

Dominicana

Vol. LXI

Summer 2018

No. 1

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ISSN: 2165-7335

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Dominicana is a semi-annual journal of theology, philosophy, and culture published by the Dominican Student Brothers of the Province of St. Joseph. Founded in 1916 at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C., the journal originally ran until 1968 and was refounded in 2011.

Subscription rates for one year: libraries and other institutions, \$50.00 (\$60.00 outside U.S.), religious houses, \$20.00 (\$30.00 outside U.S.), individuals, \$16.00 (\$25.00 outside U.S.). To subscribe, visit dominicanajournal.org, or send a check payable to “Dominican Students” to *Dominicana* Editor, 487 Michigan Ave NE, Washington, D.C., 20017.

ARGUMENT

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him.

— Matthew 25:31–32

Only when life arrives at its ultimate conclusion does its full meaning become clear. In Sigrid Undset's saga, *Master of Hestviken*, as Ingunn Steinfinnsdatter nears death, her life "appeared to her in a single instant as though embroidered on a ground—a single fabric, a whole tapestry of the same stuff from . . . childhood's days until now, until the end." Her approaching end is of a piece with her beginning. Her mortality—her death—serves to unveil the unity of her life.

More broadly, as the story in which God tells his loving plan, the whole of reality will only make total sense when it reaches its terminus. Then "we shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation and understand the marvelous ways by which his Providence led everything towards its final end" (CCC 1040). As St. Thomas says, "although the end be last in the order of execution, yet it is first in the order of the agent's intention" (*Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1). What God has planned from the beginning will only be perfectly known by us at the end.

This issue of *Dominicana* focuses on the end of things, in particular, the end of the world in the apocalypse. Death, judgment, heaven, and hell not only form part of the deposit of faith, they also provide a way of considering the efficacious grace

of God working here and now. On his deathbed, St. Dominic knew this link between earthly ends and heavenly hopes. Serene in his mortality, St. Dominic consoled the brothers gathered around him, encouraging them to consider what lies beyond the grave. In thanksgiving we his sons frequently pray to him: “O wonderful hope, which you gave to those who wept for you at the hour of your death, promising after your departure to be helpful to your brethren!”

A number of pieces in this issue focus on the connection between the last things and hope. Br. Joseph Hagan takes on the question of how we should hope for the end of the world, while Br. Damian Day shares the wisdom of some twentieth-century apocalyptic novels. Br. Isidore Rice and Br. Anthony VanBerkum discuss contemporary apocalyptic tendencies and the challenges and opportunities these present to evangelization. Br. Ephrem Reese offers a Thomistic appropriation of René Girard’s thought on Christ’s sacrificial triumph over violence, and Br. Jonah Teller discusses religious imagination and the afterlife with theologian Carol Zaleski.

Both Br. Aquinas Beale and Br. Maximilian Jaskowak meditate upon the triumph of love over death and evil as expressed respectively in the biblical story of Ruth and the great Marian image of “the woman clothed with the sun” (Rv 12:1). Fr. Michael Dosch shares with Br. Peter Gautsch stories of how God’s transformative love overcomes even the most trying situations. In an original translation provided by Br. Josemaría Guzmán-Domínguez, we hear a fifteenth-century friar, fra Savonarola, preaching on the love of Jesus in the face of death.

Additionally, this issue features Br. Thomas Martin Miller’s review essay of a new book about the history and role of cooperator brothers in the Order of Preachers, original fiction by Br. Isaiah Beiter, and a variety of reviews on books commenting upon the precarious interactions between the city of God and the city of man.

Convicted that “the world and its enticements are passing away” (1 Jn 2:14), we offer this issue as an encouragement to seek the things that last. We are pilgrims in this world. And as pilgrims strain their eyes towards the distant horizon where earth and heaven meet, we hope that our readers, in considering their end and the end of the world, will open their hearts more and more to God, who was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

Br. Philip Nolan, O.P.
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ESSAYS

DARE WE HOPE FOR THE LAST JUDGMENT?

Joseph Hagan, O.P.

Faith in the Last Judgment is first and foremost hope.

— *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI

In *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI proposes the Last Judgment as “not primarily an image of terror, but an image of hope; for us it may even be the decisive image of hope.” It seems shocking. Most associate the Last Judgment with fear and dread. Yet Benedict invented nothing new in proposing the Last Judgment as an image of hope. Rather, he is bringing Christians back to their patrimony, even if it surprises our modern ears. The Second Letter of St. Peter states:

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, *waiting for and hastening* the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! (2 Pt 3:11–12)

St. Peter acknowledges that Christ’s return will destroy heaven and earth, and in the same breath, he calls on Christians

to be “waiting for and hastening” this terrible day. Looking to the Second Coming, St. Paul cries out: “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22), and St. John exclaims: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rv 22:17).

We hope in God, that he will unite us to himself on the great and terrible day. We also hope in the way he will accomplish this, including the Last Judgment. But what does such hope look like?

OUR DESIRE FOR JUSTICE

For all our fear before God’s justice, we hunger for justice with a growing impatience. Think of our country’s various political movements: women’s suffrage, civil rights, anti-war protests, women’s rights, gay rights, abortion rights, right to life, etc. In each case, we see a human judgment that something is unjust, and we see an earnest pursuit of justice.

There is something noble in seeking justice in this world, but there is also something fallible. It is easy to be wrong in judging what is just or unjust. Both advocates of abortion and its opponents see themselves as fighting for justice; one side is seeking a false justice. Even when we judge rightly, we are often unable to render full justice. Take for example the case of a murdered child. Even if the jury convicts the right man and the judge hands down a just sentence, no human could ever return the murdered child to her parents. Human justice can only extend so far.

Worst of all, a human pursuit of justice may bring about an even worse injustice. Here, we can think of the French Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution. Real injustices triggered both these revolutions, but at the same time their attempts to reorder society unleashed new horrors. The Reign of Terror decapitated cloistered Carmelite nuns, and Lenin invented concentration camps—all in the name of justice apart from God. They proved Nietzsche’s aphorism: “He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 146).

The point is clear enough. Man's attempts at justice are limited at best and can even spark the worst atrocities. We long for a justice beyond our reach, a justice that can only be found in God, a justice that will be realized perfectly only in the Last Judgment.

REASONS FOR HOPE AMID THE LAST JUDGMENT

Granting our dissatisfaction with human justice, does it necessarily follow that we hope in the Last Judgment, or is it just the lesser of two evils? Certainly, the Last Judgment still retains its horrors. All will be revealed, putting our ugliest sins on full display before humanity. All evil will be punished, whether by hellfire or purification. Yet even in these aspects, there is a goodness, giving us reasons to hope in the Last Judgment.

When Christ sent out his disciples, he warned them of impending persecutions but also encouraged them: "have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known" (Mt 10:26). The promise of public revelation casts away the disciples' fears! Fully realized at the Last Judgment, this revelation will manifest the truth of God's justice. We have suffered already from failed attempts at justice based on the lies of propaganda and false promises. We await and desire this public revelation in part because we desire justice based on truth.

To the unrepentant, the revelation of their sins will be their shame, for they will see how they crafted their own shackles. But to the repentant, the revelation of their past sins will cause the saints to sing praise to God for his mercy and to the once-sinner who overcame sin by grace. The sinner-turned-saint will in turn sing of the sheer gift of heaven. Thus, we also long that God will write our lives, no matter how wayward, into a song of eternal praise through the grace of repentance.

Perhaps the scariest part of the Last Judgment will be the sentence of the unrepentant to hellfire. This seems to be more a cause of consternation than anticipation, yet we trust that God will end all works of evil, not by a reign of terror but by just



Michelangelo — The Last Judgment

punishments. In this life, we vainly attempt to curtail evildoers, but in the Last Judgment, God will finally accomplish this. We also trust that God respects our choices. Like the prodigal father, his mercy is far greater than the sins of his wayward son, but he will not force his stubborn older son to join the banquet (Lk 15:11–32). His mercy is never outdone, but neither is it forced on us. Even

more, we hope that God will mercifully lessen the punishment of those who refuse his banquet. St. Thomas writes: “Even in the damnation of the reprobate mercy is seen, which, though it does not totally remit, yet somewhat alleviates, in punishing short of what is deserved” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 21, a. 4, ad 1).

But what will happen to those repentant sinners in the state of grace yet still tainted by venial sins and earthly attachments? For those who die in such imperfection, we believe in the merciful purification of Purgatory. But what of the imperfect who are alive on earth on that final day? By grace, God will surely bring them to heaven while somehow purifying them. Among different ways of envisioning this purification, St. Paul speaks of fire: “Each man’s work will become manifest; for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire. . . . If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3:13–15). Think of the three young men in the Book of Daniel cast into the blazing furnace. The flames destroy their captors and their bonds, but they are unharmed (Dn 3). Similarly, at the Last Judgment, God will destroy all that binds us. Perhaps there will be pain inasmuch as we have clung to our own shackles, but certainly our true selves will be unharmed. Even more, as among the three young men there appeared one like the Son of God, we know that whatever that day brings, Jesus Christ will be with his elect. For us, repenting sinners, the Last Judgment is a call to responsibility. Even if we are among the elect, we will still be answerable for our sins, including the ones we may overlook. So as we hope in God’s mercy, we pray for the gift of deeper repentance so as to be purified by God’s mercy even today.

Hoping in our heavenly reward is straightforward enough, but we also hope that God will reward those to whom we are indebted. How could I ever repay my parents for the gift of life, for the sleepless nights of my infancy, and for their patience during my adolescence? Or how could I properly honor my fellow countrymen, from the settlers who made our nation to the soldiers

who stormed Normandy? At the Last Judgment, we long to see God reward all whom we could never fully repay in this life.

THREE “SETTINGS” FOR LEARNING AND PRACTICING HOPE IN THE LAST JUDGMENT

Hope in the Last Judgment, though reasonable, remains strange. It goes against our fabric, confronting our desire for self-preservation with death, our desire for pleasure with purification, and our desire for reputation with public revelation of our sin. Overcoming our dread before the Last Judgment requires more than a few words in an article: we need a reeducation of the heart. For such a reeducation, and in homage to *Spe Salvi*, I propose the following three “settings” for learning and practicing hope in the Last Judgment: Confession, Mass, and heavenly friendship.

THE FIRST JUDGMENT, CONFESSION, AND FILIAL CONFIDENCE

Perhaps our dread concerning the Last Judgment stems from man’s First Judgment, marked by fear and failure. Adam and Eve had just eaten the forbidden fruit, they heard God approaching, and they fled, ashamed of their nakedness. When called to responsibility, they passed the blame, fearing God’s punishment. For our part, we are sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. We have inherited their brokenness. This inheritance helps explain our dread of the Last Judgment. When God approaches again in the Second Coming, all our actions will be laid naked, we will be called to responsibility, and we will be justly punished. But unlike the First Judgment, this time there will be no hiding.

All the sacraments help remedy this inherited dread of judgment, but particularly Confession. In this sacrament, God forgives our sins and heals our wounds. By frequent confession, we slowly undo the failures of Adam and Eve. Instead of hiding in shame, we freely approach God through his priest. Instead of passing the blame, we take responsibility for our sins. Instead of

trying to avoid punishment, we do penance for our sins. Overall, Confession teaches us to move from fearing a wrathful judge to trusting a loving Father. Confession's opening line, "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned," addresses the priest, but even more so our heavenly Father. Confessing to our Father teaches us filial confidence. Thus, we learn to long for the Last Judgment because we have confidence in our Father's great mercy, far greater than our sins and the world's greatest atrocities. We have only to run into his arms.

There is one major difference between Confession and the Last Judgment. Confession is strictly private, protected by the seal. It only has a few elements of being public: we must verbally confess to a priest—that can be intimidating enough!—and we are spiritually reconciled to the Church. On the contrary, the Last Judgment will be fully public. Perhaps this explains why God instituted the sacrament with these public elements. Many argue that God can forgive sins without any middleman. That's true enough, but God has greater plans. Confession not only forgives our sins, but by confessing to a priest, we prepare for the Last Judgment, when all will be made manifest.

THE MASS AND THE LAST JUDGMENT

The Mass touches the past, the present and the future: it is a memorial of Christ's sacrifice, it makes Christ present now in truth and reality, and it anticipates the Kingdom of God and heavenly worship that is to come. Participation in the Mass helps us to look forward to and prepare for the Last Judgment, almost as if it were a dress rehearsal, yet with all the surpassing truth, grace, and efficacy of a holy sacrament. Think of it. God's people gather at the appointed hour. We stand and face the East, at least symbolically, and this signifies our desire for Christ's return. Then, the priest enters and ascends to his throne, like Christ the Head coming to his judgment seat. After a brief introduction, our first communal act is to publicly confess our sinfulness: "I confess to almighty God

and to you, my brothers and sisters, etc.” The priest absolves the congregation, forgiving venial sins (mortal sins are reserved for Confession), and we rejoice in God’s might and mercy: “Glory to God in the highest.” The rest of the liturgy is a prolonged foretaste of that heavenly bliss, hearing the Word of God, praising him, and savoring his Sacred Banquet.

Throughout the Mass, our spoken responses point ahead to the Last Judgment. In the Creed, we profess: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.” After the words of consecration, when the priest says, “The mystery of faith,” the people respond with different options, including “We proclaim your death . . . until you come again” or “When we eat this Bread . . . until you come again.” These responses show how the Eucharist recalls Christ’s sacrifice, makes him truly present in this moment, and points forward to his return. Later, in the Our Father, we pray: “thy kingdom come.” This petition includes different aspects, but it certainly voices a plea—even if only implicitly—for the definitive establishment of God’s kingdom at the Last Judgment. Hope for this definitive establishment appears in the priest’s subsequent prayer: “as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

This liturgical desire for the Last Judgment peaks on the First Sunday of Advent. In the Collect, the priest prays: “Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.” And later, in the Preface, he prays: “when he comes again in glory and majesty and all is at last made manifest, we who watch for that day may inherit the great promise in which now we dare to hope.” Such prayers rekindle our desire for Christ’s return, like a dress rehearsal giving way to the moments before opening night, rallying us for when the curtain raises.

Of course, this is not the usual experience of Mass. For many, it’s a minor miracle to be focused during the Mass, let alone to recall Christ’s Cross and Resurrection. Yet the Mass undeniably

also looks forward to Christ's return and judgment. And even while anticipating the heavenly liturgy, the Mass is much more than a dress rehearsal. It offers grace to heal and strengthen our hearts before that day, and even now allows us to enjoy Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

LOVE THROUGH THE FIRE

To overcome our dread of the Last Judgment, we are helped by the love of friends in heaven. In *Purgatorio*, the second work of the Divine Comedy, Dante comes before a wall of purifying fire. He is paralyzed with fear. An angel assures him of the blessedness awaiting him on the other side, but he dares not enter the fire. Then his guide Virgil promises him that the fire will not destroy but only purify him. Still, Dante resists. Finally, Virgil unlocks Dante's fear:

He saw me stiffened and immovable,
 he said, a little troubled, "Son, look now,
 what's keeping you from Beatrice is this wall."
 . . . my stiffness softened, at the name
 that ever rises fresh within in my mind.

(*Purgatorio*, xvii, 34–36, 41–42)

With the hope of seeing Beatrice, his beloved, Dante enters the fire. The flames painfully scour his soul, but they do not destroy. Amid the fire, Virgil keeps encouraging Dante:

But my sweet father spoke of Beatrice
 with every step he took, to comfort me:
 "I think I can already see her eyes." (ibid., 52ff.)

No eloquence stirs Dante's frightened heart, and similarly for us, arguments melt before the refiner's fire. Of course, purgatory is a distinct reality from the Last Judgment, yet like Dante before the wall of fire, we may feel a similar dread before the Last Judgment.

We trust in the blessedness awaiting the elect on the other side, but the Last Judgment, with its trials and mysteries, can freeze our blood and lock our knees. Such dread has tempted Christians since the beginning. St. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians: “concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited” (2 Thes 2:1–2). But what will calm our nerves and steady our minds before that day? Arguments can only do so much. We need friends, and in particular heavenly friends, our own Beatrices.



Gustav Dore — Beatrice in the Purgatorio

For many, this heavenly friend is a deceased parent, spouse, or even child. Even more, the most exalted saints offer us friendship of extraordinary love and power, especially the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. Above all, it is the love of God and the promise of seeing him face-to-face that strengthens our footsteps through the purifying fire. St. John puts it powerfully:

We know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, *that we may have confidence for the day of judgment*, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but *perfect love casts out fear*. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. (1 Jn 4:16–18)

The perfect love of God casts out our fear and gives us confidence for the Last Judgment. Love and confidence are the two great gifts that God give to the heart that asks for them. It is by love and confidence that we dare to await and hasten the Last Judgment.

Br. Joseph Hagan entered the Order of Preachers in 2012. Before joining the Order, he received a master's in theology through the University of Notre Dame's Echo program.

UNTIL HE COMES

THE APOCALYPSE AND THE CATHOLIC NOVEL

Damian Day, O.P.

Apocalyptic novels shock and terrify, assaulting the imagination with jarring spectacles. Fire and famine, death and destruction, disasters and deluges. Cities erased and civilizations blotted out. And—perhaps worst of all—the evil and shameful deeds of our fellow men. These scenes might lead to despair: If, in the end, all will come crashing down, what matters? But some apocalyptic stories do not disturb merely for the shock value. In his introduction to Robert Hugh Benson's *The Lord of the World*, Ralph McInerny writes that the good apocalyptic novel "can touch us as no abstract argument could . . . can put the apocalypse before the eye of the imagination in a way that both thrills and edifies" (viii–ix). McInerny distinguishes the truly great novel about the future from those that merely project contemporary concerns or attempt to dazzle. Those that possess true merit do so "because they seek the very meaning of human history—and its end" (vii).

This search for meaning is not necessarily hopeless. The Catholic knows that God's providence guides the unfolding of the ages. If God is guiding history, then it is headed somewhere, to some culmination. This world will end someday, suffering travail till all things are fulfilled. Remembering the finitude of this world and its impending culmination alters how we judge our own times and trials. As apocalyptic novels, Robert Hugh Benson's *Lord of the World*, Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and Myles Connolly's *Mr. Blue* place before our minds the end of history and call us to meditate upon our lives in its light.

A STRUGGLE NOT WITH FLESH AND BLOOD

History is a battleground, a struggle “not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens” (Eph 6:12). *A Canticle for Leibowitz* follows a monastic order through the rehabilitation of a world nearly obliterated by a nuclear holocaust. Man repeats the cycle of history, passing from a “dark ages” through a renaissance to a futuristic society. Following the fiery end of civilization, the monks preserved some of the knowledge man had discovered so that they could re-educate humanity. But Satan is ever at work to pervert even the goodness of knowledge. Abbot Paulo awaits the arrival of a secular scholar, Thon Taddeo, who wishes to research the material the monks preserved. The monks saved knowledge for such study, yet some gnawing apprehension sits at the back of his mind. He sees a vision of a king with crooked scales and loaded dice approaching relentlessly. On his banner, the emblazoned title mockingly proclaims, “*Vexilla regis inferni prodeunt . . .* Forth come the banners of the King of Hell”—the beginning of the last canto of Dante’s *Inferno*, announcing the presence of the evil one himself (152). The abbot glimpses for a moment the working of the devil, riding with the unwitting scholar, come to wrest secrets of power from the goodness of knowledge. He comes with a crooked scale to release knowledge from the balance of virtue so that it may become a tool of domination and destruction.

Abbot Paulo perceives the subtle hand of Satan moving behind the scenes. But sometimes the works of the devil manifest themselves more clearly. The protagonist in Connolly’s *Mr. Blue* describes his idea for a screenplay: all the earth consolidated under the International Government of the World (IGW), a handful of men controlling all resources. By destroying all crops, they force all of mankind into their mechanical megacities of steel and smog. Harnessing the power of knowledge, these despots have semi-mechanized their fellow men. Enslaved humanity follows a precise

clockwork schedule, consuming for their only sustenance the same fluid that fuels their machines. As Blue puts it, “The fantasy of the philosopher had come true: machines had become superior to men” (48). It is a “kingdom of the Antichrist” (52).



Albrecht Dürer—The Four Horsemen

Perhaps the kingdom of the Antichrist will not look so dull. It may, in fact, be far more enticing. Benson's *Lord of the World* depicts a terrifyingly conceivable and dangerously alluring kingdom. When the Antichrist comes, Scripture tells us, he will be an attractive figure. A political figure, arising within secular history, the Antichrist will assume the mantle of divinity and worship. Such is Benson's mysterious Antichrist, Julian Felsonburgh, who appears as if from nowhere. By his eloquence, the force of his personality, and the apparent purity of his life, Felsonburgh suddenly coordinates the cessation of war. The world finds itself at peace and united under one man hailed as the Savior of the World. No war, no bloodshed, no divisions. Universal brotherhood and peace. How attractive this seems! How man longs for peace like this, purchased without cost! Hence tens of thousands acclaim Felsonburgh as God and Lord, "who bore not a sword but peace, not a cross but a crown" (249).

