emerges through the church doors. An icon of the Virgin carried by servers leads the procession. Banners follow, and more than half a dozen clergy in black cassocks and white surplices emerge in pairs; then four young girls in white dresses and gloves strew flower petals and periodically curtsy. Two altar servers appear, followed by two laymen with candles, a server rings a hand bell, another carries incense. In light rain, four men uphold a canvas canopy that protects the priest who carries the monstrance housing the sacred host of Christ's body. A long shot of the countryside views the church in the distance, with horse drawn carts in the fields halted in reverence. The pealing narrows to a single bell as the camera closes in upon the cross at its very top, and lingers there. The cross overlooks the same quiet river valley where the barbarities occurred.³⁵

Back at the church doors, a silent throng kneels in adoration around the doors and in the courtyard. After the service the small group reassembles. Lanzmann learns that almost as many Jews were locked in the church as there were worshippers that day. Fifty vans in a steady stream were needed to empty the church. Lanzmann asks why they think these calamities happened to the Jews. "Because they were the richest!" exclaims one. Another re-

minds him, "Many Poles were also exterminated, even priests!" Then Mr. Kantarowski, the church organist, steps to the fore in front of Simon Srebnik to tell a pertinent story he heard. Sharp jabs of his index finger punctuate his expression.

Mr. Kantarowski will tell us what a friend told him. It happened in Myndjewyce, near Warsaw.

Go on.

The Jews were gathered in a square. The rabbi asked an S.S. man: "Can I talk to them?" The S.S. man said yes. So the rabbi said that around two thousand years ago the Jews condemned the innocent Christ to death. And when they did that, they cried out, "Let his blood fall on our heads and on our sons' heads." Then the rabbi told them: "Perhaps the time has come for that, so let us do nothing, let us go, let us do as we're asked."

He thinks the Jews expiated the death of Christ?

He doesn't think so, or even that Christ sought revenge. He didn't say that. The rabbi said it. It was God's will, that's all!

[Then the lady in the babushka steps next to Mr. Kantarowski. She speaks sharply while frowning and gesturing urgently. As she speaks, Mr. Kantarowski rubs his hands together in a washing motion.]

What'd she say?

So Pilate washed his hands and said, "Christ is innocent" and he sent Barabbas. But the Jews cried out: "Let his blood fall on our heads!" That's all; now you know!³⁶

The volume lowers as the camera closes in upon Srebnik, staring into the distance and forgotten by the group. The scene then shifts to a shot of the church doors from the back of a vehicle as it drives off. The camera lingers on the church; the further down the road it travels, the smaller the church becomes.

The Exegesis of Irony

The searing collisions of irony in this complex sequence happen on several levels: the doors, the procession, and the organist's story. The church doors provide a focal point for the sequence and the link that collapses past into present. The doors literally frame the conversation with the villagers in the presence of Simon Srebnik. The procession honoring the Virgin emerges from the same church doors through which Jews passed to their deaths by the thousands. At one point crowds of people kneel in silent adoration at the doors, enacting what might have been repentance for the crimes that were committed there; but it is not so. At the end of the sequence Lanzmann brings the viewer up to the very doorway where the Jews underwent their "passion." Church entrances have historically featured art signifying the passage from the worldly precincts of death to the heavenly realm of life; for Jews this was a passageway from life to death. Medieval churches once protected people fleeing arrest or persecution by a "right of sanctuary." But this church protected no one during the Shoah; and instead it became a holding pen for murder.

The innocent purity of the children in the procession, especially the flower girls in white, carries a terrible double irony. First, their awkward, doe-like innocence contrasts with the vio-

lated child-man standing in their midst, Simon Srebnik, witness to the killing of Jews who had been locked in this church. Second, the pubescent girls strewing petals before the sacrament exquisitely reflect the Church's self-image as virginal, sinless, unstained, "the pure and spotless bride of Christ" — celebrated in the very place that witnessed unspeakably murderous defilement. Shoshana Felman writes:

[T]he contiguity of this rather unvirginal and violated childhood (of the child who had to sing when his heart wept) with the immaculate virginity here enacted, of itself creates an almost sacrilegious, and desecralizing, resonance, in an astounding, a vertiginous and a breath-taking cinematic condensation and juxtaposition of different dimensions, of different registers of space and time, of different levels of existence and experience. The sudden, unexpected superimposition of the Holocaust in which the church served as a death enclosure (as the antechamber to the gas vans) and of the present Christian celebration of the birth of the Virgin Mary, brings out a terrible and silent irony, of a church that in effect embodies a mass tomb, at the same time that it celebrates a birth, of a site whose history is stained with blood, at the same time that it is the stage of an oblivious celebration of an ethical virginity and of an intactly white immaculateness.³⁷

The Christians of Chelmno identify themselves with the purity of the Church's self-portrayal. The procession venerates an icon of the Virgin, the classic Catholic image of the Blessed Mother who protects all her children. The Church sees itself reflected in her image, and she is the "Mother of the Church." But having "objectified" the Jews (from a Levinasian perspective), and sealed off their guilty consciences from history by means of fantasy, the people objectify the religious symbols themselves, however reverently, and detach them from the gestalt of Jesus' teaching on merciful love. Catholic viewers are crushed by the pincers of contradiction between what this church did and what the larger Church claims for itself:

The Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder. She does all in her power to relieve their need and in them she strives to serve Christ.³⁸

Simon Srebnik returned as a lonely witness to the terrifying depths of the Shoah. Yet the villagers treat him as an occasion to reinforce their innocence. They brazenly explain the reason the Holocaust happened while he stands in their midst: Jews were the richest, smuggled their wealth, sewed gold into their clothes, and so on. Their new negation of the Jews belatedly re-ignites the Holocaust and spiritually kills Simon Srebnik as he stands in their midst,³⁹ because he remains a Jew under the self-condemnation voiced by the rabbi in Mr. Kantarowski's story. Their mindless vitriol and utter callousness are pathetic enough. But the peculiar Christian pathology about the Jews, which solders their mind closed to the enormous crimes committed in their church, here becomes delusional.

Most pernicious of all is the rock hard certainty of their understanding of why Jews perished in the Holocaust; the reason is religious and they think it is Christian. Crass Eastern European anti-Semitism blends seamlessly with venomous Christian anti-Judaism in self-righteous anger over Jewish bloodguilt for the death of Jesus. "It was God's will — that's all ...

Now you *know!*" This *knowingness* marks the peculiar spiritual sclerosis that has prevented Christians from caring for the Jews as their Other. This self-authenticating certitude cauterizes their consciences against any charge of complicity or indifference during the Holocaust. Shoshana Felman notes that Mr. Kantarowski, despite the vigor of his speech, remains personally mute as a character. "He refuses to take responsibility for his own discourse," standing twice removed from it by only repeating what he heard from someone else, and making the rabbi tell the story for him.⁴⁰ This somehow reassures his conscience; "the words of the rabbi *speak for him*," and make the Jews "provide their own interpretation of their history and their own explanation of their murder."⁴¹ Lanzmann asks, "He thinks the Jews expiated the death of Christ?" The translator replies, "He doesn't think so. He didn't say that. The rabbi said it." Just as it was in the first century, so it is now: "It was God's will, that's all!" Felman compactly analyzes the underlying engine that drives this scene and might well caption the history of Christians relating to Jews: "their utter failure to imagine Otherness."⁴²

But Christian viewers of *Shoah* note yet a third removal in Kantarowski's words that is bitterly ironic in this setting, namely, that the rabbi quotes Matthew 27:25 about Jews accepting bloodguilt for Jesus' death. The earlier fantasy about Jews praying to Jesus and Mary returns as a Christian hallucination of a rabbi accepting the authority of a New Testament text as the grounds for his own and his people's deaths. Each step in the conversation moves the Christians further and further from responsibility. With grim vehemence the babushka lady takes over from Mr. Kantarowski: "So Pilate washed his hands and said, 'Christ is innocent' and he sent Barabbas. But the Jews cried out: 'Let his blood fall on our heads!' That's all; now you know!" But it is the Christians who are washing their hands of the Jews. A chilling and eerie moment occurs at the end of the scene. While the babushka lady speaks about Pilate, Mr. Kantarowski rubs his hands over each other in a hand washing motion. This unconscious act captures the Lady Macbeth-like sleepwalking Christian conscience as it tries to blot out the stain of slandering, alienating, and finally murdering the Jews. But the spot does not come out.

Nevertheless, the most sobering reality for Christians is yet to come. It occurs when one juxtaposes the words of Kantarowski and the logic of Matthew 27:25, "And the whole people said in reply, 'His blood be upon us and on our children.'" The continuities between Matthew's scene and Kantarowski's speech are striking. Since the Temple had already been destroyed and the city ransacked by the Romans, Matthew retrofitted his narrative about providence to the calamity that befell the city. The saying he quotes on the lips of the Jews is therefore a Christian fabrication. Matthew ties the historical calamity of a later generation to guilt for the death of Christ, and makes the Jews speak, interpret, and accept their own destruction in their own words. Matthew could have said later, "I didn't say it — 'all the people' said it!" Matthew's license to write such a text came from his utter certainty that, despite its being inflicted by a tyrannical pagan regime, the destruction that befell Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Jews came from God. History had already proven him right, so casting the *fait accompli* as prophecy was legitimate. Matthew and Christians of his community washed their hands of

the Jews who refused to believe in Jesus, and so suffered the consequences of the destruction of the Temple and the siege of the city. Matthew in effect said, "It was God's will — that's all!" But the most ominous feature that Matthew shares with Kantarowski's outlook is that he objectified the Jews over against his own community. They are now estranged and different — a "they" and "them" over against "we" and "us." Care for the Jews as the Other became merely optional, something that Christians may or may not carry out, depending on conditions. In the end, despite the psychosis we see operating in the Chelmno church scene, the depth and accuracy of Kantarowski's exegesis of the verse from Matthew is uncanny, and mimics Matthew's logic down to the last detail.

