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Richard John Neuhaus

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- **While We're At It**

A Passion for Truth: The Way of Faith and Reason

Nearly 130 years ago the First Vatican Council, in a document called *Dei Filius*, affirmed the complete compatibility of faith and reason, and a few years later, in 1879, Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, "On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy," which affirmed the normative status of the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. Both texts come in for frequent mention in the new encyclical by John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason), but this reflection of almost thirty thousand words also reaches back to biblical and classical sources, lifts up the pioneering intellectual work of the patristic era, pays high tribute to its development in the medieval period (with particular attention to St. Anselm of Canterbury as well as St. Thomas), and brings all this into critical conversation with the modern era and the Church's response to it in the Second Vatican Council. *Fides et Ratio* is as breathtaking in its historical and intellectual reach as it is provocative in its argument.

Each time I work through the encyclical, I do so with quite different sensations—ranging from intellectual excitement to puzzlement to wonder that such a thing should be attempted and, finally, to a humbling awareness that there is more going on in this text than I understand. Reading it is rigorous mental exercise, which, given the subject matter, is not surprising. It is also, more than might be expected, a spiritual exercise. One's purpose of course is "to think with the Church" (*sentire cum ecclesia*), and thinking with the Church begins with thinking. I will here present, in a straightforward and relatively brief manner, the argument of *Fides et Ratio* and then offer a few initial observations. I warmly recommend a reading of the complete text, for this encyclical will be grist for philosophical and theological mills for a long time to come, also, no doubt, in the pages of this journal. (The numbers in what follows refer to the sections of the encyclical. The complete text of *Fides et Ratio* appears on the Vatican web page at www.vatican.va.)

We Are Natural Philosophers

Human beings, says John Paul in the introduction, are natural philosophers. In every culture, they ask the fundamental questions: Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life? To deny these questions is to deny our humanity (1). The Church accompanies humanity on its pilgrimage toward truth, bearing the message that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. The Church serves humanity by her service (*diakonia*) to the truth. Any truth attained is but a step toward the fullness of truth to be revealed in the End Time (2). Philosophy, meaning "the love of wisdom," is one resource for

understanding the truth, and philosophy is universal (3). Philosophy begins in wonder at the world and oneself in it, then moves through speculation to produce systems of thought. Such systems are never final but must always recognize "the primacy of philosophical enquiry" from which they stem and which they are meant to serve. There are "core insights," such as the principle of noncontradiction, that are common to all philosophies and required by right reason (*recta ratio*) (4).

Such core insights are often denied in modern philosophy that is right to focus on the human being and has achieved much, but is so preoccupied with our knowing that it neglects what can be known. "Reason has wilted," no longer "daring to rise to the truth of being," with the resulting consequence of the threatening triumph of technique, agnosticism, relativism, and skepticism. Philosophy has lost its nerve, confidence in reason is abandoned; "with a false modesty, people rest content with partial and provisional truths, no longer seeking to ask radical questions about the meaning and ultimate foundation of human life, personal and social" (5). As the bearer of revelation, the Church proclaims that truth can be known. She assures us of our "capacity to know" and challenges philosophy "to recover and develop its full dignity." The purpose of this encyclical is "to pursue that reflection by concentrating on the theme of *truth* itself and on its *foundation* in relation to *faith*" (6).

Truth in History

In the "utterly gratuitous" initiative of the Word made flesh, it is revealed that "God desires to make himself known; and the knowledge which human beings have of God completes all other true knowledge of the meaning of their existence which their mind is able to attain" (7). Against the rationalist critique of that time, Vatican I stressed that there is "knowledge peculiar to faith" that transcends but does not contradict natural reason. Such knowledge is certain, said the Council, "since God neither deceives nor wishes to be deceived" (8). Vatican I affirmed a "twofold order of knowledge"; natural reason and divine faith are distinct in both their source and object. Philosophy and the sciences operate within the order of natural reason, while faith recognizes the fullness of truth that God has revealed in history, most definitively in Jesus Christ (9). Vatican II, on the other hand, stressed the historical character of revelation. God's deeds in history have an "inner unity" with the words by which they are understood, with Christ being both the mediator and fullness of revelation (10). In the incarnation of Christ, truth is "immersed in time and history" and is "entrusted to the frail structure of our knowledge" (11). Thus, in history is found the synthesis by which "the Eternal enters time, the Whole lies hidden in the part, God takes on a human face" (12).

Revelation remains "charged with mystery" because our vision "is always fragmentary and impaired by the limits of our understanding." Faith is obedient response to God, assent to His testimony, and the act of entrusting ourselves to Him, which is an act of intellect and will that is consummately free, since "there is no exercise of true freedom when decisions are made against God." It cannot be true freedom to reject "the very reality which enables our self-realization." In the free act of faith the person "reaches the certainty of truth and chooses to live in that truth." In a sacramental way, illustrated by the Eucharist, revelation bears the signs that disclose its meaning in an "indissoluble unity between the signified and the signifier" (13). The knowledge of faith does not abolish the mystery but constantly "refers back to the mystery of God which the human mind cannot exhaust but can only receive and embrace in faith." Between that knowledge and that mystery, human reason has free play to enquire and understand, "restricted only by its finiteness before the infinite mystery of God." Revelation impels reason to leave "no stone unturned" in seeking the truth, knowing with St. Anselm ("one of the most fruitful and important minds in human history") that the ultimate truth, namely God, is "not only that than which nothing greater can be conceived" but also that which "is greater than all that can be conceived" (14).

The words of Jesus, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free," speak of revelation's summons to be "open to the transcendent." This revelation is neither the product nor the end of human reason, but a gratuitous expression of love that anticipates the ultimate truth, which is the theme of philosophy and theology alike (15). In the wisdom literature of Israel and other cultures, we learn that the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of reason are bound in a "profound and indissoluble unity." Reason can best reach its goal when its search is set within the horizon of faith (16). There must be no separation or competition between reason and faith: "one is in the other, and each has its own scope for action." God's glory, the fullness of the mystery, makes possible human nobility, which is the exercise of reason. The heart knows there is an answer to every unanswered question (17). Israel, which opened reason to the path of mystery, understood, first, that knowledge is a journey that allows no rest; second, it is not a way for the proud who seek personal conquest; third, it must be traveled in the "fear of God." When these rules are forgotten, one ends up as "the fool" who is a threat to himself and others (18). Wisdom literature, like Greek philosophy, understood that "the book of nature," read by reason, can lead to knowledge of the Creator (19). Faith, however, "liberates reason" to set its knowledge "within the ultimate order of things" (20).

Reason and the Infinite

Israel understood man as "being in relation"—with himself, others, the world, and God. The opening to the ultimate mystery allows reason to "enter the realm of the infinite." Our mission from God is to be explorers on the way to truth, leaving "no stone unturned," resisting doubt, and leaning on God (21). In Romans 1, St. Paul affirms reason's capacity for knowledge of God, but reason was "wounded" and "warped" at "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" in the human assertion of autonomy in deciding for ourselves what is good and evil. "Reason became more and more a prisoner to itself," an imprisonment from which it is released by the coming of Christ (22). In 1 Corinthians, Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world with the foolishness of the cross. "Human wisdom refuses to see in its own weakness the possibility of its strength," namely, that it is supported by the gratuitous love of God. The cross is the definitive critique of the pride that thinks truth can be autonomously possessed. "The preaching of Christ crucified is the reef upon which the link between faith and philosophy can break up, but it is also the reef beyond which the two can set forth upon the boundless ocean of truth" (23).

In every human heart there is "a seed of desire and nostalgia for God," as is made evident in the arts, literature, philosophy, and other work of creative intelligence (24). We all desire to know the truth, and want to live the truth we know (25). Truth comes to us first in the form of questions about the meaning of life, of suffering, and, most particularly, of death (26). The answer we give such inevitable questions will determine whether we think universal and absolute truth is possible. "Every truth—if it really is truth—presents itself as universal, even if it is not the whole." On such questions there is a universal search for "a certitude no longer open to doubt" (27). There are obstacles to reaching the goal, but we may define the human being "as the one who seeks the truth" (28). "It is unthinkable that a search so deeply rooted in human nature would be completely vain and useless." The very search "implies the rudiments of a response"; in everyday life, as in scientific method, the search is premised upon the intuition that there is an answer. To deny the "thirst for truth [is to] imperil existence" (29).

