

George, Robert P. and Jean Bethke Elshtain, eds. *The Meaning of Marriage: Family, State, Market, & Morals*. Dallas: Spence Publishing, 2006. xviii + 317 pp. \$29.95 hardcover.

On the weblog of *First Things*, the magazine's editor, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, remarked recently that as the cutting edge of progressivism moves ever deeper into the living flesh of traditional civilization,

we may soon expect an article in *The New Republic* making "the conservative case" for recognizing that three- or five-parent families are normal for those who prefer them, and that it is therefore time to stop "privileging" the culturally arbitrary institution of two-person marriage, whether homosexual or heterosexual. Thus does yesterday's radicalism become today's progressive accommodation on its way to tomorrow's conventional wisdom.

This may indeed be the way ahead of us. But perhaps there is still time to decline the offer to go down this path, or even to find our way back to a healthier culture of marriage for men, women, and (especially) children. If that opportunity is still open to us—and the virtue of hope requires us to think that it is—then Robert P. George and Jean Bethke Elshtain's book *The Meaning of Marriage* will prove an invaluable guidebook for the journey back home for marriage and family.

Not that this collection of eleven essays is all about the issues of same-sex "marriage" and polyamory and nothing else. The contributors consider marriage from the perspectives of moral philosophy, political theory, legal history, economic analysis, and the best evidence of the social sciences on the needs of children, and in several of the essays the contemporary arguments over same-sex unions make hardly any appearance. But those arguments are always within reach, as it were, since the claim that persons of the same sex can be married—and have a right to be considered married under the law—is the most thoroughgoing challenge to the survival of the institution of the family that we have yet seen in our history.

Thus Robert P. George explains how marriage is properly understood as "an intrinsic human good," a relationship "naturally ordered to the good of procreation . . . as well as to the good of spousal unity" (151). Once such an understanding of marriage is abandoned in favor of an instrumental "status as a means to other ends" (166), those ends themselves come to be ours to choose, and we claim the illusory

power to be the fashioners of our own ends, as though none were given to us by our nature as ensouled bodies or embodied souls. Then all bets are off, and no argument stands in the way of the demands that marriage and family be reshaped to fit the “desires, interests, or subjective goals” (170) of the next claimant on the benefits that marriage’s tattered remnant as a public institution can confer. The root of the mistake, George argues in his astonishingly careful essay, lies in a “[r]evisionist sexual morality [that] necessarily supposes that the value of sex must be instrumental either to procreation or to pleasure” (156).

George’s depth is rivaled by the breadth of Roger Scruton, who explores the “steady de-sacralization of the marriage tie” (8), and instructs us similarly that

Sexual desire is not a desire for sensations. It is a desire for a person: and I mean a *person*, not his or her body, conceived as an object in the physical world, but the person conceived as an incarnate subject, in whom the light of self-consciousness shines and who confronts me eye to eye, and I to I. (15)

With this kind of seemingly effortless agility, Scruton leaps from crag to crag at the highest level of argument, tracing the travails of marriage in terms at once sacred and secular, literary and psychological, political and ideological. The editors were wise to place his essay first in the collection, as it sets the tone of all that follows and whets the reader’s appetite. Rather than overshadow the rest of the volume or dominate the collective analysis, Scruton’s essay pushes open multiple doors through which the other authors lead readers in search of particular truths about marriage’s meaning.

If marriage is now threatened by the fact that we have, in Scruton’s words, “remove[d] every hint of the forbidden, the dangerous, and the sacred” (16) from our understanding of human sexuality, when and how did our troubles begin? Is it in the Enlightenment political principles of America’s founders that we can find the beginnings of our present predicament? After all, it could be argued, the founding of modernity’s most successful political order was animated by principles of individualism and of contract that could be turned to the sapping and mining of society’s foundation in the family. In answer to this, David F. Forte cogently argues that Americans at the time of the founding synthesized various influences on their thought—from a distant but still living Aristotelian perspective on the friendship of husband and wife, to the ideas of “utility, sentiment, and voluntary association” (107) found in the Scottish Enlightenment, to the “providential God” (110) of

Protestantism—to produce, in combination, an understanding of the family as the relationship in which virtue is taught and the place where we “create order out of chaos” (113). Marriage and family become, in this analysis, a non-individualistic setting for the production of the stalwart individuals in whom the power of self-government can safely be lodged.

In like fashion Seana Sugrue argues that even in John Locke, America’s philosopher, we find “two distinct spheres of pre-political social order,” namely “the realm of property and the realm of conjugal society” (176). In the former, all relationships are built on contract and are therefore wholly conventional. In the latter, “Locke understood parental governance over children to be natural” (180). If the natural sets limits to what the state (based merely on consent) can properly undertake, then it follows that the extension of state power into the natural order of the family will perversely introduce the “logic of the market” where it does not belong, the result being “the commodification of children” (185). Some readers of Locke may object that he got this ball rolling himself, inasmuch as his thoughts on the family, while referring to the duty of care owed by parents to children, say little about the duty of obedience owed by children to parents, which seems to be based largely on calculation. But Sugrue’s understanding of Locke usefully reminds us that his state of nature is not peopled with solitary individuals, but with families, and that a Lockean politics must take their needs into account.

Could it be, then, that the path to our current state of affairs began in the emergence of market economies, which (it is often said) rendered all relationships impersonal, all individuals fungible, and all determinations of value as evanescent as yesterday’s Dow Jones average? Not according to Harold James, who surveys the functioning of the family in recent European economic history, and finds, in the market performance of many great family firms, evidence that the “evolution of a strong sense of family is a crucial part of the creation of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie,” with the family supplying a ready basis of “social capital” and “networks of relationships,” thereby “lowering transaction costs” and “managing risk” in the marketplace (59-60). Marriage and family supply us with reliable citizens for the polity and with effective entrepreneurs for the economy. Just where we look for “rugged individuals” in modern society, we will see, if our eyes are open, that ruggedness is not so individual after all.

If it is not in the American founding, in the Lockean philosophy that largely animated it, or in the market economy that accompanied it, that we are to look for the source of modern marriage’s troubles, then

where? Perhaps it is in “modernization” defined as “the spread of technical rationality,” as Don Browning and Elizabeth Marquardt suggest (30). Under the pressure of this irrational rationality—invariably “adultcentric” (45) since only adults and never children can be at once so clever and so stupid—our modern “reformers” of marriage have hit upon a view of it that “breaks the integrative goals of the institution” (45), leaving us “little more than an affectionate sexual relationship . . . of tentative commitment and uncertain duration” (31).

This species of “modernization”—a species alien to the great early modern thinkers from Locke to our founding, who were all too wise to reduce everything to *technê*—is a promising candidate for the culprit we seek. And of course, “technical rationality” is a comprehensive thought that forbids thinking comprehensively. Therefore our society was set on a path of incremental changes, each seemingly sensible on its own terms, that made for grand-scale thoughtlessness. (As Leo Strauss once put it, “retail sanity and wholesale madness.” [*Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 4.]

The first such change, as Katherine Shaw Spaht shows in her survey of the history of American marriage law, was when the permanence of marriage came to be eroded by the liberalization of divorce laws, as long ago as the nineteenth century. When, in the twentieth century, some states (Nevada notoriously among them) moved out ahead of other states, there was a race to the bottom after the Supreme Court held that “the state with the most liberal divorce law would prevail in a contest with a state having a more conservative divorce law” (218). “Easy entrance and easy exit” (219) became the prevailing patterns of the law of marriage and divorce. By the 1980s, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor could describe marriage in a way that “emphasized almost entirely the perspective of the individual who by the free exercise of his personal choice seeks to pursue and achieve personal happiness and to obtain material benefits from marriage” (226). Fold in the emerging jurisprudence of “privacy” rights regarding contraception, abortion, and homosexual activity, and a ruling endorsing “gay marriage” such as *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, handed down by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts in 2003, makes a kind of perfect sense, in a society that has by degrees taken leave of its senses.

Even some of the proponents of our last mad step, or our next one, seem to be dimly aware that the one *after* the next will be a step too far. As Hadley Arkes notes, “it has become important for the partisans of same-sex marriage to insist that marriage will not be available to ensembles of the polygamous,” for instance.

And yet the problem is endemic and insoluble for them. The hard fact of the matter is that the parade of scary possibilities becomes virtually impossible to constrain precisely because it is brought forth by the very principles that are put in place by the argument for same-sex marriage (126).

And so we come to where Father Neuhaus remarked we are going—and not because the polyamorous “family” is another idea *like* same-sex “marriage,” but because it is the *same* idea playing out its next logical consequence.

And while we await its arrival—or struggle against it, as we should—there are already practical consequences of our modern forgetfulness of the meaning of marriage. As Jennifer Roback Morse argues, the “no-fault divorce” regime in most states today is only apparently libertarian. In its effects it is ineluctably statist. No longer an “organic social institution” (77) protected by law but having its own integrity, marriage has been torn asunder by the law and remade entirely as the law’s creature. Marriages are unmade at the will of one of the parties, often contrary to the will of the other, and if the now-sundered couple happened to have children, then parents and offspring alike come under the care and instruction of the state, whose “family” courts and social-service agencies minutely regulate all aspects of these individuals’ relations with each other. Citizens who love liberty should think twice about whether individual “choice” was such a great idea in this instance.

The principal victims of these changes are, of course, children. Maggie Gallagher reviews the social-science evidence on child well-being, remarking that “every major social pathology that can trouble an American child happens more often when his or her parents are not joined by marriage” (198). Capably refuting the flawed social science literature that “gay parenting” (202) can do just as well as traditional mothers and fathers, Gallagher argues that, “[f]or the child searching for the meaning of his embodiment, both the same-sex-as-me parent and the opposite-sex-from-me parent play vital roles” (210). This fully rounded upbringing can go missing either in a family headed by a same-sex couple, or, as is far more commonly the case, in the many broken families headed by single parents, usually women. As W. Bradford Wilcox notes, “contraception [and abortion] changed men and women’s basic assumptions about the nature and character of marriage” (246), disrupting age-old patterns of courtship and inviting women to become more like men not only in ways that arguably benefited them (with respect to work and career opportunities), but in ways that clearly did

them harm (with respect to sexual proclivities). The consequent increases in illegitimacy and related social pathologies had an impact “disproportionately on the ranks of the poor and working classes” (248)—not the first or last time that progressive social reforms backfired badly on the most vulnerable, who were their intended beneficiaries.