In our times, with a world rent by violence and communities torn by hatred this vision of peace exercises a draw on our hearts. Even Benson's hero, Fr. Percy, struggles within himself against the power of the Antichrist's person and promise. It was as if "a hand gripped his heart—a hand warm, not cold" (116). The allure of the false christ assaulted his heart, "His emotions had been stormed, his intellect silenced, his memory of grace obscured, a spiritual nausea had sickened his soul" (117). For weeks he wrestled with the superabundance of the evil influence. Assessing the situation to the Pope, Percy describes how "in the early age, Satan's attack had been made on the bodily side, with whips and fire and beasts; in the sixteenth century it had been on the intellectual side; in the twentieth century on the springs of moral and spiritual life. Now it seemed as if the assault was on all three planes at once" (135). Such will the end times be.

FAKE EDENS AND FALSE VIRTUES

While Satan sometimes launches these all-out attacks, frequently his lies are more insidious. The Book of Revelation prophesies a new heaven and a new earth, an existence without sorrow or tears, with God dwelling in the midst of his people, chasing away every shadow of darkness in his own marvelous light. Man, acutely aware of not yet possessing this paradise, sometimes succumbs to the temptation to try to create his own utopia here and now. Satan happily meddles in such attempts. Benson, Miller, and Connolly all depict man's futile striving for a new Eden apart from God.

In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Thon Taddeo epitomizes man's attempt to grasp at paradise through science. The scholar, having sucked out a treasure of lost knowledge from the monastery's library, proclaims the imminent usurpation of a new king. Echoing the confidence of early modern philosophy, Taddeo prophesies that knowledge's reign will bring man mastery over nature. Subduing nature, man will conquer disease and famine, eradicate every social ill, and engineer a utopic future. Weaponize knowledge and establish Eden. It seems so simple, always nearly in our grasp. More experiments, more funding, a little more time and we will have it. Our own heaven on earth. A better world formed by our own hands.

Dom Paulo shatters the illusion. Taddeo dreams of returning the world to some lost cultural epoch, of surpassing it, and building a world better yet. The abbot rebukes him, "It never was any better, it never *will* be any better. It will only be richer or poorer, sadder but not wiser, until the very last day" (224). Man will never re-establish Eden. As the Psalmist says, "In his riches, man lacks wisdom" (Ps 49:20). Progress in the sciences will not perfect man or the world in which he lives.

Unable to make heaven on earth, man resorts to pseudo-cures. The last section of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* portrays the sad result of such an attempt. For all his progress, man still suffers.

The reality of suffering confounds “advanced” cultures. Doctor Cors tells Abbot Zerchi “pain is the only evil I know about” (284). Uncomfortable with pain, the fictional society establishes “Mercy Camps” to end the lives of those enduring great suffering. This is Satan’s great mockery of Christian mercy, perverting both knowledge and compassion. From a window in the monastery, the abbot observes a camp, growling, “*Evenit diabolus!*” (290). Indeed, Satan has come, his banners now overlaid with false mercy.

The prevailing worldview in *The Lord of the World* shares this inability to cope with suffering. Society clutches at the crown Felsonburgh bears and rejects the cross Christ carries. Benson’s society throws down the cross and takes up the instruments of euthanasia. Early in the novel, Mabel Brand, the young wife of an important politician, witnesses a vehicular accident. The scene contrasts the priest, Fr. Percy, and “the ministers of euthanasia.” A man lies before Mabel, body mangled, crying out in pain, calling out with his lasts breaths for Jesus and Mary. And suddenly, Fr. Percy is there. Mabel saw him “wave his hand in a swift sign, and heard a murmur of a language she did not know” (27). Mystified, relief fills her when the ministers of euthanasia snuff out the sufferer. Yet, a corner of her heart seems unsatisfied. Later, she asks her husband what one ought to tell people as they die. “Why, nothing,” is all he can respond (28). Death has no meaning beyond the cessation of pain. Euthanasia is a meaningless response to the perceived meaninglessness of suffering.

That is the kind of Eden man can build without God. Without God, striving to build heaven on earth ends by truncating man. Society lowers its horizons, “friendliness took the place of charity, contentment the place of hope, and knowledge the place of faith” (254). Severed from the guidance of supernatural virtues these purely human ones become weak and faint, no defense against the worming tongue of the evil one. So Satan whispers that man can grasp divinity and rebuild paradise.

The Christian stands as an eschatological sign to remind man continually that he cannot build heaven on earth. At the climax

of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, man, supposedly more advanced and civilized, closer to Eden than ever before, immolates the world in another fiery nuclear inferno. Lying wounded in the rubble of his ancient monastery, Abbot Zerchi notices the skull of a long dead monk beside him. To his confrere, the abbot whispers, “What did you do for them, Bone? . . . Help them rebuild, give them Christ, help restore a culture? Did you remember to warn them that it could never be Eden” (314)? It could never be Eden. It will never be Eden. Neither science nor world governments nor the lies of the devil and the Antichrist will ever give man the paradise he desires.

SACRAMENTS AND THE SECOND COMING

The Christian view of the future avoids a naive optimism. Despite the progress of science, there will be no utopia. And as the end times approach, life will not be easy for Christians. Scripture prophesies mass apostasies, rejection, and persecution. Illusions of all mankind peacefully united in the true faith with the Church sovereign and universally recognized for her wisdom and beauty must be abandoned. During the end times, the Church will not triumph gloriously in any worldly sense. She will be crushed and diminished. But she will not be destroyed—“the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). Our hope rests not in worldly power, but in the rock-solid foundation of Christ’s promise. The preface to *Lord of the World* opens with a discussion between Fr. Percy and an old Catholic politician. The politician recounts the long list of defeats suffered by the Church. Asked if he thinks matters will improve, the man admits, “I see no hope until . . . Until our Lord comes back” (10). This recognition is not despair, but a profound understanding of hope. Our hope is our God. The hope of Christ’s coming is the real meaning of the end of the world. Through all the upheavals and persecutions the Church must endure, awaiting the coming of our Savior.

During this period of waiting, the papacy stands as a point of stability and sign of endurance. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*,

the Church develops a contingency plan should man attempt to annihilate himself. A spaceship with three bishops and a number of priests and monks will preserve the Church in the colonies on other planets. Should the pope and the rest of the bishops suffer extermination, a successor and ministers of the Sacraments will survive. As Abbot Zerchi tells the passengers, “as long as Man lives elsewhere, the office of Peter cannot be destroyed” (277). Christ will always have a vicar to feed his flock.

In Benson’s tale, the forces of the Antichrist destroy Rome in a fiery bombardment that mingles the blood of the pope and cardinals with bones of ancient martyrs. Suddenly, the young Fr. Percy finds himself the last successor of St. Peter. Felsonburgh, hailed as God and Savior, controls the world, while “the Vicar of Christ sat in a whitewashed room in Nazareth, dressed as simply as his master, waiting for the end” (253). With the forces of evil seeming to have the upper hand, the new pope and his few cardinals remain the last obstacle to the eradication of Christianity. Like his master, the pope is betrayed by one of his followers. Learning that the pope convened a meeting of his cardinals for Pentecost, Felsonburgh leads an armada of aircraft to the final confrontation.

Standing in unity with the pope, the priests of the Church will bring Christ to the world in the Eucharist until that Second Coming. As the nuclear blast razes his monastery, Abbot Zerchi rushes to the tabernacle, retrieving “the Christ-filled ciborium” (310). Upon regaining consciousness among the ruins, the priest’s first thought is: “Anyone needing the last rites? Viaticum” (310)? Like his predecessor whose bones lie scattered next to him, the abbot had given Christ to man, fulfilling the Lord’s promise: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). To the very close of the ages, God is with his Church especially through the Sacraments administered by his priests.

With such an emphasis on the priesthood and the Eucharist, it is not surprising that these three novels mark the final confrontation with liturgies. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the pope, learning of the impending nuclear holocaust, celebrates two

special Masses, beseeching the Lord to come and save his people. Mr. Blue, in Connolly's novel, recounts the activities of the last Christian on earth, Fr. White. Having concealed his vestments and secretly grown wheat, Fr. White steals out of his apartment late one night. In those long months of waiting in the kingdom of the Antichrist, one desire animated Fr. White's soul: "I shall bring God back to earth" (54). Climbing to the highest tower, Fr. White celebrates Mass "in the citadel of the Antichrist" (58). As alarms sound, mobs surge below and bombers above, Fr. White serenely and reverently says his Mass. And then, at the words, "*Hoc est enim corpus meum*," the earth melted away, and through the sky torn asunder, "ribbed with lightning came Christ as he had come after the Resurrection" (61). The promise contained in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist finds fulfilment in Christ come again in glory.

Christ remains with his Church through the Eucharist, which strengthens the faithful to endure the trials of the end times. Knowing that the final assault approaches, Percy celebrates Pentecost Mass with his cardinals and processes out to battle armed with the Eucharist, singing the *O Salutaris* and *Tantum Ergo*. There Antichrist and Christ confront each other, "the final piteous Prince of rebels, the creature against God" (351). In that moment of arrogant triumph, when Felsonburgh seems victorious, his false utopic kingdom secure, comes the Revelation. However much he struts and blusters, Satan's pryncedom perishes. Our God, not the rebellious enemy, is the Lord of history. When its Lord appeared, "then this world passed, and the glory of it" (352).

ENCOUNTERING OUR FRIEND

What will there be when the glory of this world has passed, when the final false Eden has faded and the last Antichrist has fallen, when man has stopped grasping for paradise and all of Satan's arrogant perversions have ceased? The end shall be a termination and a culmination. This world and its failures and

imperfections will give way to eternal realities. Paradise will come, but not as the result of technological tinkering. It will not be balefully dull nor shallow and truncated. Those pseudo-Edens could never satisfy because they lacked divine stability. Without Christ, human utopias come up short and lapse into hellish mockeries. For only when God dwells among his people, only then “death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rv 21:4). Peace and the end of suffering—but on God’s terms, not man’s; through God’s initiative, not man’s. What man could never accomplish, despite his greatest effort, Christ will bring as a gift to his faithful. What Christians foretaste in the Eucharist, what sustains them in the Sacraments, will then come to full measure. God “will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them” (Rv 21:3). The Sacraments foreshadow and provide a foretaste of the definite and ultimate union of man and God. Longing for this union, strengthened by the Sacraments, Christians endure the illusory Edens until the end of history. Then the apocalypse, even with all its trials and persecutions, will end in a joyful encounter with God, whose friendship alone constitutes our paradise and beatitude.

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TRANSCENDING THE DEEP WATERS

LIFE, DEATH, AND LOVE IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

Aquinas Beale, O.P.

In the notes to his collection of poems entitled *West-Östlichen Divan*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe somewhat famously described the Book of Ruth as “the most charming, little narrative handed down to us as epic and idyllic.” The description, at least initially, seems apt enough. Many people remember this short work of the Bible as the heartwarming story of a young, foreign woman who enters into the nation of Israel as the result of her loving fidelity for her mother-in-law and for her mother-in-law’s God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Yet, memories can be misleading.

As one innocently turns to the opening verses of the narrative, the illusion immediately begins to fade. In those lines, tragedy unfolds at a breathtaking pace: famine, desertion, and death all figure prominently in the first chapter.

Nevertheless, if death and despair dominate the literary landscape of the opening verses, the book concludes on more upbeat notes of life and love. While the story of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, may contain more sorrow than most readers remember, it remains a story of faithfulness and hope.

I ASKED YOU FOR LIFE, AND THIS YOU HAVE GIVEN

The Book of Ruth has a strong fairytale-like quality to it. The book opens by filling in some background material: there had been a famine in the land of Israel; a particular family had left Bethlehem and settled in Moab in search of a better life; and at the end of ten years, all of the men of the family had died. The book then goes on to tell how two of the remaining members of this family return to Bethlehem. Naomi, the matriarch of that

family, leaves Moab with one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, with nothing more than the hope of living off of the charity of her fellow Israelites. By the end of the story, both of these women enjoy the abundant blessings of the land and people of God.

This movement from hope to fulfillment is not limited to the lives of these two women. It is also mirrored in the story of the land. The name Bethlehem means “House of Bread” in Hebrew—a rather ironic name for a town suffering from a famine. At the start of the book, Bethlehem does not sustain life as much as its name suggests, pointing to a frustrated desire for life throughout the entire land—not just in the lives of Ruth and Naomi.

Life, then, is the aim of the narrative arc in the Book of Ruth. And, in this respect, the story has a happy ending. God visits his people, giving them bread, and God also makes Ruth fruitful, granting her a son, Obed. Moreover, as the mirroring of the narrative arc in nature suggests, the story of Ruth concerns not just the life of a single family, but of an entire nation. The entire land yearns for the vital favor of God, which will be fully realized in Ruth’s great-grandson who will be a king—and not just any king, but the king: King David. Therefore, the fairytale-like happy ending of the Book of Ruth touches the lives of the countless people through the ages who have viewed David and his offspring as heirs of the special, life-giving promise of God.

WHAT PROFIT IS THERE IN MY DEATH, MY GOING TO THE
GRAVE?

But, the story of Ruth and Naomi is not simply a lighthearted fairytale of ancient Israel. The narrator sets a more somber tone for the story from the very beginning: “In the days of the judges, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem of Judah went to sojourn in the territory of Moab, along with his wife [Naomi] and two sons” (1:1). The land, referring to Israel, is not doing well. Rather than flowing with milk and honey, it denies its inhabitants the food they need for survival. Moreover, the days

of the judges were marked by a lot of political and social instability, as the loose confederation of Israelite tribes struggled with their neighbors, the Philistines and the Moabites.

The land of Moab, too, holds a significant place in the history of Israel and their covenant with the Lord. It was on the plains of Moab that Moses gave the people of God his final words of encouragement to keep the commands of the Lord—it was there, on the plains of Moab, that Israel waited with anticipation to enter into the land of promise. Yet, back to the land of Moab Naomi now goes, along with her family. Therefore, their return to Moab strikes a discordant note, suggesting that life within the Covenant of Israel did not satisfy every desire.

Furthermore, the sons of Naomi both marry Moabite women, which had been prohibited by Moses on those very plains of Moab (see Dt 23:4). Therefore, there is little surprise when tragedy strikes this family multiple times. First of all, the patriarch, Elimelech, dies once the family has settled in the land of Moab. Next, we hear that the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, died after they had lived for ten childless years with their Moabite wives.

Finally, we hear that “the woman” (Naomi) has been left alone, without husband or sons. She must face the challenge of survival on her own. And, even though she hears that the Lord has visited his people back in her hometown of Bethlehem and has blessed them with food, her return there is anything but triumphant and joyous.

Her sentiments are brilliantly captured in her heart-rending dialogue with the women of Bethlehem at the end of the first chapter: “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has made it very bitter for me. I went away full, but empty the Lord has returned me. Why do you call me Naomi? The Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me” (1:20–21). To underline the change she has experienced in her life, Naomi plays with the meaning of her name, which sounds very much like the Hebrew word meaning “pleasant” or “delightful.” Instead, she tells the other women to call her Mara, which literally

means “bitter” in Hebrew. The cause of this bitterness, of course, is highlighted by the juxtaposition of the fullness that Naomi once had and the emptiness she now feels upon her return to Bethlehem. And, to heighten the tension of the situation, Naomi sings a lament that could rival any two lines from the mouth of Job in the bleak bitterness that it betrays.

Naomi is a broken woman. But, she is not the only character who has experienced the disappointments of life thus far in the narrative. Ruth and her sister-in-law, Orpah, both have lived with their husbands for ten years without giving birth to children, and both have lost these husbands to premature deaths. For ten years, they have lived in expectant hope of the birth of new life only to see that hope die with their husbands. Both of them have to start over again—with Orpah returning to the house of her mother and Ruth returning with Naomi to Bethlehem.

Life may be the telos of the Book of Ruth, but the narrative begins with death. Naomi would not be in need of a redeeming kinsman to protect her if her husband and two sons still lived, and Ruth would not be in need of a husband if her husband Mahlon had not died. As Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem from Moab, they walk in the shadow of death, where the waters of despair have risen to their necks and only the faintest glimmer of hope shines before them.

TRUST IN THE LORD AND DO GOOD, AND YOU SHALL DWELL IN
THE LAND AND ENJOY HIS FIDELITY

Yet, Ruth and Naomi are not completely without hope. The kernel of this hope lies in the exchange between Ruth and Naomi at the start of their journey to Bethlehem. While still in Moab, Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to return to the houses of their mothers, rather than go with her to Bethlehem. In the midst of this appeal, she prays to God that they may find prosperity in exchange for the *hesed* that they had shown to her and her family. In the Bible, the Hebrew term *hesed* most often refers to God’s

covenantal relationship with Israel, and it is usually translated as “fidelity” or “loving-kindness.” In the case of Ruth and Orpah, this term likely refers to the steadfast character of their commitment to Naomi.

For Ruth this loving fidelity is especially strong, as she clings to her mother-in-law and refuses to abandon her when she goes back to Bethlehem. Her poetic speech of commitment stands out in the gloom of the first chapter. “Do not press me to abandon you,” she says. “For, wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord (YHWH) do thus to me and more; for only death shall separate me from you” (1:16–17).

Ruth’s commitment to her mother-in-law is indisputable. She will remain committed to Naomi until death, and she sees this commitment wrapped up in her relationship with God. It is an expectation, of course, as one who is faithful to the God of Israel (YHWH), that she remains with Naomi—it is a matter of *hesed* that she not abandon her mother-in-law.

Moreover, Naomi is not the only one who notices this *hesed* in Ruth. In the fields outside of Bethlehem, when she first meets Boaz and is overwhelmed by his kindness to her, he explains:

All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been thoroughly reported to me—that you left your father and mother and the land of your kindred and went to a people which you did not know yesterday or the day before. May the Lord repay your deed, and may your recompense be complete from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge. (2:11–12)

Boaz has seen and taken note of the fidelity that Ruth has shown to Naomi, and he honors this loving-kindness by such an act of his own: at their nighttime rendezvous on the threshing-



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld — Ruth in Boaz's Field

floor, he promises to look out for the interests of Ruth and Naomi, which ultimately culminates in his marriage to Ruth.

Finally, God has the last word in the story of Ruth and Naomi. Although conception of children occurs in the natural order, requiring little to no divine intervention, the narrator takes care to inform us that when Boaz takes Ruth as his wife, it is the Lord who grants Ruth her pregnancy (4:13). Like he had done for Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel in the days of the patriarchs, the Lord remembers the plight of his handmaid and takes away the rebuke of Ruth's decade of barrenness by granting her the gift of a son. The Lord remains faithful to his promise and acts kindly—with *hesed*—towards Ruth, who had joined herself to the Covenant through her loving commitment to Naomi and, above all, the God of Israel.

DEEP WATERS CANNOT QUENCH LOVE,
NOR RIVERS OVERWHELM IT

The Book of Ruth stands within the canon of Scripture as a “charming, little narrative” that reflects some of the deepest realities of the human condition. We all long for life and the fulfillment of our desires that can only be satisfied by love.

The story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz illustrates how our restless hearts can find rest in the love of God, which flows over into our relationships with those around us. Success in life is ultimately not about the abundance of wealth or the absence of suffering. As Ruth teaches us, loving-kindness is the greatest asset we have in facing the trials of this life, including death.

The specter of physical death remains a reality that everyone faces in this life. However, the Lord also promises us that death does not have the final word, for he has destroyed death by his own death and resurrection. We have only to remain faithful to him and keep his love within our hearts.

In this way, Ruth is a model for every faithful member of God’s flock. Through her actions of loving-kindness, she proves herself to be a member of that flock. The love that she has in her heart conquers the deep waters of death that threaten her at the start of her story. That love could achieve such an end because it came from God, whose own loving-kindness towards humanity never fails.

“Deep waters cannot quench love, nor rivers overwhelm it.” So sings the ancient poet in the eighth chapter of the Song of Songs. Why? As the story of Ruth illustrates and as that same author of the Song states just a few lines before, “For, strong as death is love.”

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SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS

RENÉ GIRARD ON THE APOCALYPSE

Ephrem Reese, O.P.

When René Girard died in November of 2015, Bishop Robert Barron made the case that we should regard him as “a kind of Church Father”—a somewhat stunning endorsement. Why was this “comparative anthropologist” being likened to great saints like Justin, Irenaeus, Basil, Augustine, and Benedict? The Fathers’ great literary and rhetorical feat was to transpose the teaching of Christ, the religion of the “Lord” of a strange semitic people, into the highest forms of intellectual culture of their time and place. If René Girard is indeed a contemporary Church Father, it is because he has hijacked contemporary academic methods to preach the Word and discipline the world. Barron calls Girard a Church Father because, at a time when Western culture has become acutely skeptical of Christianity and has begun to list it beside other great mythic systems, he upends the model and says that Christianity is not one more instance of the “monomyth”; rather, it is the deconstruction of the myth of violence.