III

Shoah reflects Christian anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism as a pathological lack of feeling and fantastic perception about Jews that blocks care for the Jew as Other. These embedded attitudes, combined with ordinary fear and concern for self-preservation, created the deafening silence of Christian indifference during the Holocaust. The unguarded candor of the villagers presents the Christian viewer with a rare look at how others see us, and perhaps with an opportunity. What can we learn from this uncomfortable view? Can we hear the slightly altered voice of the One who stands among us "with eyes like a fiery flame" (Rev. 1:14) and a message to the Church that begins, "I know your works" (Rev. 2:2)?

After the Holocaust the Church has enjoined people to remember and not forget. But ordinary Christians may be at a loss as to how to repent of the sin of anti-Semitism.⁴³ If defined as active hatred of Jews, they will claim not to be guilty of that sin. How do we recall and recant a sin that was not our doing? Yet many generations of Christians were unknowing carriers of the anti-Jewish virus that led to the Black Death of the Holocaust. At issue here is a crisis of "sacred imagination." We will not feel the pain of something we do not understand and cannot imagine, and the Holocaust can seem "long ago and far away." Fresh imagination is needed to find our way to forgiveness. What spiritual disciplines might we use?

In what follows I wish to make three small proposals. The Church might move forward toward a new mode of repentance and care for the Other in the wake of viewing *Shoah* by:

1. Renouncing the logic of Matthew 27:25
2. Emphasizing the eschatological dimension of the Church
3. Speaking of the sins of church members in the first person.

If we should have resources for post-Holocaust Christian renewal already within our tradition, then finding them will require a shift of focus that is willing to lose some hallowed views while welcoming other new ones. David Tracy wrote, "To understand any tradition after the *tremendum* [of the Holocaust] is to retrieve its genius through a retrieval that is also a suspicion. Through that kind of hermeneutics, we may find hidden, forgotten, even repressed aspects of the tradition for thought now."⁴⁴ How does the framework of Emmanuel Levinas's thought and the cinematic mirror of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, help us re-read Matthew and the rest of our New Testament? If Christian faith can "retrieve its genius through a retrieval

that is also a suspicion," it will do so first by recognizing the need for critical theological study of the Scriptures that reveals their human diversity and at times sharp differences of viewpoint. Diversity characterizes the Old Testament, as for example in the differing perspectives on God in the two versions of the story of creation in Genesis 1-3; or the opposing views on kingship in Israel intertwined in 1 Samuel 8-12; or the strong minority voices of Job and Ecclesiastes contesting the classic Deuteronomistic theology of retribution that interpreted the Exile as just punishment for sin. In the New Testament, the portrayals of Jesus' passion emphasize different aspects of the story that cannot be reconciled on the literal level. The ancient Church refused to harmonize the Jesus tradition by combining the four Gospels; the Church has received them in all their diversity.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, the church has placed side by side in the same canon works that do not share the same outlook. The response to the canon is not to suppress or undervalue the sharp view of an individual biblical author, but to make up one's mind in face of diverse views existing side by side.⁴⁵

Thinking that serves the life of the Church cannot be content with ascribing these differences to different sources, which solves the problem presented by unity by simply dismissing it. We should not fear to find diverse perspectives that do not merely supplement one another. The canon does not transcend history like a timeless monolith, but offers alternatives within historical development that demand spiritual discernment. Like the audience of Jesus' parables, we must participate in the work of interpretation so that we see and hear rightly and become healed (Mark 4:10-12) and, to adapt a saying of Paul, we must work out our hermeneutics with fear and trembling (see Phil. 2:12).

1. Renouncing the logic of Matthew 27:25

With Matthew's bloodguilt verse Christians began to lose their sense of responsibility for Jews as Jews, and so weakened their obedience to the command to care for the Other. We should renounce not only the traditional misunderstanding of Matthew 27:25 as condemning all Jews, but also the very reasoning process embedded in the text itself. Matthew introduces the haunting issue of responsibility in the language of the Old Testament relating to bloodguilt for condemning the innocent. Judas tries to escape responsibility by returning the blood money. The priests refuse the contaminated money, and launder it by buying a burial ground for vagrants. Raymond Brown writes,

Matthew thinks divine retribution falls most clearly on "all the people" who volunteer: "His blood on us and on our children."... Matthew, writing after 70, vocalizes a causal judgment that arose among Jewish believers in Jesus, namely, that the decisive factor contributing to the catastrophe was the giving over of the innocent Son of God to crucifixion by the Romans.⁴⁶

Matthew interpreted this as a sign of divine judgment on the city for rejecting Jesus and consenting to his crucifixion in the previous generation. The crucial move is to interpret the events of history in terms of God's judgmental action upon the Jews. This is a common theme of the prophets of Israel, but here carries a momentous difference: the community that

speaks of these events is Matthew's "church" (only he uses this term) of Jewish and Gentile Jesus believers. The grounds have shifted: the ancient people retained their status as God's people, whereas the Jews of Jesus' time and their children of Matthew's time forfeited theirs. The judgment on Jerusalem and the Temple self-evidently proves it. But this logic is as flawed as it is lethal. As Jewish New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine observed,