It is probably safe to say that “marriages” contracted between two men or two women will always be fairly few in number. The attractions of polygynous or polyamorous unions will probably be resisted by most Americans as well. But the wreckage of marriage as an institution has already claimed many victims, and many more will be claimed in their turn if the institution is not restored along something like its former principles. And that will prove legally, politically, and morally impossible to accomplish so long as the “progressive” effort to push marriage even further away from those principles continues to gain ground. This brief review cannot do justice to the wealth of evidence and the penetrating insights contained in these essays. But readers who share a concern about the next generation of our fellow citizens, and the generation after that, should know where to turn for useful advice on how to act on that concern. That place is *The Meaning of Marriage*. Here, as Jean Bethke Elshtain says, is where “well-educated people” can enter into “this much needed discussion” (xviii).

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“The Lost Generation: Can American Civilization Recover Without a Religious Revival and the Retrieval of the Natural Law?”*

Eberstadt, Mary. *Home-Along America: The Hidden Toll of Day Care, Behavioral Drugs, and Other Parental Substitutes*. New York: Sentinel, 2004. 240 pp. \$25.95 hardcover.

My Italian American grandmother, long ago gone to her eternal reward, was someone I constantly sought out in my youth for guidance and advice. Formally uneducated and of peasant background, she was a wise, clear-thinking, no-nonsense woman. Put another way, and in contradistinction to the majority of academics and professionals who have wrought so much harm on American civilization since the mid-sixties, the natural law was evident in the way grandma thought and acted. Pondering the contrast between many of the working class, ethnic friends of my youth and the modern day gnostics that I am presently surrounded by in academia, I recall to mind the acute observation of the then Pastor Richard Neuhaus who stated that the “natural law comes naturally to all except those who’ve been culturally denatured by having their minds bent to the denial of the obvious.” [National Catholic Register, April 19, 1987, p.5]. I’m pretty sure that if I had asked grandma a question about whether or not parental involvement and supervision were necessary to increase the chances of ushering forth sound, healthy, happy, productive, and moral children, she would have been puzzled and, perhaps, even a little irritated. She might well have blurted out in response something like “Are you crazy? Of course, parents are a must! You might as well ask if God exists!”

Mary Eberstadt’s lucidly written and profoundly important volume, *Home-Along America: The Hidden Toll of Day Care, Behavioral Drugs, and Other Parent Substitutes*, provides a more sophisticated, but essentially consistent, response compared to that of my grandma. Mary Eberstadt makes a persuasive case that the increasing absence of parents (in both quality and degree) from family life as a result of such social trends as divorce, out-of-wedlock birth, and dual career and worker families—and a corresponding and increasingly heavier dependency on day care centers—has been a major (but not the only) factor in producing a host of mental and behavioral dysfunctions for children. Her proto-typical sociological analysis represents an application of the

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consequences for both the individual and society of the spread of what the classical French sociologist Emile Durkheim termed “anomie” or normlessness, that is, in its extreme form, suicide, and in its more varied and empirically likely forms, the self-destructive behavior he termed “partial suicides.” The volume contains brilliantly executed chapters on day care centers producing illness, aggression, and unhappiness among children; feral behavior including suicide and various forms of violence committed by children and teenagers; child obesity; the mental health catastrophe in terms of a significant increase in mental problems among the young but also a too-common misdiagnosis of individual behavior on the part of the mental health establishment; the promiscuous and harmful prescribing of “wonder drugs” for children; contemporary teenage music as representing a “primal scream” against the abandonment of children by their parents’ generation; the catastrophic spread of teenage sex; and the recent utilization among affluent parents of specialty boarding schools as an example of “parental outsourcing.” This material is based on a careful distillation of various forms of empirical evidence and the application of logic that is presented in a writing style accessible to the educated person, all facts that will increase the impact of the author’s volume.

Throughout the volume, the author is careful, nuanced, moderate, and reasonable. She does not make the claim, for instance, that exposure to day care centers will, in all cases and under all circumstances, produce problems for children. Nor does she say that the intact family always produces salutary results. Nor does she deny that some children with serious mental problems require drug therapy. She acknowledges, also, that not all are equally responsible for the exodus of parental involvement in the lives of children; for instance, some single parents without extended family support are, practically speaking, forced to use child care. Without stating it as such, she is defending the sociological claim that certain social forces tend to produce observable patterns, generalities, and trends that are both truthful and vitally important to identify if civilization is to right itself.

Even though this is not her specific focus, her analysis stands as an indictment against the ideological formulations and individual rationalizations over the past 40 years offered by academics, radical feminists, health care professionals, and upwardly socially mobile citizens “on the make” who will conveniently ignore the reality that the time-consuming and difficult endeavor of parenting is essential for both children and, derivatively, society. (I’m here reminded of the pre-1960s sarcastic comment, not devoid of truth, made by a critic of sociology to the effect that a sociologist was one who required thousands of dollars

of research funds to discover the local house of ill repute. Eberstadt's analysis now ups the ante; one can say that the social scientists of the last 40 years are typically those who required thousands of dollars of research funds to discover the local house of ill repute while simultaneously "re-symbolizing" it as a recreational center).

The ideological grounding of what Eberstadt terms the "separationist movement" (i.e., the separating of parents from their duty in child-rearing) is basically two-fold. One, it defends the freedom, individualism, and economic interests of people who don't want their lifestyles and professional careers interfered with and interrupted. Second, (and this is mostly implicit in her analysis) following the work of people like Allan Carlson and Bryce Christensen, it justifies the uncritical acceptance and continual expansion of the status and economic interests of those involved in the therapeutic professions, a key subset of what thinkers like Peter L. Berger and Richard Neuhaus term the "new knowledge class" (or perhaps better yet, "new gnostic class"). The basis for the psychological rationalizing activity of individuals, on the other hand, as this reviewer sees it, is grounded in the very nature of the human being, a nature that includes a self-centered component that can be explained theologically through the reality of "original sin," or humanistically through a philosophical examination of the non-rational and irrational component of the human psyche. Crudely put, on this issue, the realism of a Saint Augustine and the cynicism of the Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto converge.

This reviewer has one, relatively minor, suggestion for Eberstadt and one more potentially serious criticism of her analysis. The suggestion is that she could have more systematically analyzed changes in American culture that would have strengthened her analysis of why the deleterious exodus from parental responsibility has occurred. In this regard, she could have included the work of sociologists like David Riesman (the move to "autonomous individualism") and Robert Bellah (the move from "Republican" and "Biblical" individualism to "expressive" and "instrumental" individualism). Similarly, I was surprised that there was no mention of James D. Hunter's profoundly important 1991 analysis, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, and his discussion of the societal-wide change in the understanding of the locus of "obligation," i.e., from the family to the self. Indeed, Eberstadt's very significant work can be rightly seen as a specific application of Hunter's more general analysis of present-day American civilization and society.

The potentially serious criticism of Eberstadt's analysis is that there is almost virtually no discussion, sans a passing reference to the

Amish (77), of the role of traditional Christianity in her analysis of how we got to where we are and what we might do about it. Only the recording angel can answer whether this omission is philosophical and intellectual in nature (as with contrasting neo-conservative vs. traditional conservative worldviews) or is a matter of prudential judgment on the part of the author as she might want to make “plausible” her analysis and suggestions to a now largely secularized upper-middle class, professional-oriented American constituency. Neither does she incorporate any discussion of the role of “natural law” into her analysis; the closest she comes is to a passing reference about “what we know of human nature” (180).

Regardless of *why* religion and the natural law as analytical considerations are not incorporated into her book, the simple fact is that such omissions weaken what is otherwise a very sharp, important, and witty analysis. Traditional Christianity stresses duty and, more specifically, duty to one’s children out of duty to God. The natural law directs us “to do good and avoid evil.” The secularization of traditional religious commitments on the part of significant numbers of Protestants and Catholics and the denial of the reality of the natural law on the part of too many Americans is clearly crucial for a more complete understanding of the issues that Eberstadt investigates. Her proposals to reverse the present day neglect of children, much like that of another fine thinker, David Blankenhorn in *Fatherless America*, are (in this reviewer’s judgment) too incrementalist in nature and not radically challenging enough of the status quo. On the one hand, Eberstadt *does* state that “nothing is deterministically fixed” and “we Western men and women are not helpless victims of historical machinations beyond our control” (180). On the other hand, however, her basic call for “a change of heart, a new public consensus” built around the proposition that “it would be better for both children and adults if more American parents were with their kids more of the time” (172) is pretty thin gruel in attempting to replenish our present-day sick American body. In fairness to the author, there are plenty of bright scholars, influenced for instance by the sociologist Max Weber, who understood secular modernity as a permanent revolution—the end of the road, so to speak, in which social policy changes can make an impact only at the margins. If a Weberian-like analysis *is* correct, then this reviewer owes an apology to Mary Eberstadt; she is trying to accomplish as much as one can, to make, in essence, a half-decent chicken salad sandwich out of chicken scraps.

If this reviewer believed that Weber was correct, he would be even more sympathetic than he is already to the other-worldly orientation of a thinker like Saint Augustine. There are scholars,

however, like Pitirim Sorokin, who posit that civilizations can and do cyclically change, that our present day empirically based “sensate” culture is not necessarily here to stay, and, furthermore, a resurgence of traditional Christian religion and of natural law thinking with their sense of duty and obligation is possible. It is to that end—that of a Christian religious revival and the restoration of the integrity of the Catholic Church in the United States with its corpus of Catholic social doctrine and natural law thinking—that I implore the readers of this review to invest their minds and energy. Only a radical change in the cultural/religious ethos can produce a fundamentally different civilization, a proposition that would unite thinkers like Max Scheler, Christopher Dawson, and Benedict XVI. Minus such a cultural revival, I fear, the lost generations of children—and of scholars and other elements of the cultural elite—will continue into the indefinite future at the cost of much harm to themselves and social life. In any event, Mary Eberstadt has written an important volume that will serve as a catalyst of sustained reflection, discussion, and debate for years to come. It is deserving of your strong support.