GIRARD’S STORY

Girard’s central achievement was to put the human story of sacrifice (which includes the story of human sacrifice) into terms both ancient and new. He begins with a simple story about desire. When we see another person desiring an object, regardless of our satisfaction with what we have, and regardless of the intrinsic worth of the other object, we have an overriding desire for what the other person is desiring. For Girard, this imitation of desire, or *mimesis*, is a universal cause of both friendship (union because of common desiring) and conflict (rivalry because of common desiring). Conflict arises mysteriously and demands resolution.

Some noticeably different third party is singled out for blame—a “scapegoat.” In banding together to punish this imagined “cause” of the conflict (which was really caused by a natural compounding of desires) the community moves from rivalry to friendship.

This happy turn often takes on a divine quality: the mysterious forces of war have been appeased somehow; the gods’ anger has been quelled by punishing the guilty. Girard contends that the God of Israel had begun to draw back the veil over this “mechanism” by commanding the sacrifice of explicitly *innocent* victims. The Gospels, however, put this in full spotlight. The clearest example is *Caiphas propheta*. In his office as high priest, says St. John, Caiaphas prophesied that “it is better for you that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation should perish” (Jn 11:50).

The Greek name for the Book of Revelation is *apokalypsis*, which means “pulling back a covering.” Girard is right to see an “uncovering” of the scapegoat mechanism of violence in Christ. The scapegoat is a figure of Christ, who was made to pay for sin through innocent suffering. But the condemnation of Jesus is also the occasion for him to reveal who he is, as St. Matthew writes:

The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” “You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Mt 26:63–64)

Jesus uncovers his divine sonship publicly and, at the end of time, fully. Girard develops a Johannine insight: “the devil has sinned from the beginning. Indeed, *the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil*” (1 Jn 3:8). Jesus throws light on the ancient machinery of sin and death. But do we stop there, or must we go on to say: the Son of God came to reveal new things as well? He also came to reveal himself, and to reveal the knowledge of the

Father to his children. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, St. Thomas says that the teaching of the only-begotten Son who makes the Father known (Jn 1:18) “surpasses all other teachings in dignity, authority and usefulness” (11.221).

René Girard was no Thomist. In fact, his quasi-theological, sweeping theories about history and human nature challenge St. Thomas’s teachings, especially on the important concept of sacrifice. But in his contribution to *Ressourcement Thomism* (2010), a contemporary Dominican theologian, Richard Schenk, counsels that “future Catholic reflection would do well to learn” from Girard “through a critical and selective reception of Girard’s often overly reductionist theses” (203) on the different dimensions of sacrifice at work in the sacrifice of Jesus in first-century Palestine. Furthermore, Girard’s narrative, which takes us from Jesus’s fulfillment of Jewish cult to the peculiar form of religious terrorism which threatens us today, is rich and compelling, and deserves serious consideration. I aim to offer a Thomistic “selective reception” of Girard’s thought.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE “SCAPEGOAT” RITUAL FROM THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

Death and disorder have maimed the world. When we consider our inclinations to destroy ourselves and one another, we begin to wonder: did we cause this? How did it happen? How can we resolve it? In his book, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (1999), Girard compares the ritual violence that plays out in many cultures to the catharsis of ancient drama: by watching violent scenes, we are purified of violent urges. When a Greek wonderworker named Apollonius of Tyana induces the citizens of Ephesus to stone a beggar to death in order to quell an “epidemic” in the city, “he expects from this violence a *cathartic* effect superior to that of ordinary sacrifices or of the tragic dramas that were performed, no doubt, in the theater of Ephesus in the second century of our era” (53). Girard is able to multiply instances in history and

literature in which the collective murder of one person, picked out for his difference, has a pacifying effect on society.

But the eyes of faith begin to see through such devices from early in the Old Testament. The God of Israel demands that his people be holy as he is holy. While God accepts, even commands, sacrificial offerings, he often makes clear to his people that he has no need of this service, as for example in Psalm 50:

If I were hungry, I would not tell you;
for the world and all that is in it is mine.
Do I eat the flesh of bulls,
or drink the blood of goats?
Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and pay your vows to the Most High;
and call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me. (Ps 50:12–15)

Nonetheless, God does demand sacrifice. The offering of the goat in Leviticus 16 is a mystery of the Law, enshrined almost dead-center in the Five Books of Moses. Girard capitalizes on the rich ambiguity of the ritual. Aaron the priest takes two goats and sacrifices one by lot to the Lord. The other “shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.” William Holman Hunt’s painting of the scapegoat evokes the pathetic nature of the spectacle, in which a poor, unlovely goat staggers over what one critic called “the world as a god-forsaken wasteland, a heap of broken images where the sun beats” (*The Iconography of Landscape*, 22). The divinely commanded rite strips sacrifice of its sublimity, and we see the innocent victim sent out, with our sins on him, to a brutal death.

Although the scapegoat does pull back the covering of the machinery of religious violence, it also reveals a sort of fear of demons and compromise with their power. In his JPS Torah Commentary on Leviticus, Jewish scholar Baruch A. Levine writes of the scapegoat, “Chapter 16 transforms the sacrificial worship of

demons into a set of rites that coerce and subjugate the sinful and evil forces identified with the demon. The High Priest, acting in accordance with the command of the God of Israel, forced the iniquities of the people back on Azazel” (252) which “in later myth was the name given to the demonic ruler of the wilderness” (102). This give and take with the powers of darkness will reach a zenith and be abolished in the sacrifice of Christ that it foreshadows.



William Holman Hunt — The Scapegoat

THE DESTRUCTION OF IDOLATRY, OR “DEMYTHOLOGIZATION”

Paul in the New Testament, and Isaiah in the Old, are the great Biblical mockers of idolatry. Once, Paul was waiting around in Athens, on his best behavior, I imagine. But in that great and philosophical city, “his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17:16). In Acts 19, Paul is slandered by the guild of craftsmen who make idols of the goddess Artemis in Ephesus. The author, St. Luke, draws out the humor of their outrage:

You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited. (Acts 19:25–27)

The preaching of the Gospel includes, then, a “demythologization” of the religious culture of Jesus’s time. The Jews were continually called to turn to God from idols; now, the gentiles have also “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven” (1 Thes 1:9–10).

Girard reads this turning from idols as an unmasking of demonic powers. And well he should: as St. Paul says, “the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God” (1 Cor 10:20). Now, pagan sacrifice is what Donald Rumsfeld might call a “known unknown.” The danger of sacrifice is that it opens us to a dark spiritual territory. Only by revelation, the knowledge that we have in Jesus Christ, do we learn that the darkness behind the idols is demonic.

In a talk given at Calvin College in November, 2016, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek pointed out that Rumsfeld’s table of knowledge was incomplete. In addition to known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns, we have unconscious knowledge, or unknown knowns: things that work in our mind without our conscious acknowledgement. Freud traffics in these. Girard, in Freudian fashion, wants to draw out the unconscious aspect of the machinery, to depict it as an “unknown known.” That is, whether or not we openly court demons, we have an unconscious pact with the demonic *in the scapegoat mechanism*. Some part of us recognizes that sacred violence is necessary to resolve the tensions

of human existence. Why else would man, “little lower than the angels” (Ps 8:5), do something so stupid as worship rocks?

Girard goes so far as to say that this violence is the foundation of human religion. “By accepting to be crucified,” he says, “Christ brought to light what had been ‘hidden since the foundation of the world’ [see Mt 13:35, which cites a version of Ps 78:2 not found in most Bible translations, and which is used as the title of a collection of Girard’s work, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1978)]—the foundation itself, the unanimous murder that appeared in broad daylight for the first time on the Cross.” Girard sees natural religious ritual as deeply informed by a “founding murder” (Freud’s term, which Girard adopts).

Girard goes too far in my view. If we take Sacred Scripture in its full complexity and reflect on the natural inclination to sacrifice to God, we cannot accept this flattened idea of sacrifice. Yes, Jesus took the powers of the world captive. But before that, many sought to acknowledge the one true God by sacrifice, albeit in a flawed way, and this act even defined humanity. Girard would have us see the twisted inclination define humanity in a way that almost touches on our nature.

A Thomistic idea of natural religion also sees sacrifice as an aspect of our nature, but never considers that nature to be totally corrupt in its basic form. Girard’s idea of sacrificial religion, if it is to be accepted, has to be reconceived as a wounding, a defect in our naturally good inclination to make sacrifices of love; but as he understands it, sacrifice is a stable cultural habit, rooted even in individual souls, toward sacred murder by conspiracy. Schenk argues that even if we hold a higher idea of sacrifice according to St. Thomas’s notion, we must also take care to distinguish it from the real forms that Girard identifies. In the next phase, we will see how this complex notion of sacrifice plays out in the light of Christ’s revelation.

THE FAILURE OF CHRISTIANITY

Girard sees the Christian revelation as an impossible ideal of equality. Pulling back the curtain on the idolatry, “which is good in the absolute, has proven bad in the relative, for we were not prepared to shoulder its consequences. We are not Christian enough” (“On War and Apocalypse,” *First Things*, August 2009). He thinks that the failure of Christians to live up to this ideal has generated a dangerously self-deceived world of demystified ritual aggression: “Once in our history the truth about the identity of all humans was spoken, and no one wanted to hear it; instead we hang ever more frantically onto our false differences.” Now that the pantheon of gods demanding sacrifice has been disbanded, the violent instincts that they symbolized remain pent up until they flare out in self-righteous crusades. One imagines an ancient, purer Christianity, when men and women imitated Christ and their martyrdom continued to shed his light on sacred violence.

But Girard thinks that this initiative “failed.” And necessarily so! “Christianity is the only religion that has foreseen its own failure. This prescience is known as the apocalypse.” Thus, what is uncovered, or *apocalypsed*, so to speak, is actually the failure of the Church, not its justice. Girard believes that Christ’s Spirit doomed Christianity to a final destruction, which it foresees in Scripture.

While Girard appreciates the Book of Revelation, he does not understand the significance of its wedding feast. This feast is perpetually lived out in the Eucharistic liturgy of the Church, which has priority of importance over the *martyria* of individual Christians. The victory of the Cross was already established at the Last Supper. Girard says, “We can all participate in the divinity of Christ so long as we renounce our own violence” (“On War and Apocalypse”). But a better formulation would be: by participating sacramentally in the divinity of Christ, we come to renounce our violence as God strengthens us with the infused virtues of faith, hope, and love.

As an example of this I offer Dorothy Day (1897–1980). This young socialist journalist struggled with the Christ who commanded non-retaliation and identified himself with the poor. Through her reading and her life with the poor in slums, jails, and breadlines, she became convinced that modern “peacekeeping” measures were, in reality, often unnatural, violent social mechanisms for dealing with the unwanted neighbor in a cruelly industrial age. She believed it was necessary to abandon the World and the State as far as possible, and to “build a new society in the shell of the old,” as her mentor Peter Maurin frequently put it. Girard said, “Violence is a terrible adversary, since it always wins. Desiring war can thus become a spiritual attitude” (“On War and Apocalypse”). Day would agree with the latter judgment, and she proposed a strong Catholic “attitude” as an antidote to the love of war. However, she would not have agreed that we are locked in a demonic historical movement in which “violence always wins.” She acknowledged the failure of Christians to be Christians, but she did not place this fact within a historical scheme that basically admits the defeat of Christian society and looks with terror toward the future. Rather, she took it as reality. Reality is hard, but pliable. Human desire is twisted, but good can be elicited out of its gnarled roots. Day was smitten with the “little way” of St. Thérèse. There is nothing that cannot be done for God, and this littleness invades great powers. It is not the martyrdom of the early Church; it is rather the martyrdom of love: “In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and thus I will be all things, as my desire finds its direction,” said Thérèse in *Story of a Soul*.

Girard does not exclude love, but fear seems to crowd love out of his account. But it is the light of God’s love, given in the sacrifice of the Son, which reveals the darkness of sacred violence. Love may be at the periphery of Girard’s account, but it belongs at the center.

SACRIFICE WITHOUT GOD

In Girard's narrative, we now live in a time when the idols are broken, and we no longer believe in sacrificing to them. We are past heaping our sins on a goat, but the scapegoating continues, and the "uncovered" nature of it propels us more rapidly and openly towards apocalyptic violence. We find aggressive post-Christian forms of sacrifice which simply embrace some form of the scapegoat ritual *with* the knowledge that it is a merely human ritual for resolving human crises. This can be secular: we need to create new technologies which demand human death for the happiness of others, whether that entails fatal labor conditions, abortion and sterilization, or humanitarian war against the unenlightened along with its "collateral damage" of innocents. Such political movements, as many have pointed out, have a kind of subliminal religious ideology about them.

But the religious form of this, for Girard, is Islam. In the Qur'an, the ram that saved Isaac from sacrifice was somehow the same sacrifice that had been sent to Abel. This was so that he would not have to kill Cain. Girard interprets this to mean that Islam *understands* that sacrifice is a human, ritual means of combating mimetic violence. Its new suicidal forms of ritualized violence are born of a desperate struggle against Western technological violence. "Terrorism is a superior form of violence," says Girard, "and it asserts that it will win." In the demythologized West, we don't have the means to understand why religious terror is superior to ordered strength. We try to explain terror in terms of social oppression and mental disorder. But in reality, it is a post-Christian, demythologized sacrificial system. Girard points to the transparently false piety of Mohamed Atta, the September 11th hijacker, who spent the three nights before the attacks celebrating in bars.

Again, Girard's narrative may not be incorrect. But neither does his account do full justice to the truth. The apocalypse is not essentially a historical movement caused by human and demonic

forces of collapse. Josef Pieper, a titan of Catholic religious-historical speculation, wrote a study called *Über das Ende der Zeit* in 1953 (published in English in 1954 as *The End of Time: Meditations on the Philosophy of History*). He compared his own time, with its “purely immanent, ‘culture-sociological’ conception of history . . . disposed to envisage the possibility of a catastrophic end as to be expected or even imminent” (*The End of Time*, 140–141) with the apocalyptic speculations of the thirteenth-century Joachimites. They thought that they perceived the last revival of Christian life around the figures of SS. Francis and Dominic, whom “the Lord has aroused at the end of terrestrial time” (138). Girard’s own speculations are an interesting synthesis of, on the one hand, the sociological kind of speculation about global catastrophe, and on the other, the religious, prophetic anticipation of an apocalypse.

St. Thomas’s response, which Pieper urges us to follow, is “characterized less by perpetual contemplation of the final catastrophe, than by a mute readiness” for it (140). The basis of this silent readiness is something lacking in Girard’s history-focused account: “the affirmation of created reality” (137). Pieper cites another apocalyptic Catholic thinker, Erik Peterson, whose study of martyrdom and apocalypse highlights how “the martyrs utter no word against God’s creation,” and “only the Gnostics, who avoid martyrdom, can speak ill of God’s creation” (“Witness to the Truth,” in *Theological Tractates*, 171, 255). Sometimes, Girard comes close to doing the latter, when he suggests a violence hidden at the foundations of this created world. (I do not accuse him of Gnostic heresy, I only mean that his characterization of man’s religious operations suggest a deep corruption of man’s natural inclinations.)

AN ACT OF LOVE

Bishop Barron rightly admires Girard, whose sociological readings of history and religion give Christians some strong weapons against those who would reduce Jesus to the status of a

mythical resurrection-figure, or who would characterize Judaism or Christianity as violent. But, as I have tried to show, Girard's attempts to seat violence in human nature itself, to rule out naturally good forms of sacrifice, and to see Christianity as an exercise in failure, are problematic.

We should pay attention to man's violent inclinations and the intellectual acrobatics which systematically sustain them through politics and economics. But to dwell on these things leads, not to responsible action, but to despair. Girard's explanation promises a certain liberation from unconscious ritualism, but the mechanisms he describes suggest a kind of inexorable doomsday machine: unconscious violence will have its way, bolstered by demonic religious manifestations in whatever culture, Christian or not.

There is in this vision a temptation to hate this world. But the Christian, who in Revelation is the witness (or martyr) of God's work, as Pieper says, "finds creation, in spite of everything, 'very good.'" Thus, in the midst of apocalyptic fervor, "the attention of St. Thomas seems so completely drawn towards the plenitude of reality, and therefore of good, in the created order as well as in the *ordo gratiae* [order of grace], that the atmosphere of his work is wholly derived from this point" (*The End of Time*, 140).

Girard concludes that the meaning of history is "terrifying." Another great French Catholic thinker, Blaise Pascal, was famously "terrified" by the situation of man: hung between silence and emptiness, lost in an eternal blank, until he is found suddenly by the dark and terrible Fire of God. But God does not want us to be terrified. In Jesus, he reveals our unconscious slavery to Satan and his works. Why? Not so that we may shrink or scoff. Rather, he wants us to know the truth, to know of his victory over those forces, and to have courage. Courage is that quality in us which, when it sees the fearful, rises up to destroy it for the sake of the good that lies beyond.

On the subject of the evil found in nature, and the violent and truth-concealing slant of human acts, the teaching of

St. Thomas on creation as an “emanation” or “procession” from God himself has always been a great consolation to me (*Summa Theologiae* I, qq. 44–49). The effect always contains some trace of the form of its cause. The fire from which we are born, from which we “emanate,” as St. Thomas says, makes of us a fire, and the Creator of all things is a fire of love and knowledge, mercy and truth. We are made, not only with trace or vestige, but “after the image” of this Creator. His act of sacrifice is an act of love, and “love is unitive force,” as Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite says (*On the Divine Names*, IV.12). True sacrifice unites, not all against one, but all to God who is all in all, whom we love “in all things and above all things” (Collect of the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time).

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USEFUL BRETHREN

A REVIEW ESSAY ON *DOMINICAN BROTHERS*

Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Dominican Brothers: Conversi, Lay, and Cooperator Friars*. Chicago: New Priory, 2017.

Thomas Martin Miller, O.P.

St. Dominic's vision for the Order of Preachers included from the beginning a role for non-ordained brothers. Such brothers have accordingly been part of the order for the entirety of its history under various names, as reflected in the title of Fr. Augustine Thompson's book *Dominican Brothers: Conversi, Lay, and Cooperator Friars*. Not only the name but also the vocation of these brothers has been subject to dispute, as seen in Thompson's characterization of two sharply opposing views submitted to the 1965 General Chapter of the Order:

[The first] saw the brothers' life as essentially hidden and an exercise in humility. They had only an indirect involvement in the apostolic work of the Order: they freed priest friars of domestic drudgery so that they could dedicate themselves full-time to prayer, study, preaching, and sacramental ministry. Thus the work of the brothers was essentially manual labor. . . . Their functions did not require training in the sacred or [secular] sciences. Their forms of prayer and way of life were wholly distinct from that of clerics. . . .

[The second position] saw the Order as fundamentally directed to the preaching apostolate. In this view, the traditional life of the brothers was a monastic relic. The constitutions needed to be changed so that the formation, work, and role in governance of the brothers would all be identical to that of the clerics. The only distinctions

remaining would be those directly connected to the sacramental function of the ordained. (226–7)

With these and other complexities in mind, the 2013 World Congress of Cooperator Brothers in Lima, Peru, recommended that “in tandem with the 800th Anniversary of the Order, a rich history be published on the history, vitality, permanence, and presence of cooperator brothers in the life and mission of the Order.” That heady task “to help the Order situate, in a historical perspective, its reflections on the specific vocation of the cooperator brothers today,” was given by the Master of the Order to Fr. Thompson, a historian of medieval Christianity currently teaching at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California, the school for the Western U.S. Dominican Province of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, and he has met it with aplomb. Thompson recognizes that gaining real historical perspective on the vocation of cooperator brothers, rather than engaging in ahistorical criticism, romanticism, or sanitization, is difficult because “in addition to the lack of attention the brothers have received, there is also a gap between modern sensibilities and the traditional religious and social culture typical well into the twentieth century” (2). Both of these difficulties play to Thompson’s strengths as a historian, but his conclusion about the specific vocation of cooperator brothers suggests a higher synthesis of their integration into the Order.