Not only does it open the possibility that any disaster can be interpreted as a sign of divine displeasure, it also too easily locates the divine on the side of the oppressor, rather than on the side of the victim. It is no more theologically appropriate to claim that the destruction of the Temple represents divine rejection of the Jews than it is to claim that the conquering of Christian Jerusalem by the Muslims in the seventh century represents the divine rejection of the church.⁴⁷

Matthew's logic equates the rejection of Jesus as Messiah with perpetrating the death of Jesus, a rejection that has remained in effect to this day among Jews who simply remain Jews and refuse to become Christians. Since the second century Jews were charged as "Christ-killers" because of Matthew 27:25; with the maturing of christological thought ascribing divinity to Christ, this becomes the even more serious charge of deicide. Growing from the toxic root of belief in a self-imposed curse upon the Jewish people for rejecting Jesus, the charge of deicide led to virulent Christian anti-Judaism. The destruction of the Temple set into motion a chain of thinking that stirred a vitriol that soon hardened into traditional theology. Matthew claims to know the ways of providence in explaining the destruction of the Temple and the violence of the Roman war as due to Jewish complicity in the death of Jesus for which they took full responsibility. Christians of the New Testament era already objectified the Jews, and arrogated the claim to know God's mind based on a theological judgment about the devastating events of the Roman War. Already in the Church's first formative decades, then, Christians failed to care for their non-Christian Jewish Other.

This breakdown is unfortunate in itself; but because of the canonical status of these writings, a law of unintended consequences arose that licensed future generations to replicate Matthew's reasoning. Because of this logic, the Church disowned the greater body of Jews who did not believe in Jesus by linking them to Jesus' death. A bizarre sequel to this is the Christian history with the figure of Judas. Having been one of the Twelve, this was essentially the story of a Christian failure. That seems to be how Mark thought of it. But beginning with Matthew, the memory of Judas is spewed from the Christian memory as a reprobate. So successfully did the Church dissociate Judas from itself that in the Church fathers made Judas an emblem, not of the Christian failure, but of Jewish treachery. St. Augustine, for instance, says that Judas "wears the mask (*sustinet personam*) of Christ's enemies, the ungrateful Jews," both those who "hated Christ in his own day, as well as those in the present who succeeded their elders by hating him with their own impiety."⁴⁸

The particular situation of Jerusalem's destruction that gave rise to the judgment was forgotten; but the potentially lethal anti-Jewish logic of the judgment remained, backed by the authority of Scripture. The historical result has been that Matthew 27:25 "has caused more

Jewish suffering than any other in the Christian Testament.”⁴⁹ The legacy of medieval persecution of Jews based on this bloodguilt passage is well known and widely repudiated. But to this day its logic sustains Christian supersessionist thinking on the popular level as well as the perception of Judaism as a carnal, legalistic, degenerate religion that must pass away, if not by killing then by conversion. In this mindset, modern Jews still “reject” Jesus simply by remaining Jews, and so implicitly endorse their ancient ancestors’ judgment of him at the crucifixion; thus the logic of Matthew 27:25 lives on. Scholar Amy-Jill Levine understands this personally. “While the violence has mostly subsided, the charge remains,” she writes. “I have been accused of being a “Christ-killer”; so have my children.”⁵⁰

This denial of the Jews as Other is the temporal Church’s original sin, embedded and passed on, consciously and unconsciously, until the Nazis’ murderous “Final Solution” hijacked it. Impelled by the events of the Shoah, the Second Vatican Council’s *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965) took the momentous step of explicitly repudiating the effects, and implicitly disavowing the logic, of a canonical text of Scripture: “Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf. John 19:6), *neither all Jews at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion ... Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture*” (par. 4, emphasis added). This move, more than any, other set in motion a process of reversing Christian antipathy to Jews. It was not a blanket reversal, and by itself does not neutralize the centuries of “teaching of contempt”; but it potentially snapped the chain of anti-Jewish theological reasoning about judgmental divine providence that Matthew 27:25 set in motion for Christians. What was explicit in this text still needs to be underscored, but what was implicit in it needs to be made explicit. The full effect of the Church’s dissent from Matthew has yet to register for most Catholic Christians. My proposal is that the Church continue along the trail blazed by *Nostra Aetate* by publicly exposing and repudiating this unchristian chain of reasoning in its preaching and teaching.

2. Emphasizing the eschatological dimension of the Church

Matthew 27:25 cannot be excised from the Gospel, but it can be juxtaposed to alternative perspectives within the biblical canon. An unfortunate effect of Matthew’s shift to the issue of bloodguilt and the theological judgments on history is that it obscured the alternative views within the tradition. By contrast the evangelist Mark, while not excusing culpable outsiders, keeps focus on the insiders who knew better, the disciples, who failed to remain faithful to Jesus during his passion.

