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Editorial

'What is the human being?' is one of the great questions of the twentieth century. The question was thrust on us by growing knowledge of the place of our solar system in a galaxy of billions of stars, and of that galaxy among billions of others, and also of our place in the evolutionary unfolding of life on our tiny planet. Philosophers and theologians have attempted to address the riddle of the human in books on 'anthropology,' but it proves to be a slippery topic. Pope Francis's recent letter reminds us how much Literature has contributed to our current understanding of human nature and how little the Christian preacher can afford to neglect it.

Writers whose vision of life seemed unacceptably uncanny at first gradually imposed themselves as authoritative teachers of new ways of seeing, so that adjectives such as Dostoevskian, Kafkaesque, Rilkean, and Proustian have entered our common vocabulary. Romano Guardini, the subject of Pope Francis's graduate studies, was perhaps the Catholic thinker who responded most sensitively to the voice of modern humanity emerging in these strange writers, including also Blaise Pascal, whom Pope Francis and Jean-Luc Marion see as a proleptic figure in the encounter of the Gospel with modern humanity. A Guardini conference held in the Viennese region in May this year had the title: 'Man, "a blueprint to something monstrous"' ('*Der Mensch—"ein Entwurf auf etwas Ungeheures hin*"'). This sounds disturbingly Nietzschean, the human as something to be overcome, to reach the over-human. Yet humanity does evolve, taking strange new shapes, not only through technology, but also in the intimate domain most subtly mapped (and created) in literature. Humanity is an unfinished adventure, learning from its terrible mistakes, developing new resources of feeling and imagination.

A young Czech hotel manager showed me his grandfather's concentration camp number which he had tattooed on his arm. Since God had remained silent through all the tragedies his family had endured in the two World Wars and under the Soviet regime, he saw no alternative to atheism. Yet he remarked ruefully that no one had spoken to him of God. The engagement with Literature urged by Pope Francis could be a component in shaping a more effective missionary speech. Literary critics are hungry to break out of their stifling frameworks, in order to recover the human and spiritual depth of their studies, while preachers tire of the boilerplate rhetoric of standard apologetic. Their mutual engagement in free, open contemplation of the human and the traditions of the divine could generate a tremendously creative cultural renewal, replacing impoverished secularism with a civilization joyfully open to the full depth of what the words 'humanity' and 'divinity' point to.

Joseph S. O'Leary

Pope Francis

The Role of Literature in Formation

1. I had originally chosen to give this Letter a title referring to priestly formation. On further reflection, however, this subject also applies to the formation of all those engaged in pastoral work, indeed of all Christians. What I would like to address here is the value of reading novels and poems as part of one's path to personal maturity.

2. Often during periods of boredom on holiday, in the heat and quiet of some deserted neighbourhood, finding a good book to read can provide an oasis that keeps us from other choices that are less wholesome. Likewise, in moments of weariness, anger, disappointment or failure, when prayer itself does not help us find inner serenity, a good book can help us weather the storm until we find peace of mind. Time spent reading may well open up new interior spaces that help us to avoid becoming trapped by a few obsessive thoughts that can stand in the way of our personal growth. Indeed, before our present unremitting exposure to social media, mobile phones and other devices, reading was a common experience, and those who went through it know what I mean. It is not something completely outdated.

3. Unlike audio-visual media, where the product is more self-contained and the time allowed for "enriching" the narrative or exploring its significance is usually quite restricted, a book demands greater personal engagement on the part of its reader. Readers in some sense rewrite a text, enlarging its scope through their imagination, creating a whole world by bringing into play their skills, their memory, their dreams and their personal history, with all its drama and symbolism. In this way, what emerges is a text quite different from the one the author intended to write. A literary work is thus a living and ever-fruitful text, always capable of speaking in different ways and producing an original synthesis on the part of each of its readers. In our reading, we are enriched by what we receive from the author and this allows us in turn to grow inwardly, so that each new work we read will renew and expand our worldview.

4. For this reason, I very much appreciate the fact that at least some seminaries have reacted to the obsession with "screens" and with toxic, superficial and violent fake news, by devoting time and attention to literature. They have done this by setting aside time for tranquil reading and for discussing books, new and old, that continue to have much to say to us. Regrettably, however, a sufficient grounding in literature is not generally part of programmes of formation for the ordained ministry. Literature is often considered merely a form of entertainment, a "minor art" that need not belong to the education of future priests and their preparation for pastoral ministry. With few exceptions, literature is considered non-essential. I consider it

important to insist that such an approach is unhealthy. It can lead to the serious intellectual and spiritual impoverishment of future priests, who will be deprived of that privileged access which literature grants to the very heart of human culture and, more specifically, to the heart of every individual.

5. With this Letter, I would like to propose a radical change of course. In this regard, I would agree with the observation of one theologian that, "literature… originates in the most irreducible core of the person, that mysterious level [of their being]… Literature is life, conscious of itself, that reaches its full self-expression through the use of all the conceptual resources of language".[1]

6. Literature thus has to do, in one way or another, with our deepest desires in this life, for on a profound level literature engages our concrete existence, with its innate tensions, desires and meaningful experiences.

7. As a young teacher, I discovered this with my students. Between 1964 and 1965, at the age of 28, I taught literature at a Jesuit school in Santa Fe. I taught the last two years of high school and had to ensure that my pupils studied *El Cid*. The students were not happy; they used to ask if they could read García Lorca instead. So I decided that they could read *El Cid* at home, and during the lessons I would discuss the authors the students liked best. Of course, they wanted to read contemporary literary works. Yet, as they read those works that interested them at that moment, they developed a more general taste for literature and poetry, and thus they moved on to other authors. In the end, our hearts always seek something greater, and individuals will find their own way in literature.[2] I, for my part, love the tragedians, because we can all embrace their works as our own, as expressions of our own personal drama. In weeping for the fate of their characters, we are essentially weeping for ourselves, for our own emptiness, shortcomings and loneliness. Naturally, I am not asking you to read the same things that I did. Everyone will find books that speak to their own lives and become authentic companions for their journey. There is nothing more counterproductive than reading something out of a sense of duty, making considerable effort simply because others have said it is essential. On the contrary, while always being open to guidance, we should select our reading with an open mind, a willingness to be surprised, a certain flexibility and readiness to learn, trying to discover what we need at every point of our lives.

Faith and culture

8. Literature also proves essential for believers who sincerely seek to enter into dialogue with the culture of their time, or simply with the lives and experiences of other people. With good reason, the Second Vatican Council observed that, "literature and art… seek to penetrate our nature" and "throw light on our suffering and joy, our needs and potentialities".[3] Indeed, literature takes its cue from the realities of our daily life, its passions and events, our "actions, work, love, death and all the poor things that fill life".[4]

9. How can we reach the core of cultures ancient and new if we are unfamiliar with, disregard or dismiss their symbols, messages, artistic expressions and the stories with which they have captured and evoked their loftiest ideals and aspirations, as well as their deepest sufferings, fears and passions? How can we speak to the hearts of men and women if we ignore, set aside or fail to appreciate the "stories" by which they sought to express and lay bare the drama of their lived experience in novels and poems?

10. The Church, in her missionary experience, has learned how to display all her beauty, freshness and novelty in her encounter – often through literature – with the different cultures in which her faith has taken root, without hesitating to engage with and draw upon the best of what she has found in each culture. This approach has freed her from the temptation to a blinkered, fundamentalist self-referentiality that would consider a particular cultural-historical "grammar" as capable of expressing the entire richness and depth of the Gospel.[5] Many of the doomsday prophecies that presently seek to sow despair are rooted precisely in such a belief. Contact with different literary and grammatical styles will always allow us to explore more deeply the polyphony of divine revelation without impoverishing it or reducing it to our own needs or ways of thinking.

11. It was thus no coincidence that Christian antiquity, for example, clearly realized the need for a serious engagement with the classical culture of the time. Basil of Caesarea, one of the Eastern Church Fathers, in his *Discourse to the Young*, composed between 370 and 375, and most likely addressed to his nieces and nephews, extolled the richness of classical literature produced by *hoi éxothen* ("those outside"), as he called the pagan authors. He saw this both in terms of its argumentation, that is, its *lógoi* (discourses), useful for theology and exegesis, and its ethical content, namely the *práxeis* (acts, conduct) helpful for the ascetic and moral life. Basil concluded this work by urging young Christians to consider the classics as an *ephódion* ("viaticum") for their education and training, a means of "profit for the soul" (IV, 8-9). It was precisely from that encounter between Christianity and the culture of the time that a fresh presentation of the Gospel message emerged.

12. Thanks to an evangelical discernment of culture, we can recognize the presence of the Spirit in the variety of human experiences, seeing the seeds of the Spirit's presence *already* planted in the events, sensibilities, desires and profound yearnings present within hearts and in social, cultural and spiritual settings. We can see this, for example, in the approach taken by Paul before the Areopagus, as related in the Acts of the Apostles (17:16-34). In his address, Paul says of God: "'In him we live and move and have our being'; and as some of your own poets have said, 'We too are his offspring'." (*Acts* 17:28). This verse contains two quotations: one indirect, from the poet Epimenides (sixth century B.C.E.), and the other direct, from the *Phaenomena* of the poet Aratus of Soli (third century B.C.E.), who wrote of the constellations and the signs of good and bad weather. Here, "Paul reveals that he is a 'reader' while

also demonstrating his method of approaching the literary text, which is an evangelical discernment of culture. The Athenians dismiss him as a *spermologos*, a 'babbler', but literally 'a gatherer of seeds'. What was surely meant to be an insult proved, ironically, to be profoundly true. Paul gathered the seeds of pagan poetry and, overcoming his first impressions (cf. *Acts* 17:16), acknowledges the Athenians to be 'extremely religious' and sees in the pages of their classical literature a veritable *praeparatio evangelica*".[6]

13. What did Paul do? He understood that "literature brings to light the abysses within the human person, while revelation and then theology take over to show how Christ enters these depths and illumines them".[7] In the face of these depths, literature is thus a "path"[8] to helping shepherds of souls enter into a fruitful dialogue with the culture of their time.

Never a disembodied Christ

14. Before exploring the specific reasons why the study of literature should be encouraged in the training of future priests, I would first like to say something about the contemporary religious landscape. "The return to the sacred and the quest for spirituality which mark our own time are ambiguous phenomena. Today, our challenge is not so much atheism as the need to respond adequately to many people's thirst for God, lest they try to satisfy it with alienating solutions or with a disembodied Jesus".[9] The urgent task of proclaiming the Gospel in our time demands that believers, and priests in particular, ensure that everyone be able to encounter *Jesus Christ made flesh, made man, made history*. We must always take care never to lose sight of the "flesh" of Jesus Christ: that flesh made of passions, emotions and feelings, words that challenge and console, hands that touch and heal, looks that liberate and encourage, flesh made of hospitality, forgiveness, indignation, courage, fearlessness; in a word, love.

15. It is precisely at this level that familiarity with literature can make future priests and all pastoral workers all the more sensitive to the full humanity of the Lord Jesus, in which his divinity is wholly present. In this way, they can proclaim the Gospel in a way that enables everyone to experience the truth of the Second Vatican Council's teaching that, "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear".[10] This is not the mystery of some abstract humanity, but that of all men and women, with their hurts, desires, memories and hopes that are a concrete part of their lives.

A great good

16. From a practical point of view, many scientists argue that the habit of reading has numerous positive effects on people's lives, helping them to acquire a wider vocabulary and thus develop broader intellectual abilities. It also stimulates their imagination and creativity, enabling them to learn to tell

their stories in richer and more expressive ways. It also improves their ability to concentrate, reduces levels of cognitive decline, and calms stress and anxiety.

17. Even more, reading prepares us to understand and thus deal with various situations that arise in life. In reading, we immerse ourselves in the thoughts, concerns, tragedies, dangers and fears of characters who in the end overcome life's challenges. Perhaps too, in following a story to the end, we gain insights that will later prove helpful in our own lives.

18. In this effort to encourage reading, I would mention two texts by well-known authors, who, in a few words, have much to teach us:

Novels unleash "in us, in the space of an hour, all the possible joys and misfortunes that, in life, it would take us entire years to know even slightly, and of which the most intense would never be revealed to us because the slowness with which they occur prevents us from perceiving them".[11]

"In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do".[12]

19. However, it is not my intention to focus solely on the personal advantages to be drawn from reading, but to reflect on the most important reasons for encouraging a renewed love for reading.

Listening to another person's voice

20. When I think of literature, I am reminded of what the great Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges[13] used to tell his students, namely that the most important thing is simply to read, to enter into direct contact with literature, to immerse oneself in the living text in front of us, rather than to fixate on ideas and critical comments. Borges explained this idea to his students by saying that at first they may understand very little of what they are reading, but in any case they are hearing "another person's voice". This is a definition of literature that I like very much: *listening to another person's voice*. We must never forget how dangerous it is to stop listening to the voice of other people when they challenge us! We immediately fall into self-isolation; we enter into a kind of "spiritual deafness", which has a negative effect on our relationship with ourselves and our relationship with God, no matter how much theology or psychology we may have studied.

21. This approach to literature, which makes us sensitive to the mystery of other persons, teaches us how to touch their hearts. Here, I think of the courageous plea that Saint Paul VI made to artists and thus also to writers on 7 May 1964: "We need you. Our ministry needs your cooperation. For as you know, our ministry is to preach, and to ensure that the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of the ineffable, of God, is accessible and intelligible, indeed moving. And you are masters in this work of rendering the invisible world in accessible and intelligible ways".[14] This is the point: the task of believers, and

of priests in particular, is precisely to "touch" the hearts of others, so that they may be opened to the message of the Lord Jesus. In this great task, the contribution that literature and poetry can offer is of incomparable value.