PIERCING THE HISTORICAL VEIL

Thompson remedies the lack of attention given to the brothers by going beyond capsule “biographies on the Saints, Blessed, and Martyrs” (ix) to include “as often as possible, something on the other brothers of whom we know more than a name, even if what we know is sometimes meager” (x). *Dominican Brothers* is worth purchasing for the indices and endnotes alone, as Thompson surfaces centuries of information buried in the

archives of the Order. As with his earlier work *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Cornell, 2012), he also takes the time to correct enduring myths by recourse to primary sources. St. Martin de Porres's status within the Order of Friars Preachers, for instance, was apparently as ambiguous as his racial, social, and educational background (154): he made solemn vows, but as a *donatus* (a habited member of the Third Order living among the Friars), he never became a friar properly speaking (156). Misunderstandings about St. Martin's status have endured partly as "the result of an anachronistic projection of the modern canon law of profession back into the 1600s" (156). These interpretive anachronisms are common precisely because of dramatic changes in religious and social culture over the last two hundred years which bedevil not only accurate reporting about individual cases but also attempts at theological synthesis.



Fr. Thomas McGlynn, O.P., sculpting St. Martin de Porres

Thompson addresses the gap between traditional religious culture and modern sensibilities by tracking the Order's changing understanding of what separated the labor of lay and clerical

friars. The mature adult tradesmen of the medieval period, who “called themselves ‘conversi,’ meaning that they had undergone a ‘conversion of life’ from secular livelihoods to monastic practice” were “usually totally illiterate in both Latin and the vernacular” (2). By 1965, in contrast, the constitutions “assume that the modern brother will be literate in the vernacular” (207) while “clerical brothers could rarely speak Latin well, if at all, and some found the recitation of the Breviary with understanding difficult. . . . The great wall of Latin literacy that previously separated the lay and clerical brothers was crumbling” (203). Meanwhile, the clerical state was ever more closely associated with the license to preach. For the first several hundred years of the Order, many of the numerous “common friars,” who studied and sang the Office but never preached outside the house, were not priests but rather deacons or clerics in minor orders (7). In the wake of Trent, these friars would be ordained to the priesthood, and, following Lacordaire’s reestablishment of the Order in France after the losses of the revolution, these priests were needed to preach, a work no longer restricted to a privileged few. The large priories of the medieval period, with hundreds of friars, no longer existed (174). Following Pope Paul VI’s suppression of the minor orders in 1972, clerics and preachers were functionally interchangeable categories in the Dominican Order. At the same time, the understanding of lay brothers changed from that of skilled tradesmen who were also contemplative religious, and essential to the Order in both regards (197), to an understanding of the brothers’ work as interchangeable with that of lay employees (195), performing services “priests cannot do . . . because of time or ‘ineptness’” (198). Whereas large “monasteries could not function without physical labor,” and so “conversi were essential to their existence” (30), such labor was more optional for the smaller Dominican houses of the nineteenth century, especially after the industrial revolution (179). This situation was then projected historically, and so when a biography of Martin de Porres from this period “makes him illiterate and

unskilled . . . it is hard to recognize the skilled healer, fundraiser, and organizer of hospitals and orphanages” (198).

THOMPSON’S PROPOSAL

It is only with this history in mind that Thompson can identify a “convergence” between the two opposed 1965 views on the presence of cooperator brothers in the life and mission of the Order: “Both agree that the purpose of the Order is essentially clerical: administration of the sacraments and pulpit preaching. So, brothers should either do traditional domestic work or be ordained” (227–8). This dichotomy Thompson rejects as ahistorical on the basis of his archival work and historiographical perspective. On the one hand, “Dominican conversi” were, from the beginning, “laborers by definition” (30). “The lay brothers did not preach externally or internally, as they could not receive the license” to preach externally, granted only to priests, “and they did not speak Latin,” the language of the internal sermons (7). On the other hand, Thompson does not see the labor of the brothers as devoid of training, wholly distinct in way of life from the clerics, or even purely of benefit to the ordained preachers. Instead, “when medieval Dominicans speak of a conversus as ‘useless,’ they mean that he was admitted without a useful skill or could not learn one, not because he was a noncleric” (17). Drawing on Bl. Humbert of Romans’ commentary on the Constitutions and early obituaries of the brothers, Thompson gives a whole litany of internal and external labors provided by the brothers (31–40, 45–71). Further, “conversi professed their vows using exactly the same words as clerics did,” and so “Humbert instructed the brothers’ master to remind them that, as religious, they were ‘equal to clerics’” (19). Thompson goes so far as to conclude that “the conversi’s work was not seen by medievals as ‘cooperating’ in the ministry of preaching,” but rather that the conversi’s labors for the material needs of the Order “had clear value in themselves” due to their performance under vowed

obedience to Christ, and thus “did not need to be justified by some vicarious share in public preaching” (7).

Thompson’s perspective is certainly a welcome shift from the less historically informed oppositions of 1965 which seem to devalue the work of brothers, but it also unnecessarily heightens the opposition between the value of the brother’s work and its relation to that of the clerics. Pope St. John Paul II’s teaching that “profession of the evangelical counsels is complete in itself” and thus has “a value in itself, apart from the sacred ministry” occurs in the very same paragraph of *Vita Consecrata* as the claim that in clerical Institutes which “presuppose the exercise of Holy Orders . . . the sacred ministry is constitutive of the charism itself and determines its nature, purpose and spirit.” Thus, paragraph 60 continues, “the presence of Brothers constitutes a different form of participation in an Institute’s mission, through services rendered both within the community and in the apostolate, in collaboration with those who exercise the priestly ministry.” The Order’s Fundamental Constitution of 1968 similarly says that “since the ministry of the word and of the sacraments of faith is a priestly office, ours is a clerical Order, whose mission the cooperator brothers, exercising in a special way the common priesthood, also share in many ways.” While the exact language of these documents may reflect their twentieth-century composition, Thompson’s own evidence that the implicit sentiment must be as old as the Order itself is in tension with his characterization of the brothers’ saving work as deriving its value independently from the preaching of the priests.

Thompson highlights that both the Order as a whole and its houses were referred to as “Holy Preaching” because “the Order as a whole received the license [to preach] from the pope and gave a limited or extended share in it to individual friars,” in accord with Dominic’s founding intention (6). Vows in the Order of Preachers must lead to some kind of participation in the charism of preaching, because it was for the sake of preaching that Dominican houses were founded, and preaching the Word of God is the manner in

which the Order contributes to the salvation of its members, as both the second approbation letter of Pope Honorius III promulgated in 1216 and the Primitive Constitutions of the Friars Preachers promulgated in 1228 tell us. Acts done out of obedience that are unrelated to preaching might thus have a religious character, but they would not be specifically Dominican. Both 1965 views agreed that the purpose of the Order is essentially clerical because the purpose of the Order is preaching, and preaching is essentially clerical, even if the scope of both “preaching” and “clerical” have evolved over the last eight hundred years.

A COUNTER PROPOSAL

How, then, can a historical perspective on the 1965 dispute lead to something more than a muddled middle? A clue is offered by Master Bruno Cadore’s foreword, which suggests that we read Thompson’s research as a commentary on the brothers’ “manner of integration within the body of preachers ‘totally dedicated to the evangelization of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’” (v). Both the opposed 1965 views and Thompson’s own position seem to regard Dominican brothers as a kind of species of religious life. The Dominicans are a religious institute specifically devoted to preaching, and preaching is essentially clerical, so if the brothers have “equality in religion” then they must have “very distinct, even different, religious vocations” than the clerics (19). What the Master suggests, however, is that the brothers do not have a specifically different vocation but rather an integral function within a body. The nature of integral parts, St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us, “is that the whole is not present in each of the parts, as to its entire power, or as to its entire essence, but that it is present to all of them together at the same time” (*Summa Theologiae* III, q. 90, a. 3, co.) “in a certain order being dependent on one another” (ad. 3). For example, man is specifically rational, and the brain is required for man’s exercise of rationality, which makes it a kind of first part, but it does not possess in actuality the entire essence. The brothers

are not identical to the clerics, but have their own integral part to play in the life of the order—a distinction which “always requires inequality” (ST I, q. 47, a. 2, co.) but not “through any preceding inequality, either of merits or of the disposition of the matter; but inequality comes from the perfection of the whole” (ad. 3).

Does this leave the brothers only in a kind of “domestic drudgery”? No, because Bl. Humbert tells us that such domestic work which could easily be done by all *should* be done by all, on a rotational system (16, 40). Such work was only to be assigned exclusively to a brother when he had “so little skill as to be nearly useless” (32, 40), exactly the kind of man that legislation and exhortation repeatedly tried to prevent from being accepted (17–18, 31). Even the most obvious kind of inequality, the brothers’ “subjection . . . to their own superior, a cleric, the master of *conversi*” was not to promote clericalism but rather “to protect (one would hope) the *conversi* from clerics who sought to turn them into personal servants” (22).

The cooperator brothers today, as in St. Dominic’s vision, can have a special role “in the administration and care of temporal affairs” (11), quite broadly understood, that are necessary for preaching in its more restricted sense, and still “cooperate fully in [the Order’s] mission of evangelization for the salvation of souls” (v).

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THE LOCUTORIUM

SEEDS OF THE LOGOS

AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROL ZALESKI

Jonah Teller, O.P.

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Would you tell us something about yourself and how you came to the faith?

I grew up in Manhattan, just north of the Lower East Side, as the only child of parents who were cultured, kind, politically progressive, secular Jews. I never saw the inside of a synagogue except when I attended the bar mitzvahs of two friends. At one point I asked to receive Jewish instruction, but my parents—I can't recall if they gave a reason—didn't seem to like the idea. My father told me he had stopped believing in God as a teenager when his



Carol Zaleski

own father died suddenly of a heart attack. My mother's Russian émigré parents were passionate about politics and music. On that side of the family there were Communists, Socialists, Wobblies, poets, composers, and members of the Ethical Culture Society, but no rabbis nor any traces I can detect of active Jewish observance.

Where did the religious influence come from, then? Why Christianity?

My parents loved music, travel, and the arts. On Sundays, as we read *The New York Times*—which was massive enough to have been almost an all-day affair—we listened to Vivaldi, Bach, and Brubeck. I had the liner notes to Bach's B Minor Mass, and I read the words. The Agnus Dei made an especially deep impression. I don't recall analyzing it at the time, but the effect was something like what William James calls "subconscious incubation." I was reminded of this last week when we were discussing Augustine's *Confessions* in one of my classes and we came to the part where Augustine says that the name of Christ was imprinted on him from infancy. No philosophy from which this name was absent—however profound or beautiful—could ultimately satisfy him. In retrospect, I think that was my situation, too. But of course there were many other influences as well.

Can you describe some of these other influences?

My beloved maternal grandmother gave me my first Bible because she heard that I had a part in a summer camp production of *J. B.* (the Archibald McLeish play based on the Book of Job). It was *The Bible as Literature*. She also gave me a copy of Ignazio Silone's novel *Bread and Wine*. The socialism was familiar, but the sacramentalism was a revelation. And that same summer, to round out my education, she gave me Jean-Paul Sartre's autobiography, *Les Mots* (*The Words*), which I found fascinating. It turned out that the Word had more staying power (even if at first only "as literature") than *The Words*.

When I was in high school, a history teacher suggested I give a report on the Catholic Worker movement. So I visited the Catholic Worker House of Hospitality on Chrystie Street in lower Manhattan, gave my report at school, and kept going back on weekends to help out in the soup kitchen and the mailroom. These were the first Christians I was conscious of meeting, and it seemed to me that they were actually living the apostolic life.

In college I studied ancient philosophy, beginning with the Presocratics. The idea that everything might be made of one substance—whether air, water, or some incalculable infinite force—attracted me because it was a unified vision of reality. Plato was even better, of course, and when I move on from Plato to Augustine, I was pretty well sunk.

In college and graduate school I continued studying medieval Christian writers, but I held back from entering the Church for many years because I couldn't bear the thought of renouncing my Jewish heritage. How could I make a move that would gratify the anti-Semites of this world?

It was an insoluble problem—at least not one that I could solve abstractly. But John Henry Newman is right about personal influence. My husband Philip and I got to know the Catholic writers Stratford and Léonie Caldecott (founders of *Second Spring* in Oxford) during the few years in which they lived near us in Boston; our friendship with the Caldecotts was (and is) a joy and a provocation to get serious. Then one day, by chance or providence, Philip and I visited the chapel shared by the twin Benedictine monastic communities in Petersham, Massachusetts, heard Vespers, and found what would become a spiritual home. The superior of the monks, a scholar of biblical Hebrew and of Rashi's commentaries, baptized me in the monastic chapel.

So this was the solution?

It was a grace. But though I wish I could echo Cardinal Lustiger's famous declaration, "*je demeure juif!*" ("I remain

Jewish!”), I’m not entirely sure about that. It’s a complex question. At least I can remain grateful to my Jewish heritage; I can strive to know it better and to convey the Church’s teaching that God’s covenant with Israel is irrevocable (no supersessionism here!). Among other things, it really bothers me when I hear Christians vocalizing the Tetragrammaton, whether in speech or in print. It’s so unnecessary, too.

What is it like teaching at Smith College?

Smith is a beautiful and vibrant liberal arts college for women. Diversity is the watchword, of course, but I am constantly discovering that the diversity in the student body is genuine, not just a slogan. I teach courses in world religions and philosophy of religion, and my students are Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Pentecostals, Catholics, Unitarians, Buddhists, atheists, and so on—and every kind of seeker, too. In world religions classes, we try to see what the world looks like through the eyes of the adherents; I find that this is the best starting point for a scholarly investigation of any religious tradition.

Students are often surprised by what we read when it comes to their own faith tradition (if they have one), but that’s a good thing—it cuts through the fog of familiarity. For instance, when we study Christianity in the world religions course, we read the Greek homily for Holy Saturday that begins “Something strange is happening . . .” and culminates with Christ commanding Adam, “I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell.” This is a wholly traditional way of depicting the Paschal Mystery, visualized in the *Anastasis* (Resurrection) icons and “Harrowing of Hell” motifs of Christian literature and art. But to the students it is something remarkable and unheard of. The effect is to stir both imagination and intellect. In my experience, this is how learning begins.

What is a religious imagination? How can you nourish it? How can you harm it?

Now that's a tough question! We'd have to define both terms, *religious* and *imagination*. I was a Coleridge fan for a long time, and more recently I've been writing about Tolkien. I'm attracted by their view of the imagination as a power that freely shapes manifold impressions into pictures that carry deep meaning and truth. Imagination can help us shake off a passive acquiescence to what reality, in our duller moments, seems to be. In that way, imagination is a handmaiden to faith.

But it's not necessary to be a creative genius like Coleridge or Tolkien; our imagination is just as active when we are being receptive to the works of God in nature, to art and beauty in culture, to symbol and sacrament in faith. The worst use we can make of imagination (or "creativity") is to idolize it as an end in itself.

Of course, Catholics possess an inexhaustible source of nourishment for the imagination: we have the liturgy. Unfortunately, in the rush to implement a certain vision of liturgical reform—well, you know what happened. I still cringe when I remember having to sing the Our Father to the tune of "Johnny Angel." I think things are getting better, though.

Much of what you've written about involves death and what comes after. Whence this morbid curiosity?

I've never thought of it as a morbid subject—in any case, my focus has been on images and doctrines of eternal life rather than on death and dying. I suppose we are meant to pay attention to last things, as long as we keep a sense of proportion and refrain from wild speculation.

How did you come to write about “near-death experience”?

I spent a year in Paris—my husband Philip and I lived in a cold-water flat on the Île de la Cité—doing dissertation research on twelfth-century views of the imagination. It was interesting material but it didn’t gel. Then I started hearing all those stories of “near-death experience” (some of them with sensational titles like *I Was an Atheist Until I Died*), and I realized that there were parallels to medieval return-from-death stories. So I ditched the trunk of index cards I had amassed and wrote the thesis that became *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times*. Some readers took it as a skeptical book, since I stressed the cultural shaping of near-death reports; others thought I was a tad too sympathetic. But there’s a third possibility—neither skepticism, nor credulity—which needs to be better understood. And this third possibility, I discovered later, is what the Catholic tradition understands as the art of discerning the spirits: not dismissing private revelations out of hand, but approaching all such testimonies with wise restraint.

What’s your take on the way that American culture presently thinks and talks (or doesn’t think and talk) about death, Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell?

It’s a big muddle. We’re over-exposed to death and violence in the entertainment and news media, but compared to our ancestors we are cut off from a first-hand acquaintance with death. Denial of death isn’t just a cultural phenomenon, though; it’s also a universal psychic defense mechanism. Freud had a point when he said that whenever we think of our own death we imagine ourselves as a spectator—that’s why the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* that Paul Edwards edited in the 1960s had two articles on death, one entitled “Death,” and the other entitled “My Death”!

As far as Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell go, the cultural signals are mixed. Heaven is sentimentalized, and Hell is a subject

of debate and speculation unmoored from scripture and tradition. My husband and I are working on an anthology on Hell (*The Book of Hell*, a sequel to *The Book of Heaven*); but we haven't been asked to produce a *Book of Purgatory*, perhaps because of the popular misconception of Purgatory as "Hell Lite."

With so little time and with so much to read and to learn just about the Catholic faith, why should we read about what other religions might have to say about the afterlife?

I've found fascinating (if incomplete) analogues to Purgatory in other religions, which tells me that the doctrine is at once Catholic-specific and the answer to a universal longing.

The afterlife isn't a stand-alone subject, though. What a civilization thinks about the afterlife is intimately connected to what it thinks about everything else. What is the nature of the human person? What is the purpose of intelligent life? What are the permanent things? It's good for us to know that our neighbors of other faiths have been inspired to ask the same deep questions.

The Catholic principle—going back to Justin Martyr—is that the seeds of the Logos are scattered through the world's civilizations. We don't all need to have expert knowledge of other religions, but we do need to recognize that every seed is precious. This recognition doesn't have to lead to indifferentism or shallow forms of pluralism.

How do you avoid shallow forms of pluralism?

I follow the teaching in *Nostra Aetate* and also *Dominus Iesus*. But I realize that there are some tough problems. Aside from magisterial documents, I've never found a theory of religious diversity that fully satisfies me. Either these theories fail—by falling into one trap or another—or they succeed in a way that seems thin, almost tinny, compared to the richness and complexity of the phenomena they explain.

I'm not sure whether it's from our own thick-headedness or by a wise providential design (probably both!), but we don't seem to have the full scoop on everything we might like to know. We're in a parallel, and much more haunting, situation with the problem of evil. Even though there are profound and rationally compelling solutions to the classic problem of evil, suffering and evil confront us with a mystery that chastens and appalls.

The liturgy seems to play an influential role in your thought. Why is that? What's the connection between liturgy and life?

What the liturgy offers is a new world to live in, with Christ in our midst and the saints all around us, with a meaningful measure of days and times, in an atmosphere of beauty—even if the singing is off-key. There's a big difference between reading the Bible for private edification (or “as literature”) and reading it within the horizon of a liturgically illumined cosmos. The liturgy gives us a foretaste of heaven—and it makes our day-to-day experience more coherent, hopeful, and alive.

And then there is the Real Presence. Remember what Flannery O'Connor said when the idea was proposed to her that the Eucharist was an excellent *symbol* of Christ?

How is it working on books with your husband?

We are just different enough and just similar enough to make the collaboration interesting and fruitful. I learned how to write from Philip (when I was in college, one of my professors told me my writing seemed like it was translated from German).

You've recently released a book on the Inklings. Lewis and Tolkien in particular seem to have roaringly healthy imaginations, both religious and otherwise (if that's a real distinction). What do you love in particular about them and their way of seeing the world? What should we know, in brief, about the lesser-known Inklings?

I love their peculiar blend of scholarship, mythopoeic imagination, and Christian faith. Lewis forged a compelling theological vernacular; Tolkien single-handedly created a mythology, complete with invented languages and meticulous backstories, infused with intimations of the Gospel. Lewis and Tolkien were war writers who radiated Christian hope without falling into shallow optimism; they told the Christian story without didactic preachiness; they wedded imagination to reason. The other Inklings followed a variety of career paths, including poet, publisher, biographer, soldier, doctor, lawyer, theater director—and one Dominican priest—but they all found ways to contribute to the same profoundly hopeful Christian humanism.

What writers, artists, stories, do you find yourself returning to? Asked another way, how you enjoy cultivating your own imagination? Any contemporary artists or authors?

I read whatever I am teaching—and I love whatever I read in that context because teaching summons an energy and engagement beyond what I might have supplied on my own. These days it would be mainly Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Dante, Pascal, Newman, Edith Stein, Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, the Bhagavad Gita, Coleridge, and William James. I love P. G. Wodehouse, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the Metaphysical Poets, John Buchan, George MacDonald's Curdie books, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and *Calvin and Hobbes*, to name just a few favorites that come readily to mind. Not too many contemporary authors—but in literature all times are present.

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DISPUTED QUESTION

In the Middle Ages, the disputed question was one of the major forms of academic investigation. A master of theology would pose a question on which great authorities seemed to disagree, and then entertain objections from fellow masters and students. After others attempted to reconcile the various authorities, the master would give a determination that resolved the question.