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Carlin, David. *Can a Catholic Be a Democrat?: How the Party I Loved Became the Enemy of My Religion*. Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2006. xxvi + 221 pp. \$14.95 paperback.

SCSS member David Carlin, a professor of philosophy and sociology at the Community College of Rhode Island, has produced another important book about the situation of Catholics in post-Vatican II America following his *The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America* (also published by Sophia). While the first book was about what has happened to American Catholics in the sacred order, this one concerns the transformation of one of the major institutions they had attached themselves to in the temporal order, the Democratic party. Carlin provides us with a valuable and insightful perspective on the topic as one both trained in sociological analysis and who was a long-time inside observer of the Democratic party (as a party activist, leader of his party in the Rhode Island Senate, and candidate for Congress). The book discusses what many already know about how the Democratic party in recent decades, because of its stands on life, sexual, and family issues, has ceased being a comfortable home for serious Catholics. It also explains what many are not so aware of: How this uncanny change in the party of the working class sons and daughters of the Catholic immigrants occurred.

Carlin first makes clear that, while the latter had a strong emotional attachment to the Democratic party (which he shares), it was not just this that motivated the historical connection of so many Catholics with it. He says that, especially as it emerged in the New Deal, the Democratic party “had a social and economic philosophy that largely coincided with the social teachings of the Church.” The New Deal had “followed a *via media* that avoided” both communism and *laissez-faire* capitalism (5). Like the social encyclicals, it supported the rights of labor while upholding private enterprise, stressed labor-management cooperation, and called for a fairer distribution of wealth.

What caused the later transformation? According to Carlin, it began with the decline of the old urban Democratic party machine. This decline was brought about by the demographic shift out of the cities and the enhanced education and upward mobility of the children and grandchildren of the immigrants (aided by the post-World War II GI Bill). With more education, the latter became less tolerant of the favoritism and corruption of machine politics and they no longer needed it as a career path. Left to the control of less capable men, the machines were bound to decline. (It is interesting that, in fictional form, Edwin

O'Connor captured the dynamics of this decline, almost as it was occurring, in the early 1950's in his noted novel *The Last Hurrah*, which was later made into a movie starring Spencer Tracy.)

With the collapse of the old machines, in the early 1970s, Carlin tells us that a struggle went on for control of the Democratic party among three groups of liberals: the "FDR liberals" (in my own writing, following James Hitchcock, I have referred to them simply as the "old liberals"), the "civil-rights liberals," and the "moral/cultural liberals." The first group was essentially the one with which Catholics traditionally identified. The second was at the forefront of pushing the civil rights legislation of the 1960s and later affirmative action, and sometimes took an excessively tolerant view even of violent actions against race discrimination. The third group emerged in the 1960s and stressed especially sexual freedom. They swept into prominence in the universities, the publishing and entertainment industries, and the liberal churches before turning to politics. They were the leading activists in the fight for legalized abortion. The George McGovern presidential candidacy of 1972 galvanized the moral/cultural liberals as a permanent force in the Democratic party and eventually the other groups came to accept their objectives, even if they were not zealous for them. Carlin says that an important factor that began the unification of these three factions into a new Democratic party right after the 1972 election was their common enmity for Richard Nixon.

There were other dynamics at work, also. With the New Deal fading into the past and many affluent liberals attracted to the cause of racial civil rights, the character of the Democratic party changed from one of a party of the "non-rich" which focused on economic concerns to a more pro-business party whose concerns were now mostly social and cultural. The result, Carlin says, is that today the U.S. has "one strongly oligarchic party (the Republicans), one moderately oligarchic party (the Democrats), and no truly democratic party" (22). Now, many at the lower end of the socio-economic scale vote Republican because that party at least addresses their moral and cultural concerns even if not their economic ones.

The ascendancy of the moral/cultural liberals was cemented by the entry into the Democratic party of feminists, the new potent politico-cultural force of the 1970s. Carlin provides a good, brief explanation about why feminism emerged on the heels of the civil rights movement, how sexual liberation became one of its central themes, and why it was easy for the moral/cultural liberals to ally with them. Indeed, both embraced two central tenets: the personal liberty principle and the tolerance principle. These went on to become leading principles of the

contemporary Democratic party and have had a huge influence in current American culture.

The upshot of the take-over of the Democratic party by the moral/cultural liberals was that an ideological politics replaced an organization-oriented politics that had downplayed ideology. The new ideological nature of Democratic politics was effectively reinforced and augmented by the fact that the party organization was no longer strong or well-heeled enough to sufficiently support candidates, especially in an era of expensive media-centered campaigns. Candidates now had to go to the wealthy moral liberals and their interest groups to get their funds, and the trade-off was that they had to promote the latter's ideological agenda. This partly explains why today's American political discourse is so bitter, ugly, and polarized. Carlin calls it "Manichean politics"; both parties are now ideologically charged, and see their enemies as simply evil.

With its embrace of the agenda of moral liberalism, with sexual freedom, homosexuality, and pro-abortionism as centerpieces, Carlin tells us outright that the Democratic party has now become an "anti-Christian party" (67). Most of its activists, to be sure, are not specifically and avowedly such; but this agenda, and their misunderstanding of Christians opposing it as threats to the Constitution, functionally makes them so.

Carlin makes an astute historical comparison: What we have now in America, with the abyss separating traditional Christians and secularists, parallels the politics of the Third French Republic where the pro-monarchy Catholics squared off against the anti-clerical scions of the Revolution. The Republicans are friendly to the Christians, even while Carlin seems not to entirely trust their sincerity, and the Democrats are on the side of the secularists.

Carlin does an excellent job in a chapter entitled "The Catholic-Secularist Abyss" of going behind the public policy divisions to explain the more fundamental theological, philosophical, and ethical points of opposition between serious Catholics and the secularists. Secularists are "empiricists" and "naturalists" who reject or at least doubt the supernatural. They are moral subjectivists or relativists (even while Carlin notes that they can easily become moral absolutists on their pet issues). The secularists' view of sexual freedom reflects a deeper belief that, even while generally not favoring outright promiscuity, a certain amount of sexual experimentation is healthy and conducive to "growth." Their view, of course, results from their ignoring of the transcendent and denial of natural law. The latter is also responsible for the secularist's support of rights to abortion, euthanasia, and suicide. One result of his

secularism that leads him to support euthanasia, specifically, is his inability to understand the meaning of human suffering. Carlin points out, although I wish he had tried to explain further the reasons for it, the secular liberal's selective and inconsistent respect for the dignity of the human person (e.g., the secular liberal is horrified at racism, poverty, and war, but not at the brutal killing of a child in abortion or even of the elderly and infirm in euthanasia).

Carlin also provides a very good chapter responding to the usual excuses of liberal Catholics (i.e., those attempting an accommodation with secularism in the public arena). This includes pro-legalized abortion Catholic politicians (he has a separate appendix just about Mario Cuomo). He also gives a good, insightful critique of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's famous "seamless garment" argument, even though he is personally very sympathetic to Bernardin's social justice concerns.

Besides the one on Cuomo, Carlin provides four other appendices (which he says in the Preface are a crucial part of the book). The first looks further at the nature of secularism and its personal liberty and tolerance principles above (he rightly calls them less ethical principles than "items of effective propaganda" [p. 158]). The second examines the history of secularism in America, in which he points out different stages through which this phenomenon has moved. The third is a critical consideration of liberal Christianity, which he calls the "fellow-traveler of secularism" (175). In the fourth, he briefly considers the divisions within the American Jewish community about the culture war (i.e., between orthodox and religiously liberal Jews). He discusses this because he says that, sociologically, in certain ways the experience of Jews and Catholics in America is similar.

Carlin tells us not to expect the Democratic party to retreat from its secularism in the foreseeable future. The secularists are just too much in control of the party for that to happen. He says that they are even oblivious to the fact that they lose elections because of it. Like true-believing Marxists, they think that the winds of history are on their side in the culture war and when the struggle ends they will consistently be electoral winners. If *Roe v. Wade/Doe v. Bolton* were reversed by the Supreme Court and abortion were no longer a national political issue, Carlin believes that the party might be able to shift back to its traditional concern about economic issues and the interests of the working class. As far as Catholics are concerned, Carlin believes that even more of them will eventually leave the Democratic party as the reality of its secularism sinks in. He divides Catholics into three groups: the orthodox, the "wait and seers," and the liberals. Over time, he believes that most of the first two groups will leave, but the liberal Catholics will remain.

For all of his criticism of the current Democratic party, Carlin has not left it, although he has not voted for Democratic presidential candidates for awhile. He says he is too old to change, but is also unwilling to let the Johnny-come-lately secularists evict him from the party the Catholic immigrants had first. He also maintains the view and suspicion of the Republican party that many old-time Catholics shared: it is not the party of the “little guy” and it will not reliably help him. His point is well taken. While both parties have advanced the current version of neoliberal economics—with its absolutization of free trade, exporting of jobs abroad, outrageous levels of compensation for CEOs, declining purchasing power of working and even middle class families, etc.—its strongest and most numerous philosophical defenders seem to be Republicans. At least, the Republicans nationally have not lamented or sought to seriously address these developments. Indeed, in my own research I found the “new liberals” of today clearly farther away from Church teaching generally than either the old liberals or conservatives. When it came to economics and social welfare policy, however, the new liberals were almost as close to the Church as the old (pre-1960) liberals were, and conservatism was the farthest (see my *Liberalism, Conservatism, and Catholicism* [1991, 1994]).