22. T.S. Eliot, the poet whose poetry and essays, reflecting his Christian faith, have an outstanding place in modern literature, perceptively described today's religious crisis as that of a widespread emotional incapacity.[15] If we are to believe this diagnosis, the problem for faith today is not primarily that of believing more or believing less with regard to particular doctrines. Rather, it is the inability of so many of our contemporaries to be profoundly moved in the face of God, his creation and other human beings. Here we see the importance of working to healing and enrich our responsiveness. On returning from my Apostolic Journey to Japan, I was asked what I thought the West has to learn from the East. My response was, "I think that the West lacks a bit of poetry".[16]

A "training in discernment"

23. What profit, then, does a priest gain from contact with literature? Why is it necessary to consider and promote the reading of great novels as an important element in priestly *paideia*? Why is it important for us, in the training of candidates for the priesthood, to recover Karl Rahner's insight that there is a profound spiritual affinity between the priest and the poet?[17]

24. Let us try to answer these questions by listening to what the German theologian has to tell us.[18] For Rahner, the words of the poet are full of nostalgia, as it were, they are like "gates into infinity, gates into the incomprehensible. They call upon that which has no name. They stretch out to what cannot be grasped". Poetry "does not itself give the infinite, it does not bring and contain *the* infinite". That is the task of the word of God and, as Rahner goes on to say, "the poetic word calls upon the word of God".[19] For Christians, the Word is God, and all our human words bear traces of an intrinsic longing for God, a tending towards that Word. It can be said that the truly poetic word participates analogically in the Word of God, as the Letter to the Hebrews clearly states (cf. *Heb* 4:12-13).

25. In light of this, Karl Rahner can draw a striking parallel between the priest and the poet: the word "alone can redeem that which constitutes the ultimate imprisonment of all realities which are not expressed in word: the dumbness of their reference to God".[20]

26. Literature, then, sensitizes us to the relationship between *forms of expression* and *meaning*. It offers *a training in discernment*, honing the capacity of the future priest to gain insight into his own interiority and into the world around him. Reading thus becomes the "path" leading him to the truth of his own being and the occasion for a process of spiritual discernment that will not be without its moments of anxiety and even crisis. Indeed, numerous pages of literature correspond to what Saint Ignatius calls spiritual "desolation".

27. This is how Ignatius explains it: "I call desolation darkness of the soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord".[21]

28. The difficulty or tedium that we feel in reading certain texts is not necessarily bad or useless. Ignatius himself observed that in "those who are going from bad to worse", the good spirit works by provoking restlessness, agitation and dissatisfaction.[22] This would be the literal application of the first Ignatian rule for the discernment of spirits, which deals with those who "go from one mortal sin to another". In such persons the good spirit, by "making use of the light of reason will rouse the sting of conscience and fill them with remorse",[23] and in this way will lead them to goodness and beauty.

29. It is clear, then, that the reader is not simply the recipient of an edifying message, but a person challenged to press forward on a shifting terrain where the boundaries between salvation and perdition are not *a priori* obvious and distinct. Reading, as an act of "discernment", directly involves the reader as both the "subject" who reads and as the "object" of what is being read. In reading a novel or a work of poetry, the reader actually experiences "being read" by the words that he or she is reading.[24] Readers can thus be compared to players on a field: they play the game, but the game is also played through them, in the sense that they are totally caught up in the action.[25]

Attention and digestion

30. As far as content is concerned, we should realize that literature is like "a telescope", to use a well-known image of Marcel Proust.[26] As such, it is pointed at beings and things, and enables us to realize "the immense distance" that separates the totality of human experience from our perception of it. "Literature can also be compared to a photo lab, where pictures of life can be processed in order to bring out their contours and nuances. This is what literature is 'for': it helps us to 'develop' the picture of life"[27], to challenge us about its meaning, and, in a word, to *experience life* as it is.

31. Our usual view of the world, however, tends to be "telescoped" and narrowed by the pressure exerted on us by our many practical and short-term objectives. Even our commitment to service – liturgical, pastoral and charitable – can become focused only on goals to be achieved. Yet, as Jesus reminds us in the parable of the sower, the seed needs to fall on deep soil to ripen fruitfully over time, without being choked by rocky soil or thorns (*Mt* 13:18-23). There is always the risk that an excessive concern for efficiency will dull discernment, weaken sensitivity and ignore complexity. We desperately need to counterbalance this inevitable temptation to a frenetic and uncritical lifestyle by stepping back, slowing down, taking time to look and listen. This can happen when a person simply stops to read a book.

32. We need to rediscover ways of relating to reality that are more welcoming, not merely strategic and aimed purely at results, ways that allow us to experience the infinite grandeur of being. A sense of perspective, leisure and freedom are the marks of an approach to reality that finds in literature a privileged, albeit not exclusive, form of expression. Literature thus teaches us how to look and see, to discern and explore the reality of individuals and situations as a mystery charged with a surplus of meaning that can only be partially understood through categories, explanatory schemes, linear dynamics of causes and effects, means and ends.

33. Another striking image for the role of literature comes from the activity of the human body, and specifically the act of digestion. The eleventh-century monk William of Saint-Thierry and the seventeenth-century Jesuit Jean-Joseph Surin developed the image of a cow chewing her cud – *ruminatio* – as an image of contemplative reading. Surin referred to the "stomach of the soul", while the Jesuit Michel De Certeau has spoken of an authentic "physiology of digestive reading".[28] Literature helps us to reflect on the meaning of our presence in this world, to "digest" and assimilate it, and to grasp what lies beneath the surface of our experience. Literature, in a word, serves to interpret life, to discern its deeper meaning and its essential tensions.[29]

Seeing through the eyes of others

34. In terms of the use of language, reading a literary text places us in the position of "seeing through the eyes of others",[30] thus gaining a breadth of perspective that broadens our humanity. We develop an imaginative empathy that enables us to identify with how others see, experience and respond to reality. Without such empathy, there can be no solidarity, sharing, compassion, mercy. In reading we discover that our feelings are not simply our own, they are universal, and so even the most destitute person does not feel alone.

35. The marvellous diversity of humanity, and the diachronic and synchronic plurality of cultures and fields of learning, become, in literature, a language capable of respecting and expressing all their variety. At the same time, they translate into a symbolic grammar that makes them meaningful to us, not foreign but shared. The uniqueness of literature lies in the fact that it conveys the richness of experience not by objectifying it as in the descriptive models of the sciences or the judgements of literary criticism, but by expressing and interpreting its deeper meaning.

36. When we read a story, thanks to the descriptive powers of the author, each of us can see before our eyes the weeping of an abandoned girl, an elderly woman pulling the covers over her sleeping grandson, the struggles of a shopkeeper trying to eke out a living, the shame of one who bears the brunt of constant criticism, the boy who takes refuge in dreams as his only escape from a wretched and violent life. As these stories awaken faint echoes of our own

inner experiences, we become more sensitive to the experiences of others. We step out of ourselves to enter into their lives, we sympathize with their struggles and desires, we see things through their eyes and eventually we become companions on their journey. We are caught up in the lives of the fruit seller, the prostitute, the orphaned child, the bricklayer's wife, the old crone who still believes she will someday find her prince charming. We can do this with empathy and at times with tenderness and understanding.

37. As Jean Cocteau wrote to Jacques Maritain: "Literature is impossible. We must get out of it. No use trying to get out through literature; only love and faith enable us to go out of ourselves".[31] Yet can we ever really go out of ourselves if the sufferings and joys of others do not burn in our hearts? Here, I would say that, for us as Christians, nothing that is human is indifferent to us.

38. Literature is not relativistic; it does not strip us of values. The symbolic representation of good and evil, of truth and falsehood, as realities that in literature take the form of individuals and collective historical events, does not dispense from moral judgement but prevents us from blind or superficial condemnation. As Jesus tells us, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" (*Mt* 7:3).

39. In reading about violence, narrowness or frailty on the part of others, we have an opportunity to reflect on our own experiences of these realities. By opening up to the reader a broader view of the grandeur and misery of human experience, literature teaches us patience in trying to understanding others, humility in approaching complex situations, meekness in our judgement of individuals and sensitivity to our human condition. Judgement is certainly needed, but we must never forget its limited scope. Judgement must never issue in a death sentence, eliminating persons or suppressing our humanity for the sake of a soulless absolutizing of the law.

40. The wisdom born of literature instils in the reader greater perspective, a sense of limits, the ability to value experience over cognitive and critical thinking, and to embrace a poverty that brings extraordinary riches. By acknowledging the futility and perhaps even the impossibility of reducing the mystery of the world and humanity to a dualistic polarity of true vs false or right vs wrong, the reader accepts the responsibility of passing judgement, not as a means of domination, but rather as an impetus towards greater listening. And at the same time, a readiness to partake in the extraordinary richness of a history which is due to the presence of the Spirit, but is also given as a grace, an unpredictable and incomprehensible event that does not depend on human activity, but redefines our humanity in terms of hope for salvation.

The spiritual power of literature

41. I trust that, with these brief reflections, I have emphasized the role that literature can play in educating the hearts and minds of pastors and future pastors. Literature can greatly stimulate the free and humble exercise

of our use of reason, a fruitful recognition of the variety of human languages, a broadening of our human sensibilities, and finally, a great spiritual openness to hearing the Voice that speaks through many voices.

42. Literature helps readers to topple the idols of a self-referential, falsely self-sufficient and statically conventional language that at times also risks polluting our ecclesial discourse, imprisoning the freedom of the Word. The literary word is a word that sets language in motion, liberates and purifies it. Ultimately, it opens that word to even greater expressive and expansive vistas. It opens our human words to welcome the Word that is already present in human speech, not when it sees itself as knowledge that is already full, definitive and complete, but when it becomes a listening and expectation of the One who comes *to make all things new* (cf. *Rev* 21:5).

43. Finally, the spiritual power of literature brings us back to the primordial task entrusted by God to our human family: the task of "naming" other beings and things (cf. *Gen* 2:19-20). The mission of being the steward of creation, assigned by God to Adam, entailed before all else the recognition of his own dignity and the meaning of the existence of other beings. Priests are likewise entrusted with this primordial task of "naming", of bestowing meaning, of becoming instruments of communion between creation and the Word made flesh and his power to shed light on every dimension of our human condition.

44. The affinity between priest and poet thus shines forth in the mysterious and indissoluble sacramental union between the divine Word and our human words, giving rise to a ministry that becomes a service born of listening and compassion, a charism that becomes responsibility, a vision of the true and the good that discloses itself as beauty. How can we fail to reflect on the words left us by the poet Paul Celan: "Those who truly learn to see, draw close to what is unseen".[32]

Given in Rome, at Saint John Lateran, on 17 July in the year 2024, the twelfth of my Pontificate.

FRANCIS

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[1] R. LATOURELLE, 'Literature', in R. LATOURELLE & R. FISICHELLA, *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology,* New York 2000, 604.

[2] Cf. A. SPADARO, "J. M. Bergoglio, il 'maestrillo' creativo. Intervista all'alunno Jorge Milia", in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2014 I 523-534.

[3] SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes,* 62.

[4] K. RAHNER, "Il futuro del libro religioso", in *Nuovi saggi II*, Roma 1968, 647.

[5] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium,* 117.

[6] A. SPADARO, *Svolta di respiro. Spiritualità della vita contemporanea*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 101.

[7] R. LATOURELLE, 'Literature', in R. LATOURELLE & R. FISICHELLA, *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology,* New York 2000, 603.

[8] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Artists,* 4 April 1999, 6.

[9] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 89.

[10] SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern Word *Gaudium et Spes,* 22.

[11] M. PROUST, *À la recherche du temps perdu - Du côté de chez Swann*, B. Grasset, Paris 1914, 104-105.

[12] C.S. LEWIS, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 89.

[13] Cf. J.L. BORGES, *Borges*, *Oral*, Buenos Aires 1979, 22.

[14] SAINT PAUL VI, *Homily*, Mass with Artists, Sistine Chapel, 7 May 1964.

[15] Cf. T.S. ELIOT, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, London 1946, 30.

[16] *Press Conference on the Return Flight to Rome*, Apostolic Journey to Thailand and Japan, 26 November 2019.

[17] Cf. A. SPADARO, *La grazia della parola. Karl Rahner e la poesia*, Milano, Jaca Book, 2006.

[18] Cf. K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. III, London 1967, 294-317.

[19] *Ibid*. 316-317.

[20] *Ibid*. 302.

[21] SAINT IGNATIUS LOYOLA, *Spiritual Exercises,* n. 317.

[22] Cf. *ibid*., n. 335.

[23] *Ibid*., n. 314.

[24] Cf. K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. III, London 1967, 299.

[25] Cf. A SPADARO, *La pagina che illumina. Scrittura creativa come esercizio spirituale*, Milano, Ares, 2023, 46-47.

[26] M. PROUST, *À la recherche du temps perdu*. *Le temps retrouvé*, Vol. III, Paris 1954, 1041.

[27] A SPADARO, *La pagina che illumina. Scrittura creativa come esercizio spirituale*, Milano, Ares, 2023, 14.

[28] M. DE CERTEAU, *Il parlare angelico. Figure per una poetica della lingua (Secoli XVI e XVII)*, Firenze 1989, 139 ff.

[29] A SPADARO, *La pagina che illumina. Scrittura creativa come esercizio spirituale*, Milano, Ares, 2023, 16.

[30] Cf. C.S. LEWIS, *An Experiment in Criticism*.