In our form of the disputed question, two student brothers approach a difficult issue from different angles in order to reveal its complexity. While traditionally the dispute was settled by a master, here we will allow readers to form their own decision.

THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

Isidore Rice, O.P. & Anthony VanBerkum, O.P.

THE QUESTION

“The heavens existed of old and earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God; through these the world that then existed was destroyed, deluged with water. The present heavens and earth have been reserved by the same word for fire, kept for the day of judgment.”

(2 Pt 3:5–7)

St. Peter reminds us of two important facts about this world: that it will come to an end, and that the end will be by the word of God. In popular culture today there is not lack of speculation, imagination, and fear about the first of these points, but there is much confusion about the second. People fear for the end of the habitable world or the end of the human race, by climate change, overpopulation, Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), or nuclear winter. In the realm of fiction, entertainers meticulously create worlds that have reached an end, whether it be in the zombie apocalypse or an asteroid strike.

In the following conversation, Br. Anthony VanBerkum and Br. Isidore Rice guide us through an examination of this modern-day apocalyptic imagination, and the opportunities and challenges it presents to our efforts toward the evangelization of the world.

Br. Anthony VanBerkum (AVB): In every age, our shared human experience of the world has led us to think about its end. This is seen most dramatically in our stories of the apocalypse, whether the ancient tale of a world-ending Flood or more modern fears of a nuclear-powered world war. Of course, we know that each one of us will die, and without a perception of the immortality of the soul or the general resurrection, this appears to be a kind of world-ending moment. But this is just personal, and we've always known that others will outlive us, or at least that the stars will outlast us. Nonetheless, cultures around the world and in all times have developed stories of the apocalypse. Why is this?

We observe that everything in the world is either coming to be or passing away. We can see that trees grow, die, and decay; that animals are born, hunt or are hunted, and die either way; that even rocks form over time before crumbling into dust. It's certainly possible that all of this would just go on forever, but it might seem more natural to conclude that the world itself came to be and is

passing away. This is the perspective adopted by many cultures, including our own.

In light of Christian revelation, we know that this is indeed the case. The frequency with which the apocalypse appears in the world's traditions suggests that God teaches us this truth—the world is passing away—also through the natural world itself. And this is a good thing. It's helpful for us to realize that the world is temporary, for it points us, at least at a subconscious level, to the truth that the world that we can see, smell, hear, touch, and taste is not worth our full attention. “The world and its enticement are passing away,” so they ought not engage us fully (1 Jn 2:17). We ought to have energy left over for something else, for something higher.

Br. Isidore Rice (IR): It is certainly true that an awareness of the temporary nature of our world can be quite spiritually beneficial. By increasing our awareness of the limits of our mortal human nature, mindfulness of the end can drive us to seek an end beyond the things of this world and can quicken a spirit of repentance from our all-too-worldly ways. Often in the history of the Church, an increased awareness of the four last things has done just this, for example in the preaching of St. Vincent Ferrer.

Yet it seems that our response to the apocalypse is highly dependent on our beliefs. In a Christian context, someone like St. Vincent Ferrer was able to convert many from lukewarmness and moral laxity by his apocalyptic preaching. However, false beliefs lead to less beneficial responses.

The main fruit of the 2012 apocalypse hype was interest and involvement in the pagan superstition of the Mayan calendar (and that misinterpreted, as historians pointed out). In the cultural trope of the zombie apocalypse, you may be asked what your plans are (weapon and hiding place of choice): there is an assumption that it could be overcome by human cunning and

might. Frequently, discredited fears of overpopulation are used to justify intrinsic evils such as abortion and contraception. Even Christian apocalyptic awareness has been tainted by fringe protestant preachers who frequently predict the exact date of the end, ignoring the clear words of our Lord: “but of that day and hour no one knows” (Mt 24:26). In another way, some promote the incorrect view popularized by Left Behind series that there will be a “rapture” in which Christians will be taken up into heaven before the end-times tribulations really get going.

To a world steeped in errors like materialism, hedonism, consequentialism, and nihilism the idea of an the end of the world is likely to give rise to utter despair, hasty bucket-list fulfilling, ends-justify-the-means rationalizing, and proud attempts to overcome even the apocalypse.

AVB: Yes, it’s true that our beliefs will filter how we view the world. For modern man, obsessed with the power of technology, there is a tendency to believe that even the end of all things can be overcome by the power of science. This has been a driving idea behind space exploration, for instance, the plan being for the human race to survive all catastrophes by bouncing from one planet to another. This idea was somewhat humorously taken on by Marvel’s recent *Thor: Ragnarok*, in which Ragnarok, the end of the world, can’t be prevented but isn’t a big deal, since everyone can just get on a spaceship and fly somewhere else.

Our beliefs filter anything we might observe in the world, though, so it’s helpful to consider the sorts of truths that tend to filter through any worldview. Some of these include the bare fact of some kind of end of the world, the notion that it will not be pleasant, and the corresponding idea that we ought to prepare for it. This is all present in Christian teaching, as vividly presented by the Book of Revelation, for example. These ideas can be seen in various modern apocalypses as well. Take, for example, the outcry over GMOs,

Artificial Intelligence, overpopulation, and the like. Each of them suggests a coming end of the world, or at least an end to human rule over the world. The concern is that they will cause disease, or starvation, or slavery to machines—all unpleasant prospects. And so, the conclusion goes, we ought to prepare for them, whether by building survival bunkers or by trying to eradicate these causes of disaster.

There's a striking difference between these modern fears and the apocalypses of myth, however. While the mythical Ragnarok is inevitable and unstoppable, the response is not fear but a kind of hopeless courage—this is the sort of heroic attitude borrowed by J.R.R. Tolkien for the heroes of Middle-Earth. The proposed modern world-ending fears, on the other hand, are rather tame. One can question whether they're even capable of ending the human race, let alone the whole world.

All of this suggests a couple things about our modern peers. First, we're still interested in the world, and we care about where history is going. Second, we've lost contact to a large extent with the world—some of our “end of the world” scenarios don't see everything going up in fire and ash but merely the extinction of mankind. Both of these are, I think, open to the Christian message. It is through the preaching of the Gospel that we learn where history is going, and also that we ourselves, each individual person, are meant to go along with history to a glorious end. Similarly, the instinct to understand ourselves as stewards of creation, as taught by Genesis, is still with us, as seen by our intuition that the end of the human race might just bring about the end of the rest of creation as well.

IR: Reflecting on the end of the world, the good created universe, and our stewardship thereof can be fruitful, but we should also consider how we relate to “the world” taken in the sense of that all-too-fallen human way of thinking. One can distinguish two tendencies in the Christian tradition for how to approach the world

in this sense. One would be to find common ground that could serve as a starting point for proclaiming the Gospel. This finds scriptural basis in Paul's preaching in the Areopagus of Athens, where he refers the Athenian's altar to an unknown god and one of their poets' sayings to Christ (Acts 17:16–32). No one can be entirely without truth nor act without striving towards some at least apparent good. Thus Christ can be proclaimed as the fullness of truths only glimpsed before and the true good which we all seek. In this approach, just like the Israelites despoiled the Egyptians of their treasures (Ex 12:36), we can claim whatever is true and noble in our contemporary culture for the service of God.

The other approach stresses the radical difference between the Gospel and the world. Think of the simple preaching of John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2). Likewise, from its first line the *Didache*, one of the earliest Christian writings, teaches that "there are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways." It seems apocalyptic preaching would usually fall in this category. While it is possible to sift through philosophies, religions, and cultures to find seeds of the Gospel in greater or lesser degrees, the four last things show that in the end there are only two options: death brings a judgement either to heaven or to hell. From this perspective, seeds of the Gospel mean little if they have not sprouted. To him who has Jesus, more will be given; to him without Jesus, even what he has will be taken away (see Mt 13:12, 25:29). Rather than the despoiling of the Egyptians, this is reminiscent of the commands to take nothing from and suffer no mixing with the Canaanites (Ex 34:11–16).

We really need to preserve both of these perspectives. Emphasizing the former without the latter can devolve into a bland religious relativism—everyone has their path to the top of the hill. The latter without the former leaves little room for natural reason, which



Giuseppe Sanmartino — St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. (*The Angel of the Apocalypse*)

along with faith is one of the wings with which our minds ascend to contemplate God (*Fides et Ratio*, prologue).

In relation to the end times, we can find many truths in contemporary ideas, as you have mentioned. But the sinful actions inspired by falsehoods admixed with these truths can make the proximity to the truth more of a hindrance than a help, practically speaking. For example, both a Christian perspective and a typically modern one may agree on the truth that a good death is a desirable

thing. Yet whereas the Christian rightly understands this to be a death foreseen and prepared for by receiving the sacraments, many people today would think of a good death primarily as a painless one—dying in one's sleep. In the most extreme case, the ill effects of this partial truth are manifested in “death with dignity” movements, promoting and carrying out assisted suicides. In the dim light of half-truths this seems desirable, but in the light of the fullness of the truth, especially the truth of the four last things, it is a terrifying prospect. Likewise, while the desire to preserve the life of the species may be laudable in itself, if it leads to immoral tinkering with human life, for example embryonic stem cell research or messing with our human DNA, it becomes something quite terrible from an eternal perspective.

AVB: You make a good point, that we need to be careful when borrowing from the wisdom of the world in pursuit of preaching the Gospel. But I think we both agree that it ought to be possible to use modern apocalyptic fears as a way to introduce people to the Lord. What do you think are some practical aspects to consider in this regard?

For my part, I think a good first step might be to try to help people figure out what exactly it is that they fear from an apocalyptic scenario. For example, someone who is a strict materialist seemingly shouldn't be too concerned: all individual material things will end at some point no matter what, so why does it matter if everything ends? If such a person is worried about the end times anyway, then perhaps that's an opening to discuss how our experience of the world is not actually entirely materialistic. (Of course, if our hypothetical interlocutor is consistent and doesn't actually fear the apocalypse, we would need to take a different tack.)

Or perhaps someone is deeply concerned for the environment, and so considers human abuse of natural resources to be a potential cause of the end of the world. As Christians, we certainly agree

that it is important to care for creation, so this provides a common ground from which to start a discussion.

In any case, though, it would be necessary to be very careful that the language we're using is understood properly by both parties. This could help strike the balance you describe, as we're meeting the world where it is without simply adopting its perspective as our own.

IR: Looking at what is feared in an apocalypse does seem potentially fruitful. Perhaps for someone whose world revolves around material possessions or worldly status—getting the latest cellphone, remodelling the house again to get it just right, getting that promotion at work—the end may inspire fear of losing all they have striven for. Dickens's classic *A Christmas Carol* wonderfully illustrates this kind of fear and the conversion it can inspire. Yet, for Christians, the second coming of Christ is not something only to be feared, but even to be longed for: "Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus" (Rv 22:20).

Environmental concerns also strike me as an interesting topic to consider, especially because they are real concerns, much more threatening than fanciful AI and zombie apocalypses. I think they also bring up one of the greatest fears associated with the end: the need for and difficulty of conversion.

Following the distinction you made earlier, something like climate change at first seems more like a potentially avoidable apocalypse than the complete and inevitable end, yet it does present an inevitability: if we continue to burn so much fossil fuel, the greenhouse effect will continue to heat the world up, drastically changing climates and the way people live around the globe; if we stop, we will have to radically change our habits of consumption. Either way, a change in our ways will be necessary.

I am no expert on climate science, but it certainly seems like an area where a stubborn will can cloud the intellect. This dynamic of conscience formation and the erring conscience can appear here just as much as it can in an area like Catholic sexual teaching. Someone who is cohabitating will be disinclined to believe that premarital sex can lead to hell. Analogously, someone who is accustomed to make an hour long commute daily in a Hummer will be rather disinclined to believe that burning fossil fuels leads to global warming. Both will have their justifications, but do these really come from reason simply seeking the truth? Converting our habits is difficult; justifying them to ourselves by believing a lie is easy.

It also highlights the need for a positive vision of conversion. When climate change seems to mainly demand a long list of moralizing changes to my behavior, there is little joy offered in accepting it. All too often environmentalism can fall into a dreary misanthropy: the world was great until humans ruined it (parodying John the Baptist, the antinatalist could say that the environment will not increase until we decrease). Perhaps presenting a positive vision of living sustainably, using and benefiting from our earth responsibly, would be more attractive. Likewise, if we conceive of Christianity mostly in terms of what we must turn away from, rather than the One we need to be turned towards, we will not have the strength to carry it out. But with Jesus before our eyes, drawing us to himself and from our sins by his grace, we will long to be ever more converted to him until he comes again.

AVB: It can be difficult to make the jump from a vague sort of fear, whether of climate change, AI, or zombies, to a more specific conversion of life. As you argue, this is obvious for the Christian, but I don't think it's absent among our contemporaries. I find it interesting that even in secular or pagan contexts, an apocalyptic worldview tends to influence action, or at least to suggest a desired action.

Many Norse myths, for example, praise the courage of the hero who goes out to defend his people, even though eventually the whole world will be destroyed anyway. For them, it seems that an apocalyptic worldview tends to highlight the good things that society does have.

Today's apocalypses are more directly oriented to action, as we've been discussing. Caring for the environment is something that we can take concrete steps to achieve. Depopulation—a real society-endangering problem in many places—is a course of action that society can chose, and also one that we can choose to end. Even the more fanciful case of the zombie apocalypse gives the ordinary man a chance to imagine how he could be a mythical hero, that is, how an apocalypse could really change how he acts.

Perhaps this sort of broader worldview is what we're looking for. I think we all know the challenge that you speak of—the conflict of conscience and act where intellect and will are misaligned—and likewise we all experience this as a kind of suffering. Even in non-world-ending matters, like losing weight or being more productive at work, we are constantly frustrated by our inability to really do the good that we know. It seems that really taking to heart an apocalyptic worldview can help us to understand the things of this world in their proper order, and in so doing we find ourselves better able to act. If I'm a father and a horde of zombies is attacking my house, I'm not going to sit on the couch eating chips, but I'm going to grab some kind of weapon and try to fend them off long enough for my family to escape. The proximity of the threat, its realness, helps spur us to action.

IR: The point you bring up about how something like the zombie apocalypse invites us to consider how we would react to an apocalyptic event is interesting. Many apocalyptic stories examine how different characters fare under extreme conditions, when their true character emerges. Think of the humble heroism of Sam

Gamgee in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, contrasted with Dr. Mann's willingness to lie and murder to avoid death in *Interstellar*. Tolkien uses the Hobbits in a particular way to invite readers into the narrative; like the reader, the Hobbits are accustomed to comfort, but they are thrust into a dangerous and heroic world.

There are positives and negatives to the way we can imagine ourselves in apocalyptic situations. On the one hand, these forms of literature can inspire us to strive after the heroic virtues exemplified by the characters. On the other hand, by running through how we would react to situations we've never faced, it's easy to gain a baseless inflation of our own self-image, kind of like the fan on the sidelines who is sure that he would have caught that pass. There can be a kind of presumption of virtue in a pinch.

I suspect this is part of what is behind our Lord's instruction, "And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mk 13:11). We ought to be prepared for martyrdom, and being inspired by the stories of the ancient martyrs as well as persecuted Christians today can be helpful towards this, but imagining the great virtues we would demonstrate and the eloquent speeches we would give under the ultimate test is apt to lead us astray.

AVB: I agree that we have to be careful about using apocalyptic fears to inspire virtue. Besides the issue of presumption which you point out, there's the opposite problem of a paralysing fear that prevents action. It's also necessary that the end of the world feel real enough to inspire our will to action. With respect to the first, I think your point about focusing on good things to be achieved over evils to be avoided helps to ward off paralysing fear. Fear is directed against some perceived evil, which in the case of the end of the world, as you say, is often the loss of a good thing that we value. We can therefore encourage our contemporaries to focus

on the good things of the world, while simultaneously trying to distinguish between passing goods and those that last, or those that are worth dying for. In an age clouded by many, many different goods, having an apocalyptic worldview can help us remember what's really important.

Second, as I've been arguing, I think that our experiences of life naturally incline us to recognize the passing nature of the world. Admittedly, it's easy to have this instinct buried under the barrage of pleasures that modern society offers us, but I think the multiplicity of modern apocalyptic fears indicates that this hasn't happened, at least not entirely.

Of course, this isn't to say that we can move directly from an apocalyptic sense to faith in Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate Good that our knowledge of the end of the world ought to help us love, but we can only know and love him by grace. Nonetheless, I think that being sensitive to the passing nature of things and the eventual end of the world can help make us more sensitive to the movements of grace in our lives.

IR: Indeed, in apocalyptic fears we see the great value we rightly and naturally place in preserving our passing earthly lives, but also how even this great good pales in comparison to the eternal life we are offered in Christ. Ultimately, the Christian way of preparing for the end is radically different from a zombie apocalypse plan, which aims only to preserve natural life. It does not consist in a procedure for escaping a coming persecution from the far-left or the far-right, from ISIS or old age—for who knows how our final test will come about—but rather of clinging ever more to Christ, for only his grace and his gift of final perseverance can see us through. It is comforting that we have the prayers of his mother “now,” when we can begin to act well and form our character in the virtues, “and at the hour of our death” when we will most need the grace of final perseverance to remain steadfastly united to him.

AVB: We might say that the New Testament is the greatest piece of apocalyptic literature. Not only does it vividly describe the end times, but it tells us how to prepare for them. What's more, it insists that the end is imminent, that we're living in the final age of the world. Its advice is somewhat counterintuitive, but so is its image of the end: there's the fire and chaos, but what results is not dust or void but a brilliant new creation. One gets the sense that the world we can see is transient and unstable, not because of human carelessness or uncontrollable chaos, but because the kingdom of God is breaking into our everyday reality. It's this apocalyptic closeness of God that challenges us to give the fading things of this world their proper importance and no more, which requires conversion of hearts and actions. This is an apocalypse which we cannot stop, and for which we ought to have a healthy, loving fear—but we can simultaneously look forward to it with hope, a hope rooted in the divine Master of the apocalypse, Jesus Christ.

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CONTEMPLATA

THE VIRGIN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Maximilian Maria Jaskowak, O.P.

Revelation 12: *And a great sign appeared in heaven . . .*

This sign demands a response from the assembly of angels, assent or dissent, obedience or disobedience. The trial of the obscurity of faith presupposes, as in the case of any rational creature, an intellect and a will. With splendid knowledge of God, incomparably greater than that of man, the angels understand the *gravitas* of the sign: God has ordained that the supernatural order would supplant the natural order. That a certain economy of grace would elevate creation. That beatitude, or heaven, would only be attained by self-renunciation—the Cross.

. . . a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars . . .

The assembly marvels at the image of the woman. She is the chosen vessel and precious portal: the Mother of God. For the angels, the great sign—a sign of contradiction—is the mystery of the Incarnation. The angels recognize in this sign the eternal will of the Father: to unite all things in the person of his Son, the Incarnate Word of God. Called to be ministers and collaborators in this plan of salvation, the angels are given a choice, with the consequences being irrevocable: to serve the child—the God-Man—or not.

... and another sign appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads . . .

Lucifer, a seraph angel according to the natural order, manifests his perverse will to the assembly. Scandalized by the Incarnation and the supposed elevation of the woman by grace, he attempts to determine for himself—apart from God—the good of his existence. First poisoned by the sin of pride, envy immediately takes hold of Satan, and he expresses contempt for the woman and the child.

... now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought . . .

The war of time immemorial begins with disobedience: a rebellion, instigated by the adversary of mankind, which continues even now. The prince of the heavenly hosts, having discerned the *non serviam* of Lucifer, rallies the angelic choirs together, wielding sword and shield against the enemy, commanding his army to cast the beast out, forever. The seraph falls sharply, his appearance marred by the ugliness of sin; he has chosen against the providential designs of his Creator, spurned the delights of God, because of a woman and her child.

As the angelic war ensues, the arresting image of the woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars, remains. The woman strikes, as it were, the head of the beast, holding—perhaps, protecting—the child as the belligerent dragon falls. Is the woman shielding her son from the gruesome scene happening underfoot? Or, better yet, is the child anticipating the flight away from the battle, for which purpose the two wings were given to his mother? Neither the woman nor the child express fear. The child gazes longingly at his Father. The woman smiles knowingly.



Miguel Cabrera — *The Virgin of the Apocalypse*

Miguel Cabrera's *The Virgin of the Apocalypse* (1760) excites with its lively energy; its brilliance compares favorably with the accomplishments of the great Italian Renaissance master, Michelangelo, whose work Cabrera emulated and esteemed as art par excellence. In both fame and genius, Michelangelo and Cabrera were kindred spirits: Michelangelo in Italy, Cabrera in Mexico. Like the assorted biblical scenes which cover the walls and ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, *The Virgin of the Apocalypse* chronicles a dramatic event recounted in the last book of the Bible, the Apocalypse of the Apostle John (or simply, the Book of the Apocalypse).