There are different "modes of truth": the truth of evidence and experiment, the speculative truth of philosophy, and religious truth, which is "to some degree grounded in philosophy" (30). Truths are socially embodied in traditions, and we all live by more truths that are simply believed than by truths acquired by personal verification. Therefore, "the human being—the one who seeks the truth—is also the one who lives by belief" (31). In believing, we entrust ourselves to others and the knowledge they impart. Such knowledge, while not primarily empirical or philosophical, is not inferior, for it engages "the truth of the person" and the human capacity for "self-giving and fidelity." Here the martyr is the most compelling example

(32). The search for truth is sustained by trust and friendship. "A climate of suspicion and distrust . . . ignores the ancient philosophers who proposed friendship as one of the prime requirements for sound philosophical enquiry." The search for truth, which is "humanly unstoppable," is finally a search for a person to whom we can entrust ourselves. Beyond simple belief, Christian faith immerses us in the order of grace; in the mystery of Christ we are offered "true and coherent knowledge of the Triune God," in whom our desire and nostalgia come to fulfillment (33). This truth of faith is not opposed to the truth of reason. "The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reasoning," and that unity is "rendered certain" by the truth that the God of creation is also the God of salvation history (34). We now explore the connection between revealed truth and philosophy, beginning with the history of that connection (35).

How We Got Where We Are

On the Areopagus (Acts 17) St. Paul positively engaged the natural knowledge of God, even though it had lapsed into idolatry. A major concern and achievement of classical philosophy was to employ rational analysis in purifying religion of its superstitious and mythological elements. On that basis, early Christianity entered into fruitful dialogue with ancient philosophy (36). While engaging philosophy—understood as practical wisdom—St. Paul warned against gnosticism and "the various kinds of esoteric superstition widespread [also] today, even among some believers who lack a proper critical sense" (37). The fathers such as Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria employed Greek philosophy in order to show that Christianity is "the only sure and profitable philosophy" (Justin) and to expose the errors of those who attacked the truth. Clement wrote, "Greek philosophy is rightly called the hedge and the protective wall around the vineyard" (38).

In critically adopting Platonic thought, Origen began to construct a Christian theology of rational discourse expressing the true doctrine about God (39). Christianizing Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought, St. Augustine, "the great Doctor of the West," produced "the first great synthesis of philosophy and theology" (40). Augustine and others did not simply put the truths of faith into philosophical categories. They disclosed what remained implicit and preliminary in the philosophers, showing how "reason could find its way out of the blind alley of myth" and be opened to the absolute. This was more than a meeting of cultures. "It happened in the depths of human souls and was a meeting of creature and Creator," demonstrating that "reason could attain the supreme good and ultimate truth in the person of the Word made flesh" (41).

In medieval thought, Anselm's view of the understanding of faith (*intellectus*

fidei) is one of the intellect seeking that which it loves: the more it loves, the more it desires to know. He wrote, "To see you was I conceived, and I have yet to conceive that for which I was conceived." Given reason's capacity to exceed whatever it attains, it is not defeated by the inability to understand the object of its love. Anselm: "Thought has comprehended rationally that God is incomprehensible." The harmony of faith and philosophy is again confirmed. "Faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason; and at the summit of its searching reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents" (42).

St. Thomas Aquinas saw that nature, philosophy's proper concern, could contribute to understanding divine revelation. "Faith therefore has no fear of reason, but seeks it out and has trust in it. Just as grace builds on nature and brings it to perfection, so faith builds upon and perfects reason." Faith is also an "exercise of thought," and Paul VI was right to say that what St. Thomas "gave to the new encounter of faith and reason was a reconciliation between the secularity of the world and the radicality of the gospel" (43). Convinced that all truth is of the Holy Spirit, Thomas underscored the harmony among the Spirit's gifts of wisdom, philosophical wisdom, and theological wisdom. In St. Thomas we see "the passion for truth" tied to "realism," which produced not merely a philosophy of "what seems to be" but a philosophy of "what is" (44).

A Fateful Separation

With the late medieval universities, the distinction between faith and reason "became more and more a fateful separation." The profound unity of patristic and medieval thought was sundered by, at the same time, an exaggerated rationalism and a distrust of reason's capacity to reach the highest forms of speculation (45). The nineteenth century was the apogee of philosophy pitted against Christian revelation, with some trying to transpose the contents of Christian faith into structures of dialectical reason, while atheistic humanists constructed new religions in the service of projects that "gave rise to totalitarian systems which were disastrous for humanity." In science, positivism, combined with technological progress and the logic of the market, removes the human person from the center of concern, and results in a nihilism that denies the human possibility of attaining truth (46).

In contemporary culture, philosophy as universal wisdom has been marginalized by "instrumental reason" which is divorced from the search for absolute truth, and ends up by debasing the dignity of reason and turning it against man himself (47). This "rapid survey" of the history of philosophy shows the growing separation of faith and reason. Notable achievements of modern philosophy notwithstanding, reason "has taken side-tracks" and lost sight of the goal of wisdom. "Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling

and experience, and so runs the risk of ceasing to make a universal claim. . . Faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition." Faith and philosophy each have their own autonomy, and the boldness of one must be matched by the boldness of the other (48).

The Church has no philosophy of her own, but respects the autonomy of reason that is by its nature oriented to truth. "A philosophy which did not proceed in the light of reason according to its own principles and methods would serve little purpose." The Church does respond to errors in reason that threaten what has been revealed (49). The Church takes note of philosophical ideas and systems that are incompatible with her faith, which is also a service to philosophy in support of *recta ratio*, "reason reflecting rightly on what is true" (50). Philosophers recognize the need for self-criticism and should know that no philosophical system "can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth." The Church "intervenes to stimulate philosophical enquiry" lest it stray from the path that leads to recognizing the mystery hidden in Christ (51). This encyclical is in continuity with past interventions, notably that of Vatican I in *Dei Filius*, which corrected both the underestimation (in fideism and radical traditionalism) and the overestimation (in rationalism and ontologism) of reason's natural capacities (52). Vatican I taught that faith and reason, revelation and the natural knowledge of God, are distinct but inseparable. Against rationalism, the distinction is emphasized, together with the "transcendence and precedence" of the mysteries of faith. Against fideism, the inseparability is emphasized, which is grounded in the unity of truth, which is, in turn, grounded in the unity of God. "This God could not deny himself, nor could the truth ever contradict the truth" (53). In this century, the Magisterium has cautioned against rationalism and "modernism," as well as errors of reason connected with evolutionism, existentialism, historicism, and Marxism. These past interventions are "an invaluable contribution which should never be forgotten" (54).

"I cannot fail to note with dismay . . . "

Today, old problems return in new forms. There is a deep distrust of reason that leads some to speak of "the end of metaphysics." Theological research frequently succumbs to an uncritical rationalism. There is also a resurgence of fideism, "which fails to recognize the importance of rational knowledge and philosophical discourse for the understanding of faith, indeed the very possibility of belief in God." Fideism is evident in a "biblicism" that neglects the living tradition of the Church or limits scriptural interpretation to one methodology that has its own philosophical underpinnings (55). John Paul urges, "I cannot but encourage philosophers—be they Christian or not—to trust in the power of human reason and not to set themselves too modest goals in their philosophizing. . . . One must not abandon the passion for

ultimate truth. . . . It is faith which stirs reason to reject all isolation and to run risks gladly that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good, and true. Thus faith becomes the convinced and convincing advocate of reason" (56). To this end, Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* ("the one papal document of such authority devoted entirely to philosophy") is still pertinent, especially in "his insistence upon the incomparable value of the philosophy of St. Thomas" (57). That initiative produced a great revival in Thomistic studies (58).