Mark does portray his ideal picture of the group of disciples (Mark never uses the word “church”) in his early chapters where they drop their former lives in obedience to Jesus’ call, and become “the Twelve”; they are to “be with him” and to have authority to preach, drive out demons, and heal the sick (3:12-13; 6:7-13). But this early portrayal becomes an ironic backdrop for their many failures throughout the Gospel, culminating in the betrayal of Judas (14:10-11), the denials of Peter (14:66-72), and the desertion of the rest (14:50). The run up to

the passion particularly scrutinizes the failures of Peter. He rebukes the Lord for speaking about suffering (8:32-33); boasts that he will never deny the Lord even if it costs him his life (14:31); and sleeps while Jesus agonizes in prayer (14:37).

While Mark clearly condemns the treachery of the Jewish high council, the conniving priests and scribes, and the indifference of Pilate, they did not know Jesus. Mark's paradigm of failure comes from the disciples, who knew who Jesus was but betrayed, denied and deserted him anyway. Like Lanzmann, Mark masterfully uses irony to convey the darkening depths of the disciples' failure. He introduces characters both friendly and unfriendly into the passion story to fill roles that the disciples should have filled. A woman anoints Jesus for burial while they bicker about the cost (14:5); Simon of Cyrene carries his cross (15:21), Mark's paradigmatic picture of the true disciple; and Joseph of Arimathea honors his death by burying him (15:42-45). Even more ironically, Jesus' enemies offer the homage that the disciples should have offered, though it is hateful and mocking homage: the Sanhedrin receives his acclamation as Messiah (14:61-62; 65); Pilate calls him "the King of the Jews" (15:2); the soldiers venerate him with the royal trappings of crown, cloak, and scepter (15:16-20); the inscription above him on the cross announces his presence (15:26); and the centurion declares officially his enthronement as Son of God (15:39). Through all this the disciples are nowhere to be found. Future forgiveness of the disciples and Peter is only hinted (14:28; 16:7).

Did Mark's portrayal smear Peter and the Church? Not at all, if the church tradition that Mark acted as Peter's "interpreter" is anywhere close to being right. If so, Peter seems to have told these stories on himself as a kind of reverse psychology: he puts himself forward as a negative model of discipleship in order to promote true repentance. Furthermore, if tradition has historical credence, by the time Mark wrote Peter had recently given his life as a martyr and so had finally taken up the cross that he shirked during Jesus' passion. Therefore, despite the painful ironies that Mark constructs out of the stories of Peter, Peter's failures portray against the backdrop of martyrdom a larger irony that is redemptive. It conveys a potent image of encouragement for disciples in Mark's time who have to deal with their own abysmal failures during a time of persecution.⁵¹

Most scholars think Matthew's Gospel is a "second, revised and expanded edition" of Mark, which Matthew subtly altered by addition and qualification. He does not omit the portrayal of the disciples' failures, but he subtly qualifies them by showing the reassuring promise of future forgiveness and redemption. Symbolically Matthew's story of Peter walking on water, then sinking because of fear, and Jesus pulling him to safety (14:28-31), is a promise of redemption from his future failures. Peter criticizes the Lord's teaching about the cross, but when Jesus calls him "Satan" he already has the blessing of the Lord's word that God has revealed to him Jesus' true identity as God's Son, because of which Jesus will build his Church on "the rock" whose name Peter bears (Matthew 16:16-18).

Mark's ecclesiology contrasts with Matthew's by refusing to bring the future redemption of the Church into the present, except as a hinted promise. One can hardly imagine Mark's inter-

rupting the narrative about Peter's denial to remind the reader, "the Church as such is sinless." In Mark the spotless pure Church, however, real is a distant star whose light will grow brighter at the proper time—a time that is "not yet" during the emergency of "now" in his church's crisis of failure. Mark firmly sets the community before the cross and magnifies the various images of the failures of its most important figures, the Twelve, in order to teach about true repentance. Mark is not conducting a campaign of dissent, but trying to repair the failures of disciples.⁵² Peter sacrificed his stature (or Mark did it for him) in order to allow the larger church to identify with the bitter and still bleeding gashes inflicted by the failures of its "sons and daughters."

The spotlessness of the bride is eschatological, like New Jerusalem that will descend from heaven (cf. Rev. 21:2, 9-10). The present Church is sinless in hope and in radical dependence upon the grace of her espoused husband. The text of Ephesians 5:26-27, often used to remind us of the Church's sinlessness, is primarily eschatological, as St. Thomas taught.⁵³ The moment that Christ "presents to himself the church in splendor" occurs at the end of the Church's journey, not during it. For that reason the Church prays daily, "Forgive us our trespasses."

Assertions about the sins of members being "ontologically extra-ecclesial"⁵⁴ jar the senses in the post-Holocaust discussions. This is not a question about doctrine, but about rhetorical appropriateness and the demands of pastoral care. However correct the assertion about the sinless Church in a dogmatic sense, it is inappropriate in the context of discussion about the Holocaust. Here we can learn from Mark's Gospel. My proposal is that the post-Holocaust Church, like Mark's post-Temple Church, cover its assertions about sinlessness like Lenten statues, and dwell in silent sorrow before the cross with her sinful sons and daughters. The appearance of an ontological bifurcation, rather than the pedagogical distinction, between the historical temporal Church on pilgrimage from the sinless and pure bride of Christ lands pastoral practice in a no-man's land of inauthenticity, spiritual impotence—and irony.