Cabrera's oil painting of the twelfth chapter from the Book of the Apocalypse depicts, in sensational fashion, the momentous role of *the woman* in the economy of salvation. During the first centuries of Christendom, the Church Fathers generally understood *the woman* of the Apocalypse as a figure of the Church; in fact, not until the medieval period did *the woman* become more commonly associated with the Blessed Virgin. By the eighteenth century, however, artists of the baroque period universally interpreted *the woman* of the Apocalypse as Our Lady. Undoubtedly, the Catholic Reformation (responding to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation) influenced this development and likewise engendered Marian piety and devotion among the faithful. For the post-Tridentine Church, art became one of the foremost instruments of evangelization, intent on revealing the order, unity, and clarity—in a word, beauty—found in the saving truths of Scripture and Tradition.

The Virgin of the Apocalypse, then, as was customary of the time, conveys immense meaning and forethought by the artisan; every facet of the piece, every shade of color, every contour or expression of the face, every detail, exudes intentionality, in order to express the natural beauty and goodness reflected in creation. The objective of such painters, sculptors, and other craftsman, the underlying goal for the period, was to inculcate a sense of awe for the grandeur of reality, which for the devout of heart also entailed the elevation of nature by grace. By accentuating emotion and drama in their principal characters, baroque pieces have exceptional qualities of realism, a realism which presupposes a God at work in and among his creation. As a result, the most minute of details has the capacity to arrest the imagination.

Cabrera's composition is even more striking when considered alongside another image which portrays the woman from the Book of the Apocalypse: the celestial *Virgin of Guadalupe*. This miraculous and familiar icon of Our Lady, impressed upon the *tilma* of St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin (1474–1548), is held



The Virgin of Guadalupe

especially dear to the Mexican peoples and renowned throughout the world. The *tilma* never ceases to beguile the most skeptical mind, if only for its unusual durability and lack of pigmentation. Where *The Virgin of the Apocalypse* dazzles us with its splendor and elevation of the natural to the supernatural, the *Virgin of Guadalupe* captivates us by its otherness, by which it transmits the supernatural through the miraculous use of natural materials. The apparitions and messages of Our Lady of Guadalupe, similar to the milieu associated with the baroque period, emphasize the beauty and goodness of God found in creation, while also revealing something about its promised elevation. The Immaculate Virgin

Mary, the very garden of God, is the most perfect reflection of this beauty and goodness.

The relationship between *The Virgin of the Apocalypse* and the *Virgin of Guadalupe* also concerns the painter, Miguel Cabrera. In 1752, the artist was granted unprecedented access to the miraculous icon in order to fashion three copies: the first, for the Archbishop of Mexico City; the second, for the Holy Father; and the third, for the purpose of further replication. This project preceded the completion of *The Virgin of the Apocalypse*; so Cabrera, who knew of the apocalyptic undertones at Guadalupe (. . . a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet . . .), painted his piece having previously studied the image of the *Virgin of Guadalupe* for years.

Also of note, Cabrera “borrowed” the format and iconography of his work from the Flemish painter, Peter Paul Rubens, who completed a painting on the same subject sometime between 1623–1625. While Cabrera’s masterpiece exceeds Rubens’s in terms of prominence today, the original, if you will, enjoyed extraordinary popularity in the seventeenth century. Rubens’s art traversed the seas, arriving in the Spanish Americas for men like Cabrera to “borrow” and reproduce. And yet, Cabrera did not simply duplicate Rubens’s *The Woman of the Apocalypse* as he did with the *Virgin of Guadalupe*. Instead, though he followed the format and overall iconography of Rubens, he incorporated elements from the *Virgin of Guadalupe*, which surely derived from his personal piety and his intimate knowledge of the miraculous icon.

Apart from the notable differences in style, Cabrera differed from his Flemish precursor in subtle ways. For example, Cabrera incorporated tacit details of Marian iconography particular to the Immaculate Conception. Where in some reproductions of Rubens’s piece the garments of Our Lady are colored red and blue, Cabrera chose the pigments typically associated with the Immaculate Conception, that is to say, white and blue. The humble demeanor of the woman, despite the chaos which seemingly surrounds her,

also lends itself to the pleasant posture characteristic of Mary Immaculate. On the right of the woman and child, cherub angels brandish instruments which evoke titles of the Blessed Virgin from the Litany of Loreto: *speculum justitiae*, mirror of justice;



Peter Paul Rubens — *The Woman of the Apocalypse*

rosa mystica, mystical rose. Finally, Cabrera followed the woman's expression as imprinted upon the *tilma*: eyes cast downwards, a smile adorning her face. Rubens's Virgin, in contrast, possesses a severe countenance, far removed from any sense of benevolence.

Specific to the *Virgin of Guadalupe*, however, Cabrera accomplished something extraordinarily beautiful in *The Woman of the Apocalypse*; alas, the idea is elusive to the casual observer, having been overwhelmed by the vast movement and drama of the piece. The woman depicted in Cabrera's painting is Our Lady of Guadalupe. While *The Woman of the Apocalypse* and the *Virgin of Guadalupe* both depict the same woman from the twelfth chapter in the Book of the Apocalypse, Cabrera—the preeminent artist of Mexico—portrayed Our Lady so that his people, to whom and for whom the Blessed Virgin appeared, would recognize, first and foremost, the Virgin of Guadalupe. In essence, Cabrera identified the woman of the Apocalypse as the Virgin who appeared to the Mexican peoples; this woman definitively revealed herself as the Apocalyptic Virgin of Guadalupe. She is the *great sign* of contradiction, who even now, intercedes for her beloved children.

The message of Our Lady of Guadalupe bequeathed to St. Juan Diego in 1531 also suggests this definitive reading. During the first of five successive apparitions that occurred over the course of four days, the Blessed Virgin introduced herself by way of identification:

I am the perfect and ever virgin Holy Mary, Mother of the God of truth through whom everything lives, the Lord of all things near us, the Lord of heaven and earth.

She then declared the purpose of her apparition:

I want very much to have a little house built here for me, in which I will show him [God], I will exalt him and make him manifest.

I will give him to the people in all my personal love, in my compassion, in my help, in my protection: because I am truly your merciful Mother, yours and all the people who live united in this land and of all other people of different ancestries, my lovers, who love me, those who seek me, those who trust in me. Here I will hear their weeping, their complaints and heal all their sorrows, hardships and sufferings.

(A Handbook on Guadalupe, 1997)

Tradition holds that when St. Juan Diego asked the Blessed Mother for her name she responded, in his native language of Nahuatl, “*Tlecuatlecupe*,” which means “the one who crushes the head of the serpent.” For Christians, the allusion to the serpent is generally acknowledged as a reference to Satan, the adversary of mankind. For Mexicans, especially those with ancestors who practiced the Mesoamerican religions of the Aztec peoples, it may also refer to the feathered serpent god, *Quetzalcoatl*, thereby serving a dual allusion. Our Lady crushes the head of Satan and the head of the pagan religions. At the far right of the scene, St. John the Theologian is painted as the lone witness of the drama, true to the reputable tradition that the evangelist composed the Book of the Apocalypse on the island of Patmos. Mexican commentators, in the centuries following Our Lady’s appearance, did not fail to recognize the evident connection between the two men with identical names, St. John and St. Juan, both of whom had visions of the same woman. Notice, as well, the waters which separate the woman and the island of Patmos, symbolizing the journey of the Christian faith to the shores of Mexico.

For all their similarities, there is one striking contrast regarding the woman in the two images. Our Lady of Guadalupe is noticeably pregnant, whereas Cabrera’s rendering depicts a woman holding a male child. The presence of the child in *The Woman of the Apocalypse* represents the fulfillment of the promise hidden in the miraculous icon of the *Virgin of Guadalupe*: that the woman would give birth to a son, the Incarnate Word of God, in

the hitherto pagan land. And indeed, the Virgin of Guadalupe, the great sign of contradiction and the woman of the Apocalypse,

*brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations
with a rod of iron. . . .*

Now we, the sons and daughters of Adam, stand in the arena, fighting the “good fight of faith” and running “so as to win,” preparing ourselves for the day we will stand on trial (1 Tm 6:12, 1 Cor 9:24). Meanwhile, the child gazes at his Father, awaiting the day and hour of his Second Coming. The woman smiles upon us from the heavens; the angels sing her praises.

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GESTA DOCTRINAMQUE

Let the brothers reflect on and make known the teachings and achievements (gesta doctrinamque) of those in the family of St. Dominic who have gone before them, while not forgetting to pray for them (See Liber constitutionum et ordinationum 160).

TREATISE ON THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Girolamo Savonarola, O.P.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Many books have been written concerning the life and times of fra Girolamo Savonarola, one of the Renaissance's apocalyptic voices. He was born in Ferrara in 1452 and entered the Order of Preachers at San Domenico in Bologna in 1475, serving variously as novice master, lector, and itinerant preacher. Toward the end of his life he famously preached many series of sermons at San Marco and the cathedral of Florence, which inspired both many conversions and a popular revolution in the city. This political turmoil led eventually to his papal excommunication and his execution. While the details of his life are well documented, his legacy is disputed. Was Savonarola a holdover from the Middle Ages or a herald of modernity, a theocrat or a republican, a true prophet or a fraudulent doomsayer, a defender of Catholic tradition or a proto-Protestant Reformer? Was he a villain or a saint?

It is the opinion of this translator that judging by the sermons and other works that have been passed down to us, by the overwhelmingly favorable reception of Savonarola in the Order since his death, and by the witness of saints devoted to Savonarola (St. Philip Neri, St. Catherine de' Ricci, and Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati come to mind), this friar from Ferrara is a holy (if complicated) preacher of the Word of God. In our own day, we would surely profit from heeding the Truth he was sent to proclaim.

The following selection is an excerpt from Savonarola's Italian *Treatise on the Love of Christ*.



Moretto da Brescia — Portrait of a Dominican, presumed to be
Girolamo Savonarola

A note on Biblical citations: In this text, Savonarola cites the Scriptures in Latin. I have used English translations wherever Savonarola simply cited the Bible. In a few places, I have kept the Latin and translated Savonarola's elaborated translations from the original Italian.

WHAT GREAT PRIZE CAN THEY EXPECT WHO LOVE JESUS
CHRIST WITH ALL THEIR HEART UNTIL THEIR DEATH

I want to demonstrate that the lovers of Jesus will not only have present consolation, but even more that they will also have a prize so great that there is no intellect high enough in the world able to understand it. First, I will prove this through Holy Scripture. The Apostle says in the second chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians: "*Oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, quae praeparavit Deus iis qui diligunt illum*" (1 Cor 2:9): Eye has never seen, nor has ear ever heard, nor has it ever dawned in the human heart, what God has prepared for his lovers. Therefore, this prize is so great that it surpasses not only the power of the senses but even that of the human intellect.

Moreover, this can be shown by reason. For God has ordered man toward a beatitude that consists in the vision of the divine essence and its fruition. This is demonstrated by the natural desire in the heart of man that cannot be satisfied in any creature even if it were among the angelic hierarchies, because seeing the beauty of the angels, it would have a supreme desire to see their creator, and therefore it would be uneasy and anxious until it saw the face of God. To whom should this infinite and eternal beatitude be given if not to the lovers of Jesus who have subjected all of their wishes to his commandments and for whose honor they suffer many trials in this world? And that this happiness is great and immense is manifested in the first place by this: that God is infinite, ineffable, incomprehensible, and more excellent than any created thing and the whole universe together, without any comparison since there is [between them] infinite distance. Nevertheless, in beatitude the

rational creature is so elevated that she joins herself to this infinite good by knowledge and love and transforms herself entirely into him. The eye of the intellect becomes so strong that without any harm it peers into that inaccessible light and contemplates fearlessly that infinite and most strong majesty. Moreover, with great security, [the creature] embraces him not only as lord but also as a friend, rather as her most sweet spouse. And this security increases joy, because she knows that this ultimate happiness is without end; and everything she sees—present or past or future—generates joy in her heart and she cannot in any way be saddened, but always, without tedium, she remains in continual jubilation and exultation of mind.

And although I am unable to express the greatness of such a prize, it can nevertheless be known that it is an inestimable reality, if we consider that which the saints have suffered, especially the martyrs. Among these, the ones who most rouse our minds, which are slow to believe great things about the next life, are those who used to be rich and excellent in doctrine who, so as not to lose such a prize, suffered not only the decimation of their own possessions but even harsh martyrdoms and cruel death. They would not have endured these things if they had not certainty concerning the next life because, being very wise, as was especially Dionysius the Areopagite, they would not have moved towards these lightly.

Here I could say many things about such happiness, but I'll leave them, because this happiness can be known better through an interior instinct of the Holy Spirit and through devout contemplation than through human persuasion. One thing alone I would like to note for beginners: That if the tears and sighs in the prayer and contemplation of Jesus's servants are so sweet that for them they leave all other worldly consolations; and if that sweetness of spirit is so sweet that the saints not only patiently, but willingly, even joyfully suffer every tribulation; now what will be in that heavenly homeland when God will lovingly dry the tears from the saints and give repose to their sighs and thus will surround them with every consolation? Surely, there is no intellect

that can understand this beatitude, nor tongue that can express it, therefore, I will finish here.

HOW THE LOVE OF SWEET JESUS IS GAINED

Having said that without the love of Jesus no one is saved, and that to love Jesus is a most sweet thing, and that he who loves him awaits a great prize, perhaps, by these words, one may be enkindled to want to love him. And so, I intend with divine help here to discuss how this love can be gained. And even though to treat of this would be more fitting to those who are more expert than I, nonetheless, because I was asked to do it, I will say that which I feel.

It seems to me, therefore, that he who wants to gain the love of Jesus should first raise his affection totally from earthly things, him having said: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Mt 19:21). As a result, it is necessary for him who wants to save himself and to love God sufficiently unto salvation to raise his affection from earthly things, so that his end is not placed in these. But for him who wants to gain a perfect love it is not enough to elevate the affections but moreover he must, if he can, effectively leave behind all the things of the world and, poor and naked, follow Christ Jesus. For, even though a rich man might be perfect in the love of Jesus while not leaving his riches—as were Abraham and David and King Saint Louis, and many others—nevertheless it is a great burden to be able to be saved amid riches, let alone to achieve such perfection. And these were few, especially compared to those who have abandoned the world. So said the Savior: “It will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:23). And it is written in Ecclesiasticus: “Blessed is the rich man who is found blameless, and who does not go after gold, and who did not hope in treasures. Who is he? And we will call him blessed, for he has done wonderful things among his people” (Sir 31:8–9). He esteems it as a marvel that the rich man be

not tangled in his riches, because of the great difficulty that it is to have temporal things and not to place one's affection in them. And thus, whoever wants to make himself perfect in the love of Jesus, may he raise himself up with the affections and with effect from the world. Take note that I don't mean from great things alone, but even from the small ones; for there are many who have left behind great things and still, having later put their affection on minutiae, remain sterile and infertile on the way of God. And so many religious never make any profit in the cloister due to this affection they have for tiny things, like little books, small knives, and other knick-knacks. To them such an affection does not seem to be a sin, or that if it is a sin, it is small, and thus they do not guard themselves and are tempted by the devil. And they do not know that these affections, even though they are miniscule, remove them from the way of perfection and distance them much from the Spirit, much more dangerously if they are in a more perfect religious order. I do not say this by myself, rather it has been preached and approved by all the holy fathers, and the present-day experience demonstrates it to us. So say the holy experts in religion, that it behooves one to subtly examine his conscience and to penetrate neither feignedly nor lukewarmly the secret of his heart, and if he finds it again to be inclined to earthly things, he must quickly return it to heavenly ones and leave behind even tiny things, and not to have for his use anything except the necessities for corporeal or spiritual life, and better less than much. And this he will be able to do easily if he contemplates often the vanity of passing things and death which is near.

Whoever observes that which I have said should not therefore believe himself to be a perfect lover of Jesus. Rather, there is a need for him to recollect himself within himself and to consider his own misery, both corporeal and spiritual, and his sins and his weakness, and that he humble himself much before God, knowing himself to need God in all things and contemplating that he not only cannot do but cannot even think any good without him. He needs to have this recognition not through sure

knowledge, as even sinners have it, but through long experience of his own frailty. Consequently, he needs to be on top of the custody of his own life and to diligently consider his own defects every day. And since he easily falls from good resolutions he must fall back on God and with contrition and tears every day ask for the aid of Jesus, humbling himself not only before [Jesus] but even before his inferiors, considering himself least not with the tongue but with the mind and heart due to his reflection on his own defects, interior and exterior, and deeming himself not to be worthy of such a state. Because reflecting every hour on his own lacks and on the other hand the great kindness of Jesus—who does not cease rousing him to do good and giving him many inspirations and receiving him kindly in prayer, not ever taking offense from his sins nor from his indignities repeated every day—and recurring often to prayer, prostrate before the holy feet, he will not be able to help but to grow little by little in the love and the knowledge of his Creator and Redeemer, who will secretly open the eyes of his intellect. Then he will begin to contemplate eternal things, no longer holding in esteem the whole world nor his own glory, from which he must guard himself as if from poison. Moreover, like him who has tasted a drop of Jesus's sweetness, he will ever seek to distance himself from any other care to be able to remain with Jesus in prayer and contemplation. If anyone, therefore, has arrived at this state, it would seem to me that he would begin to give himself over greatly to contemplation of the goodness of God in the Incarnation of his only Begotten Son, contemplating all the things he did in this world and preeminently his Passion and Death for our love. And so, little by little he will grow from humanity to divinity, and here that charity will be made perfect that will make his heart burn with love of Jesus. Few gain this state. Not for this should anyone despair but rather he should grow in fervor to attain it. Because, if he continues with prayer and contemplation and other pious deeds, he will in any case attain to great perfection even if in a long time, and [in a] greater or lesser [degree] depending on how far God will deign to stretch his benevolent hand and depending on how

diligent and solicitous he will be to good and holy works. Note, however, that when contemplating, a man must follow more the instinct of the Holy Spirit than his own orders. Hence, if you had decided to contemplate one thing at a certain time and then within that hour of contemplation the Spirit within you encouraged you toward another, you must follow the interior instinct and not your own view.

But since the instinct of the Holy Spirit teaches better than human words on how to contemplate, it seems to me better to make an end of this here than to elongate words unnecessarily.

HOW TO MAINTAIN THE LOVE OF JESUS ONCE GAINED

It is not enough to gain divine love if, once gained, it is not maintained until the end, for Our Lord said: “Whoever perseveres until the end, this one will be saved” (Mt 24:12). Therefore, it seems to me necessary to say how to maintain this love, however much God will give me or has given me to understand.

Then, after the soul feels itself enkindled by this sweet love, tasting a spark from the heavenly things, she must keep continuous care of herself. In this way, so far as it is possible for her frailty, she will not offend the eyes of sweet Jesus who has given her such treasure, considering how great her ingratitude would be if, through her own negligence, she separated herself from him. So much more must she remain in fear the more she has tasted his sweetness and proved her own infirmity, especially given what the Apostle Paul said to the Hebrews: “*Impossibile est eos qui semel sunt illuminati et gustaverunt etiam donum caeleste, et participes facti sunt Spiritus Sancti, gustaverunt nihilominus bonum Dei verbum, virtutesque saeculi venturi, et prolapsi sunt, rursus renovari ad poenitentiam*” (Heb 6:4–6). It’s an impossible thing, that is to say very difficult, for those who were once enlightened by God and have tasted his heavenly gift and have been made participants of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good Word of God, having joy in the hope for the virtues and for the glory of the future age, and have then

fallen into mortal sin, that they would again raise themselves up to penitence. And of this difficulty we have continual experience in the religious orders. Never has it been seen, or rarely, that a religious comes back to true penitence who once has fallen out of the religious state, and much less the greater was his position or fervor in the cloister. And we see through experience that to these one cannot preach but in vain, because they receive no correction, as if they were despised by God, according to Solomon's saying in Ecclesiastes: "Consider the work of God. Who can make straight what God has made crooked?" (Eccl 7:13). And so, he must remain in great fear who tastes the love of Jesus, as the Apostle says: "He who stands, let him see to it that he does not fall" (1 Cor 10:12) and "you stand fast only through faith. So, do not become proud but stand in awe" (Rom 11:20). But he is reputed to be blessed who always remains in the fear of the Lord, as says the Scripture: "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord always" (Prv 28:14).