In short, Carlin’s book not only should help uncertain orthodox Catholic Democrats to evaluate whether they should stay in the party and enable Catholics in general to better understand what the state of the party is, but it also helpfully explains and traces the forces that have shaped the contemporary party. I wish Carlin had looked more carefully at the cultural forces that transformed liberalism in the 1960’s (e.g., precisely why liberalism became secular); while the collapse of the political machines was a significant factor, I believe these forces may have been more important in transforming the Democratic party. The book does not have the consistent depth of inquiry or heavy footnoting of sources that scholars may crave, but it achieves a good balance among scholarly inquiry, popular commentary, and personal reflection. A bibliography of further readings and a simple index would have added to the book. It is a substantial enough book at more than 200 pages, but it moves quickly, and is clearly written and easy for the non-scholarly reader to follow. It is a book that Sophia Institute Press should make every effort to widely disseminate in the American Catholic community.

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Zuckert, Catherine and Michael Zuckert. *The Truth About Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 320 pp. \$32.50 hardcover.

Academics rarely make the national news; when they do, it is usually because they are tantalizingly postmodern, telling us naughty things like there is no truth (Richard Rorty, Stanley Fish) or that pigs may have more rights than mentally handicapped children (Peter Singer). When this happens, the coverage is usually somewhat favorable; or at the least an effort is made, in the interests of journalistic objectivity, to abstain from any real judgment.

All of this was upended in 2003, when a wave of journalists and pundits accused the political philosopher Leo Strauss of being the posthumous “godfather” of the Bush administration’s reputed neoconservative, warmongering imperialism, and for being (gasp!) postmodern. The accusations at times bordered on the hysterical, reaching an apogee with the actor Tim Robbins’ “Embedded,” a play that includes fascist neo-cons saluting each other with “Hail, Leo Strauss!”—this in reference to a Jewish refugee who had fled the Holocaust.

While the sensation died down fairly quickly (the *New York Times* issued a retraction of sorts near the end of the year, though without acknowledging its own pivotal role in fanning the misinformation), lingering suspicion of Strauss’s thought has remained. In response to this, several articles and books defending Strauss, mostly written by his former students (and in one case, by his daughter), have gradually begun to surface. Among these generally cogent apologies, it would be difficult to find one more painstakingly even-handed, detailed, and comprehensive than Michael and Catherine Zuckert’s *The Truth About the Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy*.

Before they tell us the “truth” about Strauss, the Zuckerts first uncover the origins of the 2003 smear campaign. They trace it to, of all people, perpetual presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, who vehemently condemns Strauss as subhuman for his anti-progressivist reading of Plato (LaRouche, it turns out, fancies himself to be something of an authority on Plato). The real scholar behind LaRouche’s rants, however, is Shadia Drury, a professor who has built her career on condemning Strauss as a Nietzschean, a charge she substantiates with a curious blend of acute insights, astonishing oversights, and downright falsehoods.

Once the palate has been cleared of Strauss’s detractors, the Zuckerts then move to the man himself. Part I of *The Truth* is devoted to

explicating Strauss's ambitious and multiform project: the resuscitation of classical political philosophy as a lens into the crisis of our time and as a tool for remedying it. In particular, Strauss strove to refute Heidegger, whose radical historicism both precludes the possibility of political philosophy and paves the way for totalitarianism in the political arena. Almost all of the topics for which Strauss is famous—e.g., his juxtapositions of ancients and moderns, Athens and Jerusalem, philosophers and poets—can be understood in light of his protracted quarrel with Nietzsche's most brilliant and dangerous student.

Strauss, we thus learn, is no "postmodern" thinker, if by that we mean someone who, like Heidegger or Derrida, is working within the parameters of Nietzsche's solution to the problem of modernity. Etymologically, however, this also makes Strauss the only true postmodern, for unlike Nietzsche etc., whose horizons are cast by modern philosophy, Strauss goes beyond modernity by going behind it, to the ancients. The Zuckerts are particularly adept at showing how Strauss endeavored to peel away centuries of conventional wisdom about Socratic philosophy in order to see it with fresh eyes. Hence one of their most illuminating chapters is on Strauss's understanding of esoteric writing, an area of his thought that for some time has been greatly misunderstood, even by some of his students. The Zuckerts' critique of fellow Straussian Stanley Rosen, for example, is fascinating.

The more central focus of the Zuckerts' study, however, is Strauss's complicated attitude towards America, which can be summarized in three tension-ridden propositions: 1) America is modern; 2) modernity is bad; 3) America is good. Strauss does not hesitate to locate the American founding within the Enlightenment, and he does not hesitate to suggest that the Enlightenment, all told, was a failure. Yet Strauss also acknowledges much that is good in America, for the country continues to be sustained by pre-modern residues such as religion and is partially constituted by healthy classical principles such as the rule of law. Strauss, writing mostly during the Cold War, was also quick to defend America against Heidegger's claim that there was no real difference between modern liberal democracy and totalitarianism.

The Zuckerts' three propositions also form the backdrop against which they can evaluate what they call "Straussian geography," the subject of Part II. As it turns out, the three main schools of thought among Strauss's students—East-Coast, West-Coast, and Midwest—are distinguished by their underemphasis of one of the propositions. East Coast Straussians (such as Allan Bloom) downplay America's goodness, West Coast Straussians (such as Harry Jaffa) America's modernity, and Midwest Straussians (such as Martin Diamond) modernity's badness.

The Zuckerts themselves are Midwest Straussians, though this does not prevent them from offering a fair-minded assessment of all three camps. Indeed, one of the most conspicuous features of the Zuckerts' writing is their moderation, both in their style and in their conclusions.

From this valuable overview two things become fairly certain. First, there is no such thing as a unified "cabal" of Straussians, an often heard charge. Second, if Straussians have anything in common, it is the pursuit of the serious academic study of political philosophy as a viable alternative to positivism and historicism. As a whole they are not interested in shaping policy, and their link to neo-conservative thought, to draw a scholastic distinction, is more accidental than substantive.

One species of Strauss-inspired scholar that does not appear in this taxonomy, however, is that of the religious believer. The authors originally proposed a section entitled "Faith-Based Straussians" in order to highlight the work of Strauss's students in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic thought, but the editor was by this point worried about length and having too extensive a discussion on the pupils instead of the teacher.

While such concerns are understandable (the book is as already a meaty 320 pages), this was, in my opinion, an unfortunate decision. Not only does it deprive us of more information on half of the Athens-Jerusalem equation so crucial to Strauss's thinking, it would have provided a much-needed corrective to the widespread perception of Straussians as crypto-atheists. Strauss is famous for his formulation of the divide separating Athens and Jerusalem, but this does not mean that he was hostile to religion or that his thought cannot serve as a productive point of departure for theological reflection, regardless of whether one agrees with it. It would have been instructive to hear how believing scholars like Fr. Ernest Fortin or Pierre Manent have wrestled with Strauss's thought in this area.

Perhaps, however, this lacuna is fortuitous, for it leaves the religious reader to wrestle with Strauss on his own, like Jacob with the inscrutable angel. And for that matter, perhaps the 2003 tempest in a teapot is fortuitous as well. Regardless of the merit of the accusations against Strauss, they have forced his admirers to explain to a broader audience his meaning and intention. Understandably, Straussians had been more eager to talk about the great thinkers to whom Strauss had directed their attention than Strauss himself. But the recent slander has robbed them of this luxury, prompting them to articulate more explicitly the import and value of their teacher's legacy.

Formed in this crucible of pseudo-scandal, *The Truth About Leo Strauss* is one such response, yet it is my sense that it will far outlast the

controversy that begot it. This valuable and serious guide to Strauss's thought, relevance, and impact should be read by all who wish to deepen their understanding of the intellectual crisis of the West and the estimable twentieth-century scholar who devoted his life to its diagnosis.

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Varacalli, Joseph A. *The Catholic Experience in America*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006. 364 pp. \$55.00 hardcover.

For more than 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has done more to shape history than any other institution in the world. Yet, as those of us who teach Catholic Studies know well, it has been difficult to find an accessible, comprehensive history of the Church itself. And, it is becoming even harder to find a history that both acknowledges the contributions of the Church to society and focuses on the controversies.

Joseph A. Varacalli's *The Catholic Experience in America* is that history. It is an affirmative look at the social history of the Church, yet it does not back away from some of the challenges that the Church has faced—including the clergy abuse crisis of the past decade, the growing secularization of her colleges and universities, and the negative response of many progressive Catholics to her teachings on birth control, abortion and homosexuality. In all areas, Varacalli assumes that the normative standard is defined by the Church's magisterium, her official teaching authority—yet he points out that “millions of Catholics in the United States have been either supremely indifferent, hostile, or selectively accepting of that authority” (xx).

While acknowledging these controversies, Varacalli focuses on identifying the events, issues, philosophical positions, and the trends that have made up the experience of being Catholic in America. A cheerful Catholic, he writes with a genuine affection for the Church—yet avoids a facile triumphalism. While Varacalli, a founder of the Society for Catholic Social Scientists, is steadfast in his loyal support for the magisterium, he is also fair in presenting the not-so-loyal opposition.

Still, he does not hesitate to point out the failure of reason for many progressives on such contentious issues as abortion rights and gay marriage.

Varacalli maintains that the true Catholic vision “enriches both world civilization and American culture primarily in two overlapping ways: “The first is as the standard bearer and ultimate interpreter of the natural law—conceptions of right and wrong that are embedded into the very constitution of the human being or, as Saint Paul put it, written into the human heart.” Second, “the Church contributes culturally to civilization through her constant presentation and organic development of Catholic social doctrine, or more commonly referred to as Catholic social teachings” (60).

A sociologist and Director of the Center for Catholic Studies at Nassau Community College of the S.U.N.Y. system, Varacalli chooses to direct his attention to what sociologists call the “unit ideas” of social analysis instead of discussing the particularities of individual actors in the history of the Church. Rather than “naming names,” Varacalli’s is a broader framework—one that moves beyond “the controversial, colorful, idiosyncratic, and singular individuals who are such an essential part of American Catholic history.” As a result, it is a more comprehensive and objective approach to describing the Catholic experience in the United States than many of the others.