3. Speaking of the sins of church members in the first person

This leads to the last proposal. To an uncomprehending outsider, as well as the unconscious insider, the Church asterisks its regret with claims to the innocence of "the Church as such." However correct on a dogmatic level, the implied distance of sinful Christians from the innocence of "the Church as such" creates a credibility gap, and makes supposed repentance seem retracted by a hundred qualifications. In the pastoral setting where fine theological distinctions are easily lost, these claims can enervate the act of *teshuvah*, both in Catholic and Jewish eyes.

The human tendency will be to identify oneself with the Church as sinless bride of Christ. As when watching a movie whose happy ending they know, people look impatiently past the bad parts of the story for the feel-good news of forgiveness and restoration. But the Holocaust calls Christians to Mark's type of self-examination before the cross in order to unlearn a dangerous and ingrained way of thinking. How do we train ourselves for repentance in the face of this enormously widespread, verifiably ancient, unconsciously deep, and virtually endemic problem of Christianity?

Bishops in lands where the atrocities occurred sensed the need for this in a series of statement of the 1980s and 1990s commemorating events of the Shoah. For example, a 1988 statement of the German and Austrian bishops, *Accepting the Burden of History: Common Declaration on the 50th Anniversary of the Pogroms Against the Jewish Community on the Night of 9-10 November 1938*, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the *Kristallnacht*. The bishops declared, "The Church, which we proclaim holy and which we honor as a mystery, is also a sinful Church and in need of conversion." Similarly on the level of the universal Church, as the millennium approached Pope John Paul II arranged for a series of moments in which the Church sought forgiveness for past wrongs, including and especially the Shoah. The document *We Remember* was an outcome of this. But some confusion followed when other documents reiterated the sinlessness of "the Church as such."⁵⁵

The statement of the International Theological Commission convened by then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger brings some clarity. Entitled *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* and issued on the eve of the millennium in December 1999, it explained the theological substructure beneath the Church's requests for forgiveness. It reiterated both statements on the Church's sinless state, as well as statements of Vatican II about the Church "always standing in need of purification" (1.2). It placed these reflections in the context of the traditional understanding of the Church as reflecting the divine and human natures of Christ while acknowledging the new note sounded by the Pope's acts of repentance on behalf of the Church (2.4). The Church can "take upon herself the weight of past faults" of her members, and "makes herself responsible for the sin of her children," just as Christ himself bore the sins of the world. Strikingly, while Church is innately holy, "she nonetheless confesses herself a sinner, not as a subject who sins, but rather in assuming the weight of her children's faults in maternal solidarity, so as to cooperate in overcoming them through penance and newness of life" (3.4).

My proposal extends from this truth the Church is "a sinner" by the reciprocity with her members, as Christ himself bore human sin. Let the Church speak of the sin of her members in the first person, as our Lord himself spoke of us sinners together with himself in the first person. The exchange of voices has precedent in ancient tradition. St. Augustine often spoke about Christ speaking in our voice, speaking the word "I" not for himself, but for our sake. He did this by assuming our human sin and fear into his own sinless self. Indeed St. Paul calls Christ "sin," 2 Cor. 5:21, and a curse, Gal. 3:13, thus in effect becomes a sinner, not as "the sinning subject" but as one who assumes the weight of our sins. Augustine's word for this is "transfiguration"—though this is not a reference to Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain (Mark 9:2-8); it rather it draws directly on the root sense of *trans* + *figura*, that is, "carrying over the form or picture."

He who deigned to assume the form of a slave, and within that form to clothe us with himself, he who did not disdain to take us up into himself, did not disdain either to transfigure us into himself, and to speak in our words, so that we in our turn might speak in his. This is the wonderful exchange, the divine business deal,

the transaction effected in this world by the heavenly dealer ... He does not say [to Saul], "Why are you persecuting my saints?" or 'My servants," but *Why are you persecuting me?* [Acts 9:4] This is tantamount to asking, "Why attack my limbs?" The Head was crying out on behalf of the members, and the Head was transfiguring the members into himself...And if two in one flesh, why not two in one voice? Let Christ speak then, because in Christ the Church speaks, and in the Church Christ speaks, and the body speaks in the Head, and the Head in the body.⁵⁶

The exchange of voices in the body operates vertically, as it were, from the Head to the Body, so how can it be inappropriate to speak of an exchange horizontally, from member to member? Since the Church shares flesh and blood as a mother with her children, St. Augustine's logic about an exchange of voices applies: "If two in one flesh, why not two in one voice?" This is the theological basis of my proposal. With particular reference to the sin of Christian anti-Judaism, which permeates the root and branch of our tradition like no other, the Church's teaching and proclamation might suspend talk of "her sons and daughters," with its third person references to "they" and "them," and refer instead to "I," "we," and "us." Such words spoken by the universal Church publicly in prayer to God and in dialogue with Jews would teach individual Christians to take greater personal responsibility for the actions of their fellow believers. It would also provide training exercise for the sacred imagination in "imagining Otherness"; to practice imagining the Other who is Christian will help us begin to practice imagining the Other who is not Christian, particularly the Jewish Other. As the Church finally hears the cockcrow of the Holocaust, we might at last weep the bittersweet tears of repentance and sorrow for what we have done in our history. The Church can begin to seek forgiveness forthrightly by confessing that we all as one, speaking in the first person, have played Judas to the Jewish people, and now to say together, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4).