It is not necessary only to be shy of falling into mortal sin and to separate oneself from the good and kind Jesus but also to remain in fear of not becoming lukewarm and negligent. Thus, this terrible sentence is written in the Apocalypse: "*Utinam calidus aut frigidus esses, sed quia tepidus es neque calidus neque frigidus, incipiam te evomere ex ore meo*" (Rv 3:15–16). I desire that you be hot or cold, that is fervent or a great sinner; but since you are neither one nor the other but lukewarm and negligent I will begin to hold you as an abomination, as is the food to the sick man once he has vomited it. God does not say this because he is pleased with sinners but to show how displeasing he finds the lukewarm. He lets it be understood that a great sinner can be converted to a greater perfection than can one who is lukewarm. This too proves itself true every day among religious orders, in which never has it been seen, or rarely, that a lukewarm religious resurfaces to great fervor. Rather, doing everything in the cloister through a certain customariness, he does not receive correction humbly in his heart, but almost through a servile fear he observes the Rule, thinking nothing but on present things. And so, little by little, he loses merit

and becomes a gossip and loses time and often breaks out in great impatience, and he delights in eating and drinking well and in being dispensed much, saying that he is weak or that he cannot live so austerely, and he says few prayers and much drivel. And one sees many of such type, whose state is very dangerous; many of them are seen to jump out of their religious orders; and no one sees them ever return to spiritual fervor. But one can often see great sinners come to penitence and make themselves very fervent in the love of Jesus. So that, it is necessary to be vigilant and to continuously excite oneself to greater fervor, considering that whoever does not continue to make profit and gain in the love of Jesus necessarily turns around. This turning, as I have said, is very dangerous.

Still it seems to me that it is necessary to consider and foresee often the temptations that could truly come to be. For example, when a man sees himself in a tranquil state, he should think about the persecutions and humiliations that could happen to him and, in his mind, arm himself against them and pray to God that he strengthen his soul against them should they come to pass. This Job did when he was in prosperity, and so he was later strong in adversity. Because tribulations foreseen wound less. So said Saint Job: "For the thing that I fear comes upon me" (Job 3:25). Similarly, when a man is of low estate according to the world, he must think of escaping every dignity and human glory, considering everything to be vain and that there is nothing he could have more likely to make him fall from the love of Jesus and his sweetness than external dignities. And so, he must be solicitous to flee from every glory and to present himself as contemptible to the outside, but not with scandal to his neighbors, but hiding his treasure, not revealing himself to the outside except as pertains to the glory of God and the salvation of his neighbors. Also, the lover of Jesus, as he is able, must flee human conversations even if they are good, because the Bridegroom of the soul is shy and does not want to embrace the bride that is, our soul, in the presence of others. Rather, he says through the mouth of the Prophet: "I will lead her into solitude and speak to her heart" (Hos 2:14). And

especially he must flee conversations with women even if they are devout, because they are very dangerous, more so if under the guise of religion one becomes very familiar with them and the devil subtly sows sensual passions amid devout things. Similarly, a man should flee all company that he knows to be detrimental to the spirit. Also, he must often flee from speaking, because talking too much, even about good things, makes a man very lukewarm and makes him lose his fervor because as St. James says: “if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man” (Jas 3:2).

Many other things could be said, but you already know the love of Jesus and the other virtues, in what ways and works they are gained, and by which ones they are retained. And so, it is necessary to do everything with fervor and promptness of will, and, if it is possible, to actually order it toward God, and to be assiduous in contemplation, and especially to contemplate often and chew on the lives of the holy fathers of the past and of all the saints, because these greatly comfort the heart and confirm it in the love of Jesus. Lastly, since perseverance is a gift from God, the man in love with Jesus must daily pray the omnipotent God to grant it to him, to make him persevere in that love until the end. Doing so, he will be able to maintain this most sweet love.

WHAT PAIN AWAITS HIM WHO DOES NOT LOVE JESUS

Lastly, we see what pain awaits him who does not love Jesus, so that, if anyone reading were not stirred by love, at least he may be moved by fear. Take note, then, that every pain is the privation of some good, as corporal illness is a pain because it deprives the body of health which is its good. And so, greater is the pain that deprives of a greater good. Since they who will not love Jesus will be deprived of the vision of infinite goodness, their greatest pain will be to see themselves excluded and separated as unworthy of such vision and of the company of the blessed whom they will know to be rejoicing in heaven. They will also have great mental suffering when they see themselves enclosed in external shadows in the

company of cruel and insatiable demons, where they will not see anything but hideous and sorrowful things. The reunion with the body will increase their pain, for it will have continual affliction in fire. It will be fetid and dark, with cries and the grinding of teeth. And above all will the irreversibility worsen their pain, as they reflect that they are never to leave. I believe that whoever should diligently consider this last point would guard himself from evil doing and would begin to love the good and sweet Jesus. And if it were not enough, besides those pains that await them in the future, in the present life they have many others, and here begins their hell. Because whoever does not love Jesus is unstable and desires continually things that cannot sate his appetite and has a thousand pains in this world that are not had by the lovers of Jesus, Son of the eternal Father, blessed God, with the Holy Spirit, forever. Amen.

Translated by Josemaría Guzmán-Domínguez, O.P.

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THE LIVES OF THE BRETHREN

GOD'S ELOQUENT MERCY

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL MARY DOSCH, O.P.

Peter Gautsch, O.P.

Fr. Michael Mary Dosch, O.P., is the novice master for the Province of St. Joseph and the spiritual director for the annual U.S. National Rosary Pilgrimage to Lourdes. He entered the Dominican Order in 1998 and was ordained a priest in 2005. Originally from the coastal town of Margate, New Jersey, where he grew up surfing (he once escaped a mako shark by catching a well-timed wave), he has spent the last thirteen years landlocked in Ohio (“the toughest hurdle of my vocation was to leave the ocean behind”). After four years as parochial vicar at St. Gertrude Parish in Cincinnati and six and a half years as pastor and superior at St. Patrick Church in Columbus, he’s now back at St. Gertrude in his second year as novice master. We’re grateful to him for speaking with us. (This interview has been edited for clarity and length.)

Let’s begin at the beginning, or at least at a beginning: how did you end up a friar?

I had often thought of the priesthood and had the example of good, holy diocesan priests growing up. I always had an interest in the intellectual life; I used to think I’d join the diocese and insist on teaching. I went to the Catholic University of America to be an

electrical engineer. In the beginning of my sophomore year, the Knights of Columbus had a one-day retreat at this place called the Dominican House of Studies. The friars giving the retreat invited us back; I used to go to the Dominican House with a fair amount of regularity as a college student. I went back to south Jersey, worked for four years, and had a couple of long-term relationships—I almost married twice. But the connection was there at the House of Studies. And so even when I would go back to visit friends, I always made a point of visiting the House of Studies. Three or four years went by, and when I was looking into a vocation, I was primarily looking at the Order. I was trying to decide between the diocese and religious life—of course, if it was going to be religious life, I knew it was going to be the Dominicans.



Fr. Michael Mary Dosch, O.P.

We Dominicans, like all religious, are bound by the three evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but at our profession we only pronounce obedience. What have you learned about obedience over the course of your religious life thus far?

Everything falls under obedience, including our own happiness. None of my assignments have been anything that I initially planned. Most of the things in my life have not been orchestrated, but they have been a tremendous source of my joy. I love my vocation. The only unhappy Dominicans I know are the ones who got what they lobbied for. By being obedient, we can be confident that it's in the Lord's will. And he certainly has manifested that in my life, in my assignments. God, of course, is the one who made us to be happy. So if we hear him and allow him to form us, we will find our authentic happiness.

Every friar has the experience of being a novice, but only a select few have the experience of being novice master. What's the novitiate like from the other side?

It's a great joy for me. I think that certainly in God's providence he's led me here. Part of my wanting to be a Dominican was wanting to teach, and I thoroughly enjoy teaching about that which I'm most passionate about: the Dominican vocation and priesthood. It's nothing that I ever anticipated; I never even imagined, really, this being a role that I'd be asked to do. But when Fr. Ken [Letoile, the prior provincial] asked me, of course under obedience I was going to do whatever I was being asked to do for the needs of the province. And I've enjoyed every moment of it.

What are the things you hope to instill in the novices under your charge?

Docility. To be able to hear God's will in their life. To be formed in what it means to be a Dominican as a novice, to go with

an open mind and an open heart to the studentate to continue learning, to never have the pride of thinking they know it all, and to realize, as I often tell them, that their greatest formation is going to be after they're ordained, when they're sitting on the other side of that screen. My own experience as a young priest in the confessional was that I learned so much about God, about who God is, about the priesthood. It's a very powerful moment. The things you experience as a priest—it's like you get to live a thousand lifetimes: the number of miracles you witness, the number of conversions, the brokenness of so many people. It's a truly privileged position.

What advice do you have for people considering religious life and/or the priesthood? What are common obstacles that impede our ability to listen for God's call?

In this day and age we have a lot of people that like to be perpetual discerners. God gives us freedom, and he's always faithful. He does not usually give signs that are going to make it completely clear to us where we're supposed to go and what we're supposed to do. So the important thing is to pursue your heart's desire, to keep looking at what God's asking of you, and to pursue that zealously—go ahead and take a risk. The Lord is ever faithful, so if he doesn't want you somewhere, he's going to make it clear. But he typically wants you to make a free choice. He knows that for most people who are discerning, if they were to have a voice come out of heaven, saying, "I want you to be a Dominican," of course they would follow it. But he wants it to be a free decision, so it's not usually that transparent. Just do it!

As novice master, you're now living at our priory in Cincinnati for the third time in your Dominican life. What's your opinion of Skyline Chili?

Chocolate meat sauce over soggy spaghetti doesn't do it for me. I come from New Jersey, the land of diners—I know what cheap, good, tasty food is supposed to be like.

In the context of the Order's worldwide mission, the four Dominican provinces in the United States are somewhat unique in the extent of our parochial commitments—you yourself have spent almost eleven years in parish ministry. Our Order was founded for preaching for the salvation of souls; how does parish ministry lend itself well to that mission? What do you see as the classic features of a Dominican parish?

The parish sacramental life is the basic means of sanctification for most people in ordinary circumstances. Our history as American Dominicans is that we came to a mission territory and established certain institutions, many of which were parishes, in order to build up the faith in the service of the local ordinary. So it makes sense to see that we established so many. But one thing we have to consider as Dominicans is: is this parish particularly Dominican? Most of our parishes are centers of preaching, a holy preaching. There's a dynamic community, and people see that and will travel in; they're often "destination parishes." But this isn't in competition with other parishes. It's actually meant to enliven the local diocese. At St. Patrick's [in Columbus] you see that: it's the downtown parish, which often under normal circumstances withers and dies. But it has a great vibrancy, and I think people go there for something particular. You see leaders of the local Church coming from there; you see a number of local vocations. There's a vibrant youth ministry, confession ministry, etc. So for all of our parishes, there has to be something unique and distinctive.

They also have to be places that allow the entirety of Dominican life to flourish in the community, which means that even though there's a parish, other friars assigned there are doing other apostolates. I think Fr. Tom [Blau] and now Fr. Stephen

Dominic [Hayes]'s jobs—preaching missions within the diocese—are ideal: the itinerant preaching where you get to sleep in your own bed most of the time, and you're serving the greater diocese with a real need—both preaching and being able to live in community.

What are some distinctive characteristics of Dominican preaching?

It's for the salvation of souls. It's always going to be teleological. It's always going to be a proclamation of the Good News, much more so than moral exhortation. It's definitely a gift of the charism, because even sometimes when I try to evaluate one of our preachers who might not seem to me to be very good compared to a diocesan priest who might be quite good, people often respond to the Dominican. God's grace is clearly at work too. Our preaching tends to be doctrinal. We never step away from the core elements of the faith. A Dominican is always eager and ready to preach on the Trinity, for example, when others might be afraid to speak about that mystery. Sometimes it's hard to place a finger on the charism, but you can see that it's at work, because so many Dominicans preach differently, and yet there's always something distinctive. There is a real action of the Spirit.

Where's your favorite surf spot?

Margate, New Jersey, my hometown. It's an ocean break, and it can be problematic, but under ideal circumstances—when there's a good sandbar, and a nice hurricane way out at sea, and a gentle offshore wind—you can't beat it.

I'd like to ask you about Lourdes. Every year six million people make pilgrimage to Lourdes, yourself and your annual group among them. It's now been 160 years since Mary first appeared to St. Bernadette. What's the significance of Lourdes for the Church today?

Lourdes is the preeminent Marian shrine, in a way. The message is perennial: the need for healing and a mother's love. And everybody that goes there experiences it. It's also unique in that when Our Lady appeared, her message was for people to come here in procession, on pilgrimage—in the local dialect of St. Bernadette, procession and pilgrimage were the same word—and to have a church built here at the grotto. And she picked a place that's beautiful: there's the river that flows right by it, there's the grotto. It's beautiful in all the different seasons of the year. So it attracts a great number of people.

And of course you hear the stories of miracles. Everybody that goes there experiences our Mother's love. Very few walk away cured, but most people will walk away saying that they've experienced some sort of miracle. People often go doubting or having all these expectations and hopes, and they experience Our Lady's Son in the sacraments. Many of these miracles actually happen in the confessional, in the sense of true conversions of heart. People come angry with their disease, and they see people who are so much sicker than they are, and then confess their change of heart and go home changed.

Another thing about the miracles is that most of them don't happen with the water. A lot of them do, but most of the miracles happen in the Eucharistic procession and at the blessing of the sick at Benediction. In fact, the seventieth approved miracle was just announced. I was there; on the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes, after the international Mass, the bishop of Tarbes-et-Lourdes came up and proclaimed the seventieth miracle. A sister from France who had crippling sciatica for a long time was cured back in 2008. She's still alive today.

Yes, I was actually a bit surprised to hear that this was the seventieth miracle—that seems a small number compared to how many stories of miraculous healings there are out there.

There are about seven thousand in the files that are undergoing investigation. The miracle has to be something truly stupendous in order to be considered. There's a long examination process by the medical bureau of Lourdes, and then the final decision of whether it's a miracle or not gets sent back to the person's diocese. Sometimes there are bureaucratic holdups, or sometimes medical records can't be released because there's a lawsuit or what have you. The people that work there see miracles all the time, but not necessarily the kind that can be testified to.

Have you seen any miracles on your own pilgrimages there?

Yes, little Colleen was there with her twin sister and her mother. She'd broken her elbow badly in a trampoline accident; a larger child fell on top of her, and her elbow snapped. It was set by the doctor, but it wasn't healing. The doctor removed the pins in hope that the swelling would go down, and he was going to reset it later. He wouldn't have let her go on the trip except that her mother was a medical doctor. So they made the trip, and her arm was in a sling. As soon as they got there they went in the baths. They very carefully lowered little Colleen into the water first, and then her twin sister and her mother went in. When her mother came out past the curtain, Colleen was bending her arm, saying, "My arm feels strong." Cured in an instant. My sister, who had joined me on that trip, told me very excitedly that little Colleen had been healed. And I thought, "Oh, it was probably a sprained wrist or something and she was actually fine. No big deal." It wasn't until a year later that her mother told me the full story. I thought, "Why wasn't this proclaimed to everybody? Why didn't we announce this to the pilgrimage?" It was a great lesson, because miracles happen at Lourdes all the time, and people don't know about it. They happen right under your nose.

Sometimes the miracles are remote. People bring back water, or people pray—I've had people write their petitions down, and after I've gone to Lourdes and dropped their petitions off

at the grotto, I've come back and heard that there had been an astounding change of health that they were attributing to Our Lady of Lourdes. It definitely happens.

But again, most people don't have physical healings—Our Lady calls people to Lourdes primarily for a change of heart. What God wants for us is our eternal happiness. When I went to Lourdes for the first time, before I entered the Order, I was hoping for various physical ailments to be cured, and I would maybe have taken that as a sign of my vocation. But what happened instead was something that's hard to articulate—a confirmation of my own discernment and just an opening of all the doors to lead me to my Dominican vocation. And I would not give up my vocation for the healing of all of my illnesses combined. So something greater happened there than physical healing.

People's lives are changed: the love of Our Lady is sort of concretized in their minds. There's a sense that they've been to their Mother's home and can now share that with other people. So nobody that goes with an open heart leaves unchanged, even if for most people that doesn't mean a physical healing.

We friars have a beautiful chant at Compline during Lent, which begins: Media vita in morte sumus: quem quærimus adiutorem nisi te, Domine? "In the midst of life we are in death. To whom do we look for help but to you, Lord?" How has this been true in your own experiences with suffering and with death?

Well, I believe powerfully in God's mercy, because it has been the darkest moments that have been the most grace-filled. The death of my sister when I was twenty-four, and then having to raise my nephew and niece in their last teenage years, was so foundational for my own vocation. And now, within my vocation, my recognition of the Lord's mercy has helped me so much in helping other people. St. Thomas talks about God most eloquently manifesting his power by mercy—by reaching down into imperfections, trials, and tribulations, and drawing out something

good and beautiful. Suffering has always been where I've seen God write most eloquently his love for us.

You were commissioned by the Holy Father as a Missionary of Mercy. What are common misconceptions about mercy? What do you wish more people knew about mercy?

People often limit mercy to just forgiveness. But we intuitively understand that it's more. "Lord, have mercy on me"—we'll pray that when we're suffering, not just when we've sinned. Mercy is this great manifestation of God's power in the midst of evil. It is so beautiful, so eloquent, that God is able to write straight with crooked lines, that he's able to reach down into any sort of imperfection, into evil itself. In some ways it's a new creation *ex nihilo*, that God is able to reach down into wickedness and sin and draw out something good.

The greatest emblem of this, of course, is the crucifix: from the worst thing we've ever done—nailed the God-man to the tree—God takes this evil and from it draws our salvation. If he can do that with the worst thing that we've ever done, what can he not do with my illness? What can he not do with my sinfulness? What can he not do with my handicaps? Whatever the case may be: if we authentically trust more and more in God's mercy, we can be more supple instruments in his hands to proclaim the good news to the far corners of the world for the salvation of souls.

Br. Peter Gautsch entered the Order of Preachers in 2011. Before joining the Order, he studied theology and music at the University of Notre Dame.

ORIGINAL WRITINGS

LONG AND DRAWN OUT

Isaiah Beiter, O.P.

The monkey sauntered through the brush on the forest floor. The hair on its head, light brown and inexplicably patchy, waved in the breeze. And the head itself was grotesque, enormous, and lopsided. Its legs, roughly identical in length, carried the monkey over a series of knobbled tree-roots belonging to a great trunk, smooth and dark. In the branches of this tree sat Benny the Boa Constrictor, hungry and tense, watching. He was slim for a boa constrictor, and his green and mottled body curled over many branches, around the mighty girth of the tree, and onto the back of the page. There it abruptly stopped, as Matt had lost the crayon he had been using.

Having failed in his search, Matt Dryden Jr. cried out: “Mom, can I have some grape juice?” The crayon was still missing when he returned, so he was forced to take up another, and the snake concluded, not a few shades more yellow than it had begun.

When Matt Dryden Sr. arrived home, his wife asked him about his presentation that day. She had been preparing his favorite pot roast for dinner that evening, in hopes of a celebration (“or a consolation,” she hadn’t allowed herself to think). The presentation had not gone well—so Matt said to Rebecca, though not in so many words. The current project was selling juice boxes to children,

children without any money or transportation, but who had big mouths and liked to watch TV.

Junior finished his own juice box in the living room, just hidden from his parents by the bar in the kitchen. Before him sat his sketch of glorious Caesar on a four-legged couch. Slave-girls were feeding him grapes one by one, sweet and green.

In the meeting room that day, Ted Benson, his boss, was watching, sucking his teeth under sallow cheeks, as Matt presented his plans for the thirty-second Jam Juice TV spot. "What color togas did they wear in Rome?" asked the sallow-cheeked Ted Benson. What kind of question was that? Kids don't know what color togas they wore in Rome—they just want grape juice! Does Ted even have a kid?

Matt's son would have known what color togas the Romans wore, and what color tunics too. His earlier drawing had been very accurate, as he had just finished a chapter book about a boy who woke up as a Roman gladiator one day. But nobody thought to ask him.

The son's father was tired of the boss's constant questions. Benson had no clue, no mind for advertising. But the boss had taken Matt's proposal in the end.

Later that evening, Matt and his wife talked about the phone call she had gotten from the school that day. "Mrs. Dryden?" the teacher had started, "Has your son said anything about the way some of the children are treating him?" It would be six minutes before the teacher would use the word "bullying," but Mrs. Dryden had already gotten the idea.

"He told me some of the kids were mean at school," she worried to her husband, "but he doesn't seem to mind much. Will you talk to him?"

The next afternoon, the victim asked his mother, "how did the Spartans fit onto their shields?"

"Onto the shields? Were they standing on them?"

“No, in *Spartans at Sunrise*, when all the boys go out to battle, their moms all say, ‘come back with your shields or on them.’ What do they mean?”

“I don’t know, honey,” she said.