[31] J. COCTEAU – J. MARITAIN, *Dialogo sulla fede*, Firenze, Passigli, 1988, 56; Cf. A SPADARO, *La pagina che illumina. Scrittura creativa come esercizio spirituale*, Milano, Ares, 2023, 11-12.

[32] P. CELAN, *Microliti*, Milano 2020, 101.

Jean-Luc Marion

Pascal's Three Orders: What the Heart Sees

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As a scientist, Pascal was aware of how hugely the known physical universe had expanded in his time, and expressed terror at its immensity: '*Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.*' He also knew the power of the mind, shown in the scientific revolution, its power to know the universe though it could crush 'the thinking reed,' and its power to know itself, shown in the modern philosophy founded by Descartes. As a man of great religious depth, he also knew the power of Grace, the supernatural, and charity. His fragment on the 'three orders' gives concentrated expression to his experience at the crossing of these three worlds. To measure the greatness of his thought, beyond the usual clichés and anecdotes, we can hardly do better than begin by attentively reading one of his texts and seeking to understand it. Here then is the fragment on the 'three orders':

> The infinite distance from bodies to minds is a figure of the infinitely more infinite distance from minds to charity, for charity is supernatural.
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> None of the splendor of greatness has any luster for people who are engaged in the pursuits of the mind.
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> The greatness of those who pursue the life of the mind is invisible to kings, to the rich, to captains, to all these great ones of the flesh.
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> The greatness of wisdom, which is nothing if not of God, is invisible to the carnal and to the intellectual. They are three different orders, by their nature.
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> Great geniuses have their brilliance, their greatness, their victory, and their luster, and have no need of carnal greatness, with which they have no affinity. They are seen not by the eyes, but by minds.

> Saints have their dominion, their brilliance, their victory, and their luster, and have no need of carnal or intellectual greatness, with which they have no relation, for they add nothing to it nor take anything from it. They are seen by God and the angels and not by bodies or curious minds. God suffices for them.
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> Archimedes, without any brilliance, would be equally venerated. He did not conduct battles for the eyes, but he provided all minds with his inventions. O how he shone to the minds.
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> J. C. without goods, without any external production of science, is in his order of holiness. He gave no inventions. He did not reign, but was humble, patient, holy, holy, holy to God, terrible to demons, without any sin. O how he came with great pomp and a prodigious magnificence to the eyes of the heart and which see wisdom.
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> How useless it would have been for Archimedes to act like a prince in his books of geometry, even though he was one.
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> It would have been pointless for Our Lord Jesus Christ to shine in his reign of holiness, to come as a king, but he did come in the radiance of his order.
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> It is quite ridiculous to be scandalized by the lowliness of Jesus Christ, as if this lowliness were of the same order as that of the greatness which he came to show.
>
> Let us consider this greatness in his life, in his passion, in his obscurity, in his death, in the election of his people, in their abandonment, in his secret resurrection and in the rest. We will see it so great that we will have no reason to be scandalized by a lowliness that is not there.
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> But there are some who can only admire carnal greatness as if there were no spiritual greatness, who only admire spiritual greatness as if there were no infinitely higher greatness in wisdom.
>
> All bodies, the firmament, the stars, the earth and its kingdoms, are not worth the least of minds. For the mind knows all this, and itself, and the bodies nothing.
>
> All bodies together and all minds together and all their productions are not worth the least movement of charity. Of an infinitely higher order.
>
> Of all the bodies together it would not be possible to make a little thought succeed. That is impossible and of another order.[1]

This fragment, sometimes admired as an isolated piece of brilliant prose, was identified by Hans Urs von Balthasar as a central utterance, which he

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[1] *Pensées,* ed. Lafuma, §308, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963), 540. The best exposition of the fragment is that of Vincent Carraud, *Pascal et la philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1992; 2007), §16-17: 'With the establishment of the three orders… Pascal puts in place, in §308, a structure of overcoming metaphysics… The means of this overcoming consists in thinking as *distance* what Descartes had established as *distinction'* (234), with his corrections to my study *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes. Constitution et limites de l'onto-théo-logie cartésienne* (Paris: PUF, 1986; 2004), §23.

saw as summing up the entire collection of the *Pensées*.[2] Rather than just savor it as a prose poem, we should take it seriously as formulating a fundamental decree of thought. By its lucid mapping of the three orders, it sets forth the unsurpassable terms of all our political, theoretical (scientific or metaphysical), and theological debates.

The Scriptural Origin

The fragment on the three orders connects with another which speaks of three temptations: 'Concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, pride, etc.' (§933), clearly alluding to a verse of the Vulgate: '*omne quod est in mundo, concupiscientia carnis est, et concupiscentia oculorum, et superbia vitae'* (1 Jn 2:16). Pascal immediately gives a gloss on this by assigning a specific domain to each of the temptations: 'There are three orders of things: the flesh, the mind, the will. The carnal ones are the rich, the kings. The curious and the learned, their object is the mind. The wise, their object is justice.' But these domains, so well defined and so autonomous, immediately give rise to temptations, since people can relate everything to them as to so many objects, which thus reign in the place and stead of God. Objects thus become temptations. The fragment continues: 'In the things of the flesh, concupiscence properly reigns. In things of the mind, curiosity properly reigns. In wisdom, pride properly reigns.' But this last temptation remains more difficult to explain: wouldn't access to wisdom constitute a just reason for pride? So we need to be clear: even in this last case, 'God must reign over everything and we must refer everything to him.'

> It is not that one cannot be glorious for the good or for knowledge, but this is not the place for pride; for by granting to a man that he is learned, one will not fail to convince him that he is wrong to be haughty. The proper place for haughtiness is wisdom, for one cannot grant to a man that he is wise and that he is wrong to be haughty. For that is justice. But it is precisely this justice (the pride of attaining wisdom) that must be contested, for example by the Stoics who claim to know wisdom (the wise equals the gods), but they derive less from it divine wisdom than from the admiration of other men and therefore confuse the glory of the world with the love of wisdom 'Therefore God alone gives wisdom and that is why "*qui gloriatur in domino glorietu*" (1 Cor 1:31).' (§933)

[2] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologisch Ästhetik, II, Fächer der Style* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962), 543. Emmanuel Martineau, innovative and convincing editor of the *Pensées,* saw this fragment as the 'most fascinating prose work of the Grand Siècle' (*Le Monde,* 2 March 1990, p. 35); see Blaise Pascal*, Discours sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets* (Paris: Fayard/Armand Colin,1992), 37-8, 218-20.

Here two remarks may be made. First, Pascal follows St Augustine in developing the three concupiscences enumerated by John, by taking up again as such the concupiscence of the flesh (*voluptas*), but also by interpreting the concupiscence of the eyes as *curiositas*, itself understood as a deregulated desire for all knowledge, including the sciences; then by interpreting *ambitio saeculi* not only as vanity in the face of the world, but as pride (*superbia*) in the face of God.[3] These three temptations must be identified precisely in order to resist them resolutely. But Pascal goes further. For, as we have seen, to stigmatize the pride that the wise man takes in his own wisdom, he had to explain that even and especially in this case, the wise man confuses the 'orders'—wisdom is to be related, like everything else, to God and not to the wise individual. Henceforth, the three temptations become the index of the 'three orders' in which they are exercised.[4] This is how the ancient philosophers classified themselves: the Epicureans by the order of the flesh, the Peripatetics and Academics by curiosity, and the Stoics by pride.[5]

Taking Up and Correcting Descartes

It then remains to clarify the meaning of this 'order' that replaces temptation. Each temptation arises in function of an order of things offered for possession and which, in this order, attempt to usurp the role of the sovereign good, of God. We need to distinguish the respective orders, and we can reason each time only within a particular order; otherwise the desire itself becomes unfocused and insignificant: 'A craftsman who speaks of riches, a procurator who speaks of war, royalty, etc., but the rich man speaks well of riches, the king speaks coldly of a great gift he has just made, and God speaks well of God' (§303).

Now it happens that thinking according to an order, respecting and even instituting an order to link together the terms of thought, corresponds precisely to Descartes's notion of method: '*Tota methodus consistit in ordine et dispositione eorum ad quae mentis acies est convertenda, ut aliquem veritatem inveniamus*—the whole method consists only in arranging in order the things towards which the mind's view must turn, so that we may find some truth.'[6] With one difference, however: for Descartes, there is only one order, the one appropriate each time for resolving a given question; and above all, the mind

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[3] Principally *De vera religione,* 38, 70, *Confessiones,* X, 30-37, *In primam Johannis epistulam*, II, 12. See our analysis in *Au lieu de soi. L'approche de saint Augustin* (Paris: PUF, 2008), §24, pp. 219 ff.

[4] This point was clearly marked by Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, 'Les trois concupiscences,' *Chroniques de Port-Royal*, n.11-14, Paris, 1963.

[5] See section IX, §§140-6, 'Des philosophes.'

[6] Descartes, *Regulae ad directionem ingenii,* IV, ed. Adam-Tannery, vol. X, p. 379, 25-7.

produces this single order by imposing order (parameters) and measure (dimensions) on the material in question, so as to retain only what ensures certitude to knowledge. The Cartesian order therefore remains univocal, because it performs a strictly epistemological function. It thus concerns only knowledge, and first and foremost that of the material bodies of the world. It will only later be extended to knowledge of minds, not without difficulty, with necessary adjustments (keeping only the ordering of reasons and dropping the measure of dimensions).

In place of this knowledge according to the order established by the knowing mind, Pascal recognizes several heterogeneous orders, each of which allows us to think of strata of reality distinguished according to what they impose on the mind—the body (the flesh), the mind (the sciences), and charity (the heart). Indeed, if we fail to distinguish between the different orders, our thinking gets lost and wanders: 'There are various kinds of right sense, some of in a certain order of things and not in the others, where they are out of place. Some draw consequences of a few principles, and this is sound sense. Others draw many consequences from things where there are many principles' (§511/2). This is seen par excellence in the difference between 'the spirit of geometry' (which produces its order), and 'the spirit of finesse,' which receives it from 'principles so loose and in such great number, that it is almost impossible that some of them are not missed' (§512/1). In short, since one must distinguish the logic specific to each type of temptation (1 John, St Augustine), one must also distinguish the 'orders of things' in the experience of the world (Pascal) and not merely establish the *ordo cognoscendi* of the method (Descartes).

To which one might object, with forceful arguments, that Descartes himself had perfectly well distinguished two orders. Sometimes he does so by focusing on the contrast between the thinking substance (*res, substantia cogitans*) and the extended substance (*res, substantia extensa, materialis*), spelling this out so clearly that he has been criticized for his radical dualism. Sometimes, and principally, he opposes the fundamental concepts (*naturae simplicissimae*) of extension, quantity, measure, etc., to those of thought, will, imagination, sensation, etc., Pascal was certainly not unaware of this distinction of orders, which he attributed to Descartes: '...almost all philosophers confuse the ideas of things and speak of corporeal things spiritually and spiritually things corporeally' (§199). He even claimed it and formulated it with exceptional clarity: 'It is not from space that I must seek my dignity, but from the regulation of my thought. I will have no advantage by owning land. Through space the universe grasps me and engulfs me like a point: through thought I grasp it' (§113). And again: 'All our dignity thus consists in thought. It is from this that we must rise, and not from space and duration, which we cannot fill. Let us therefore work at thinking well: this is the principle of morality' (§200).

Pascal, it is clear, remains Cartesian in philosophy, because with Descartes, philosophy had brought to light the gap between the first two orders, thought and its object—material, corporeal, arranged in order for

measurement. Yet he judges Descartes 'useless and [un]certain' (§887)[7]—for what reason? The answer is by no means obvious, since Descartes not only radically distinguished between body and mind, but also discerned the gap between the finite mind and the infinite; he even indicated the distance between them and the rather radical paradoxes we have to go through in order to 'reach by thought in some way, *quocumque modo attingere cogitatione*' the divine infinite.[8] And doesn't Pascal himself also approach the infinite as the place and name, if there is one, of God?

Descartes thus lacked nothing to discern the conditions of knowledge of God and to establish 'metaphysical proofs of God' (§190)—except that, when it comes to God, it is not a question, in the last instance, of *knowing* him as a mind knows a body, or even as a finite mind would know a finite mind. For the distance between the first order (bodies) and the second (mind) is not identically redoubled when the second relates to the third. This other distance is of another order: 'The infinite distance of bodies to minds figures the infinitely more infinite distance of minds to charity, for it is supernatural…. This is of an infinitely higher order. From all bodies and minds one could never draw a movement of true charity; that is impossible and of another supernatural order' (§308). For bodies, thought only has to think, *cogitatio* only has to transcribe them into *cogitata*, following the procedures of order and measure, the ego only has to implement what Descartes calls the *Mathesis universalis*. But for God, the ego no doubt has to think, to exercise its *cogitatio*, but according to a mode of which Descartes (at least as Pascal read and understood him) is ignorant: a thinking according to the mode of the will, and of the will exercising love.

The Hermeneutic of Invisibility

The distinction between the orders implies their distance. The first, still natural, distance between bodies and thought already establishes a double relationship of visibility and invisibility between them. Of visibility, because thought sees (by gaze, *intuitus, cognitio intuitiva*, 'simple sight') the matter that it makes patent in perception and/or intelligible by concept. Of invisibility, because the material thing, seen and known, does not know itself to be known or seen; this is the reason why so-called materialists do not want to admit what they do not see: thought, free will, the essences of things, and so on. The mind sees without being seen by what it sees, and only becomes manifest to other minds. Hence a paradoxical political consequence: kings do not *see* as such the artists whose works they nevertheless commission, nor the scientists whose discoveries they make use of; Archimedes remains invisible as such to

[7] The first version of that fragment read '*descerde inutile et certenne*' (see *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes,* §22, p. 316, n. 23).