Dividing his history into six major parts reflecting important themes and issues in Catholic history, Varacalli opens with an introduction to the Catholic theological and philosophical worldview. An excellent overview of the structural and organizational aspects of the Church and her authority, it is invaluable to the introductory student of Catholic Studies. But, in many ways, this first section is equally valuable to those of us who need to be reminded of the beauty of the “Catholic vision” and the origins of the legitimate authority of the papacy: “Catholics believe that Jesus Christ founded the Catholic Church as the Church of Christ, headed by a pope, who as the ‘Vicar of Christ,’ is guided and protected by the Holy Spirit through the exercise of ‘magisterial authority,’ the decision making authority of the pope and those bishops in loyal communion with him” (3).

Part II provides a chronological overview of Catholicism in the United States, concluding with what Varacalli calls the “Catholic Restorationist Movement” begun by Pope John Paul II and continued by Pope Benedict XVI. Ever the sociologist, Varacalli points out that by the middle of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church had established a coherent and impressive set of institutional arrangements (a plausibility structure), that afforded its members an effective break from and

alternative to the dominant social message. However, Varacalli also argues that this plausibility structure, which reached its maximum effectiveness during the post World War II period, “is now in a state of severe disarray—damaged by the widespread internal dissent allowed to fester in the post-Vatican II period” (46).

In subsequent sections, Varacalli demonstrates that the beneficiaries of this weakening of the plausibility structure are the progressive Catholics who “see the weakening as something quite positive...They assert that the destruction of what they invidiously refer to as the ‘Catholic ghetto’ was both necessary and inevitable.” More traditional Catholics argue that the construction of an intact and internally consistent plausibility structure is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition to keep an authentic Catholicism alive in the hearts and minds of the Catholic population and to evangelize throughout the rest of American civilization (47).

Providing ample evidence, Varacalli demonstrates that the restorationist movement that began with Pope John Paul II, is now in a battle with liberal Catholicism over who controls the infrastructure of Catholic organizational life and Catholic teachings. The birth control controversy, the ordination of women, divorce, abortion and homosexuality are all a part of this power struggle between the restorationists and the progressives. Varacalli treats each issue fairly and thoroughly, but always with reference to the normative stance of the Magisterium.

How this battle will end is not neatly resolved in *The Catholic Experience in America*. Unlike the typical progressivist perspective which continues to predict a democratic Church of the future in which teachings emerge from the “bottom up” rather than from the hierarchy, Varacalli writes that “the future is open and theoretically speaking, just about anything can happen” (243). While readers might have hoped for some reassurance about the future, Varacalli offers instead something even more valuable. He has provided us with a sociological perspective on how to understand our current dilemma, and ways to begin to initiate intelligent discussions of the issues involved in an analysis of the state of the Church.

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Wood, Gordon. S. *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2006. 336 pp. \$25.95 hardcover.

Gordon S. Wood is a preeminent scholar of the American Revolution. This book is not only essential to understanding the personalities of the nation's Founders, but it also provides an insight into the kind of government they thought they created. What comes through very clearly is that they were men of their time who were shaped by their personal experiences and prejudices. What is obvious is that they had no crystal ball by which to see the future. Today's America would be a surprise to them.

Over the ensuing centuries, two branches of government, the executive and the judiciary, have accrued far more power than the framers of the Constitution could have possibly intended, and the hegemony of federal power over the states that we now have would be nothing short of heresy to them, with the possible exception of Alexander Hamilton. As men of the Enlightenment, they were reared on the writings of John Locke, who exalted individualism, and Adam Smith, who praised free enterprise; they adhered to an ethos that promoted a meritocracy which presumed a government ruled by a virtuous elite. The role model for this ruling class, which in the mind of the Founders was indeed limited, stemmed from the Roman ideal of the civic minded man. George Washington was the exemplar. By no means a natural, Washington, always conscious of his legacy, assiduously worked on his public persona as a statesman who served reluctantly, with no desire for personal gain, and only at the behest of his countrymen. Washington's gravitas was, according to Wood, indispensable to the new nation.

Because America was populated by settlers, quite different from immigrants who come to a foreign culture, the model of government in the colonies mimicked that of England. Men such as Adams and Madison, though with different emphases, had parallel concepts for the governance of the new nation based on their appreciation of the mother country's political institutions and processes. Wood tells us that Adams hoped for an elected monarch. Madison, on the other hand, saw the federal government's role to be similar to the Privy Council in London, which would simply mediate disputes between the states and facilitate trade between them and foreign nations. Adams' unpopularity, according to Wood, arose partly from his concept of government, since in the English constitution, "The nation and the

government is considered as one ... whereas, by ours, the nation and the government are considered as distinct." In other words, in America the people never surrender their power. The people continue to rule through their representatives and can recall elected officials when they are displeased. Adam's idea of government was therefore considerably less than the democracy that was emerging in the latter part of the 18th century and which completely engulfed America in the 19th century. As a matter of fact, even Thomas Jefferson, the great believer in the goodness of the people, at the end of his life feared the ascendancy of the common man. His expressed dislike of Andrew Jackson, the nation's seventh President (1829-37), who Jefferson said was a man of violent passions and unfit for the presidency, is indicative of his disappointment with the type of leadership that the raucous politics and raw democracy of the 19th century fostered.

Wood's depiction of the Founders' vision for America is at odds with our contemporary democracy. Indeed, today's politics for them would be downright abhorrent! Men of education, wealth and virtue, without the constraints of heredity, would be for them the only acceptable governors for the new nation. Benjamin Franklin fits the description to a tee. Because of this, the Founders, according to Wood, eventually eliminated themselves and others like them from the national power structure. This was true of both the Federalists and, to a lesser extent, Jefferson's Democratic Republicans (who survived, if only in name). In Wood's epilogue, he provides a withering critique of the Federalists' demise. Out of touch with the power of public opinion, he says, they failed to grasp the power that the common man achieved in American politics. Their methods for governing, which relied on high-minded discussions, especially by letter exchange among the elites, was of an era which had passed. Their language, manners and methods were not only anachronistic but ineffectual in the public forum that developed in 19th century America. To say that they were not politicians, as does Wood, is tantamount to understatement. They were rather philosopher-farmers, businessmen, lawyers and, most of all, gentlemen.

There are two characters that Wood presents in this volume who come as surprises. First, Aaron Burr, since he is the complete antithesis of the others. Burr was certainly no statesman and affected no airs of virtue. He was concerned simply for his own gain. Yet his personality was perhaps most suitable for the developing political arena that the others despised. The other is the pamphleteer Thomas Paine. His writing would certainly resonate with the expanded democratic vision that quickly developed. As a matter of fact, his vision found in *Common Sense* (1776), which was a call to arms for the Revolution, as well as his *The Rights of Man* (1791-92), which defended the French Revolution,

encouraged radical democracy without the mediating gentility that the Founders hoped for. Their presence in this volume provides a contrast between the like-minded others vis-à-vis Burr as well as early signs of an imminent change in American political philosophy found in Paine. This coarsening of politics as anticipated by Burr and the radical democratization of the American franchise to the common man by Paine have for the most part shaped our leadership and nation for the last 200 plus years.

The Founders were unique and exceptional men. Wood's book shows us just how much their limited circle, vision of leadership, and high moral goals enabled the creation of the Constitution. As Madison knowingly stated, "No Constitution would ever have been adopted by the convention if the debates had been public." Yet their age passed shortly thereafter and what they wrought became uniquely American—though something that would be foreign to most of them today.

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“Mission Possible”

Shaw, Russell. *Catholic Laity in the Mission of the Church*. Bethune, South Carolina: Requiem Press, 2005. 191 pp. \$14.95 paperback.

Russell Shaw is easily one of the most important Catholic thinkers on the contemporary scene. He possesses a deep knowledge of Church teaching, tradition, and history. Moreover, he has demonstrated in his voluminous writings an uncanny ability to apply prudentially his knowledge of Catholic principles to a wide array of topics embedded in a broad spectrum of historically contingent contexts. This latter ability is no doubt a function of the incessant interaction between sustained reflection, experience, and constant prayer, combined with the gift of discernment. His significant impact on many of the Catholic faithful, additionally and in part, is a function of his skill in communication; his writing is rich, balanced, reasoned, lucid, concise, poignant, and widely accessible.

Russell Shaw’s latest and vitally important Catholic literary product, *Catholic Laity in the Mission of the Church*, is published by Requiem Press, yet another new and promising publishing house and vehicle for the new evangelization inspired by John Paul II and now continued by Benedict XVI. In the volume, Shaw takes up a theme that he has continued to address and develop over the course of his career, i.e., the proper nature, role, and function for the Catholic laity.

To cut to the chase: Russell Shaw notes an unhappy irony regarding the contemporary situation of the Catholic laity. On the one hand, since the Second Vatican Council and at the level of official, articulated Church doctrine, never have the laity been given such a clear, brilliant, compelling, and inspiring mission so full of promise for themselves, the Church, and the society, i.e., of the lay apostolate dedicated to the evangelization of the world. He cites, especially in chapters three and four, as the basis of this mission such important Church documents as *Lumen Gentium* or the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church; *Apostolicam Acutuositatem* or the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People; *The New Code of Cannon Law*, and Pope John Paul II’s *Christifideles Laici*, among others. It is a vision that emerged, in the author’s words, “in the Second Vatican Council’s teaching that the Church is Mystical Body of Christ, People of God, and *communio*—communion—which arises from and in some way reflects—the divine-human communion of the New Covenant itself” (33). Shaw notes that *Lumen Gentium* “insists that *all* the faithful, not just those who have been ordained or entered religious life, share in Christ’s three-fold office as priest, prophet, and king” (43). He continues: “The Dogmatic

Constitution contains a crucial affirmation of the equality-within-diversity which exists among all of the Church's members" (44) and notes that, for John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici*, "the vocation of the laity does not come by delegation from the hierarchy. It comes from baptism and confirmation and is theirs as members of the Church. The secularity of lay people, 'a theological and ecclesiological reality,' distinguishes them from clergy and religious. Called to holiness, they should make spiritual commitment visible 'in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities'" (59-60).