So when his father came home, Matt was lacing the sandals of an ancient warrior with a huge shield. But through the evening, he grew frightened for the soldier going to battle. This young man probably wanted to impress his mom and dad and all his friends. But what if the battle was too scary—how would he get away? Maybe a horse would make the warrior less scared; he could go fast when someone was trying to get him.

“Time for bed, Matt,” his mother called from her room.

He came dutifully, and she brought out his pajamas. “I’m going to draw a horse tomorrow, Mom.”

“Oh, what kind of horse?”

“One faster than all the other horses.”

Matt was fast himself, and today was a running day in PE. Matt didn’t like running day. Mr. Marner always finished class with a big race around the whole gym, and Matt always won. But that meant that Matt always beat Dillon, and Dillon was very large and didn’t like losing. Matt could see the future in the scowl on Dillon’s face.

At lunch, Dillon stole one of Matt’s shoes and filled it with chocolate milk. “Try running now, dope,” he tossed out. But the only response Matt could give was *squish*. And the *squish* left wet spots on the floor everywhere he went for the rest of the day. Little girls slipped on them and cried, if only because their skirts were now stained with a ghastly smear of chocolate milk.

At work, Matt Sr. was in meetings all day with the filming department, the casting office, the graphic designers. He was finally finishing the rounds when sallow-cheeks called and announced that they would be going ahead with Phil Boyle’s proposal instead. “Something more adventurous,” the boss had said.

Imagine it: the scorching sun, reflecting off the waves. The long-bearded pirates, roasting on the deck. They arrive at an island. They dig up the treasure chest. They fit a grizzled key into the lock, and *click!*, it opens. A bounty of cool and sweet Jam Juice juice boxes overflows onto the hot sand. The pirates cry out in victory.

What a joke.

Matt's dad called back each of the desks he had visited that day. "Cancel that design, Paul. We won't be needing those slave-girls after all, Deb," and so on.

Don came to Matt Sr.'s desk at about 4:30 that afternoon. "I don't know if you heard; Phil's proposal went through. We're all going out to congratulate him."

"Can't—the wife's making dinner," Matt said, glad to have an excuse.

Pork chops and baked potatoes were waiting for him at home. "You want to throw the ball after dinner, Matt?" the father asked.

"OK. But I don't know where my glove is."

"It's on its hook in the garage, honey," Mrs. Dryden said. "You left it in the hall."

Matt was a pretty good catch, even when his father was asking about his day. He talked about the race and how they were getting ready for a test on jungle animals in science class. His dad told him how they were making a commercial for juice boxes, about the different ideas that had been on the table.

"Why did someone bury all the juice boxes?" wondered Matt. His father didn't know. "Why did Mr. Benson pick the pirate story, then?"

"Complicated adult reasons," said Mr. Dryden.

Then he asked Matt about the other kids at school, whether they were all nice. Matt told him about Dillon, about the chocolate milk and the spots on the floor, and even about the weepy little girls.

His father couldn't understand why Matt was so unconcerned about it. "Weren't you upset? He put chocolate milk in your shoes!" But Matt just shrugged his shoulders.

"All my friends thought it was pretty funny."

Thus Mr. Dryden was made confident that his son suffered no debilitating injury to his self-esteem.

Back inside, his son drew that horse that he had planned, but as he brushed the mane, he forgot that the horse had been destined for a warrior. So the horse wouldn't be lonely, he drew a whole herd of horse-friends for him. And Harry the horse ran free through the mists on this island of wild horses. His dappled brown coat glistened in the evening light, and he stood victorious at the top of the hill, peerless, unafraid.

"It's time for bed, Matt," Rebecca called from her room.

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FRIARS' BOOKSHELF

THE MEDIEVAL OPTION

Andrew Willard Jones, *Before Church and State: A Study of Social Order in the Sacramental Kingdom of St. Louis IX*. Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2017.

Having attended public schools, most of my history courses taught me that the politics of the Middle Ages involved nearly constant conflict between monarchs and pontiffs, and I almost found myself relieved, or encouraged to be so, to be living in a society in which politics and religion are so separated. With *Before Church and State: A Study of Social Order in the Sacramental Kingdom of St. Louis IX*, Andrew W. Jones, a professor at Franciscan University of Steubenville, provides a compelling alternative vision while at the same time showing the dangers in any attempt to impose modern political categories onto medieval social order. *Before Church and State* provides a fascinating historical exposition of thirteenth-century France with a recurring analysis of society as sacramental, wherein the modern understanding of “Church” and “State” has no place.

Jones centers his rebuttal around the life of Gui Foucois, a French layman and lawyer who later received Holy Orders, rose quickly to the episcopate, and eventually became Pope Clement IV. Gui’s entire life’s work revolved around the *negotium pacis et fidei*, the business of peace and faith. By opening for his reader a window into this “business,” Jones shows that the spiritual and temporal powers were, and were understood to be, both thoroughly “secular” and thoroughly “religious,” cooperatively caught up in the common pursuit of justice. Gui becomes a microcosm of this unity, secular and religious, and in no way did this dichotomize his

life. Though his means developed as his place in society changed, his goal remained ever the same: the building up of a society preparing for heaven.

Exploring the relationship of Gui and St. Louis IX, both before and after Gui received Holy Orders, Jones reveals a remarkable difference between modern and medieval governance. The medieval worldview, while acknowledging the fallen state of man, saw peace as natural. This is in contrast to later political theories, which suggest that man's primordial condition is violent and selfish. For Gui, peace was not an imposed absence of war but the positive harmony of society working toward its proper end. When someone fractured this peace, as fallen man was (and is) wont to do, it had to be restored by the temporal and spiritual swords.

Through an enormous amount of anecdotal evidence, Jones shows that medieval governance operated with radical subsidiarity and a primary reliance on prudential leaders, not legal codes. Despite this emphasis on subsidiarity, the social order was not thereby splintered. There was profound unity by means of networks of *consilium et auxilium*, of counsel and aid, through which leaders were united in friendship and cooperation, not coercion. These networks crossed the bounds of spiritual and temporal powers in a way that such a distinction was not even considered a special barrier to overcome; after all, the goal of each was the same.

Turning to St. Thomas toward the end of his book, Jones searches for a speculative foundation to the "sacramental" social order that he has been defending to this point as a historical reality. In doing so, his text acknowledges but seeks to avoid direct engagement with Thomist theoretical debates by keeping his commentary close to the concrete realities of thirteenth-century France rather than the abstract considerations of speculative theology. While this restraint could be considered laudable, as Jones explicitly avoids claims of expertise in theology or philosophy, Jones's approach in this section does leave a large speculative

lacuna in the work. Because of this, despite the insights that Jones provides here, Thomists may be less than satisfied with this chapter, especially because many of its claims that reach beyond historicity would require a far more sophisticated treatment of highly debated theological theses surrounding nature and grace. Further, he seems to read St. Thomas as if the Common Doctor is formulating his doctrine as a description of France, rather than as a speculative consideration of the nature of the temporal and spiritual powers. While considering St. Thomas's doctrines is undeniably important, *Before Church and State's* strength lies in its erudite historical analysis, not in its speculative explanations, which it offers as something "useful and perhaps thought-provoking, rather than definitive" (399).

Being a work of history, *Before Church and State* is primarily descriptive, but it is also implicitly normative. Jones's story of medieval France suggests that the spiritual and temporal powers have not always been (and therefore, need not be) divorced. In fact, he traces the roots of separation through the Reformation and to the so-called Enlightenment, which, he claims, leaves the modern age with a sort of despair with respect to the supernatural. If this is the case, Jones invites us, in light of St. Louis IX's France, not only to reconsider the mutual role of the temporal and spiritual in crafting and directing social order, but to reevaluate the living political philosophy governing the West.

Before Church and State is one among many pieces in a long project of reclaiming the narrative of history from the monopolization of "secular" historians. Replete with highly readable, and enjoyable, anecdotes, Jones's book merits a read from anyone interested in rediscovering the Middle Ages and considering that religion may be only as accidental to society as justice.

Reviewed by Elijah Dubek, O.P.

Br. Elijah Dubek entered the Order of Preachers in 2016. He graduated from Kansas State University with a degree in biochemistry.

ROTTEN FROM THE ROOT

Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*. New Haven: Yale, 2018.

Patrick Deneen, in his new book *Why Liberalism Failed*, blames the United States' founding political philosophy as the root cause of many of our contemporary woes. He contends that liberalism—the political philosophy as distinct from the position of the Democratic Party—imposes “an ideological remaking of the world in the image of a false anthropology” (19). As this ideology has become more ingrained in politics and culture, the ever-multiplying crises of the contemporary world bear out its falseness. Because this ideology began with a lie about human nature, it has failed.

Deneen identifies two principles of liberalism. First, liberalism redefines freedom. According to classical thought, man achieves freedom in the virtuous governance of his life and passions. Thus “liberty had long been believed to be the condition of self-rule that forestalled tyranny” (23). Opposing this notion, thinkers like Locke conceived of the free man as the one most able to pursue whatever private goods he wanted without external hindrances. They believed “that ancient norms of behavior could be lifted in the name of a new form of liberation” (41). In the liberal thought-experiment-turned-political-system, government arises as a contract between private individuals who give up some freedoms “based on the calculation of individual self-interest” (34). The very term “liberty” received a new meaning, which required new means for achieving it.

The second principle of liberalism, then, is the belief “that conquering nature would supply the fuel to permit nearly infinite choices” (41). The individual needs to be freed from the limits inscribed in his own nature. And here, Deneen argues, liberalism sowed the seeds of its own failure. He cites catastrophic environmental degradation, the rising levels of anxiety among the young, and massive amounts of student debt, as well as other

signs of system-breakdown. All of these, he argues, can be traced to the lie that our freedom involves achieving private ends, ends which have not been instructed by nature, tradition, or culture understood as “an accumulation of local and historical experience and memory” (89). In sum, liberalism’s “twin outcomes” are “the depletion of moral self-command and the depletion of material resources” (41).

Deneen is not the first to tell this story, though his condemnation of liberalism is perhaps one of the most emphatic. His book’s more helpful contributions come in his exposition of the pervasiveness of liberal ideology. Deneen argues that our changing attitudes towards technology, the liberal arts, economic and political inequality, and civic engagement all exhibit in one way or another the failed logic of liberalism.

For instance, in our efforts at civic engagement we experience the national government as a distant, vague entity. As our focus shifts from local to national concerns, we lose our sense of participation in civic life. This emphasis on the federal level can leave us apathetic about such remote cares, or make us angry at forces we cannot influence. Yet the national government is also the protector, even provider, of the conditions by which we can achieve our private hopes and dreams:

Thus, for liberal theory, while the individual ‘creates’ the state through the social contract, in a practical sense, the liberal state ‘creates’ the individual by providing the conditions for the expansion of liberty, increasingly defined as the capacity of humans to expand their mastery over circumstance. (49)

This is true whether one leans more to the right as a “classical liberal” or to the left as a “progressive liberal.” Both political inclinations focus primarily on the individual’s rights (whether political, economic, religious, sexual, etc.) and the distant

state, leaving little place for the sustenance and flourishing of such essential institutions as family and local community.

Likewise our relationship with technology ranges from paranoid fear in the face of a remote yet inevitable power to a consumptive addiction to the newest gadget. Technological development meets with both euphoria and a sense of dread; rather than “controlling our technology to our own betterment, we find that the technology ends up either ruling or destroying us” (93). In these examples, Deneen traces the manner in which a foundational commitment to the selfish will of the individual, “freed” from nature and tradition, leads, in both culture and political life, to “naked” individuals who are alone and isolated and subjected to impersonal yet looming power structures (17).

Deneen makes the important observation that we sometimes think of this as an inevitable state of affairs. Liberalism outlasted its twentieth-century ideological rivals in communism and socialism and so may appear to be the only remaining option—“the end of history,” in Francis Fukuyama’s famous rendering. Technological developments can sweep across our cultural landscape, making us feel as if we have no choice but to buy in. Drawing on examples of communities such as the Amish, who decide whether or not to use a new technology through a consideration of its anticipated effect on the common good, Deneen shows that this sense of inevitable “progress” need not overmaster us.

In my view, Deneen could do more to criticize in a similar way the imagined inevitability of the pervasiveness of liberal ideology itself. It is true that many in contemporary society pursue individual goods over and against the common good, and that one of the reasons for this is our political and cultural paradigm. But his depiction of the history of ideas at times makes it seem as if the current state of affairs developed almost necessarily, from a bad seed to a rotten fruit. For example, he writes, “as it becomes more fully itself, [liberalism] generates endemic pathologies” (179). The ideology has become an agent. Especially in the book’s closing pages, however, he acknowledges that individuals and

smaller communities do have the freedom to live in a manner more grounded in tradition and centered on virtue, and in fact this may be our only hope going forward. Thus, on the one hand Deneen's polemic against liberalism may at times leave the reader feeling paralyzed before inevitable forces, on the other he himself encourages individuals to choose to live in ways not totally dictated by the forces he describes.

In a more practical way his book serves as an examination of conscience for those of us who share his concerns that private, selfish interest has found its way to the core of our beliefs and practices. We can ask ourselves: How often do we fall into the trap of thinking of real freedom as a lack of external constraints? In what ways do we imagine ourselves as isolated individuals in pursuit of purely private goods, and how has this belief shaped our lives? How have we let our technologies control us? Have we let education simply be a means towards an economic or political end, or have we sought soul-forming education so that we will have enough self-control to pursue the common good and our true happiness? How might we encourage a vital civic life by committing ourselves more thoughtfully and sacrificially to the needs of our families and local communities?

By demonstrating the urgency of these questions, Deneen's book makes room for a positive vision of "liberty after liberalism" (198), a liberty that must begin with a cultivation of true interior freedom and virtue-forming communities.

Reviewed by Br. Philip Nolan, O.P.

Br. Philip Nolan entered the Order of Preachers in 2015. In 2013, he graduated from Williams College with a degree in philosophy.

LOVE UNYIELDING AND UNCONQUERED

Bishop Saad Sirop Hanna, with Edward S. Aris, *Abducted in Iraq: A Priest in Baghdad*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 2017.

“Christ is love and love was never meant to be easy. It is the hardest of all and yet it will always be the only answer” (168). So ends Bishop Saad Sirop Hanna’s recently published memoir on his abduction in 2006 by a militant group associated with al-Qaeda. Over ten years later, he reflects on this cataclysmic event, leaving his readers with a glimpse into the mystery of God’s love. Indeed, God has made Hanna’s life a living commentary on Luke 6:27: “But I say to you that hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” In the face of torture, hatred, and uncertainty, the love of Christ triumphed within Hanna, and now it shines forth brilliantly through his pen.

Iraq and her people were suffering greatly at the time of Hanna’s abduction. Returning to Baghdad to tend to his flock after studying in Rome, Fr. Hanna compares post-Saddam Hussein Iraq to “[a patient] who had just recently fallen, could barely stand, and was staggering on his feet” (95). Rubble, barbed wire, and foreign soldiers comprised the landscape. Car bombings and other attacks fomented fear and suspicion, sentiments that would divide Shiite, Sunni, and Christian.

On the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Hanna experienced this hatred against his own person. Abducted after Mass by followers of a branch of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabiyya and held in captivity for a month, Hanna suffered torture at the hands of his captors as they attempted to convert him to Islam and waited for ransom money. Wahhabi Muslims desire to return Islam back to its original principles, but they have no settled position on non-Muslims. This particular group of men, however, hated Christians, naming Hanna *kafir*, “infidel,” one who has sinned. On several occasions during Hanna’s imprisonment,

they beat the handcuffed and blindfolded priest with sticks. In one chilling episode, after Hanna had managed to escape for a few brief hours, the men came with cables: "I fell forward, down on my knees and elbows, and before I could rise a little, or even put out a hand for cover, I felt the cable rip across my bare back once more, and again and again" (134). By faith, we can see in this horror a continuation of the Lord's own Passion in his priest. Christ desired to allow Hanna to participate in his own redemptive suffering, to relive in his own body the mystery of Christ's priestly, self-sacrificial love. And Hanna embraced the fullness of this conformation to Christ in his priesthood:

This life was of my choosing. I had dedicated myself to following the example of Christ, and, in the righteousness of my suffering, to endure through no act of hatred but solely through the openness of a love unyielding and unconquered; in that I felt a closeness to him and to the purpose of my being, and it gifted me with a greater strength and joy than I had ever known was possible. (108)

Fr. Hanna had his own Simon of Cyrene to accompany his passion. Abu Hamid was once a student, but his university was in a Shiite area, which had become dangerous for a Sunni. One of the few occupations remaining was cleaning guns for the soldiers and guarding prisoners. Abu Hamid and Hanna became as near to being friends as one can in such a situation. Taking pity on Hanna, Abu Hamid brought him salt and medication for a severe toothache; he would often cuff Hanna's hands in front, where it was more comfortable, rather than behind; he tended to Hanna's thirst; and once he even spoke out against the beatings Hanna received.

On another occasion, at one of the many houses in which Hanna was deposited (to keep his whereabouts secret), the owner, Ali, released him from his handcuffs, fed him, and even called the Americans, hoping for a rescue mission that, alas, never came

to pass. Human encounters such as these, it seems, encouraged Hanna's faith in God's love.

Seeing God's presence even in his captors, Hanna opened himself to forgiveness amid the torture, pain, and fear. Hanna realized that his captors themselves lived in the fear of losing their own loved ones to American raids. They themselves had to inform families of the deaths of their loved ones and grieve their loss. The irrationality of violence harmed all involved. Yet, in forgiveness, the love of Christ triumphs. On his way to freedom after his ransom had been paid, one of his captors asked:

"You don't hate us, do you?"

It took me a second to be sure I had heard him right before I answered. "No," I said. "No, I don't hate any person. My faith asks this of me, to love all people. Even those who harm me. It's true I don't always accept the things they do, but I don't hate them." (155)

Love forgives all things, heals all things, transforms all things. The blood of Christ on the cross was not spilled in vain: participation in this great mystery of love changes the way we see the world and the way we encounter other people, for his blood was shed for all people. "It is the mission of love that Christ has asked of us, and every day and every hour it rises up to challenge us" (168). This is Hanna's appeal: to allow love to inform completely our vision and actions in every situation. "Love must be the driving force for all people," he writes, "to 'love your enemy,' to look beyond the threats of the here and now, to look beyond ethnicity, creed, culture, or religion, and to connect on a level of shared humanity" (168).

Love sees in every person the precious gift of a common humanity, the humanity in which Christ himself suffered for our redemption, the humanity that he now bears in glory, and the humanity that Christ assumed into heaven in the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In Christ's name, all people are worth loving,

no matter the cost. To this, Bishop Saad Sirop Hanna has given his witness.

Reviewed by Br. Luke Mary VanBerkum, O.P.

Br. Luke Mary VanBerkum entered the Order of Preachers in 2016. Before entering, he studied philosophy and theology at the University of Notre Dame.

CLOISTER CHRONICLE

The Thomistic Institute, of our Pontifical Faculty, is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. Its nearly forty college chapters are found on secular university campuses in the United States, Ireland, and Great Britain.

January 25th, the Thomistic Institute hosted its annual St. Thomas Aquinas lecture at the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception. Fr. Stephen Brock of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome delivered a lecture titled “Sizeless Stretchable Souls: Substantial Form as Nature in Aquinas.”

February 10th, thirteen student brothers gave their lives to God in the Dominican Order as they professed Solemn Vows in the magnificent Upper Church of the National Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. Saint Dominic, pray for us!

March 16th–17th, the Thomistic Institute held the final Thomistic Circles conference of the year, here at the Dominican House of Studies, entitled “On Cooperation with Evil.” Speakers included Dr. Steven Long (Ave Maria University), Msgr. Andrew McLean Cummings (Archdiocese of Baltimore), Dr. Christopher Tollefsen (University of South Carolina), Fr. Ezra Sullivan, O.P. (Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas) and Dr. Edward Feser (Pasadena City College).

Fr. Thomas Joseph White, of the Dominican House of Studies, recently published *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism* (CUA Press). This excellent book offers an accessible

introduction to the major doctrines of the Christian religion and responds to a variety of contemporary objections.

March 10th, six student brothers were ordained to the Order of Deacons, by the Most Rev. Timothy P. Broglio, Archbishop for the Military Services, USA, in the Upper Church of the National Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.

This semester witnessed an epochal shift in the gastronomical life of the brethren at the Dominican House of Studies. Our cook of many years, Gregory Bryant, retired this spring. His presence, and his fried chicken, will be missed. As a farewell gift, he was presented with a chef's knife in reparation for the many knives we have dulled, chipped, and lost.

May 19th, nine student brothers will be ordained as Priests of Jesus Christ, by His Eminence, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York, in the Upper Church of the National Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. This summer they will begin their priestly ministry as parish priests, chaplains, and university professors—working for the salvation of souls. *Deo Gratias!*