[8] Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia,* III, AT VII. 53, 5.

the soldier who massacres him; the Duke, before whom Pascal recommends stepping aside to give way to him, does not *see* him as the 'frightening genius' that only another great mind, Chateaubriand, could recognize in him. In a word, bodies and those who govern or possess them do not see what they are, nor the laws that govern them, nor their meanings.

What happens to the same relationship of visibility and invisibility when it plays out between the second and third orders? It remains, but in an infinitely more infinite way. It remains, because 'The heart has its order, the mind has its own, which is by principle and demonstration. The heart has another. One does not prove that one is to be loved by setting out the causes and reasons in order; that would be ridiculous' (§298). What comes under the heading of '...the order of Melchisedech' (§609) is visible only to those who recognize Melchisedech as the announcement of the eternal priesthood of a Messiah, and remains rigorously invisible to those who have no expectation of it.

A fortiori 'J.C. and Saint Paul have the order of charity, not of the mind, because they wanted to humble, not to instruct' (§299): to abase, in other words to make appear the very holiness of God: 'J.-C., without goods, without any production of science, is in his order of holiness. He gave no inventions. He did not reign, but was humble, patient, holy, holy, holy to God, terrible to demons, without any sin. O that he is come with great pomp and prodigious magnificence to the eyes of the heart and to those who see wisdom' (§308). The evidence of the third order—for it is indeed an order—manifests holiness and consequently is manifested only to the gaze of holiness. Only the saint sees the holy, while bodies and minds see nothing. But just as the scholar sees in mind not only the other truths of the mind but also the bodies which he raises to the evidence of the concept, while remaining invisible to them, so the saint, while remaining invisible to them as such, sees in the light of holiness both the bodies, with those who govern them, and the minds, with what they conceive. Hence the paradox that, as their vision grows and deepens, the more those who see become invisible to what and to whom they see.

Without dwelling on the Jansenist discussions on the modalities of grace (or on what Pascal retains and rejects of them), let us stick to this rule: '...the eyes of the heart and which see wisdom' (§308). 'It is beautiful to see through the eyes of faith' (§317), to '...see from the eyes of faith' (§500) not only bodies and their kingdoms, not only sciences, but the holiness of God, and to be seen only by that. According to this rule and in this properly supernatural situation, we see the holiness of God, his charity, only to the extent that we know it by loving him. For love is not known by perception, representation or concept, but in loving him. One epistemology is replaced by another, which should be qualified as erotic:

> I am not speaking here of divine truths, which I would be careful not to bring under the art of persuasion, for they are infinitely above nature: God alone can put them into the soul in the way that pleases him. I know that he willed that they should enter from the heart into the mind, and not from the mind into the

> heart, in order to humiliate this haughty power of reasoning which claims the right to be the judge of the things which the will chooses,[9] and to cure this enfeebled will, entirely corrupted by its foul attachments. And hence, instead of saying, as when speaking of human things, that we must know them before we can love them, which has become a proverb, the saints, on the contrary, say, when speaking of divine things, that we must love them in order to know them, and that we enter into the truth only through charity — one of their most useful sayings.[10]

The reversal of the hierarchy between the understanding and the will does not lead to voluntarism, nor to an arbitrariness without reason, because it is no longer a question *here* of knowledge by representation or concept of a body or even of a mind, but of knowing love through the only mode of thought appropriate to love, namely love itself; and this love is first realized by an act of the will, before it eventually leads to knowledge through the understanding. Love only appears if a will loves it and so *does* it. Or again, love knows itself only if a love recognizes it.

Here the eyes see to the exact extent that they love. We know that certain electronic devices make it possible to perceive other wavelengths beyond violet and below red, in short to perceive what the ordinary gaze cannot see. In a sense, the same applies to the gaze of love: where we naturally see only an arid, dry, and undesirable landscape, it sees the hitherto *unseen* colors of love —things appear according to their erotic prestige, lovable and also hateful, visible as lovable or not. Under this erotic gaze, things retain their other (sensible) colors and their other (intelligible) properties, but it is no longer these that characterize them, for they are neutralized and bracketed; only the erotic qualities that make these things likable or not become visible and significant. The relief, greatness, and baseness of things are no longer measured by the quantity of wealth, the concentration of power, or the evidence of demonstrations, all of which vanish into a profound vanity, but by the density (or lack) of love that they reveal and that they arouse. Under the sun of holiness, everything that does not belong to love and does not reveal love fades into a haze of vanity; the first order, because 'That something as visible as the vanity of the world should be so little known, that it should be a

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[9] Notice that here Pascal quotes the Cartesian definition of judgment, where '*...ex magna luce in intellectu sequitur magna propensio in voluntate' (*Descartes, *Meditation IV,* AT VII, 59, 1-3).

[10] Pascal, *L'art de persuader, Oeuvres complètes,* 355. The last formula comes, without reference, from St Augustine: '*Non intratur in veritatem nisi per charitatem*' (*Contra Faustum* XXXII, 18, *Patr. Lat.* 42, 507), which builds on Romans 5:5. See Olivier Boulnois, '"On n'entre dans la vérité que par la charité." Amour et connaissance selon saint Augustin, Pascal et la phénoménologie,' in Raphaël Authier and Vincent Carraud, eds., *Manifestation et révélation: À propos du livre de Jean-Luc Marion,* D'ailleurs, la révélation (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra, 2022).

strange and surprising thing to say that it is foolish to seek greatness. This is admirable' (§16); the second order, by virtue of the 'vanity of the sciences' (§23), whose 'curiosity is nothing but vanity' (§77). In short, 'One who does not see the vanity of the world is vain himself' (§36).

In light of the third order, the world remains visible only insofar as it belongs to love and reveals it; everything else in it is reduced to a figure — the figure of absent love. For the 'Figure carries absence and presence, pleasure and displeasure. A cipher with a double sense. One clear and where it is said that the meaning is hidden' (§265). The figure shows a lack, and this lack already indicates what alone could fill it, namely love. For as long as love does not appear, things are reduced to their figures, their phantoms of the love they lack. To see the things of the world in full light is therefore to see the shadow of love in them. To judge the things of the world means *not* to see them as what they believe they are and are not (bodies or their concepts), but to measure what they actually show, according to their potential weight of love, given or received. To assess the things of the world means to consider them from the height of love, which saves or cancels them depending on whether they are lovable and loving.

From the perspective of the third order, nothing subsists except by its degree of love, given or received. Pascal proposes a rule for reading biblical texts: 'Everything that does not go to charity is a figure. The sole object of Scripture is charity' (§270). This rule can be extended to all world experience, where every phenomenon remains a mere figure of itself, if it is not shown in the terms and forms of charity. And each of us, spectators of the world, is thus constantly exposed, each time we encounter a phenomenon, to seeing it either as a figure closed in on its lack of reality (a figurative figure) or as a figure representing a possible, and therefore real, love (a figured figure): this decision of the gaze judges us, '...so that those who loved figurative things would stop there and those who loved figured things would see them there' (§270). Love, in the third order, judges things and those who do or do not see them.

Phenomenal Implication

What is the result of this reversal and breakthrough? The question is all the more pertinent in that Pascal, precisely because he dominated his century, has also become a contemporary.

The oblique intention of the *Pensées* was, in their century, to validate Descartes' physics and metaphysics in their respective orders, but to surpass them by subjecting them to the third order. The heart reveals the reign of charity, which supernaturally disqualifies the natural kingdoms of body and mind. In fact, through Descartes, Pascal undertook to go beyond any inclusion of the question of God in the field of what was then constituted as a *metaphysica*. His aim, by contrast, was to return Christian theology to its true

domain—that of charity—and to its real challenge—the conversion of the heart.

But today there is more. If Pascal, by distinguishing the three orders, enables a threefold hermeneutic of phenomena as bodies, as minds, as lovable (or not) by the heart, he is not only anticipating, among other things, the three stages of life according to Kierkegaard (aesthetics, ethics, and faith), but also the threefold hermeneutics of phenomena, according to sensible intuition (Kant), the intuition of essences (Malebranche), and categorical intuition (Husserl). Or again the three reductions of phenomenology, the transcendental reduction (Husserl), the reduction of the thing to its quantity and sense of being (Heidegger), and finally the reduction of the ego to the flesh (*Leib*) (Husserl), or even to the ethical face of others (Levinas). As in all these analogies, Pascal's three orders determine not so much three regions of phenomena, but above all three modes of their phenomenality (the how, the *wie* of the thing's manifestation). The three orders can (and must) also be understood as so many intentional points of view, which target the thing insofar as it appears either as a body perceived by the senses, or as a concept that can be thought of by construction, or as something lovable (or not) to the heart. These three points of view then define three horizons of the phenomenality of the world, autonomous and independent, even exclusive of each other (because of the invisibility of the superior to the inferior).

But if the three orders are not three irreducible domains because they are closed in on themselves, but three modes of intentional aim and therefore three reductions (or hermeneutics), could we not overcome or suspend this heterogeneity? In other words, should the principle that, in certain cases, we must love things before we know them be limited to 'divine things'? In turn, must we consider all 'human things' according to the principle that we must know them before we can love them? Are there not also certain 'human things' that can only be known by first loving them, so that they obey the same erotic logic as 'divine things'? In this hypothesis, Pascal's epistemological innovation could extend beyond what he himself developed. The same 'thing' could sometimes be seen as a body, or also as a mind, or finally and equally as that which the heart alone can see because it knows how to love it? This would be the case, par excellence, of the erotic phenomenon.

Darlia Leukhina

Negation of Morality: The Underground Man and The Kantian Man

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> I was struck by the ability of the Russian to reconcile himself to the customs of the people among whom he happens to live. I do not know whether this mental quality is a virtue or a vice, but it does reveal a remarkable flexibility and that sober common sense which forgives evil wherever it feels it to be necessary, or impossible to eradicate.
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> Mikhail Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time.*

In the realm of moral philosophy, the dichotomy between rationality and irrationality often emerges as a central theme, particularly when examining the complexities of human behavior. This essay explores the contrasting moral landscapes of Immanuel Kant and Fyodor Dostoevsky, particularly through the lens of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground.* Kant posits that morality is a product of rational thought, advocating for a calculative approach to ethical dilemmas that mirrors the exact sciences. In stark contrast, Dostoevsky's protagonist embodies a form of moral reasoning that defies conventional logic, acting out of spite and irrational desires rather than any coherent ethical framework. This juxtaposition raises profound questions about the nature of freedom, individuality, and the essence of human experience. Here, I shall look into Dostoevsky's exploration of the fragmented identity of the Russian Man, which underscores the limitations of Kantian moral philosophy, revealing that human behavior cannot be neatly categorized into good or evil, right or wrong, but rather takes place within a spectrum of moral ambiguity shaped by personal experiences.

Subversion of Rational Morality

Some ethical questions require a deep understanding of a situation and thoroughly considering all aspects of the issue. There are cases, however, when people choose to act based not on their moral compass but on their calculative reasoning. Kant describes practical reasoning as a thought process in which 'we do take the moral law as a source of authoritative requirements that limit the weight that we may give to our desire-based interests, and we are able to act on these requirements simply because we ought to' (xxiv). In other words, an innate human faculty enables us to make the most rational and moral decisions in different scenarios. For Kant, 'morals began with the noblest property of human nature, the development and cultivation of which looked to infinite use, and it ended—in enthusiasm or in superstition' (130), which presupposes the incomprehension of our current moral values. Humans developed and refined chemistry or mathematics based solely on repeated experiments. Similarly, common human understanding led us to the doctrine of wisdom, 'a direction to the concept in which the highest good was to be placed and to the conduct by which it was to be acquired' (88). In this way, Kant argues that morality should be rationalized just like the exact sciences, working out the implications of reason instead of a primitive estimation of the situation based on emotions. However complex this rational approach appears, as it is applied to different scenarios, Russian Man seems to inhabit a different moral perspective, perhaps even more complex than Kant's.

On opening Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, one is immediately struck by how little actual reasoning the protagonist uses. He begins his letters with 'I am a sick man…. However, I know nothing at all about my disease…. I don't consult a doctor for it, and never have, though I have a respect for medicine and doctors…. I refuse to consult a doctor from spite' (3). This illustrates that Kantian and Russian Man are antipodal; one acts based on reasoning, and the other acts entirely against it. Or, at least, the latter seems to reason in a way that we, the readers, cannot comprehend. The issue may be that the protagonist does not understand his own reasoning. He mocks Kant's idea of calculus, imagining that such a method is very unlikely ever to become predominant instead of acting based on desires: 'if this could be arranged there would be nothing left for us to do' (19). Throughout the novel, the reader can see that the protagonist is clearly aware that his acts may be immoral, yet he chooses to act unreasonably, although he reasons that his action would be unreasonable: 'I cannot get on without domineering and tyrannizing over someone, but… there is no explaining anything by reasoning and so it is useless to reason' (89). That is what makes the Russian Man described by Dostoevsky so paradoxical: the Kantian reasons to solve moral dilemmas, while the Russian Man faces moral dilemmas with his senses and desires, often leading to pitiful outcomes.

Although it is common for the men of Russian literature to prioritize emotive impulse and desire (Raskolnikov, Pechorin, Onegin, etc.), the

protagonist of *Notes from the Underground*, rather than being mistaken in his reasoning, ignores reasoning altogether. This makes Dostoevsky's Russian Man more metaphysically complex than Kantian man, the latter acting solely through sound moral judgment.