On the other hand, however, for Russell Shaw, the great promise of the laity since Vatican II has gone woefully unfulfilled because of two developments that he analysis at length, the first more so than the second: the "clericalization of the laity" and a widespread secularization both at the level of culture and within the hearts and minds of many nominal and dissenting Catholics. Regarding the first development, and following John Paul II's analysis in *Christifideles Laici*, there too many laity who are "so strongly interested in Church services and tasks" that they ignore "their responsibilities in the professional, cultural, and political world" (56). As the author puts it himself, "unfortunately, at the same time lay ministry was receiving strong encouragement and support from official Church sources, the lay apostolate—the work of the laity in bringing the message and values of the Gospel into the secular world— [has] largely [been] ignored" (58). Regarding the second development, Shaw observes that "many Catholics in the United States and other Western countries have been assimilated into a secular culture shaped by values like individualism ('the right to choose' in regard to abortion, sexual behavior, and much else) and consumerism which are in conflict with the values of the gospel" (56).

This reviewer would suggest that the author's fundamentally sound analysis of the ineffective state of the Catholic laity would have been a tad bit stronger if he added that these two explanations, at least in some cases, are mutually influencing. This reviewer believes that, in some cases at least, the discernible movement toward *lay ministry* (in many cases itself a form of the clericalization of the laity as Russell Shaw points out) is a result of an internal secularization within the Church, as some Catholics are more concerned about the secular issues of power and status within the institution (e.g. the ordination of women) than they are about selfless devotion to God and God's Church. Conversely, the clericalization of a laity characterized disproportionately by dissent or ignorance of the Faith only cements the general secularization of society as the inauthentic lay ministry that dominates

the Church's infrastructural set of organizations—following, for instance, the analysis of Monsignor Michael Wrenn and Kenneth Whitehead of the post-Vatican II “catechetical establishment”—fails to sufficiently catechize, educate, and socialize the laity for what both Russell Shaw and official Church teaching correctly see as the primary goal of the laity, the lay apostolate devoted to the “Christianization of the temporal sphere” of society.

Furthermore, this reviewer would put forth a proposition that Russell Shaw might (or might not) agree with, i.e., that all things considered, the “Catholic Action” lay model popular in the mid-century just prior to Vatican II was, *empirically speaking* (as compared to theoretically), superior to the present situation regarding lay involvement. While it is true, following the author, that Catholic Action, defined by Pius XI as “the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the Hierarchy,” (38) suggests that the laity were then “not engaging in an apostolate properly theirs...but sharing in something that properly pertained to the clerical hierarchy” (38-9), it is nonetheless the case that there was something of an effective lay presence in evangelical work geared to family, liturgy, and professional associations, among other areas of life at the time. As theoretically or theologically modest as it was vis-à-vis Vatican II and post-Vatican II magisterial thought, Catholic Action *did* make some real contributions to both society and Church in its day. In contrast, the more recent theology, for all of its splendor, unfortunately remains, for the most part, a theoretical abstraction either widely unacknowledged, ignored or rejected given the pervasive secularization of society and within the Church that has occurred over the past forty years.

In the early part of this must-read volume, Shaw provides a useful historical overview of the changing situation and circumstances of the Catholic laity. In the early Church, for instance, he notes that “the sociological and ecclesial distinction between clergy and laity was not so strongly emphasized as it came to be later” (11). Also, following St. Paul's understanding of the Church “as the Mystical Body of Christ,” “there was a strong sense in these early days of the unity and fundamental equality of all members of the Christian community, interacting within a hierarchal structure that provided for a number of complementary roles and functions” (11). The author discusses, at this point, some of the factors that lead to an encroaching clericalization: the ecclesiastical policy of Constantine and his successors (14), the emergence of monasticism (15), the radical otherworldliness of St. Augustine and his popularizers (16), and certain social, political, and religious developments associated with the Middle Ages (17ff). While

the author acknowledges that Martin Luther had an important insight regarding the stretching of the concept of vocation into everyday life, Russell Shaw correctly notes “that Luther and their followers carried it too far” (23) in their repudiation of the Catholic conceptions of mediation and sacredness (including the centrality of the Mass) and, conversely, in their promotion of congregationalism and the belief in the “priesthood of the faithful” (24). Even the Council of Trent, its immense positive contributions notwithstanding, “said almost nothing about the laity and their role...[thus tending]...to reinforce and institutionalize the inferior position occupied by lay people in religious affairs” (25).

With the exception of certain “important Catholic voices now and then” (e.g. St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Frances de Sales, John Henry Cardinal Newman, among others) “taking a significantly different line” (26), Shaw basically sees the continual spiritual impoverishment of the laity until the appearance of Catholic Action, albeit “hobbled by built-in limitations” (38). For the author, the development of Catholic Action, the publication of two key encyclicals by Pope Pius XII—*Mystici Corporis* (1943) and *Mediator Dei* (1947)—the founding of groups like Opus Dei and Focolare, and the theological reflection contained in Yves Congar, O.P.’s *Lay People in the Church* (1951), anticipated and set the stage for the theoretical and theological blossoming of the indispensable role of the Catholic laity in the mission of the Church. For Shaw, “Vatican II’s teaching about the laity was a dramatic change from attitudes common in the not-so-distant past” (47).

This review cannot possibly do justice to the numerous topics that the author addresses or the insights—sometimes subtle, sometimes profound, and occasionally provocative—that he makes throughout his book and that always provide food for serious thought. A few of the issues strewn through the volume that will intrigue the reader include the author’s discussions of the three complementary religious meanings of vocation (“common” through Baptism and Confirmation, as a “state of life,” and as a unique “personal” one acquired through discernment); the call to holiness that is common and universal to all the People of God; the numerous areas or endeavors involved in the lay apostolate; human activity in building up the Kingdom of God; the various consequences of the clericalist mentality; the need to build an intact and functioning Catholic subculture in an unsympathetic broader civilization; and the implications for governance and shared responsibility within the Church given that Vatican II, through *Lumen Gentium*, insists that all the faithful share in Christ’s threefold office as priest, prophet, and king.

I end my review with words from the author's opening passage: "there is much hard work to be done before Catholic lay women and men universally recognize, accept, and carry out the role in the Church's mission that is theirs by right and obligation—and before others truly recognize that they should. The aim here is to help in bringing these things about" (7). Russell Shaw has done his part. As for the rest of the Catholic laity? Buy the book and let's get going!

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Piedra, Alberto M. *Natural Law: The Foundation of an Orderly Economic System*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004. 268 pp. \$19.95 paperback.

In a post-Soviet world, there is a temptation for classical liberals to bask in triumphalism. Alberto Piedra's message is an antidote to this self-congratulatory mood. In *Natural Law: The Foundation of an Orderly Economic System*, he convincingly argues that liberalism has flaws in the way it views the moral law and the human person. Hence, like communism, liberalism can take us down the wrong path. The sixth book in the Acton Institute's series in "Studies in Ethics and Economics," *Natural Law* offers a historical, philosophical and theological overview of the subject. A former Catholic University of America professor and U.S. Ambassador, Piedra marshals both a scholarly and practical approach to this topic.

The book's basic argument is straightforward. Natural law is a "participation in divine law," a concept widely accepted in the West until a few centuries ago. When western philosophy severed the link between natural and divine law, human reason became the source of morality. The outcomes were the deification of man, denial of original sin, moral relativism and a misguided effort to create utopia. Piedra concludes that, in order for an economic system to be truly successful, it must be based on truth and firm ethical principles.

Piedra starts his historical survey of the rejection of the traditional concept of natural law with René Descartes, whose dictum "cogito ergo sum," placed rational thought at the center of all sciences.

As the modern sciences developed, “natural law” became narrowly limited to the knowledge of the mechanical rules that govern nature. Many believed that by discovering these laws, they could reconstruct society in a way that would foster harmony. They also accepted the propositions that people are naturally good and will follow these laws if given the freedom to do so. Authority and religious institutions came to be seen as impediments to the exercise of this liberty. Further developments came with the acceptance of the principles of self-interest and utilitarianism. With divine law dismissed, policy became a matter of utilizing the correct technical relationships and ethics became irrelevant. Through the classical economists, the notion of an achievable natural social harmony was introduced into modern economic thinking.

Adam Smith, argues Piedra, contributed to the economism of his followers. An orderly economic system depends on the moral law. Smith held that “mutual assistance and sympathies,” together with the invisible hand, would correctly channel self-interest and guide the functioning of society toward the common good. However, such a mechanistic approach cannot work because original sin always finds a way to make its presence felt. Piedra contends that, “[t]he great error of liberalism was to believe that the free market system would, by its own inner mechanisms, create the necessary ‘moral’ conditions that would permit the system to operate efficiently for the benefit of all” (110).

The denial of divine law has had tragic consequences for the modern world. Personhood is turned into something endowed by the state rather than by God. This transforms human rights into mere civil rights. Liberty no longer means freedom from sin and the passions but license. It becomes difficult to protect individual rights in a society where moral relativism holds sway. Piedra asks the question, “On what basis can a person, seeking to protect his moral autonomy, expect others to renounce their principles and points of view in the world of practice in order to follow someone else’s generalized pattern of behavior?” (26) This internal contradiction of a society based on individual license can only result in chaos. Economic stability cannot exist in such a climate.

The praxis of Enlightenment liberal thought has had mixed results. The irony of Continental Enlightenment is that its philosophy for building a harmonious society was developed just prior to the miseries of the French Revolution. Two World Wars later and the continued demographic implosion of Western Europe make one wonder if the lesson was learned. Indeed, liberal thought contributed to the rise of the “social question,” giving fuel to dissenting schools of thought. Even the track record of organizations such as the United Nations in bringing about world harmony is inconsistent.

The liberal utopian thinking is not dead, as demonstrated by today's pro-globalization groups which clamor for minimal oversight of international trade. Likewise, policies to raise living standards by lowering fertility rates weaken the family, encourage the encroachment of the welfare state and put financial stress on governments. Furthermore, the neomalthusians' blame of environmental degradation on overpopulation is misplaced. The solution is respect for the environment, which is best taught in families.