Thomism and Neo-Thomism were not alone, however. A number of Catholic philosophers and schools have produced remarkable syntheses that "have sought to keep alive the great tradition of Christian thought which unites faith and reason" (59). Vatican II, especially in *Gaudium et Spes*, offers "a virtual compendium of the biblical anthropology from which philosophy too draws inspiration." The Council teaches that Christ, the new Adam, "fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling." The Council underscores the importance of philosophy in Christian education, especially in the formation of priests and those preparing for theological studies (60). Unfortunately, this teaching has not always "been followed with the readiness one would wish." "I cannot fail to note with dismay and displeasure that [the] lack of interest in the study of philosophy is shared by not a few theologians." Reasons for this lack of interest include contemporary philosophy's distrust of reason, a disordered preoccupation with the "human sciences," and a misunderstanding of cultural pluralism, especially in relation to non-Western cultures (61). Since the late Middle Ages the Church has understood that "the study of philosophy is fundamental and indispensable" to theological studies and priestly formation. Without philosophical training, there is an inability to dialogue with modern thought and culture or "an indiscriminate acceptance of any kind of philosophy" (62). "It is my task to state principles and criteria which in my judgment are necessary in order to restore a harmonious and creative relationship between theology and philosophy" (63).

Theology is "a reflective and scientific elaboration of the understanding of God's word in the light of faith," and that task demands "recourse to philosophical enquiry" (64). Philosophy's study of the structure of knowledge and personal communication helps theology to both receive and understand faith, while philosophical training is also necessary to understand the thought forms employed by the Magisterium and great theologians of the Church's tradition (65). The *intellectus fidei* recognizes that revelation "enjoys an innate intelligibility, so logically consistent that it can stand as an authentic body of knowledge." This is not only of intellectual interest, but brings to light "the salvific meaning of these propositions" in leading people to share in the mystery of Christ by their assent of faith. Dogmatic theology must articulate the universal meaning of God and salvation "both as a narrative and, above all, in the form of argument." Likewise with moral

theology, which depends in part upon philosophical ethics. "Believing reason needs to acquire a natural, consistent, and true knowledge of those created realities—the world and the human being—which are also the object of divine revelation" (66).

Remaining Open to the New

At the same time, fundamental theology "should show how, in the light of the knowledge conferred by faith, there emerge certain truths which reason, from its own independent enquiry, already grasps." "Although faith, a gift of God, is not based on reason, it can certainly not dispense with it. At the same time . . . reason needs to be reinforced by faith, in order to discover horizons it cannot reach on its own" (67). Moral theology has perhaps an even greater need for philosophy, since "moral theology requires a right philosophical vision of human nature and society, as well as general principles of ethical decision-making" (68). Admittedly, theology needs many other kinds of knowledge, but I emphasize philosophy "lest the prime task of demonstrating the universality of faith's content be abandoned" (69). The Church, commanded to go "to the ends of the earth," has from her beginning known about the encounter of cultures. St. Paul tells the Ephesians, "You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are saints and members of the household of God." The great truth is that "faith's encounter with different cultures has created something new." In the household of God, the "seminal revelation" in all cultures is brought to fulfillment (70).

"Cultures survive and flourish insofar as they remain open to the new." Culture has "an intrinsic capacity to receive divine revelation." As demonstrated by Pentecost, cultural identity is secured and what is implicit "will be made fully explicit in the light of truth." No one culture is normative for revelation; all cultures "are prompted to open themselves to the newness of the gospel's truth and to be stirred by this truth to grow still more" (71). The challenges of "inculturating" the gospel today are "not unlike those faced by the Church in the first centuries." The East, and India in particular, can greatly enrich Christian thought. If this is to happen, we must keep in mind, first, "the universality of the human spirit" despite disparate cultures. Second, the Church cannot forget her "inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought," which is part of God's providential plan for the Church through history. Third, a legitimate defense of the uniqueness of Indian thought cannot mean that "a particular cultural tradition should remain closed in its difference." This is true for all of Asia, and for the traditional cultures of Africa, "which are for the most part transmitted orally" (72).

In all this, the relationship between theology and philosophy is "best construed as a circle." Theology begins with the word of God and has as its

final goal a deeper understanding of that word. Since God's word is truth, the human search for truth—i.e., philosophy pursued according to its own rules—has the same goal. God's word stirs reason to discover new and unsuspected horizons (73). The fruitfulness of this relationship is confirmed by theologian-philosophers whose writings "warrant comparison with the masters of ancient philosophy." For instance, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, Thomas, John Henry Newman, and Antonio Rosmini. Both philosophy and theology are weakened by neglect of such thinkers (74).

Christian Philosophy?

Before Christianity, there was philosophy completely independent of the gospel. Such philosophy had a valid aspiration to be an autonomous enterprise obedient to reason alone. Also today, theology must respect philosophy's "rigorous rational criteria [that are necessary] to guarantee that the results attained are universally valid." Philosophy, on the other hand, should not claim a "self-sufficiency of thought" that refuses "the truth offered by divine revelation, since this precludes access to a deeper knowledge of truth" (75). We must be careful in speaking of "Christian philosophy" since the Church has no official philosophy. The term indicates "a Christian way of philosophizing" that has both subjective and objective aspects. Subjectively, the theological virtue of faith guards against presumption, "the typical temptation of the philosopher." St. Paul, the church fathers, Pascal, and Kierkegaard must be heeded on this score. Objectively, Christian philosophy proposes truths that might not be discovered by unaided reason, although they are not naturally inaccessible to reason. Truths proposed by revelation about anthropology, time, history, event, and sin "broaden reason's scope for action." Much of contemporary philosophy would not exist "without this stimulus of the word of God" (76).

Theology needs philosophy "as a partner in dialogue in order to confirm the intelligibility and universal truth of its claims." From the patristic period on, philosophy was called *ancilla theologiae* (the handmaid of theology), in the same sense that Aristotle said the experimental sciences are "ancillary" to philosophy. Such terminology leads to misunderstanding today, but it underscores the inseparability of theology and philosophy. Theologians who reject philosophy end up in accepting thought structures uncritically, while philosophers who reject theology completely are "forced to master on their own the contents of Christian faith, as has been the case with some modern philosophers" (77).

Here again, St. Thomas is "the guide and model for theological studies" and indeed "for all who seek the truth." "In his thinking, the demands of reason and the power of faith found the most elevated synthesis which human

thought has ever attained, for he could defend the radical newness introduced by revelation while never demeaning the venture which is proper to reason" (78). Philosophy must obey its own rules and principles. Truth, however, can only be one. Revelation does not undermine reason, and reason "should never lose its capacity to question and be questioned." Revelation is "the true point of encounter" between philosophy and theology in the search for "a philosophy consonant with the word of God." This is the common task of believers and nonbelievers alike. Believers are reminded by St. Augustine: "To believe is nothing other than to think with assent. Believers are also thinkers: in believing they think and in thinking they believe. If faith does not think, it is nothing" (79).

Mutual Challenges

(The following chapter, the seventh, deals with the challenges the word of God poses to philosophy, and then the challenges posed to theology.) We and our experience are finite, neither uncreated nor self-generating. God alone is the Absolute. The Bible provides an account of the drama of man, created in the image of God, giving rise to moral evil through the disordered exercise of freedom. The world and human life have meaning and promised fulfillment in the mystery of the Incarnation. "This mystery challenges philosophy in ultimate ways, because reason is summoned to make its own a logic that destroys the walls within which it risks confining itself." In the Incarnate Word, human nature and divine nature are safeguarded in all their autonomy and mutuality, without confusion (80).

Our time is marked by a "crisis of meaning" and increasing fragmentation of knowledge, which often leads to skepticism and nihilism. Philosophy must "recover its sapiential dimension as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life." Otherwise, instrumental reason in the service of technology and utilitarian ends "becomes potentially destructive for the human race" (81). Philosophy should "verify the human capacity to know the truth, to come to a knowledge which can reach objective truth." "Scripture assumes that the human being, though guilty of duplicity and mendacity, can know and grasp the simple truth." In articulating her own faith, the Church needs the help of philosophy "which does not disavow the possibility of a knowledge which is objectively true, even if it is not perfect" (82).

Further, we need a philosophy of "genuinely metaphysical range," addressed to knowledge that transcends the empirical and is "true and certain, albeit imperfect and analogical." The human capacity for self-transcendence requires a philosophy that "moves from phenomenon to foundation" in the task of "mediating the understanding of revelation." Such metaphysics is necessary also to theology, for theology without metaphysics cannot get beyond an analysis of religious experience, and cannot give a

coherent account of universal and transcendent truth (83). Current developments in hermeneutics and linguistic analysis often undermine confidence in the powers of reason. "Faith clearly presupposes that human language is capable of expressing divine and transcendent reality in a universal way—analogically, it is true, but no less meaningfully for that." Were that not the case, there would be no revelation of God but only interpretations of interpretations of human notions about God (84).