The Inescapable Moral Question

What lies at the roots of this paradoxicality? Dostoevsky presents the inner turmoil of an anonymous narrator who speaks volubly about himself but does not say anything concrete; his words contradict themselves from chapter to chapter. He cannot define himself since such a man cannot have one particular defining characteristic. Hesse describes a Russian Man in the following way:

> We cannot get at him from a fixed, moralistic, ethical, dogmatic—in a word, a European standpoint. In him good and evil, outer and inner, God and Satan are cheek and jowl. (73)

Hesse describes Russian Man's adamant refusal to accept anything that can restrict him, whether it be reason, morality, or some other discipline. In Enlightenment Europe, the Age of Reason, the Underground Man undermines the priority of reason:

> Here I, for instance, quite naturally want to live, in order to satisfy all my capacities for life, and not simply my capacity for reasoning, that is, not simply one twentieth of my capacity for life. (Dostoevsky, 20)

He uses the phrase 'twice two makes four' in a telling way, which does not seem random. Such a thing as mathematics is nothing else but social agreement. It is a science that studies abstract things people cannot simply accept as mirroring reality. Society's adoption of reason as universal, which dictates what is advantageous for humans, is unacceptable to the Underground Man, for whom social agreements, such as twice two making four, are entirely mutable. They create an order, but there is no long-term guarantee of it. Underground Man assumes that rebellion is only a matter of time for those with the will. Thus, if reason is mutable, why should he submit to order? 'Granted that the "underground" man's argument is unacceptable to reason, arguments, said Shestov, serve their purpose only so long as one accepts their premises' (Shein, 24). The same is true for morality; proposing what is right and wrong cannot be universal. So, acting according to morality or reason is nothing more than following society to the detriment of man's wishes, limiting one's freedom of action and thought. Desires being irrational are still an inseparable part of human nature that destroys any order provided by reason.

> One's own free unfettered choice, one's own caprice, however wild it may be, one's own fancy worked up at times to frenzy—is that very 'most advantageous advantage' which we have overlooked, which comes under no classification and against which all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms. (Dostoevsky, 18)

Only what is rational can be categorized; reason itself is a limitation. However, as Dostoevsky proclaims, humans exercise more than just reason. He rejects the traditional dichotomy of good and evil, reason and irrational self-will. For Dostoevsky, even suffering can be of benefit. Dostoevsky does not critique reason itself but uses it as a justification for an unwillingness to take responsibility for people's choices and lives.

Dostoevsky is often called one of the main figures in the emergence of existentialism. In *Notes from the Underground*, he anticipated many existentialist ideas. As Sartre declares, the common principle for all existentialists is the precedence of existence above essence.

> What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. (Sartre 1946)

So, the Sartrean man, much like the Russian Man, has no predetermined characteristics, nothing coordinating his 'destiny.' Humans can act however they want and thus are doomed to freedom; this is the Sartrean triumph of individuality. How can we speak about any defining characteristic of a man if there are no universal characteristics at all? Everyone has self-will and the freedom to realize it, including responding to irrational desires. The world consists of infinite individuals, each with different desires and self-will. Thus, the Sartrean and Dostoevskian would argue against any general characteristic of humans.

Freedom is one of the main themes in *Notes from the Underground*, during which the narrator tries to prove that he can act irrationally, to the detriment of himself and society, showing no goal but no subservience to any authority. He can prove that the world is meaningless and that people create meaning because human life is a path. The 'goal' or 'meaning' is a matter of fact, but the path remains. Everyone cannot have one meaning since this would make twice two, equaling four dogmatic, inevitably inciting rebellion. By denying society and rationality, the narrator creates new limits for himself since, in the world of freedom, people inevitably create frames, and in the blind rejection, only new frames appear. Desiring to act irrationally, the narrator restricts his ability to act rationally; revolting against a perpetual good, he forces himself to evil. What he sees as freedom makes paradoxes.

> I was lying when I said just now that I was a spiteful official... in reality I never could become spiteful. I was conscious every moment in myself of many, very many elements absolutely opposite to that. I felt them positively swarming in me, these opposite elements. I knew that they had been swarming in me all my life and craving some outlet from me, but I would not let them, would not let them, purposely would not let them come out. (Dostoevsky, 3-4)

At the same time, freedom brings responsibility; only he is responsible for who he will become. The Underground Man appears as an unhappy, miserable man who is always afraid of other's contempt. However, this fear is because he knows his whole misery is his responsibility. Dostoevsky draws a picture in which a human has the freedom of will to act in opposition to what society dictates. In the conditions of this freedom, the Underground Man chooses to act in a way that does not make him worthy. He surrounds himself with the illusion of freedom, which makes him miserable. True freedom is not a simple rebellion against traditional order just because 'I can, therefore, I will.' Berdyaev writes:

> Freedom is irrational, and therefore it can create both good and evil… evil shows that man has an inner profundity and it is associated with personality, which alone can create evil and answer for it: an impersonal force cannot be a first-mover or be responsible for anything. (89)

Religious Dimensions

Humans are not the only creatures that have freedom; the manifestation of freedom itself consists of both good and evil. At this point, Dostoevsky's religious views come into play. Unlike Sartre, he believes in God's existence and proposes absolute freedom in a very similar way to the freedom that God has. For Dostoevsky, there is no doubt that God has freedom. However, God does not make anything evil good. God's freedom manifests in the ability not to be evil. Awareness of freedom is awareness of evil's inseparability from life. Still, we should take responsibility for it and make an informed choice to do good. He wants to make himself not according to something or someone but go through the path of life, pushing himself with an understanding of the absence of anything that can limit his self-will.

For Underground Man, humans are paradoxical because they do not fit into traditional strictures, nor any, for that matter. As manifestations of freedom, they are inherently irrational and, by the very fact of their existence, destroy any classification. However, inspired by their freedom, they often forget that it brings consequences for which only they are responsible. Dostoevsky's rejection of the free self does not follow with complete immorality.

The irrationality of the narrator's behavior opens a new perspective in a discussion about whether his actions could be considered immoral. The narrator's tendency to act based on feelings rather than reasoning often leads him to experience poor consequences that cause harm to people around him, but mainly to himself. With this in mind, is the Russian Man simply evil? Or does he not realize how wrong his actions are? In seeking inspiration from Hannah Arendt's *Banality of Evil,* we may be unable to discern any difference per se between these two characteristics.

In her book, Arendt provides a discourse on the question of whether to consider the actions of the Nazi operator Eichmann, responsible for transporting millions of victims to concentration camps, immoral or not. Hannah Arendt argues that 'what he had done was a crime only in retrospect, and he had always been a law-abiding citizen, because Hitler's orders, which he had certainly executed to the best of his ability, had possessed "the force of law" in the Third Reich' (24). In other words, she implies that he had no choice but to comply with the orders to avoid punishment. At the same time, however, he aimed for career progression as the recordings of the trials show: 'Eichmann's memory functioned only in respect to things that had had a direct bearing upon his career' (62). Although Eichmann may not have had a choice, he complied with orders with his benefit in mind. Considering all of this, can it be claimed that his actions were set within the framework of morality? Hannah Arendt concludes that Eichmann's primary sin was 'thought-defying' (252). It serves as an epitome of the banality of his evil; he was more concerned with advancing his career and following orders than with the moral implications of his actions, which ultimately led to his downfall. This case illustrates how a defect of reasoning is associated with the immorality of an individual's actions; this is also true of Dostoevsky's Russian Man, who completely rejects reasoning.

What makes Dostoevsky's Russian Man a complex conception is his motivation for evil actions, or, to be precise, his lack of motivation. In the case of Eichmann, it is evident that he was pursuing his own goals, such as advancing his career, which served as a reason for his immorality. With the Russian Man, there is no such motivation. His actions are beyond reasoning—not in the sense that he lacks it, with undesirable results, but in that he defies it for the sake of defiance. In both cases, the evil comes from thoughtlessness rather than from deeply rooted malice, but whereas an Eichmann has a purpose that motivates him to do immoral actions, the Russian Man has none, and due to his absence of reasoning, he does not understand why he acts as he does.

If we consider good and bad actions, right and wrong, nothing can be outside of these limits. Thus, Dostoevsky shows us that there cannot be something amoral. There can only be an action we consider moral or immoral, with a grade of more or less. So, by thinking this way, we reveal morality's limits and opposites. The Underground Man, however, is very different. The self-centered view of transcending good-bad distinctions makes him erratic.

Thus, he finds no meaning and assumes the worst in people. His unwillingness to know other people implies their real non-existence in his eyes; he cannot know himself and attributes his troubled traits to others, assuming their acts are out of self-interest, too.

The Elusive Russian Character

'Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are,' commonly attributed to Socrates, is a common phrase in Russia. One might object that the shared traits of a group of friends do not define one's self completely; yet the phrase is not entirely false. We might reword it to fit Dostoevsky's perspective: 'Tell me what is good and bad, and I will tell you who you are'—but not presuming to encapsulate thereby the entire nature of a human being. Dostoevsky's implicit critique of Enlightenment affirms that we are not definable through societal norms or moral ones. Perhaps this is Dostoevsky's great insight into Russian Man: the infinitely undefinable character of the human being, the close intertwining of reason and the capacity for irrationality.

In the figure of his Underground Man, Dostoevsky captured Russian Man's inability to define human nature. The characters in his novels are driven by personal ambitions to prove their nature, as seen in *Crime and Punishment*, but the nature of such ambitions questions much more than simple good or evil. The boundaries between the two blur, and as a final product, we distinguish between the extraordinary and the ordinary person, the good or evil, etc. So, the character of Dostoevsky, the Russian Man, seems nonsensical. At the same time, the author has every opportunity to capture every little detail, and hide these details so they can be detected by the alert reader.

While science can define human essence by pointing to genetics, evolution, social and cultural practices, and many other factors that differentiate, even to the slightest extent, one person from another, they all lack something that would unify all human beings. These scientific perspectives have led to a fragmentation of human understanding. Favoring one explanation of human essence over another lead to the creation of in-groups—those who support the explanation—and out-groups—those who disagree—resulting in a divisive view of humanity. Any conflicting viewpoint is often dismissed as wrong or false. This binary thinking reinforces division and does not allow for the coexistence of contradictory truths, which science typically avoids by rejecting one of the opposing viewpoints. As a result, behaviors that deviate from the norm are often seen as odd or immoral. But, for example, in *Crime and Punishment*, we see Raskolnikov's cold-blooded murder juxtaposed with his compassionate act of giving money to Katerina Marmeladova. Similarly, the Underground Man exhibits erratic behavior. These contradictions reflect the complexity of human nature that science struggles to encapsulate fully.

One could argue that a person's fluctuating behavior does not necessarily indicate moral flexibility but rather a varied openness to different groups of people, depending on one's closeness to them. The Underground Man states: 'Every man has reminiscences which he would not tell to everyone, but only to his friends. He has other matters in his mind which he would not reveal even to his friends, but only to himself, and that in secret. But there are other things which a man is afraid to tell even to himself' (27). The passage suggests that aspects of one's self always remain hidden.

These hidden aspects of the inner self can be considered the Paradox of the Russian Man. Even if one desires to know others to understand oneself better, one can never do so entirely, as there will always be parts of one's memories and experiences that remain concealed, even from those closest. If one assumes that one's nature is prior to and separate from others, one can never be sure of one's nature because everyone has aspects they are unwilling or unable to know. As we continue to think about opposites to define the self, the Russian Man exemplifies that the self remains fluid and never fully known to anyone, including oneself.

The inability to define the Russian Man's nature reflects the complexities of human identity and its inherent paradoxes. His actions are driven by thoughtlessness rather than malicious intent, challenging traditional moral assessments. In summary, the juxtaposition of Kantian moral reasoning with Dostoevsky's exploration of the Russian Man underscores the limitations of strictly defining human morality. Acknowledging human behavior's intricate, paradoxical nature, we can embrace the complexity of moral decision-making, self-awareness, and the ever-changing landscape of human identity.

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Amador Vega

So endlessly winter: On an intense reading of Rilke

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There are some lines by Rilke that have been with me since I was twenty years old. They open one of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, his last cycle of poems, composed in the solitude of the Château de Muzot, Switzerland, between 2 and 23 February 1922, four years before his death:

> Be ahead of all departure, as if it were behind
> you, like the winter that is just now passed.
> In winters you are so endlessly winter, you find
> that, getting through winter, your heart on the whole will last.
> *Sonnets to Orpheus*, II, 13 (trans. C. F. McIntyre, amended by Gillian Rose)[1]

Pre-empt all farewells, get ahead of all parting, and treat death as the winter just ended. Rilke asks you to plunge into death, winter of all winters, and to forge from your resilience a stronger, more lasting heart.

When a poem, a painting, or a piece of music moves you at a time when you have not yet formed an image of your own life, you cannot at that moment grasp the multiple meanings of the irruption. These are the meanings that, over the years, will be woven together as on a loom, stitched and unstitched to form your life-world, your *Lebenswelt*.

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[1] The original verse reads: *Sei allem Abschied voran, als wäre er hinter / dir, wie der Winter, der eben geht. / Denn unter Wintern ist einer so endlos Winter, / dass, überwinternd, dein Herz überhaupt übersteht*.