Stories circulated for some time in Jewish circles after the death of Pope John XXIII that he had composed a prayer of penitence for the Church's historic antagonism of the Jews. The authorship of the prayer is almost certainly apocryphal. But its spirit of penance, its first person style, its reversal of the accursed and Christ-killing images that Christians once hurled at Jews, along with the warmth it generated among Jewish observers, make it an example of the kind of gesture Christians might make.

We are conscious today that many centuries of blindness have cloaked our eyes so that we can no longer see the beauty of Thy chosen people ... We realize that the mark of Cain stands on our foreheads. Across the centuries our brother Abel has lain in blood, which we drew, or shed tears we caused, forgetting Thy love. Forgive us for crucifying Thee a second time in their flesh. For we knew not what we did.⁵⁷

¹ Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust," in *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (New York Oxford University Press, 2001), 104.

² Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire," 105, 107.

³ *Ibid.* 107-108.

⁴ Didier Pollefyt, "Auschwitz, or How Good People Can Do Evil," in *Confronting the Holocaust*, eds. G. Jan Colijn and Marcia Sachs Littell (Lanham, Maryland, University Press of America, 1997), 98; quoted in *Holocaust Theology: A*

Reader, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 166. Pollefyt's essay draws attention to the phenomenon of consciousness bifurcation to address the issue of such contradictions. "This disunity of 'doubling' in the lives of most of the perpetrators points to a radical discontinuity in their inner lives between the public and the private;" *ibid.*

⁵ http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/ssalbum/auschwitz_album/

⁶ Stephen D. Smith, "Is There A Future for Christianity?" in *The Holocaust and the Christian World*, eds. C. Rittner, S. D. Smith, and I. Steinfeldt (New York: Continuum, 2000), 235-238.

⁷ *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*, "Letter to Cardinal Cassidy," in *The Holocaust, Never to Be Forgotten: Reflections on the Holy See's Document, We Remember* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 7.

⁸ *We Remember*, Part V, in *The Holocaust, Never to Be Forgotten*, 20.

⁹ *We Remember*, Part IV, in *The Holocaust, Never to Be Forgotten*, 16.

¹⁰ The phrase has passed into general use from the work by Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: The Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, translated by Helen Weaver (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1964). Isaac's audience with Pope John XXIII on this issue is said to have been the impetus for the statement on Judaism in *Nostra Aetate*.

¹¹ "Address to the American Jewish Committee," in *The Holocaust, Never to Be Forgotten*, 79.

¹² I have borrowed the concept of "secular scripture" from the stimulating work of Nicholas Boyle that occasioned the present collection, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). His insights have been augmented by Jewish reflections of Michael Fishbane in *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 33-46. Clearly neither scholar is responsible for the direction I have taken the idea, especially the move to consider film as a kind of literature.

¹³ Catherine Craft-Fairchild, "Do We Remember? The Catholic Church and the Holocaust," *Logos* 9/2 (2006), 68-106.

¹⁴ Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 154-155; quoted in Craft-Fairchild, "Do We Remember?" 92.

¹⁵ Craft-Fairchild, "Do We Remember?" 93.

¹⁶ Omer Bartov, "Spielberg's Oskar: Hollywood Tries Evil," in *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 54; quoted in Craft-Fairchild, "Do We Remember?" 93.

¹⁷ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, 3 vols, third ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Raul Hilberg in Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film*, corrected and revised (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 59.

¹⁹ Fred Camper, "Shoah's Absence," in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, ed. Stuart Liebman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 104.

²⁰ Libby Saxton, "Fragile Faces: Levinas and Lanzmann," *Film-Philosophy* 11/2 (2007), 1-14 [<http://www.film-philosophy.com/2007v11n2/saxton.pdf> >]

²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Kingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981).

²² *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion*. ed. Adriaan Peperzak (London: Routledge, 1995), xi. The phrase "ethics as first philosophy" comes from a 1984 essay by Levinas, "Éthique comme philosophie première." For "first theology," see Michael Purcell, *Levinas and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33-37.

²³ "Interdit de la représentation et "Droits de l'homme" ["The Prohibition against Representation and "The Rights of Man"] in *L'Interdit de la représentation. Colloque de Montpellier, 1981*, eds. Adélie and Jean-Jacques Rassial (Paris: Seuil), 109; quoted in Saxton, "Fragile Faces," 4.

²⁴ Helmut Peukert, "Unconditional Responsibility for the Other: The Holocaust and the Thinking of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, eds. Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 159.

²⁵ *Totality and Infinity*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969 [French original 1961]), 199.