"I am well aware," the Pope notes, that this argument goes against the grain of much philosophy today. Philosophy should resume its place "in organic continuity with the great tradition which, beginning with the ancients, passes through the Fathers of the Church and the masters of Scholasticism, and includes the fundamental achievements of modern thought." This tradition is not "a mere remembrance of the past" but the cultural patrimony of all humanity. "It is we who belong to the tradition and we cannot dispose of it at will." Precisely by being rooted in the tradition can we develop for the next millennium "an original, new, and constructive mode of thinking" (85). If that is to happen, some errors and consequent risks must be noted.

Necessary Corrections

"Eclecticism," for instance, appears in both philosophy and theology when ideas are picked from here and there "without concern for their internal coherence," resulting in thought that is neither serious nor scientific (86). Closely connected is "historicism," which, at least implicitly, denies the enduring validity of truth. In theology this is a form of the "modernism" that, trying to make things understandable, "exchanges truth for relevance" (87). Another threat is "scientism," which limits real knowledge to the positive sciences and "relegates religious, theological, ethical, and aesthetic knowledge to the realm of mere fantasy." Metaphysical statements are declared to be meaningless, although "critical epistemology has discredited such a claim" (88). No less dangerous is a form of "pragmatism" that precludes principled moral judgment and supports an idea of democracy in which there is no appeal beyond parliamentary majorities or institutional agencies. It proposes a "one-dimensional vision of the human being" which denies "the great ethical dilemmas and existential analyses of the meaning of suffering and sacrifice, of life and death" (89).

These trends lead to "nihilism," which not only contradicts the word of God but "is a denial of humanity and of the very identity of the human being." To lose touch with objective truth is to lose touch with the ground of human dignity. All that is left is a destructive will to power or despair. Nihilism promises freedom but: "Truth and freedom are either joined together or together they perish in misery" (90). Modern philosophy has notable achievements to its credit, but the irony is noted that the dominant

rationalism of the past has provoked a new irrationalism that radically disputes what was once thought indisputable. This mood is sometimes called "postmodernity," which is an ambiguous term. Yet currents of thought that claim to be postmodern merit attention. Irrational nihilism is understandable in view of the terrible evils experienced in our age. The century began with the rationalist optimism of history as the triumphant progress of reason, and is ending in the temptation to despair. At the same time, however, many still subscribe to the illusion of the omnipotence of scientific and technological progress (91).

Theological Tasks

Turning to the tasks of theology, it must help the Church to evangelize, remembering that its primary duty is to the ultimate truth of revelation. "The Truth, which is Christ, holds out to theology and philosophy alike the prospect of support, stimulation, and increase." The knowledge of a universally valid truth does not encourage intolerance but, on the contrary, is the essential condition for authentic dialogue (92). "The chief purpose of theology is to provide an understanding of revelation and the content of faith." In doing so, theology is committed to an understanding of God's *kenosis*, a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return (93). With the help of philosophy, theology explores the relationship between fact and meaning, meaning and truth. Human language embodies the language of God, "who communicates his own truth with the 'condescension' that mirrors the logic of the incarnation." In interpreting the texts of revelation, the theologian is not limited to "neutral facts" but draws on "the Church's constant reading of these texts over the centuries, a reading which preserves intact their original meaning" (94).

The statements of dogmatic theology, like all human language, are historically and culturally conditioned, "but the human being can express truths which surpass the phenomenon of language." Truth is known in history, "but it also reaches beyond history" (95). Hermeneutical problems are real and complex, but "certain grounding concepts retain their universal epistemological value and thus the truth of the propositions which express them." Otherwise, "philosophy and the sciences could not communicate with one another," nor could they be understood in different cultures. Philosophy should seek to clarify the relationship between conceptual language and truth (96). The *intellectus fidei* requires a philosophy of being, especially in dogmatic theology. The "dogmatic pragmatism" that viewed the truths of faith as mere rules of conduct has been refuted, but there remains the temptation to think of these truths in purely functional terms. If the *intellectus fidei* is to integrate the theological tradition, it must turn to a philosophy that "proposes anew the problem of being"—"a dynamic philosophy that views reality in its ontological, causal, and communicative structures" (97).

With respect to moral theology, the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (The Splendor of Truth) argued that our moral crisis is a "crisis of truth." Conscience is no longer understood as an act of intelligence in discerning the truth, but as an individual right to determine the criteria of good and evil. "Moral theology must turn to a philosophical ethics that looks to the truth of the good," which presupposes a philosophical anthropology and a metaphysics of the good (98). Theology in the Church serves proclamation and catechesis. Catechesis can benefit greatly from philosophical inquiry that clarifies the relationship between truth and life, event and doctrine, transcendent truth and human language. Here, too, reciprocity between philosophy and theology can deepen understanding of the faith (99).

Conclusion

More than a century after Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*, it is important to emphasize the value of philosophy for the understanding of faith and the Church's conviction that faith and reason "mutually support each other" (100). Theology challenges philosophy to be open to "the radical newness found in God's revelation"; in theology, philosophy finds a "communal reflection" that holds together "many different fields of learning and culture within the unity of faith" (101). The mission of the gospel requires that people "discover their capacity to know the truth and their yearning for the ultimate and definitive meaning of existence." The "mediation of philosophy" can lead people to Christ, and thus "they will become more human" (102). In "cultures of ancient Christian heritage," philosophy can contribute to the "new evangelization," preparing the world for the new millennium (103). Christian philosophers should shape arguments in a way that provides common ground with those of other religions and all "who have at heart the renewal of humanity." "A philosophy in which there shines even a glimmer of the truth of Christ" can contribute to "the true and planetary ethics that the world needs now" (104).

John Paul calls on theologians to "enter into a demanding critical dialogue" with philosophy in all its aspects, "whether consonant with the word of God or not." Theologians must remember the words of St. Bonaventure, "that great master of thought and spirituality," who recognized the inadequacy of "reading without repentance, knowledge without devotion, research without the impulse of wonder, prudence without the ability to surrender to joy, action divorced from religion, learning sundered from love, intelligence without humility, study unsustained by divine grace, thought without the wisdom inspired by God" (105).

The Pope appeals to philosophers to have the courage to recover the great tradition of philosophical enquiry into authentic wisdom and truth, being

assured that the Church respects "the rightful autonomy of their discipline." He asks scientists, whose achievements "never cease to amaze us," never to abandon "the sapiential horizon" in which scientific achievements are wedded to philosophy and ethics, "which are the distinctive and indelible mark of the human person" (106). "I summon everyone to look more deeply at the human being, saved in the mystery of Christ's love, and at his unceasing search for truth and meaning." Only within the "horizon of truth" can we understand our freedom and our call "to know and love God as the supreme realization of the true self" (107). Among her many titles, Mary is called "Seat of Wisdom." As Mary offered herself so that "God's Word might take flesh and come among us," so philosophy that offers its "rational and critical resources" in response to the gospel's truth is in no way compromised but sees that "all its enquiries rise to their consummation." The ancient monks called Mary "the table at which faith sits in thought," and so it is with philosophy when it is true to itself (108).

Four Preliminary Observations

The argument of *Fides et Ratio* is breathtaking in its ambition and comprehensiveness. Permit me a few preliminary observations. First, it is a powerful restatement of the radical humanism of Catholic Christianity, a truth that has been so relentlessly pressed by John Paul II. Were this to be the final encyclical of his pontificate, it would be a fitting capstone to the repeated insistence that Jesus Christ is not only the revelation of God to man but also the revelation of man to himself. Second, one is struck by the adamant contention for the unity of truth. The way to truth is "twofold," but it is not, as in some earlier Catholic treatments of faith and reason, two-track. It is not as though faith and reason, revelation and philosophy, belief and knowledge are on separate tracks that finally converge on the one truth. Rather, the transcendent truth, which is revelation, is the horizon and guarantor of the immanent truth of human reason—and all this because *the* truth, Jesus Christ, is the Absolute incarnate in the human project.