Some time ago, in a London bookshop, someone put into my hands *Love's Work* by the English philosopher Gillian Rose, published in 1995, the year Rose died. In his foreword to the edition, Michael Wood explains how a few months earlier (December, 1994) the philosopher had given 'an extraordinary lecture on time and death, closing with an intense reading of the Rilke sonnet that begins "Be ahead of all departures" (*Sei allem Abschied voran*).' I set out in search of the lecture, whose epigraph, I found, was from *King Lear*—'O! untimely death. / Death! [sic]'—and whose reflections began with the most prescient of words: 'I may die before my time.'[2] As I read on, I was drawn once again to that first line of Rilke's sonnet, compelled to reread it from my own present moment in time.

As I gathered my ideas for this essay, a recent trip to Germany came to mind. On a February morning I had been looking for the grave of my friend, Wulf Oesterreicher, in the cemetery at Freiburg. As I walked through the cemetery, going over memories of our student years, I recalled one winter evening in the late 1980s at Wulf's family's cottage in Falkau—a small town in the Upper Black Forest—and the heated discussion that followed dinner about the best translation and interpretation of the first line of Rilke's sonnet (*Sei allem Abschied voran*). In those intense years, which seemed to want to get ahead of life itself, I let myself be tempted by a certain tragic sense of those verses. My friend's linguistic precision, and my later reading of other Rilke poems, alerted me against these sentimental projections of youth and attuned me instead to what they obscure: the unique and concrete character of a poem, at the same time universal and abstract to a degree that the concept rarely reaches.

The Most Extreme Possibility

In extreme circumstances, during the lecture delivered shortly before her death, Gillian Rose sets the rhetoric of Rilke's Orphic injunction alongside the prophetic style of the sermons of Zarathustra, Nietzsche's *alter ego*:

I may die before my time (Rose)
Die at the right time (Nietzsche).

The similarity between Rose's premonition and Nietzsche's dictum arises from the tension created by the pressure of time, as felt in both utterances. Yet there is still greater tension between the premonition or near certainty of

[2] The title of Rose's lecture is 'Against Time: Anachronism and the Human Sciences.' With thanks to Tom Y Vaswani, who provided a typescript of the lecture, a revised version of which is published as the final chapter of Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 125-46.

approaching death on Rose's side, and the vigor of Nietzsche's exhortation on the other. She allows herself, and occupies, a human space of doubt and suspense in the hesitant verb 'I *may* die…,' which opposes itself to Nietzsche's decisive 'Die.' Aware of the end time to come, she would go on nonetheless, crossing that winter *so endlessly winter*, extending the desire to live and go on singing. The young Rilke had been impressed by Nietzsche's imperative and drawn to its grief-bound asceticism. He would go on to develop his own concept of death in the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, which speak out from the realm where death and life compress into one.

Let's now read the whole sonnet in the same translation:

Be ahead of all departure, as if it were behind
you, like the winter that is just now passed.
In winters you are so endlessly winter, you find
that, getting through winter, your heart on the whole will last.

Be ever dead in Eurydice—arise singing
With greater praise, rise again to the pure relation.
Here among the fleeting, be, in the realm of declination,
be a resonant glass that shatters while it is ringing.

Be—and at the same time, know the terms of negation,
the infinite basis of your fervent vibration,
that you may completely complete it this one time.

To teeming nature's store of used, as of dumb
and moldy things, to that uncountable count,
add yourself joyously, and annul the amount.

A letter from Rilke to his friend Nanny Wunderly-Volkart tells us that, of all the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, the poet had a 'special love' for this poem. As Rilke saw it, this one song contained all the other poems in the *Orpheus* cycle. Moreover—as he had written to Katharina Kippenberg, the wife of his publisher—it seemed to him to mark a high point at the middle of his life. The poem is characterized by a peremptory tone that exhorts his Orpheus (and 'you', his reader) to overcome once and for all the death of Eurydice—symbol of love irretrievably lost—and to rise up into 'pure relation' (*Bezug*), a new mode of being or 'perception' beyond the reach of our lives up to now.[3] This new state describes the space of 'the invisible': a concept born of the *Duino Elegies* and given a sharper edge in the *Sonnets to Orpheus*. That project attained full maturity in the two inspired cycles, the *Duino Elegies* fashioned over a decade

[3] The interpretation of *Bezug* as 'perception' rather than 'relation' is Heidegger's, and can be found in his lecture 'Wozu Dichter?', published in Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995).

from the opening lines granted to him on the coast by Duino Castle, south of Trieste, where the Latin world melts into the Slavic, in 1912, and the ensuing *Sonnets to Orpheus*, a windfall, composed in 'a savage creative storm' in three weeks of February 1922. Few poets have explained their creative achievement with such lucidity and conviction as Rilke, notably in a letter to his Polish translator Witold Hulewicz, who had asked him for some clarification on the *Elegies*: 'The affirmation of life and the affirmation of death,' Rilke writes, 'appear as one and the same thing in the *Elegies*. To accept the one without the other would be, as is felt and solemnized here, a limitation which, in the final analysis, would exclude all that is infinite. Death is the side of life that does not give towards us, the side that is not illuminated: we must try to realize the maximum consciousness of our existence, which resides in *both unlimited domains and is inexhaustibly nourished by both*…. The true form of life crosses through both territories, and the blood of the maximum turn makes its way through both, *there is neither an here nor an elsewhere, but the great unity*, in which the beings that surpass us, the "angels," have their dwelling' (Sierre, 13.11.1925).

We attain the highest consciousness of our existence when we abandon the lower awareness that still distinguishes between an I and the objects of the world—in order to open ourselves to that space of life into which we cannot peer: a space inhabited by the 'angel'—one of the most powerful and enigmatic figures in Rilke's poems—; a space which, although exterior, is the vanishing point of our interiority. The unity of life and death is a limitless domain which on other occasions, in the Eighth Elegy, for example, Rilke had called 'The Open' (*das Offene*).[4] The Open puts into crisis not only the current way of perceiving the world but also our own nature as creatures. Caged in consciousness (the 'interpreted world' of the First Elegy), our gaze cannot see that openness where there is no death. For death is just that: the consciousness of death that was awakened in us on passing through (out of) the gates of Paradise. Neither in the physiognomy of the animal, nor in the face of the child, nor in the angel, does the presence of death show through. It is as though death only exists by virtue of being seen: the Orphic condition, as we might call this attitude, is what prevents us from looking forward, towards God and the eternal. For Rilke, having lost our natural (paradisiacal) condition, we are driven instead toward self-care and self-knowledge: states of mind that distance us from the divine in the creature, which is not behind us —not an object of nostalgia—but ahead. Those on the outskirts of adult human being (the animal, the child, the angel) are the counter-figures of human consciousness, to whom we owe the awareness of our incapacity to understand. Announcing a new birth inseparable from death, the terrible

[4] For detailed readings of the Elegies in relation to Rilke's concept of *das Offene*, see Amador Vega, *El final de la elegía* (Ciudad de México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2021).

beauty of the angel throws us, violates the intimacy of ourselves with our own lives.

But what does it mean to be free of death? The cruelty of the animal, the terrible beauty of the angel, the child's ignorance, define a periphery where the restlessness of man and woman—who must live without the experience of worldlessness—does not arise. The concept of world, for Rilke, is the inversion of the ideal of Paradise, which, beyond the realm of thought, is without concept. The language of Paradise, the Adamic language, is a non-representational language with a strong performative virtue, leaving no gap between action and the word that denotes it. The Open draws together several of these paradisal virtues. The contrast between the world (an interpreted world) and the Open (a non-place) is wounding to us. On the one side is the world, where we experience time and, with it, the consciousness of death; on the other is 'the Open,' realm of the counter-figures of consciousness, who can gaze into eternity without fear.

Authentic and Inauthentic Death

The 'interpreted world' is a continuous effort to master contingency, a means of enduring the knowledge of death and the certainty of its untimeliness. In his first collections of poems, brought together as *Das Stunden-Buch*, Rilke called this 'inauthentic or improper death.' Had Theodor Adorno (to whom Rose devoted a monograph) not rendered it distasteful in reference to Heidegger's philosophical jargon, I would use the word 'authentic' (*eigentlich*) here without embarrassment. For, notwithstanding the wisdom of Adorno's critique, the uses of 'authentic,' like several other of Heidegger's towering adjectives, can be traced back to Rilke.

Death—Rilke insists—cannot be anonymous, should not occur at random. We must mature toward a death that is inseparable from birth. This is a death couched within a double perception: death in this world, which is inevitable, and death in the world of the invisible, where, for Rilke, all things are destined. Maturity is the same for all things—for days, for the animal, for the flower, and for God. What distinguishes human being is the maturing of conscience, which confirms us in the untimeliness of death. We mature at pains, unlike the animal, who lives in innocence of the straits of time. Faced with the difficulty of escaping the world of represented objects, against which we situate and distinguish ourselves as subjects, Rilke conceives a new space of perception: the 'inner space of the world' (*Weltinnenraum*), a space that passes through us, undoing and disarranging the positions of here and there, life and death.

Acceptance of death is, then, necessary and urgent if we are to have any hope of traversing that 'endless winter'—the anguish of being snatched away as in a storm, anguish of a death we cannot live authentically as death. Against Heidegger's 'being-unto-death' (*Sein-zum-Tode*), the great project of

human being is not death as *possibility* but being that goes forth daily in the desire for a new birth. Perhaps in this way, in being born every day, in every moment, it is possible to bid farewell to the 'little death,' as Rilke calls it, to pass it by as something alien, improper, or inauthentic. There is a similarity between that little death and its unwelcome presence, on the one hand, and my own death and its opportunity on the other: not because my death cannot come like a thief in the night, but because when it arrives, it finds me already in the midst of it, getting through it, like the endless winter of the thirteenth sonnet to Orpheus.

To better understand the meaning of this 'getting through,' we can turn to Maurice Blanchot, whose essay 'Rilke et l'exigence de la mort' tells us: 'Surmonter veut dire dépasser, mais en soutenant ce qui nous dépasse, sans nous détourner, ni rien viser au-delà' (To overcome means to surpass, but in bearing what surpasses us, without turning aside, or aiming at anything beyond). [5] Blanchot understands 'overcoming' in the Nietzschean sense: 'L'homme est quelque chose qui doit être surmonté' (Man is something to be overcome). But it remains to be seen to what extent Nietzschean pathos is on a par with Rilkean *getting through*. The idea of transformation, or transfiguration, epochally connected to the Nietzschean Overman (*Übermensch*), and to Wagner's transfigured heroes and heroines, is present in other authors of the period, from Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*, 1915) to Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night, 1899), or from the metamorphosis that produces the Poet in Rimbaud and Mallarmé, and in Rilke himself.

'Desire metamorphosis' he commands in the immediately preceding sonnet (II, 12), '*Wolle die Wandlung*.' In Rilke, transformation acquires a metaphysical sense, devoid of Nietzsche's tragic *pathos* and of his psychological yet moralizing gaze. It is true that the tone of demand that pervades Rilke's style from beginning to end can easily place us in an ethical dilemma, as in the conclusion to the poem: *Archaic Torso of Apollo* (*Archaischer Torso Apollos*, 1907-1908): 'You must change your life' (*Du muss dein Leben ändern*). The dismembered torso of Apollo is the thing that urgently exhorts you: change your life, make your life something else. It is a demand that translates as the pressure of time and that entails a process of self-estrangement: you must make your life real, realize it, bring it out, converge your life with life itself and thus exceed it.

Strangeness is something that also has to do with excess, which leads us to highlight in Rilke's poetry the repetitive function of a hyperbolic language—characteristic of the strategies of negativity—for example, in the use of the preposition '*über*,' which indicates going beyond and going through, but also excess, an excess symptomatic of the hermeneutic condition. The human being can be an excess for himself, but as Blanchot says, 'this excess is not

[5] Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), 151.

something he can possess,' as one would possess or dominate in death by suicide, achieving an opportune time but also an anonymous death.

The Topology of the Invisible

The secret, as Rilke declares in the letter to his Polish translator, is to inhabit the place of the angel, a spaceless location in which the inner can be transformed into the outer, and life and death be grasped in their unity. This topology of the invisible ('the Open,' the 'inner space of the world') does not point the way to salvation. To get through winter does not mean to be above it or to move through it untouched, but to inhabit a beyond which is also a crossing. This practice of crossing over, which German mysticism knows by the word *Durchbruch*, contains both going beyond and breaking through, even if it is a placeless beyond and a breaking through whose only aim is the reversion of interiority into exteriority (in analogy to what Meister Eckhart called 'the birth of God in the soul'). The transformation of objective reality—of which consciousness grants us a certain image—aims at invisibility by virtue of a process of reversion of interiority and its unification into a whole. Death, on this view, is nothing more than the analogical process that things undergo: our task is to contribute to their/our invisibility, but the process must begin with the poetic word and its most extreme possibility: a crossing from the unspeakable to the speakable, from there to the visible (the consciousness of things) and then, from there, towards the invisible.

Rilke's concepts, with all their metaphysical charge, cannot be grasped without the poetics that gives them shape. We cannot approach the mystery of this poetics—which has drawn the attention of philosophers and theologians such as Heidegger and Guardini—without allowing ourselves to be moved by the exalted lyricism of the Rilkean lament (*Klang*). The poem is the space of the transformation of all things into the invisible. The poem is the inner space of the world, not its representation, where it is no longer possible to see the world as an external object, to be overcome or mastered by projecting onto it the image I have made of myself. The interior space of the world is a way of understanding the interior space in the exterior. Poetic practice consists, then, in creating that necessary stage for words to be words spoken, pronounced in action. It is the sound of the inner space of the world that is heard as lament and jubilation.