²⁶ Saxton, "Fragile Faces," 3.

²⁷ Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire," 106: "The fact of the Holocaust makes a repetition more likely — a limit was broken, a control or awe is gone — and the murder procedure is now better laid out and understood."

²⁸ Saxton, "Fragile Faces," 9.

²⁹ Marc Chevie and Hervé Le Roux, "Site and Speech: An Interview with Claude Lanzmann about *Shoah*," translated by Stuart Liebman, *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah*, 46-48.

³⁰ Dominick LaCapra, "Lanzmann's *Shoah*: 'Here There Is No Why,'" in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, 194.

³¹ Lanzmann says, "The film is the abolition of all distance between past and present;" Chevie and Le Roux, "Site and Speech," 45.

³² Claude Lanzmann, "From Holocaust to 'Holocaust'" in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, 133. The phrase comes from Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim.

³³ Chevré and Le Roux, "Site and Speech," 44.

³⁴ See the approving remarks of fellow-filmmaker Marcel Ophüls, director of the acclaimed *The Sorrow and the Pity*; "Closely Watched Trains," in *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays*, 83-84.

³⁵ Scenes at the film's beginning show Srebrenica floating in a boat past the church on the same quiet river where he worked as a child slave of the S.S. As he visits the nearby forest where he helped dispose of bodies, he says, "It was always this peaceful here, always. Even when they burned two thousand people — Jews — every day, it was just as peaceful." *Shoah: The Complete Text*, 3.

³⁶ *Shoah: The Complete Text*, 89-90.

³⁷ Shoshana Felman, "The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, eds. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 262. Lanzmann indicated his approval of Felman's analysis by translating it into French for a volume of essays analyzing the film, *Au sujet de Shoah: le film de Claude Lanzmann*, ed. Michel Deguy (Paris: Belin, 1990).

³⁸ *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, par. 8, in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Austin P. Flannery, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 358.

³⁹ Shoshana Felman, "The Return of the Voice," 267.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 265.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 265-266, emphasis in text.

⁴² *Ibid.* 261.

⁴³ See James Bernauer, S.J., "The Holocaust and the Catholic Church's Search for Forgiveness," a presentation at the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, Boston College, October 30, 2002:

<http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/bernauer.htm/>

⁴⁴ David Tracy, foreword to Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), x.

⁴⁵ Raymond E. Brown, S. S., *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 43.

⁴⁶ Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1:29.

⁴⁷ Amy-Jill Levine, "Matthew, Mark, and Luke: Good News or Bad?" in *Jesus, Judaism, and Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox press, 2002), 85. Levine is referring to anti-Judaic interpretations of the Parable of the Vineyard in Mark 12:1-12, but her comments apply even more to Matthew's reasoning.

⁴⁸ *Exposition of Psalm 108.1*, in Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms (Enarrationes in psalmos) 99-120*, translated by Maria Boulding, O.S.B., *Works of Saint Augustine III/19* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2003), 241.

⁴⁹ Levine, "Good News or Bad?", 91. See also Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵⁰ Levine, "Good News or Bad?", *ibid.*

⁵¹ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:27-28.

⁵² *Pace* the well known thesis of Theodore Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), which posits an absolute opposition between the community led by Peter that celebrated Jesus' status as a "divine man" and miracle worker, and an eschatologically-oriented community, led by the final redactor of the gospel ("Mark"), that focused upon Jesus as suffering servant and awaited the fullness of salvation at his future return. For this view Mark's portrayal of Peter and the Twelve becomes a minority group's polemic against the mainstream Christian community represented by the apostles.

⁵³ "To be a glorious Church, with neither spot nor wrinkle, is the ultimate end to which we are brought by the Passion of Christ. Hence, this will be the case only in the heavenly homeland, not here on the way of pilgrimage, where 'if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves' [1 John 1:8]." *Summa Theologiae* III q.8, art. 3 ad 2; quoted in *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, statement of the International Theological Commission (December 1999), 3.3.

⁵⁴ Commentary on *We Remember* by Avery Dulles, S.J., in *The Holocaust, Never to Be Forgotten*, 58.

⁵⁵ In the "Response" to *We Remember* by the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, Jewish analysts confessed to find "puzzling" what seemed to be the "apparent absolution of the Church from historical responsibility." Cardinal Cassidy explained that the phrase "the Church" refers to the inerrant mystical bride of Jesus Christ, whereas the term "sons and daughters of the Church" does not exclude members of the Church at any level. But they thought the document was not clear on this and wondered if even Catholics would understand it. Even after the explanations, they wrote, "we find many Church statements confusing...What are we to make of the statement of the German and Austrian bishops from 1988 which says, 'The Church, which we proclaim holy and which we honor as a mystery, is also a sinful Church and in need of conversion,' which would seem to conflict with the concept of the inerrancy of the mystical Church."

⁵⁶ *Exposition 2 of Psalm 30.3-4*, in *Expositions of the Psalms (Enarrationes in psalmos) 1-32*, translated by Maria Boulding, O.S.B., *Works of Saint Augustine III/15* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2000), 322-323.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire," 114, n. 7.