Third is the way *Fides et Ratio* criticizes both philosophy and theology. Modern philosophy has lost its nerve, and John Paul urges that it resume its dignity and duty in addressing the big questions that are born in wonder and directed to ultimate meaning. Theologians, on the other hand, are censured on several scores: their false sense of self-sufficiency, their uncritical acceptance of bits and pieces of philosophy without regard to theological consequences, and their violation of the necessary autonomy of the philosophical task. Fourth—and this has enormous significance for evangelization in the next century—*Fides et Ratio* is a very sharp criticism of any and every form of fideism. Anything that pits faith against reason, belief against knowledge, or religious experience against critical intelligence has no place in authentically Christian thought.

John Paul is keenly aware of the postmodernist mood and the idea promoted by some Christians that the collapse of Enlightenment rationalism is a great opportunity for evangelization. He, too, looks forward to the next century as a possible "springtime of evangelization" (*Redemptoris Missio*), but he insists this must not happen on the postmodernist or multiculturalist assumption that the gospel is simply one truth among other truths. Even if it seems to be in the short-term interest of Christianity, any evangelization that seeks to use fideism, or superstition, or irrationalism, or religious emotivism in advancing the gospel is, in fact, a betrayal of the gospel. The Catholic Church, he says, will have none of it. The gospel is universally true—and can be perceived as such by both faith and reason—or it is not true at all. Augustine is right: "If faith does not think, it is nothing." One studies the bold argument of *Fides et Ratio* with this purpose in mind: *Sentire cum ecclesia*—to think with the Church, knowing that to think with the Church begins with thinking.

While We're At It

- Of the people who have had the greatest influence on my life, Arthur Carl Piepkorn is right up there. He was professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, for many years and was a pioneer of the Lutheran- Roman Catholic theological dialogue. Dr. Piepkorn ("the Pieps") died twenty- five years ago on December 13, 1973. There will be a memorial lecture honoring him on Sunday, December 13, at five o'clock at Immanuel Lutheran Church, 88th Street and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan. The lecture is by Professor Robert Louis Wilken of the University of Virginia, another close student of Piepkorn's, with responses by George Lindbeck, William Wiecher, John Damm, and your scribe. For further information call Immanuel Church at (212) 289-8128. The church will also provide a light supper afterwards, but you must make your reservation at least two weeks in advance.
- The Rutherford Institute points out that last December the Supreme Court again did what is prohibited in other public spaces, notably in government schools. In the Great Hall of that august institution was a tree topped by a star, and the annual Christmas party included the singing of traditional Christmas carols. I'm all for it, but one may wonder why this does not violate the separation of church and state. As the Justices would no doubt explain, they, unlike children and ordinary citizens, are not suggestible.
- It's not too often that I agree with Ralph Nader. Matter of fact, it's not too often one hears about him nowadays. But last year at this time he did protest to the DreamWorks movie people an advertisement for their film *Mouse Hunt*. The full- page ad in the *New York Times* was headed, "12 DAYS TILL CHRIS- MOUSE." Nader did not think that

"juxtaposing the name of Jesus Christ with a clever little rodent is just a funny, attention- getting phrase." "What other major religion," he asked, "has been subjected to such crude commercialization with the envelope being pushed further and further from Xmas to Chris- Mouse (a picture designed for family entertainment, no less!)" Some things, said Nader, are "just not done." The head of marketing for DreamWorks, a person with the apt name of Terry Press, wrote back advising Nader, in effect, to lighten up. "As you referenced in your letter, over time Christmas has come to take on a dual meaning." For some it is the birth of Christ, but "to millions around the world— regardless of their faith—it is a season of giving, of peace and joy and laughter." "The ad was certainly not intended to offend anyone's faith; it was meant more as an homage to the carol 'The 12 Days of Christmas.'" Some things just are not done? Get with it, Ralph, we do them all the time. To jolly up the unhappy Mr. Nader, Mr. Press adds in a PS: "For the record, we do not endorse aluminum Christmas trees, or the colorization of *It's a Wonderful Life*." So they are not entirely bereft of a sense of the sacred.

- As a Mexican- American child in Denver, Linda Chavez learned something about the anxieties of ethnicity and trying to figure out where you stand in a world constituted by "others." That is why she is so opposed to a proposal in California that, since most public school students belong to racial and ethnic minorities, the books they read should be written by people like themselves. Ms. Chavez' world was opened up by her housepainter father's encouragement to read the great literature of the Western world. She writes: "Thankfully no one thought to tell me that the authors of such books were all dead white males with whom I had nothing in common. No teacher suggested I'd be better off reading books by second- rate authors who happened to share my ethnicity or gender. It never occurred to my father or me that the Great Books were not a part of our intellectual heritage and tradition. We believed they belonged to us as much as to anyone. Imagine what the diversity crowd would say to the young W. E. B. DuBois were he a student today. DuBois, one of America's great intellectuals, was born in Massachusetts in 1868. At a time when few blacks, even in the North, managed to attend high school much less college, DuBois graduated from Harvard University in 1890. At the age of fourteen, he was already reading the poet Virgil in Latin. As a sophomore in high school, DuBois saw a five- volume set of Lord Macaulay's *History of England*. He 'wanted it fiercely,' he later wrote, and paid for it on the installment plan, twenty- five cents a week—his entire salary. From the Victorian Englishman Thomas Macaulay, DuBois learned a vivid writing style and a love of history that no doubt influenced his later work, including *The World and Africa*, an encyclopedic look at the role Africa played in world history. What both

my father and DuBois knew—and today's diversity mavens seem blind to—is that you can't judge a book by its author's race or sex. The tragedy is that now some educators would relegate young black, Hispanic, and Asian children to an intellectual ghetto they might never escape, all in the name of diversity."

- In 1980, Fouad Ajami of Johns Hopkins published *The Arab Predicament*, still one of the best guides to understanding the personal and cultural pains attending the experience of being left out of history, or at least the history of others who appear to be running the world. Now his *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (Pantheon) is receiving deserved praise. Here he tries hard to be less judgmental, to enter into the world of the left-out, but his conclusions are equally melancholy. This on the response to what is called "the peace process": "Arafat had done well by Oslo; history had given him that rarest of gifts—a second chance. Palestinian nationalism had been rescued, but Arafat had gone into the situation alone, it seemed. Few among the Palestinian intellectual and political class were there for him. He was deserted by some of the very figures of note who had been the standard-bearers of Palestinian nationalism in the preceding three decades. The poet laureate of the Palestinian national movement, Mahmoud Darwish (born in 1942), now living in Paris, gave voice to the disenchantment with the peace in an interview he gave on a visit to Gaza in 1995, when he said that he had felt as though he had returned to Palestine and had not returned, that he had arrived and not arrived, that his exile had not come to an end. The language, he said, had to be modest in the face of this kind of misery. In less poetic terms, the Palestinian-American author Edward Said, a former member of the Palestine National Council and a writer who must be considered the preeminent public intellectual among the Palestinians, condemned the peace of Oslo as an American peace and dismissed Arafat as an enforcer of Israeli rule. The great day on the south lawn of the White House, the celebrated handshake between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, ought to be a 'day of mourning' for all Palestinians, Said wrote. The Arafat regime in Gaza, the Palestine National Authority, was, in Said's view, a security apparatus working in tandem with the Israeli intelligence services. 'People have been tortured to death. Newspapers have been closed. His [Arafat's] opponents are being rounded up. And still he rules, and most of his people either endure that rule silently or try to get a position in it.' A 'quisling' Palestinian regime had arisen in Gaza; the Palestinians had come out empty-handed from this 'Israeli-American peace.'" The book concludes with this: "Vanquished, the Palestinians had hitched a ride on the coattails of a successful Zionist enterprise. As the world batters the modern Arab inheritance, the rhetorical need for anti-Zionism grows. But there rises, too, the recognition that it is

time for the imagination to steal away from Israel and to look at the Arab reality, to behold its own view of the kind of world the Arabs want for themselves." It is, as Fouad Ajami undoubtedly knows, a wan and wistful conclusion, for one fears that the world the Arabs want for themselves is inescapably a world without Israel so long as Israel looms so large in defining their possible worlds. One expects they will continue to have recourse to their dream palace, with continuing forays of violence into a world unamenable to dreams.