Piedra gives a qualified approval to capitalism. On its technical dimension, there is no doubt it surpasses its competing systems. However, on the human dimension there is much left to be desired. He also argues that none of the major competing ideologies—such as socialism, the historical school, or institutionalism—correct the faulty anthropology of liberalism.

Although Piedra does not offer a detailed blueprint for the successful economy, he does discuss some of the characteristics such a society must have. In addition to a firm moral foundation, a truly successful economic system must be based on an understanding of labor having both subjective and objective dimensions. Work supports the development and attainment of the ultimate destiny of the worker. Hence, technological growth at the expense of the spiritual and cultural needs of people is not true success.

If there is a weakness to *Natural Law*, it is that it doesn't devote much space to the contributions of individuals such as Fr. Heinrich Pesch, S.J. or Msgr. John A. Ryan to the critique of liberalism. More attention to such writers would provide the reader with a greater appreciation of the richness the natural law approach brings to economics. On a related note, although globalization and population control are discussed in detail, one is left wishing that Piedra would delve into other important economic and social issues.

This book is a plea to re-examine how we look at economic systems. Economists dropped the person from their analysis in order to emulate the methodology of the physical sciences. As the quip goes, the quest for the rigor of physics gave economics rigor mortis. *Natural Law* points out precisely the reason why this quest is fundamentally misguided—the human being is a subject and not an object such as a molecule.

As the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land, Moses told them they could choose between obedience to God and prosperity or idolatry and doom. The same two paths lie before us today. Piedra's evaluation of the situation is that the "dynamics of liberalism, and its stress on freedom, undoubtedly had and still can have very positive

results as long as it does not separate reason from truth. However, if reason and freedom separate themselves from the principles and values on which their dynamism and proper exercise depend, freedom itself is jeopardized and, sooner or later, license inevitably takes its place” (50). The choice before us is whether to return to truth or risk turmoil.

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Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. 368 pp. \$19.00 paperback.

Readers of the *CSSR* will be delighted to find a hidden gem of Catholic social thinking in this top-rate book about early Christianity. Robert Louis Wilken, the eminent historian of early Christianity (University of Virginia), who is now in full communion with the Catholic Church, places in his eighth chapter (“Happy the People Whose God is the Lord”) a stunning discussion of Augustine’s *City of God*. Accessible apart from the rest of the book, it contains a clear depiction of what precisely constitutes that City in relation to the City of Man, and convincingly shows the implications of that distinction for the social lives of Christians. I will first discuss this important chapter of Wilken’s book, and then, confident that readers of that chapter will be lured into the rest of the book, I will take an all-too-quick look into some of the other chapters.

Wilken initially shows how Augustine’s work is a response of sorts to Plato’s *Republic*, wherein Plato set forth what an ideal city would look like. One would expect, in reply, that Augustine would present his own model city that Christians should strive to build, but the city of God is *an actual city*—“a social and religious fact”—into which one can enter and be in communion with God (as contrasted to the city of man, in which God as the highest good is missing). This city is “an ordered, purposeful gathering of human beings with a distinctive way of life, institutions, laws, beliefs, memory, and form of worship” (191), and its end is peace (193), a peace that comes from the enjoyment *in God* of one another (“Christianity is fundamentally social” [195]).

We are members of the city of God *while on pilgrimage in this life*. Hence, Augustine's city of God includes both "cities" of which *Gaudium et spes* (using the terminology differently) says we are members when it states that Christians, "as citizens of two cities," should discharge their earthly duties conscientiously (art. 43). Due to our disordered passions and turbulent desires, we will never have the lasting peace of the City of God here on earth in perfect form. Still, we are called to be fully immersed in the temporal order. The Christian bishop, for example, while not a functionary of the state like pagan priests, *as* the leader of "an alternate society" or "another city" became immersed in the social and political life of the empire (200). Christians have their ultimate sights on the eternal city, but that city neither annuls the institutions of society, nor allow them a "neutral secular space" (208). Rather it impels societal arrangements to become ever more compatible with the worship of the true God (203, 208).

The other chapters of Wilken's book are all noteworthy, the product of both sound scholarship and profound contemplation. Page after page the author lets the early tradition speak and breathe into the reader's life, making this one of those rare books that is simultaneously scholarly and a source for prayerful meditation.

Chapter 1 contrasts the Greek view of the divine (Platonic, intellectual) with the historical particularity of Christianity, and goes on to recount some of the liveliest themes from Wilken's earlier book, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. Included here is a fine insight: the historical particularity of Christianity enhances, not diminishes, the role of reason: "It has been said that Christianity brought a loss of nerve and a distrust of reason. But one might argue that Christian revelation put an end to skepticism and gave men and women new confidence in reason" (23). From a new height, reason can see farther than ever. (Chapter 7 returns to this theme in more depth.) Chapter 2 carries this historical particularity the full Catholic route—to the Eucharist, a truly social event in which all believers, living and dead, are fused into a single community (47). The truth of the Eucharist "preceded every effort to understand and nourished every attempt to express in words and concepts what Christians believed" (37). Chapter 3 shows how historical particularity is rooted in the Scriptures, and is a marvelous introduction to the Patristic skill of mining the deeper meaning from the text. The economy of salvation, in all its particularity, is what allowed Christians to enter into the mystery of the Trinity, the subject of chapters 4 and 5. Here we are treated to a close look at Hilary of Poitiers (who battled Arianism) and Maximus the Confessor (who, in fighting the Monothelites, won the crown of martyrdom).

Chapter 9 is a surprising and delightful foray into Christian poetry, focusing on Ambrose and Lactantius. Included is the inspiring story of the Arians attempting a takeover of a church in Milan. The faithful simply occupied the church, and to encourage them, Ambrose composed hymns for them to sing antiphonally. Chapter 10 captures the Catholic sacramental view of reality in its meditation on the goodness of matter—and this reader emerged with a fresh appreciation for relics! Chapter 11 shows how the moral life is, for Christians, inseparable from the faith. (One suggestion: Wilken notes that the four cardinal virtues seem too limited, but that misses just the point: the massive panoply of virtues swings on the hinges [*cardo, -inis*] of the four cardinal virtues.) From this chapter I choose a lengthier selection of Wilken’s fine prose:

For Christians the moral life and the religious life were complementary. Although thinking about the moral life moved within a conceptual framework inherited from Greek and Latin moralists, Christian thinkers redefined the goal by making fellowship with the living God the end, revised the beginning by introducing the biblical teaching that we are made in the image of God, and complicated the middle with talk of the intractability and inevitability of sin. Without an understanding of the ancient moralists Aristotle, Seneca, Cicero, and Epictetus, one cannot enter the world of early Christian ethics, yet as soon as one takes in hand the essays of Clement or Tertullian or Ambrose or reads the sermons of Gregory of Nyssa or Augustine, it is clear that something new is afoot. (275)

Chapter 12 further focuses the moral life with a look at the passions, clearly showing the difference between Stoicism, which dismissed the passions as disordered, and Christianity, which allows the passions, rightly ordered, to serve in our quest for the ultimate Good. An epilogue echoes the biblical meditations of chapter 3, noting how Christianity roots itself in historical particularity as narrated in the Bible while simultaneously using the various tools of classical culture.

This review has focused on the theological themes of the book, but it should be noted that these themes are always explicated through the eyes of the early Greek and Latin Fathers—Wilken humbly “surrenders himself” and lets us see reality through their eyes. The one chapter I have not commented on (6), for example, introduces us to two of the Cappadocian fathers, Basil and Gregory of Nyssa. Wilken’s concluding comments are apt:

The Church Fathers...set in place a foundation that has proven to be irreplaceable. Their writings are more than a stage in the development of Christian thought or an interesting chapter in the history of the interpretation of the Bible. Like an inexhaustible spring, faithful and true, they irrigate the Christian imagination with life-giving water flowing from the biblical and spiritual sources of the faith. They are still our teachers today. (312)

Teachers, and friends. By the end of the book, the reader feels a certain kinship with quite an array of the early Fathers. In an entirely non-polemical manner Wilken has allowed the truth of Catholicism to shine forth from his skilled treatment of these heroes of the early church.

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**D'Elia, Donald J. and Patrick Foley, eds. *The Catholic as Historian*.
Naples, Florida: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2006.**

Almost thirty years ago *Time Magazine* (February 10, 1975, p. 33) published its report “The Hartford Heresies,” which is no less relevant for today’s pressing theological issues. It quoted a group of 18 Christian thinkers of nine denominations, including Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles, S.J., who joined in a dramatic warning that American theology had strayed dangerously far afield. Like a juvenile sea squirt that, after wandering through the ocean searching for a suitable place to cling to and make its home for life, no longer needs its brain anymore, and so eats it; some scholars, once attaining tenure and feeling secure in their employment, often spend the rest of their careers attacking and debunking the basic truths of their discipline in a quest for renown [“Myth-Placed Priorities: Religion and the Study of Myth,” *Religious Studies Review* 32 (1), 5–10. 15/Jan/07< www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/pdf/>.] This is very apparent within the disciplines of theology and history.

Within the horrific presentation of all things religious that are heretical, biased and thus often revised to fit a singular vision of reality, it is no wonder that Donald J.D’Elia and Patrick Foley felt compelled to challenge the secular editorializing of *The Faith in Action* with a superb collection of reflections on the role of the Catholic historian within the stance of faith (*fides qua creditur*). “Savoring this hope for fealty to the faith, as well as realizing the obligations of scholarship” (preface), these co-editors and authors have challenged the Catholic Historian to be a strong intellectual presence and the public voice of truth and reason in their discipline. This concurs with Vatican II’s “Declaration on Christian Education” (*Gravissimum Educationis*), which directs Catholic educators to strive “to relate all human culture eventually to the news of salvation, so that the life of faith will illumine the knowledge which students gradually gain of the world, of life, and of humankind.” [Walter Abbott, SJ and Joseph Gallagher eds., “Declaration on Christian Education” (*Gravissimum Educationis*), *Documents of Vatican II*, (New York: Corpus Books), 646.]