The Scene of Death

I would say, then, that perhaps the only way to understand Rilke's verses is to sing or dance them; not to elevate his written words to the category of abstract concepts of thought, but to grasp them as simple enunciations with a performative character, in which tonality becomes meaning. The same occurs

when, in a prose text such as Gillian Rose's, emotion and feeling take precedence over abstract and conceptual formulation: 'What is best understood in language,' writes Nietzsche, 'is not the words themselves, but the tonality, the intensity, the modulation, the rhythm with which the words are uttered—put briefly, the music behind the words, the passion behind that music, the personality behind that passion: in short, everything that cannot be *written down*' (*Nachgelassene Fragmente*, Sommer-Herbst 1883, 3 [1-296]).[6]

If we wish to place Gillian Rose's premonition (with which I began this essay) in its proper context, we must turn to her epigraph from Shakespeare, as she transcribed it in the draft preserved by her executors:

O
exclamation mark
untimely death
full stop
new line
Death
exclamation mark
Oswald, King Lear, Act IV Scene VI lines 247-8, 6

Rose's attention to exclamation marks—whose position she alters here in divergence from Shakespeare's text—, as well as to punctuation and spacing, places us before a scenography of the ending in which the central message, with its terrible content, reaches us slowly, interspersed with the spaces she has filled as markers plotted between the only two lines pronounced by Shakespeare's Oswald:

O, untimely death! / Death!

Each new line of this interval structure, which rises like a protective wall or scaffolding against (or as a buffer to) death, is a preamble in which the little time remaining before the last exclamation is used up. It is as though we, its readers, might also rein in the calamity: an untimely time, neither calculated nor desired, and yet a time that seals all experience of time. It is also possible to view these voids, occupied by the transliterated signs, as the steps of a staircase descending into the abyss of death, after which only silence remains. There is no possibility of abandoning silence to return to these signs. There is still another step between the silence that is no longer the sign of writing and the emptiness that is engendered in that end. But with the transliteration of the last exclamation mark, Rose adds one last step, as if she might stop or delay the arrival of the emptiness announced by the verse, an arrival she herself would surely have wanted to detain, halfway through her brilliant

[6] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGA), VII 1, Berlin-New York, 1977.

philosophical career. But death is always unnoticed, and its constant premonition endows a philosophical life with a restlessness both nourishing and necessary.

Rose's last reading, restrained and emotional, goes out to meet that haste which, in life, precedes all farewells and which here serves as a counterpoint. When there are hardly any words left, when silences are greater than words, death appears between the full stop and the exclamation mark. The drama of life requires its stage, and it is worth imagining it, decorating it, filling it with the characters that we represent over the years and that run and overrun the scenes of time.

Can a poetics, a work of art or a philosophical oeuvre fulfill the desire to anticipate all farewells? To what extent is the construction of an interpreted world—the only one we can (and only barely) look into—up to the task? For Nietzsche, a young professor in Basel, art could only be tragic, and, as a consequence, life itself must aspire to be a work of art. But it is not quite here where Rilke's poetry leads. Rilke saw in the work of artists such as Rodin and Cézanne the ways in which the grammars of creation reveal the great unity of life and death. Art, like the exercise of philosophy, must be capable of moving toward this great unity. Death, seen from the side of death, can only ever be untimely, just as we can say that life enjoyed from the side of life alone fails to be adequate to life. 'The true form of life,' Rilke wrote in his letter to Hulewicz, 'crosses through both territories'—life and death. Their inextricable unity, which shows through in all the great myths, is the great aspiration of Rilke's poetry. The scene of death—one's own—is, then, the same exteriority of which the poet sings in his last lines, written at the Valmont sanatorium on 26 December 1926, two days before his death, and which we can now read as the reverse of Oswald's final lament:

O Life, Life, to be outside (*O Leben, Leben, Draußen sein*).

Jakub Rajčáni, SVD

Guardini's Legacy for a Missionary Church

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Few people have influenced such a large number of thinkers, writers, churchmen, and authors of such a wide range of specializations as Romano Guardini, albeit remaining in their shadow in most cases. His indisputable role in the theological renewal of the 20th century can be defined as that of a 'precursor' or 'catalyst.' In many aspects, he was not only critical of the phenomena and trends of the declining modern era in their causes but also prescient about their outcomes, while being himself a preeminent representative of the same modernity. Thanks to his international and interdisciplinary background, he stands out as a model for the present global age. Guardini's biggest strength was perhaps that, despite his timidity, he was able to distill what was—according to his acute perception—of importance in the literature and thought of the past, as well as of his own age, and to briefly and densely synthesize the possible Christian attitude towards it. His ever-valid fundamental conviction, as a religious phenomenologist, was that Christian faith is not a set of ideas but an existential relationship with the person of Christ and that, rather than being a habit or lifestyle, it must be based on a personal decision.

In this paper, I shall point out what Guardini could contribute to the future theology and praxis of the Church, especially to the theology of missions. Although he had never engaged in or reflected on foreign missions, his whole life was developed on the borders: physical, cultural, and academic. We know that he owned a Japanese Buddhist 'rosary' (*juzu*) that he made into a Christian rosary,[1] and we can assume that he was also using it for prayer.

[1] See Romano Guardini, *Stationen und Rückblicke*: *Berichte über mein Leben* (Mainz—Paderborn: Grünewald—Schöningh, 1995), 189. If not otherwise noted all

Furthermore, his overarching idea of 'opposites' makes it possible for us to conceive of the East and West as opposites that complement and balance each other in the same way as the Germanic north and Mediterranean south do. Needless to say, he was a representative of the North and the West, and these have a certain excellence with respect to the Eastern paradigm, especially because of their (Christian) notion of personhood. His academic career was realized in 'Christian' Germany, first within a Protestant university in Berlin and later in Catholic Bavaria; however it can hardly be said that his audience consisted only of churchgoers. His talking and writing also received disagreeable attention from the Nazi regime; hence, we can imagine that his interlocutors were of various backgrounds.

First, I highlight Guardini's notion of theological humanism, which goes against Nietzschean or Sartrean pessimism and nihilism. Then, I explain how, for Guardini, the unity of truth is broken down (refracted) and discovered to a certain degree in different traditions, which all implicitly yearn and aim for the same thing. Finally, I clarify that Guardini's interdisciplinarity and openness towards all that is good in the world is a fitting stance for the Church in the 21st century.

Theological Humanism

For Guardini, knowing God and knowing the human being are connected, not just correlated, but in fact intertwined. While it is true that the human being is a mystery to itself, and that modern science has left us with more questions than answers,[2] the human person is not merely vague and inscrutable. The human being (*der Mensch*) can and—since the times of Socrates—should know himself (and herself), but it is impossible to attain definitive knowledge about oneself and about human nature without simultaneously inquiring about other beings and, in the end, about the ultimate Being. Wanting to place oneself at the center of inquiry leads to disappointment and despair. Human sciences are of course important, but they convey only a partial understanding of the universe and truth. They must be brought to a synthesis and held in it. Science alone has not been able to answer the deepest mystery about the human person and her destiny. By

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Guardini titles are from these publishers, and translations from the German are my own.

[2] See Guardini,, *L'uomo: Fondamenti di una antropologia cristiana*, Opera omnia III/2 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2009), 83. 'The claim of the natural sciences to know man has proved just as fragile as that of humanism and cultural sciences. Infinitely more adequate than the apparent security of these disciplines is instead the wonder of Augustine or Pascal, for whom man is the problem per excellence. The most authentic core of the re-proposition of the anthropological question lies in a sincere not–knowing what man is, and in the consequent openness to every valid answer.'

bracketing God, modernity only led to humanity further becoming a puzzle. It is impossible to know oneself and one's world better without arriving at some knowledge about God, who reveals himself in it. But God cannot be adequately known if not through faith.

This relationship also goes in the opposite direction. Knowing God necessarily leads to a better understanding of the human person.[3] Theology for Guardini is not a separate or abstract subject but illuminates the mystery of the human; certainly, it is not only some talking *about* God. Despite being trained as a systematic theologian, he had only taught this subject for a couple of years, and later he applied his theological categories to matters that lie (apparently) outside of theology. The fundamental presupposition is that a real relationship with the Absolute must have repercussions on our understanding of the world, as well as on our behavior and relationships with others. Looking at things from the viewpoint of God and with his eyes (which means believing) must lead to a different and deeper comprehension of reality. God is never merely a detached object, and a relationship with him will ultimately change the knowing subject.

Conversely, as Vatican II stressed (harvesting the seeds sowed by Guardini, among others), as soon as the knowledge of God vanishes, human self-understanding starts to crumble.[4] It goes without saying that this knowledge of God is always imperfect and an asymptotic endeavor that brings tension and inquietude to those who take it seriously; however, it is a connatural desire and an unavoidable enterprise. It does not have to be

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[3] See 'Den Menschen erkennt nur, wer von Gott weiß,' originally published as 'Nur wer Gott kennt, kennt den Menschen' (1952), but now contained in Guardini, *Gläubiges Dasein / Die Annahme seiner selbst* (1993), 81ff. 'God has placed man in a relationship with himself without which he cannot be or be understood. He has meaning, but it is above him, in God. Man cannot be understood as existing and living as a self-contained figure in himself, but he exists in the form of a relationship: from God, to God. This relationship is not added as something secondary to his being, so that the latter could also be apart from it, but in it the being has its foundation.… Man is man only in relation to God. The "from God" and the "to God" establish his being' (90-1).

[4] See *Gaudium et spes,* § 36. It is worthwhile to compare this Council passage with Guardini's statements. 'When he [man] let go of God, he became incomprehensible to himself. His innumerable attempts to interpret himself are always played out between two poles: to make himself absolute or to abandon himself; to claim the highest dignity and responsibility or to abandon himself to an ignominy that is all the deeper because it is no longer felt. Man knows who he is as much as he understands himself from God. To do this, however, he must know who God is; and he can do this only by accepting His self-affirmation. If he rebels against God, if he deems Him wrong, then he loses the knowledge of his own being. This is the fundamental law of all human knowledge' (*Gläubiges Dasein / Die Annahme seiner selbst*, 94-5).

explicit, but for Guardini, unlike Sartre, real humanism has to be religious in its roots.

> Man is not created in such a way that he is complete in himself and, moreover, can or cannot enter into a relationship with God, depending on his opinion and wishes; rather, his essence consists decisively in his relationship with God. Man exists only in relation to God, and his character is determined by how he understands this relationship, how seriously he takes it, and what he does with it. This is the way it is, and no philosopher, politician, poet, or psychologist can change it.[5]

The Person

Now, one category that is crucial in the context of this religious humanism and that is an intersection between supernatural and natural knowledge is admittedly the 'person.'[6] It stands and falls with man being properly situated in the created order—between God and the world of things. Guardini was a strong protector of the specifically human, which he saw as endangered by the modern hybris of science and technology that was made possible by tearing apart the world, culture, and self. If the power thus acquired tries to replace or subdue the personal, these impersonal forces become demonic.[7]

> Man realizes his self to the extent that he carries it out and fulfills it in relation to God. Autonomism believes that man can only reach his true self when he detaches himself from God. Nietzsche proclaimed this message with his own prophetism. Totalitarian states turn it into policy. In truth, atheism abandons man to the forces of the *id*: nature, society, state. Man can be a person and live as such only if the ultimate relational point of his existence is himself a Person — not the anonymity of nature, or the work of culture, or the state. Man becomes his most real self in relation to God.[8]

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[5] Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit / Die Macht* (1986), 185.

[6] According to Guardini, 'person' is a highly democratic concept. Every human is a person, independently from the conditions of his existence or from whether she wills it; see Guardini, *Die Existenz des Christen* (2015), 468. Person is not a thing, nor some energy, nor an event, but the way in which a being characterized by spirit stands in itself, belongs to itself, responds to itself, which alone can be called an 'I'; see Guardini, *Vom Sinn der Kirche / Die Kirche des Herrn* (1990), 167. In Guardini's view, person is awakened by the call of God, a person interacts with another person in an 'encounter' and actualizes herself in it, and the most adequate attitude toward a personal being is love.

[7] See Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit / Die Macht,* 106-7.

[8] Guardini, *Die Existenz des Christen,* 29.

When a single person becomes a part of the machinery governed by anonymous indomitable powers, we can talk about anti-humanism and atheism. Technology has given humanity a sense of power, but it is power that sooner or later overcomes individual humans and becomes destructive. In this sense, Guardini was a notable source of inspiration for Pope Francis, especially in his ecological ethics. The human person partakes in the realm of values rather than things, that is, of the sacred rather than the material world. It is given to itself along with its freedom and dignity, but it is not taken for granted that the human person thrives easily. She can become 'spiritually' ill, especially when she loses contact with the essential.[9] On the other hand, it is through the liturgy properly celebrated and experienced, and through prayer and contemplation, that the human person is healed and refined and becomes increasingly human. The point is that humans cannot realize themselves fully in the realm of 'utility' that is proper to technology, although they run more and more this risk. They need the alternative realm of 'purpose' and 'meaning,' experienced, for example, in the liturgy. This need is felt even more strongly today than it was in Guardini's time.

Guardini is well aware of the corruption of human nature but believes in its redeemability, because nature is good if properly ordered towards God. For him, becoming involved with God and being religious does not mean abandoning the created order or despising the materiality of the creature. Admittedly, because of the fact of divine incarnation, Christianity is a bulwark of protecting the goodness of creation amidst various Gnostic tendencies that are but misunderstandings of the polarity running through all living beings. God, who is the source and model of humility, lowers himself towards the creature and thus raises it from being a mere thing. For Guardini, this is a bigger mystery (and a scandal for pure reason) than the Trinity.[10] As a result, the person is not some mental state or a merely spiritual self loosely attached to the body. One could think that Guardini's idea of 'polarity' (*Gegensätzlichkeit*) juxtaposes man and God, human and divine, nature and grace, matter and spirit. However, rather than opposing each other, these elements are correlated and remain in creative tension, and therefore, cannot and should not be loosened and resolved into only one of the two extremes. Paradoxical though it is, man must constantly become human in order to be divinized, and it is by being divinized that man becomes fully human. Pure nature and pure grace are both hypothetical constructs, and what is really at stake is nature transformed by grace.