- A friend has been rummaging through the *Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* and has come up with some doozies that outrage him and he thinks should outrage me. For instance, British novelist Muriel Spark on John Paul II: "I wouldn't take the Pope too seriously. He's a Pole first, a Pope second, and maybe a Christian third." That's just vulgar nasty, the kind of thing said by minor celebrities who get interviewed and feel the need to say something smart. Thomas Hobbes is very different. He said, "The papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof." That's classy nasty. And worth pondering as the judgment of an eminent seventeenth-century philosopher with views that hardly seemed outrageous at the time. Given the way history is turning out, one wonders what Hobbes would say now. I cannot imagine that three hundred years from now, or thirty years from now, anyone will wonder what Muriel Spark might have said about anything.
- Full of secrets are the archives of the Inquisition and the Congregation for the Index of Prohibited Books, which aimed in the sixteenth century to counter, among others, the Protestant heretics. The secrets are secret no longer, thanks to Josef Cardinal Ratzinger and his archivist, who have opened up the files to serious scholars, among whom is Peter Godman. Writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Godman suggests that the Holy See was not quite up to speed in enforcing orthodoxy. "They pursued this end with methods that will disappoint those who come to the archives expecting to meet the parents of Big Brother. For what one finds is not a monolithic structure of repression but—let it be said with deep affection and profound respect for the *Bel Paese*—Italian organization." A few years after the Index was launched, one censor wrote, "What we need is a halt to printing, so that the Church can catch up with this deluge of publications." Among the diverting documents Godman came across is one from the sixteenth century urging that certain authors be "liberated" from the stigma of prohibition, including a leading member of the Congregation of the Index, now a saint and Doctor of the Church, Robert Bellarmine. The document is signed by one R. Bellarmine. Godman concludes: "As one watches censors proscribing one another, inquisitors keeping an eye on Popes, and authors vying for the privilege of a purge, one tends to think that the simplifications of religious polemic, rampant in

an age of confessional conflict and still influential today, are inadequate to grasp the complexity of this fascinating subject. Perhaps more useful, for those who enter the archives of the Inquisition and Index with an open mind, are that sense of irony, that feeling for human frailty which may enable them to discover there not the beginnings of repression, but the origins of surrealism."

- I have met Norman Mailer only a few times, chiefly during the sixties, when we would run into one another at the countless rallies and demonstrations of what was then simply called "The Movement." Most memorably late one night in a park at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, where I was a delegate, and a totally sloshed Mailer was set upon demonstrating his pugilistic gifts by beating up on a cop or two. A couple of us managed to get him back to his hotel where he wisely passed out. My friend Norman Podhoretz knew Mailer very well, and is doing a book on former friends in which he will be prominently featured. This reflection is occasioned by the appearance of *The Time of Our Time*, a monster anthology (Random House, 1,286 pages) of Mailer's work over fifty years. Some of that work is simply superb, notably the journalism of the sixties such as *The Armies of the Night* and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*. Much of it, as too many lesser talents relish pointing out, is execrable. James Shapiro, who teaches English at Columbia, writes in the *New York Times Book Review* that Mailer often tried too hard to be outrageous in both his writing and his life, frequently making the latter the issue of the former. But his main complaint is that Mailer, now age seventy-five, has never been able to accept the fact that he is a conservative. "Beneath his surface outrageousness, his hipster pose, his advocacy of sexual and social license, even of violence, was a deep conventionality about the family, homosexuality, and, most of all, the relations between the sexes. Mailer may have fled his Brooklyn Jewish roots, but he never quite shook off many of the deep-seated antipathies of the culture in which he was nourished." That is why, writes Shapiro, Mailer has not been a public voice "in the '80s and '90s when more and more Americans [have been] rejecting these values as part of his time and not their own." Mailer "badly misjudged three of the great revolutions of his day: civil rights, gay rights, and the women's movement." Shapiro's reading of American culture and values, notably on the acceptance of homosexuality, speaks volumes about the little world of intellectual fashions in which he lives, but he has a point about Norman Mailer. One suspects that Mailer's driving obsession is to be the baddest of all bad boys, which assumes a world far removed from Shapiro's Morningside Heights, a world in which people understand what it means to be good. Mailer is not a nihilist; he needs the standards he so exuberantly offends. That doesn't mean he is a conservative, but it does mean his celebrity fed off a world in which

most people are. I look forward to seeing whether the more serious Norman agrees.

- The question comes up from time to time, as in a letter received the other day. The writer complains that FT's use of "Catholic" ignores the claims of Orthodox, Anglicans, Old Catholics, Lutherans, and others who think of themselves as Catholic—whether in upper or lower case. Here is what I wrote in response, and perhaps it will be helpful to others who share the writer's concern:

Dear _____,

Thank you for your thoughtful letter with its generous comments on *First Things*.

I understand well the concern you raise. During my many years as a Lutheran pastor who called himself an evangelical catholic, I frequently had occasion to tweak Roman Catholics about their assumed monopoly on the word "Catholic"—whether upper or lower case.

Notwithstanding the legitimate theological claims of others, the (Roman) Catholic Church does teach, and as a Catholic priest I do believe, that the (Roman) Catholic Church is the Church of Jesus Christ most fully and rightly ordered through time. As Vatican Council II makes clear, this is in no way incompatible with recognizing the authentically Christian realities outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church. In addition, the near universal usage in English publications is to refer to the Catholic Church, and everybody knows what is being referred to, even if they dislike the usage. It would be stylistically awkward to be constantly referring to the Roman Catholic Church (or the Church of the Latin Rite, or similar constructions)—plus it might be taken by Catholic readers as a implicit dissent from the Catholic Church's self- understanding. Similarly, we refer to the Orthodox Church without suggesting that there are no other orthodox Christians, and to the Episcopal Church, which surely has no monopoly on bishops.

So the end result is that in *First Things* we speak of the Catholic Church, taking care at the same time to acknowledge the claims and realities outside its boundaries. Admittedly, this is not satisfactory, and that realization should compel us the more urgently to seek the full communion among all his disciples that Christ desires.

- Congratulations to Valery Gergiev, artistic director of the St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre, for being named the first recipient of the annual Philips Excellence in Arts Award. I don't know him personally, but the announcement is in a classy full- page ad that encountered me over breakfast, and I have no reason to doubt that he richly deserves the award, which comes with a \$100,000 donation to the charity of his choice. That's somewhat less impressive when one

considers that the ad, which prominently features the Philips electronics business, cost well over \$60,000, or that "charity" in Russian law is wondrously flexible. What I can't help but wonder about is how much Philips paid the "creative people" who came up with the slogan for the Philips Excellence in Arts Award: "Let's make things better." Apparently that is also the slogan that "embodies the Philips mission." This is not a good way to begin the day, pondering the possibility that our expression of grand notions such as excellence and mission has been reduced to "Let's make things better." It's better than making things worse, of course, but it's hard to imagine that the motto gets the day off to an inspiring start at the Philips factories, never mind the Mariinsky Theatre. "Let's make things better." I'm thinking about it. But not too much, lest I conclude that this item wasn't worth the fifteen minutes it took to write.

- In the world of film and stage, Oscar Wilde is back in a big way. Adam Gopnik, writing in the *New Yorker*, thinks it says something about who obliges whom to be, as they say, understanding: "At a time when gay sensibility has been as much in the ascendant as Jewish sensibility was thirty years ago, the first gay saint naturally assumes a huge role. (Thirty years ago, Updike's utterly typical writer was a Jew in his forties with a block; today, he would be a gay man in his twenties with a screenplay.) It has come to seem as much of an obligation for non-gays to understand gay sensibility as it once was for non-Jews to understand Jewish sensibility, and the obligation is carried out with the same fascination and anxious, not- that- there's- anything- wrong- with- that tolerance mixed with an odd sort of envy, rooted in the realization that, as Nicholson Baker has suggested, gays are fortunate in still having a closet to come out of. Writing is made of exits and entrances."
- I mentioned Huston Smith's incisive observation that science is based on controlled experiment, we can only control what is inferior to us, ergo science excludes by definition God, angels, and anything else not inferior to us. Robert C. McCarthy of Buchanan Dam, Texas, would take the point a step further: "However, another conclusion is also valid and probably more useful inasmuch as it demonstrates the fatal weakness of the medical and social 'sciences' of psychiatry, psychology, sociology, etc. That conclusion is that we cannot conduct a validly controlled experiment on that which is *equal* to us. One human mind cannot successfully identify or exclude the variables involved in the total human nature of another person. It is like scratching a diamond with another diamond. And behavioral studies are merely statistical tabulations without any value content." I'm thinking about it.
- St. Martin's continues to publish a distinctive, if not distinguished, list. There is, for instance, *The Pleasure Principle: Sex, Backlash, and the*

Struggle for Gay Freedom by Michael Bronski, who writes: "For decades, conservative psychoanalysts, religious leaders, and politicians have charged that homosexuality is about nothing more than having sex; that homosexuals are 'obsessed' with sex; that homosexuality is a 'flight' from the responsibilities of 'mature' sexuality. And they are right." That's the point of the "pleasure principle"—pleasure for pleasure's sake. The reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* says Bronski takes on the question of homosexuals and children "forthrightly." I don't think you want to know what that means. The review concludes by noting that before matters of sexuality can be resolved, "sexuality itself and the concept of pleasure must be confronted head on." An editor might have suggested rephrasing that.