This collection of eleven essays is divided under three headings: “History, Philosophy and Culture: Inseparable to the Catholic Historian;” “God at the Center of History: A Purview of Permanence;” and “The Catholic Historical Complexion: Two Specific Areas of Study.” The first group of essayists (D’Elia, Ewbank, Buttigloine, Herrera, and Olsen) discuss the role of the Catholic Historian within the framework of nature, culture and the history of the church. The second

group of writers (Carroll, Molnar, Hitchcock, and King) address the importance of the study of history in general and Catholic history in particular. The third part of the book takes the discourse to a very intimate level by including an autobiographical memoir of the very personal, spiritual and academic journey of Carl Schmitt, Jr., a scholar who wrested with a secular education and strong Catholic familial underpinnings. The third part of the book continues on a practical point by demonstrating how history should be researched and narrated through the penultimate example of Foley's view of Southwestern history through a Catholic historian's lens.

Although the treatise addresses the formally trained historian, thoughtful men with a variety of academic experience from a broad range of disciplines authored the eleven essays. History and Philosophy are equally balanced, while one essay is grounded in a Political Science perspective. Despite their different training, the authors share a commonality of deep faith and devotion to Holy Mother Church. Their basic beliefs are grounded in every facet of the Creed, i.e., God as the center of human life, the essential reality of the doctrine of the Incarnation, the divine mission of Crucifixion and Resurrection, and the continued unfolding of creation in God's time. This is the foundation for their common acknowledgement of "the enthronement of Christ as the Lord of History," that the Christian "is firmly bound to the doctrine of creation, linear time, and therefore history" (Herrera, 72, 79), and that the Catholic Historian is responsible not only to record the influence of Christianity on history (Hitchcock, 119), but to accomplish this with "a sense of the mystery of history, of the mystery of God's ways" (Olsen, 91).

This treatise is unusual in that many edited collections of essays are only valuable for certain select parts and lose the integrity of its theme. Although some of the essays are overwhelming in their scope of ideas, each contributor's essay focuses on the issue at hand; all offer gems to be digested and savored within the thematic overview of the role and responsibilities of *The Catholic as Historian*. Limited space does not allow each essayist to develop all of his brilliant arguments, but the discriminating reader, encouraged by the numerous references to works by Augustine, Aquinas, Belloc, Chesterton, Dawson, Maritain and many others, will delve further and re-read these classics.

My only disappointment in this tome is a sparsely written index which often omitted peoples' names and terms that are included in the book, and in particular does not include any reference to the much discussed "definition of history" and "the role of the historian/ Catholic historian." I was concerned by the three different citation formats within

King's essay, but am assured that the discerning reader will carefully distinguish these differences. The absence of a Catholic female scholarly voice in this important dialogue was also troubling. This criticism, however, in no way detracts from my admiration for the value this work adds to an imperative conversation.

Christopher Dawson proposed that “[t]he modern dilemma is essentially a spiritual one, and every one of its main aspects, moral, political and scientific, brings us back to the need of a religious solution. The one remaining problem...is where that religious solution is to be found.” [Dawson, “Christianity as the Soul of the West.” Taken from *The Dawson Newsletter*, Winter 1995. All works by Christopher Dawson © Julian Philip Scott, 2003. 28/Jan/07< <http://www.geocities.com/dawsonchd/articles/Dawson9.htm>>.] I concur with the authors of these essays that it is to be found in the faithful and luminous interpretation of historical events by the Catholic historian.

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“Phenomenology Baptized”

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue, 1913-1922*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. 208 pp. \$29.95 hardcover.

When thinking of good candidates for hagiography, academic philosophers are not the first who come to mind. Indeed, today’s “philosopher” is simply not interested in matters biographical, and especially not the life of a Catholic saint! Judging by its prominent journals, twenty-first century academic philosophy seems completely indifferent to the essential realities of both practical life and theoretical inquiry: ultimate truth, meaning, purpose, evil, goodness, beauty, love, death, virtue. Today’s “philosopher” appears interested only in the obscure and jargonized, the fashionable and career-advancing, the subversive and ideological: “The norms of both teachers and students are well designed for the purpose of defending everyday social life from invasion by philosophy” (2). Philosophy as Socrates lived it, “the practice of dying,” is dead.

The quote is from the most recent work by contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, a book about the life of Edith Stein. In other words, it is a quote from a hagiography written by an academic philosopher. However, Alasdair MacIntyre is not your typical academic philosopher, Edith Stein is not your typical saint (well, no saint is “typical,” yet how many female, Jewish philosophers have been raised to the altar?), and *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue* is not your typical hagiography. What MacIntyre has written is not only a brilliant work of philosophical analysis, but also a completely new genre of philosophical writing, “philosophical biography” or “biographical philosophy.” MacIntyre demonstrates the intimate and indispensable relationship of personal experience, social milieu, and theoretical inquiry, and he does so not by abstract theorizing but through an unparalleled performance of historical, biographical, and philosophical analysis, revealing the dynamic interplay of these relationships in the life of one remarkable woman.

On the surface of it, a book on the life and thought of Edith Stein seems an odd addition to MacIntyre’s intellectual project. Having written a masterful trilogy on the meta-philosophical topic of the relation of social practice to theoretical inquiry, “tradition-constituted rationality,” which culminated in a vindication of Thomism, not phenomenology, as the superior philosophical tradition, and having struggled against the formidable and entrenched prejudice of modernity

to demonstrate that man is a “dependent rational animal,” one would expect MacIntyre’s next book to be, perhaps, a further theoretical exploration of the relation of Thomism to the political order, or a practical study of how the Thomistic tradition could be implemented in today’s world. However, if we look a bit deeper, the pre-conversion life and thought of Edith Stein is a most suitable topic for MacIntyre to have chosen to write about.

Plato’s conclusion that engagement in the life of philosophy necessarily involves a radical critique of the everyday social life of political societies, and a consequent withdrawal from that life into a particular kind of philosophical community, remains one with which, explicitly or implicitly, everyone who engages in philosophy has somehow or other to come to terms (3).

Having given us perhaps the most profound and exhaustive study ever penned of the relationship of social environment to rational activity in general and Thomistic rational activity in particular, MacIntyre now offers for our consideration the relationship of social environment to the thought of one remarkable participant in the Thomistic tradition, one who became a living embodiment of and witness to the vital essence of that tradition, the belief in and worship of Jesus Christ. What MacIntyre the philosopher is teaching us in this peculiar hagiography—and he writes as a *philosopher*, not a theologian, as he has stated emphatically numerous times throughout his career—is that authentic philosophical activity leads to Christ, and sometimes even to martyrdom at the hands of the anti-philosophers. In the case of Stein, these were the Nazis, but they are found in any social structure of power for which truth and self-criticism have no voice. From Socrates’ fifth-century B.C. Athens to Stein’s twentieth-century Germany, it has always been so.

It would be impossible to convey the richness, clarity, and complexity of this book. MacIntyre manages simultaneously to perform an abstract philosophical analysis of the development of Stein’s phenomenological thought and a biographical presentation of the personal and social factors that both influenced and were influenced by her intellectual development. The book’s main focus is Stein’s relationship with Edmund Husserl. In the course of explaining this relationship, MacIntyre provides a helpful overview of the nature and historical development of phenomenology through an analysis of the thought of Husserl, Reinach, and Heidegger¹ in their critique and rejection of Hume, Kant, and the neo-Kantians. The essence of

phenomenology, as MacIntyre summarizes it, is “its insistence on the givenness of the objects of mental acts” (44). What first attracted Stein to Husserl was his insistence on returning philosophical enquiry “to the things themselves!” (22) being subjected far too long to the subjectivism of Hume and Kant: “For Husserl . . . the mind is radically incomplete until it encounters mind-independent objects and it is in and through its encounter with those objects that the mind is constituted as mind” (33).

After several years as his student, however, Stein began to recognize serious problems with Husserl’s thought. His main problem was the absence of any cognizance of the dependence of the mind of the individual upon his own body, and upon the bodies and minds of others, for an accurate and adequate perception of reality (Chapter 12). Stein’s capacity to recognize this dependence allowed her to delve more deeply than Husserl into the nature of interpersonal relationships, especially the phenomenon of *empathy*, which was the subject of her doctoral dissertation. MacIntyre dedicates a large portion of the book to an analysis of Stein’s idea of empathy, as well as her strikingly MacIntyrean understanding of the nature of the political order (she, like MacIntyre, rejects the ideological foundations and amoral structure of the modern state, proposing instead a political order based upon a particular conception of the good), and I think the reason he focuses on these subjects is their essential connection to her later conversion to Catholicism and entrance into the Carmelite cloister. MacIntyre suggests that her phenomenological insights into empathy and political life served as a *preambula fidei* for her embrace of the personal and social imperative of supernatural charity.

The chapters “Three Conversions” and “Stein’s Conversion” are worth the price of the book alone. The former is a masterful philosophical account of the nature of ideological and religious conversion, MacIntyre’s own phenomenological analysis of the conversions of three of Stein’s friends, Reinach, who converted from Judaism to Protestantism, Rosenzweig, from atheism to Judaism, and Lukács, from atheism to Bolshevism. What is most significant about Stein’s post-conversion philosophical work is that it depicts phenomenology in particular and philosophy in general as incomplete and inadequate, even incapable of accomplishing its own tasks; it requires the help of Christian Faith to be completely itself. Not unsurprisingly, MacIntyre, the good, disciplined *philosopher* that he is, leaves this controversial and quite theological opinion of Stein’s unanalyzed, and it is unclear whether he judges it to be true or false, though he does imply that it is eminently non-Thomistic. Perhaps MacIntyre’s post-Stein work will reveal his philosophical judgment on

this matter, or perhaps he will leave it unanswered, being only an academic philosopher.

Thaddeus J. Kozinski

1. In comparison to Edith Stein, Martin Heidegger is the superior philosopher, as MacIntyre declares, yet ultimately he was the inferior human being, and one of the reasons, as MacIntyre suggests, is philosophical, not moral: His support of the theoretical bifurcation of thought from interpersonal life and political activity, and the application of this bifurcation to his own person, was a primary factor in his decision to support the Nazis, while Stein's union of philosophy and practice led her to self-sacrificing martyrdom for Christ.