- "If God had been indifferent to you he'd have made someone else." I don't know if that will make it past the epistemology police, but it's one of many items for putting on the refrigerator door or pondering in the heart (or both) to be found in *Leaves of Water*, poems by Father Ralph Wright of Saint Louis Abbey (\$12.95), 500 South Mason Road, St. Louis, MO 63141.
- A federal court ruling in the Fourth Circuit upholds Virginia's very modest requirement that parents of teenagers seeking abortions be informed. The parental notification provision was challenged in *Planned Parenthood of the Blue Ridge v. Cambios*. As the individual autonomy project seems to be sweeping the cultural field, the court's language about the "sacred endeavor" of parenthood as "the highest calling in life" is striking. Herewith a passage from the final page of the opinion: "Our Constitution confers no more fundamental rights than those brought into relief by a statute requiring that the mother and father of a teenager with child be informed of the daughter's decision to terminate her pregnancy by abortion. A mother and father who assume the responsibility of the highest calling in life are entitled to the fullest possible measure of not only constitutional solicitude, but constitutional encouragement in their sacred endeavor. They are obliged to know, and they are entitled to know, the life-defining decisions their children face. By the same token, as the Supreme Court has held and recently reaffirmed, there are few rights more fundamental than that of a woman—even a minor—to decide herself whether or not to carry her pregnancy to term. We conclude today, however, that these liberties are fully compatible, each with the other, when the law requires what the Supreme Court itself has repeatedly characterized as 'mere notice' by the child to the parent. To hold otherwise, we are convinced, would be to turn a child from parent, and a parent from child—at the very moment in life when each is most in need of the other. Such a plenary violation of family the Constitution cannot be construed to require. Were it to be so, right would be they who said that with arrogance implacable we had our foundation rent

asunder."

- Here's a happy ending. Recall that Belmont Abbey College in North Carolina returned a \$40,000 grant from Philip Morris in protest against the company's implicit encouragement of sexual promiscuity in its advertising. When the matter was brought to the attention of Geoff Bible, CEO of Philip Morris, he agreed with the college, the offending ad was pulled, and the company issued new guidelines for its advertising. Mr. Bible then persuaded the president of the college to accept the grant after all. The moral of the story, according to the college newsletter: "Stand up for what you believe in—It's worth it." Of course virtue is not always rewarded so neatly, but we have it on the highest authority that it is rewarded.
- Linda Greenhouse wrote the obituary that began on the front page of the *New York Times* and went on and on. "Lewis F. Powell, Jr., the Supreme Court Justice who brought a voice of moderation and civility to an increasingly polarized Court during his fifteen- year tenure, died today at the age of ninety." Relentless support for the unlimited abortion license is, we are given to understand, the mark of moderation and civility. Ms. Greenhouse opines, "Justice Powell did not hesitate to place the Court's weight on the side of those who had nowhere else to turn." Right.
- It was big news in Rome and Israel, but elsewhere it got hardly a mention. In August, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed outrage over the Pope's appointment of a bishop, Boutros Mouallem, in Galilee, claiming that he was too sympathetic to Palestinians. He went so far as to suggest that he might prevent the bishop from taking up his post. Luigi Cardinal Poggi, a long- time Vatican diplomat, commented, "Bishops are the successors of the apostles and it must be the Pope, the vicar of Christ, who names them in complete autonomy." He noted that the idea that a government has the right to approve episcopal nominations went out with the Middle Ages. The new papal nuncio to Israel and Palestine, Archbishop Pietro Sambri, is reportedly calming the waters, and the prime minister has apparently decided not to play Henry IV in a repeat of the investiture controversy of the eleventh century.
- Seldom does headline hype soar so wondrously over the top. I confess to having choked on my breakfast Cheerios when confronted by this headline on the front page of the *Times*: "Mass Found in Elusive Particle: Universe May Never Be the Same." Wow! The universe may never be the same! The story continued: "Among other things, the finding might affect theories about the formation and evolution of galaxies and the ultimate fate of the universe." I love that, putting the ultimate fate of the universe into the category of "among other things." These excitements are occasioned by physicists announcing that they have discovered the existence of mass in an

elusive subatomic particle called the neutrino. Malcolm Browne, the paper's excitable science writer, may be right that this is a very important discovery indeed. But it means the universe will never be the same? If the neutrino has mass today, didn't it have mass yesterday or, say, a billion years ago? Or maybe like Bishop Berkeley's falling tree in the forest, things are not unless we perceive they are. The headline's embrace of a radical theory of the social, in this case scientific, construction of reality seems somewhat overheated. I'm no authority on neutrinos; for all I know the little buggers do have mass, but I expect the universe is sublimely indifferent to our discovery of the fact. At the risk of sounding like an old-fashioned philosophical realist, I think we should be careful about assuming that our consciousness creates reality. A measure of modesty is in order, especially when the ultimate fate of the universe is at stake.

- This item rated twelve column inches in the *Times*. Jason A. Turner, the city's commissioner of human resources, has learned his lesson. In a television interview he discussed why welfare dependency is a bad thing and how working gives a person "a greater measure of personal freedom, independence, and self-sufficiency." Then he said it: "Work makes you free." Immediately, the telephone lines at City Hall and the Anti-Defamation League lit up. Didn't Mr. Turner know that "Work Makes You Free"—*Arbeit macht frei*—was the slogan on the gates of Auschwitz? Said one angry viewer, a Mr. Gilbert Jonas, "Work will make you free? That was the justification by the Gestapo. One does not need to pile this on the people of New York, especially with people here who escaped those camps and, more than that, had relatives who never did." It turns out that neither Mr. Turner nor the interviewer knew the history of the phrase, and the spokesman for ADL offered conditional absolution: "I'm not saying that he used it intentionally as an anti-Semitic remark." Mr. Turner issued the requisite apology. Eternal vigilance is the price of making sure "It" never happens again, and no place is more vigilant than New York. A few days later I caught a movie star with a drug problem being interviewed on the evening news. "My life," she said, "can be summed up in two words: My struggle." *Mein Kampf!* There was nothing on that provocation in the next day's *Times*. I do not say the remark was intentionally anti-Semitic, but one hates to think the ADL may be nodding.
- Herewith another pronouncement from an elevated religious authority on the great evil of consumerism: "In a radically new world of unprecedented technological change, the media, and television in particular, have effectively deprived millions of people of their moral agency, programming them as passive consumers in the slave-like service of a vast economic machine that is out of control. Human

beings have become means to the end of consumption." If true, this is truly alarming, and it has regularly worried me that I am not alarmed about it. Maybe, I thought, I am missing something. So the other evening I made notes of the commercials while watching *The Maltese Falcon* for the enteenth time. I was determined to have a record on how the television monster was turning my mind to mush and reducing me to a slave of consumerism. First, there was a pitch for a zippy BMW, but I live in Manhattan where sensible people don't have cars, so I resisted the impulse to run out and buy one. About a third of the commercials were for forthcoming television shows, aimed at persuading me this is a really neat channel. It's nice that the people there seem proud of their work. There were two pitches for mutual fund operators, both claiming they are good at making money. They would say that, wouldn't they? The Sears company wants me to buy a nifty new wrench they sell. I'll keep it in mind in the event I ever need one. I see there's a pill that relieves headache faster than aspirin, which is good to know. Apparently there is a veritable plague of stomach gas going around, but, fortunately, there are all kinds of new remedies for that. The effectiveness of one of them was conclusively demonstrated with scientific charts and the assurance that doctors recommend it. It didn't say which doctors. I'm told I can get a good price on a Caribbean cruise, and I suppose that would be of interest to people with time on their hands. As for me, I'm busy countering the dehumanizing effects of the consumerist beast. Oops, here's an ad for a pill that relieves genital herpes. What's that doing here? But then I recall reading that nine out of ten "sexually active" Americans have STDs—sexually transmitted (a.k.a. venereal) diseases. Back to Bogart. Nothing like that would happen to him. In the next break, American Express tells me I should be sure to take my card with me if I don't want a boy in Italy to steal my donkey, or something like that. Then there's Delta airlines saying they'll get me there on time, which I know isn't true, but I really didn't expect them to buy television time to fess up to that three hour delay on the flight to San Francisco. Next is an outfit called ACE hardware which has just the tool for digging in the garden, if I had a garden. That is followed by Xerox, which I am told has a color copying machine that works much faster than the competition's. After the deliciously wicked Sidney Greenstreet slips Bogart that mickey, Prudential life insurance delicately hints that a lot of people have not adequately provided for their families. Even the unsophisticated can see that this is in the sneaky service of getting people to buy more life insurance. There are two ads for alternative phone companies that, as best I can make out, will pay me for making all my calls with them. I'm sure there's a catch somewhere. Finally, there is a spot urging people to subscribe to the *New York Times*. I already get it, but I can see how the critics of our radically-

unprecedented- technology- dominated consumerist society might in this case be on to something when they claim advertising is a threat to public health. So that's it, one evening's notes on the dehumanizing assault by the corporate masters of consumerism. Of course, as I assume most people do, I ordinarily hit the mute button during commercials. After this one evening of careful scientific research, I do not say that ours is an age of innocence, but I am inclined to the view that moralists raising alarms about the insidious predations of television advertising turning us into ciphers of consumerism should maybe take a Caribbean cruise. I know where they can get one cheap. As for the movie: Don't trust fat men shopping for birds.

- In *Letters to Gabriel* (Briefly Noted, October), Karen Garver Santorum includes a moment that should not be forgotten. In the Senate her husband Rick Santorum was in 1997 leading the fight on behalf of a ban on partial- birth abortion. Senator Barbara Boxer of California, in opposition, thanked the women who had had such abortions for coming forward with their stories and declared, "They are crying. They are crying because they do not understand how Senators could take away an option. They are crying because they do not believe that those Senators truly understand what this meant for their families." Santorum said in response, "The Senator said she hears the cries of the women outside this Chamber. We would be deafened by the cries of the children who are not here to cry because of this procedure." The *Washington Post* described what happened next: "Republican Sen. Rick Santorum turned to face the opposition and in a high, pleading voice cried out, 'Where do we draw the line? Some people have likened this procedure to an appendectomy. That's not an appendix,' he shouted, pointing to a drawing of a fetus. 'That is not a blob of tissue. It is a baby. It's a baby.' And then, impossibly, in an already hushed gallery, in one of those moments when the floor of the Senate looks like a stage set, with its small wooden desks somehow too small for the matters at hand, the cry of a baby pierced the room, echoing across the chamber from an outside hallway. No one mentioned the cry, but for a few seconds, no one spoke at all."
- One can understand perfectly well the view, associated with certain streams of Calvinism, that in the world to come the saints will rejoice at the sight of the sufferings of those condemned to Hell. The logic is syllogistically perfect: Their condemnation is God's will; the saints rejoice in God's will being done; ergo, the saints rejoice in the sufferings of the damned. One recalls Chesterton's observation that the problem with the mad man is not that he is not logical; it is that he is only logical. This is not to say that those who hold the above view are mad, but the view is perverse. I mention this to introduce a fine reflection of Eamon Duffy, the author of *The Stripping of the Altars* and a new history of the papacy, on the subject of Hell: "For above

everything, we believe in Hell because we can imagine ourselves choosing it. We cannot know the secrets of other people's souls, but we know enough of our own to recognize something within us which shies away from God, something which wants to close our hearts to others. There is no inevitability about our response to God or to other people: hate and fear, as well as love and trust, are close to hand. Hell, in that sense, is a perpetual calling within us, from which only the loving mercy of God holds us back. We can trust in that mercy, but to trust in God's mercy is not the same as taking it for granted. We may hope for salvation for all humankind, even for ourselves: but Hell remains a terrible possibility, the dark side of our freedom. But the last word in all this belongs not with our freedom, but with God's grace. The most passionate modern theologian of Hell was the late Hans Urs von Balthasar, who returned to the possibility of damnation again and again in his writings. For von Balthasar, Christ himself had descended on Good Friday into the heart of human desolation, Christ himself experienced damnation, as he entered the uttermost limits of humanity's alienation from God. Rejecting absolutely the easy optimism which denied the possibility of such loss for every human being, von Balthasar nevertheless insisted that the essence of Christian hope was the prayer that Hell might be utterly empty, that the mercy of God reached down even to those who willed damnation for themselves, plucking them despite themselves into the heart of love. Here, he wrote, 'lies hope for the person who, refusing all love, damns himself. Will not the man who wishes to be totally alone, find beside him in Sheol Someone lonelier still, the Son forsaken by the Father, who will prevent him from experiencing his self- chosen Hell to the end?'"

- A Baptist leader in Brazil observes, "The Catholic Church opted for the poor, but the poor opted for the Pentecostal churches." That's quoted by Father Ronato Poblete of the Centro Bellarmino, a research center in Santiago, Chile. He notes that, while 85 percent of the people of Latin America say they are Catholic, only 15 percent are practicing Catholics and 12 percent are evangelical Protestants. Of course in many parts of the world and throughout history, millions of undeniably devout Catholics do not meet the conventional criteria of "practicing." Yet it is a great encouragement that there is a growing awareness of the challenge of evangelical Protestantism, especially in its Pentecostal variations, in Latin America. They are commonly referred to as the "sects," and Fr. Poblete joins last year's Synod for America held in Rome in urging that that pejorative term be totally rejected. He adds: "I want the last thing I have to say to emphasize the fact that the advancement of the so- called sects has been a gift to the Church. It has taught us valuable lessons: that the great success of their evangelization arises out of the participation of lay people, people

organized into specific jobs with responsibility. They felt needed and a part of the action of their church." Among his suggestions is this: "The Catholic Church invests much money and many years of training in the preparation of its personnel, clerical and otherwise. The Pentecostals, on the other hand, have a trained pastor in a year or two. So we see that the area of personnel training must also be seriously considered by the Church." Recent years have seen a decided upswing in the number of priestly vocations in Latin America, and there is considerable resistance to the idea of reducing the requirements for priestly formation, but it is a subject that warrants careful reflection. It is among the many questions addressed in my forthcoming book, occasioned by the Synod for America, *Appointment in Rome: The Church in America Awakening*, which should be out by the end of the year—maybe even in time to ease your Christmas shopping worries.

- Once again, the nettlesome question of those ads for the *New Oxford Review*. Nettlesome because, as I have said before, I think the magazine is immeasurably better than its ads. I am excruciatingly reluctant to hinder promotion by a publication that I respect, and there is no doubt that we need the income from advertising. That being said, however, the ad that ran in our November issue was simply beyond the pale. Whatever the derelictions of liberalism, and they are many, it is simply not true, as the ad claimed, that "liberals . . . would love to make every woman a whore" and embrace the goal of "Every gal a slut." I did not see the ad in advance and I apologize for its appearance. Of course the editors do not agree with every claim made by an advertiser. Most obviously, a book publisher may hype a book that we think thoroughly wrongheaded. We cannot and would not require that advertisers agree with all our judgments. We can and will make judgments about what is mean-spirited, malicious, violative of good taste, or seriously false. Yes, making such judgments is difficult, but that's why editors are paid such princely salaries. With the cooperation of our advertisers, we hope the necessity for such judgments will be few and far between.
- We will be pleased to send a sample issue of this journal to people you think are likely subscribers. Please send names and addresses to *First Things*, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010 (or e-mail to Ravaughan@aol.com). On the other hand, if they're ready to subscribe, call toll-free 1-800-783-4903.

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