> So lost is man's position, and so divinely great is what has actually been meant by him, that one can say: Only God can realize pure humanity. To be truly

[9] See Guardini, *Die Existenz des Christen*, 467; *Welt und Person* (1988), 124-6. The person and the spirit fall ill in particular when they lose contact with the truth, the good, justice, love and beauty.

[10] See *Der Engel in Dantes Göttlicher Komödie* (1995), 107-108.

> human is not something natural, not a natural starting point. It is impossible for mere human power. The 'humane man' is an ideology. The true human being exists only from God. In the New Testament, 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man' are the two ways of expressing the existence of the Redeemer.[11]

Guardini had learned from the wide range of his sources and elaborated on his own that man is a concrete, living, creaturely being, not only a soul or mind but fundamentally a corporeal *and* spiritual being. In Guardini's view, it is Christianity that has stressed the importance of materiality[12] because no other than God himself takes it seriously. God does not talk to souls; he does not redeem souls, nor does he take a mere human appearance upon himself, while his spirit remains divine. The logical apparatus of a 'polar structure' of every living being allows Guardini to avoid any sort of dualism, which in fact he criticized vehemently. Perhaps the soul is preeminent in many aspects, but nevertheless it remains in connection with the body as with its counterpart, and it is this creative tension that moves humans forward.[13] The human body and the material world are places where God is at work and reveals himself; hence, from Guardini's Christian viewpoint, matter is potentially sacramental. Conversely, ideas and beliefs must take shape; otherwise, they will remain vague and eventually vanish. Still, the concrete forms are not something to be clung to, as if they concealed the idea; they must be rethought and remade in order to convey the message. God is not closed in definitions and habits but acts in ever-new ways to which human obedience and detachment are due. Man's response to God must also involve the whole person: the body and mind.

Thus, Guardini's personalist anthropology is more than just naïve optimism, as was the case with the Renaissance and modern science. His view of the human person encompasses—along with hopeful confidence in human capacities—also human anxiety, perplexity, fear, and despair—all fundamental features of being caught in an existential situation (*Dasein*).

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[11] Guardini, *Religiöse Gestalten in Dostojewskijs Werk* (1989), 292-3.

[12] See L. Giussani, *La familiarita`con Cristo*: *Meditazioni sull'anno liturgico* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2008), 76. Giussani was one of the first and principal recipients of Guardini's thought in Italy.

[13] Guardini, *Liturgie und liturgische Bildung* (1992), 57-8; = *Liturgy and Liturgical Formation,* trans. Jan Bentz (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2022), 40. 'The deepest meaning to be found in the cultural movement of our day may be that we will be filled anew with humanity and strive for the true expression of human nature. Not toward the spirit and not toward the animal, but toward what we truly are: human beings—soul that forms the body, and body that is permeated by the soul and is expressed in revelation. We ought to become essential. For us, this means to be truly human. Our relations and actions in life, as well as our customs in society, our customs in labor, and our joy itself, must become essentially human.' The soul 'translates' itself into the body. Likewise, Christ translates himself into the existence of each Christian in an original manner.

Man is fundamentally a paradoxical being, meaning that he always eludes a conclusive definition. Humans must at least be characterized by more than just rationality. They are beings defined by having a 'heart' that does not necessarily contradict the intellect but complements it. The heart is the center of the person, capable of faith, and mediates between body and spirit.[14] It is also the seat of deep religious experience, an encounter with God, and a power sensible to values and beauty. The focus on the heart is ultimately a criterion for Guardini's preference for certain thinkers he categorizes under the headline *philosophia cordis.*[15] Moreover, human beings are endowed with some givens and a solid basis to build their existence, but human existence is ever developing, expanding, and striving towards an end.[16] It is not simply changing over and again but dynamically realizing its own potential at the natural level and acquiring new potential at the supernatural level. This is not an automatic and easy process but a choice that can go awry. This is why, unlike other substances, the human being does not fully exist at the outset; rather, it is a being that will only exist at the end.

> The 'nature' of man as God intended it is not the first, but the last. The fully 'natural' man, the pure, full and free, the 'beautiful' fulfillment of man is at the end, not at the beginning, and it is the fruit of dedication to that which is above man. To put it more sharply, we humans do not have a 'nature' that is given from the outset and that is fulfilled in a straightforward process of unfolding. Rather, our nature consists in transcending the 'merely human 'into the divine, and only therein are we to gain the 'actually human 'intended by God.[17]

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[14] See Guardini, *In Spiegel und Gleichnis* (1990), 40. 'In the heart, the spirit meets the body' (*Körper*) and makes it the 'body' (*Leib*); in the heart, the blood meets the spirit and it becomes the 'soul.' Both occur through love. This love, however, is ultimately only possible through grace, which draws the whole, the human being, into the community of God's life.' See also Guardini, *Rainer Maria Rilkes Deutung des Daseins*, 319; *Die Bekehrung des Aurelius Augustinus*, 54-5, 218; *Christliches Bewußtsein,* 145; *Ethik,* 104.

[15] Examples include Plato, St Paul, Ignatius of Antioch, Augustine, Bernard de Clairvaux, Catherine of Siena, Francis of Assisi, and Franciscan mystics, Bonaventure, Dante, Francis de Sales, Teresa of Ávila, Pascal, the Oratorians, Rosmini, Kierkegaard, Max Scheler, and even Nietzsche (see Guardini, *Dantes Göttliche Komödie,* 137, 258; *Christliches Bewußtsein,* 143-4; *L'uomo: Fondamenti di una antropologia cristiana*, 87).

[16] These are the paradoxical laws of a living being: to stay within the limits of order and to cross the borders of one's safe space. See Guardini, *Hölderlin* (1996), 56, 231; Laura Vedelago, *Guardini e le figure della fede* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2022), 140-1.

[17] Guardini, 'Der Glaube an die Gnade und das Bewußtsein der Schuld,' in: *Unterscheidung des Christlichen*, II (1994), 116.

This ephemerality, with the prospect of future perfection, is yet another characteristic of Guardini's well-balanced position amid various existentialist and nihilistic trends in the first half of the 20th century. He used to be perceived as nostalgic and pessimistic, especially in front of the growing power of technology, but as later developments have shown, he was insightful in ringing the bell to warn against a growing danger.

The Scope of Cultural Pluralism

Second, Guardini was a man who engaged in dialogue in time and space. His contribution to theological renewal consisted of looking for the *semina Verbi* dispersed in manifold sources of knowledge. He chose as partners for the dialogue whoever had something valuable and (at least partially) true to say. This led to his radical interdisciplinarity and polyhedrality. It can be misunderstood as not specializing in anything—theology, philosophy, religious science, and literature—while commenting on all possible issues that he chooses randomly at whim.[18] This would certainly not be ideal; fortunately, it is not the case. He is not dabbling in literary criticism or philosophy while understanding neither. Guardini's approach should be rather characterized as observing topics at a distance from a particular viewpoint, which does not deny the necessity of specialized fields of study. The topics and targets chosen for reflection are of universal and cultural importance, often before others recognize their validity. This has the advantage of being more objective and seeing seemingly unrelated things as being connected and relevant. Modern sciences, in contrast, are too specialized and look at objects at a very close angle. Guardini felt the need for a bridge-science that would bring into dialogue different pieces of truth that the respective sciences reveal about things, especially about the being called human. This innovative subject of his called Catholic or Christian *Weltanschauung* shows that thinking about the universe from the viewpoint of theology does not end in talking about God only, but faith has repercussions on a wide range of topics, such as society, culture, art, or work, and they, in turn, can nourish and purify faith.[19] Nothing in human life is unrelated to the Christian message that sheds light on virtually all matters. Reality for Guardini is 'round' and especially the Catholic worldview means nothing else than looking at it from a standpoint from which all parts are seen.[20]

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[18] See Guardini, *Stationen und Rückblicke / Berichte über mein Leben*, 45.

[19] Faith here does not mean some supernatural experience or some blind belief in the absence of evidence, but a fundamental attitude of accepting everything from God, a new mode of existence. Therefore, it can and must reveal itself in ordinary, normal circumstances.

[20] See Guardini, 'Vom Wesen katholischer Weltanschauung,' in: *Unterscheidung des Christlichen*, I, 33.

It was within his lectures on 'Christliche Weltanschauung' and seminars that he dealt over the years with thinkers and authors such as Augustine, Kierkegaard, and Rilke. According to Guardini, many thinkers aim to achieve the same goal,[21] which is why they can be compared and brought into the dialogue. This is because all humans have in themselves the same fundamental desires. All it takes is to be attentive to them. These are unquenchable desires and quests that can, however, be substituted by something else, less genuine; they cannot be ignored, but certainly can be suppressed, yet only at a cost. Questions such as What is man? What is the meaning of everything? Is there a god? How to live accordingly? are not and cannot be dealt with by any particular science because they escape the scientific method. That various thinkers and authors can in their own way deal with similar questions and arrive at similar conclusions, that is, share in the same truth to a higher or lower degree, is ultimately due to the fact that humans are endowed with the same nature that is realized in various forms. Although common human nature is corrupted and, hence, perhaps not fully knowable by any single person, Guardini is far from being a nominalist. There are no unique, independent individuals who lack any connection whatsoever, nor are there countless people who resemble each other like copies. Rather there are certain types of people who realize some *Wesensgestalt* but always in their own individual way.

Romano Guardini was not a theoretician but a lover of mysticism. Perhaps in the deeper realm, where linguistic and mental concepts fail, all people become closer to each other and can enter dialogue. On the other hand, Guardini was far from avoiding rational comprehension, indulging in some vague spiritual mishmash. For him, reality is penetrable, knowable, and illuminated by the divine Logos. Words are often insufficient to describe this, but they are still necessary. What he tried to avoid was a sterile, dry rationalism, void of experience and feeling. Thus, mystics for him mean, above all, people who have a more intimate, personal connection with the mystery of being, whose ground is Christ, not despite logical categories but beyond them.

> Today Christ is born. Today he lives, acts, and speaks. Today he dies and goes home to the Father. Today the Holy Spirit comes. Either today too or never. Faith would have nothing to do with a Savior, who was only historical, only then. However, this does not mean a mere religious experience or a poetic or

[21] See Guardini, *Briefe an Josef Weiger 1908-1962* (2008), 147. 'It seems to me that there is a deep kinship between St Benedict, Thomas, Goethe, Newman, Lucie Christine. They were all turned towards the real, averse to all extremes, all exaggeration, all full of deep reverence for mystery, be it of life, of art, or of religion. They were all antitheticians, cautious not to bend or violate anything, broad, free, full of infinite possibilities and open to all possibilities. They are all simple, people of "everyday life," but great and deep in it. All of them with the highest in mind, but true realists, clear in mind and warm in heart.'

> dialectical relationship, but a reality. A special kind of reality, of course, namely that which in the language of the Church is called the mystical. It is the form of reality of Christ encountering faith, who was then, but is at the same time 'always with us'; the pneumatic reality.[22]

The fundamental law of spiritual (as opposed to physical) existence 'Whoever tries to preserve one's own life will lose it'[23] cannot be grasped, let alone understood, on a rational or logical level, but that does not mean it is absurd. Deeper and wider insights are needed to understand this mystery. A mystical sight is a change of looking that can find God in seemingly mundane realities without confusing the former with the latter.

What Guardini wants to express can be seen from sources he chooses for his reflection, more than what he states *expressis verbis*. His openness to truth allowed him to choose practically anything for his analysis. He goes literally to the borders of theology and philosophy and looks for what is valid everywhere, especially in current areas of culture. He does not exclude a priori any partner for dialogue; however, since one must choose something to start with, he turns towards the giants of literature and thought that were relevant in his period or that were not appreciated enough. People of interest to him are figures who realized a deeper truth about reality or at least embodied such knowledge. He occupies himself above all with Platonic-Augustinian sources such as Bonaventure, Pascal, and Kierkegaard, apart from Augustine. These are the people with whom Guardini can personally sympathize and whose thoughts resonate within him. Pride of place belongs to writers such as Dante, Dostoevsky, and German poets. It is postulated that literature and other art forms are often more apt to touch on the deep issues of human existence than philosophical explanations, let alone scientific definitions. The point is that God's message is not confined to the Scriptures, which Guardini is far from neglecting, but is echoed in seemingly non-religious thinkers as well. The reason is that the Church or religion cannot stay isolated in some spiritual ghetto but must take a position in front of a plethora of topics and problems. That is not to say that Christianity has a ready-made answer to every problem, but that it should not be afraid to face and be challenged by many worldviews, almost as if it had to protect itself from them.

With every interlocutor he chooses, Guardini does not perform an act of analysis and explanation but rather an interpretation from the Christian viewpoint. This is sometimes misunderstood as if Guardini were conducting a literary analysis of those works, which leads to incorrect expectations and

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[22] Guardini, 'Heilige Schrift und Glaubenswissenschaft,' in: *Wurzeln eines großen Lebenswerks,* II (2001), 374.

[23] This 'fundamental principle of Christian existence' is one of Guardini's favorite and most-quoted Scripture passages (Mt 10:39). The other one is even more specifically Christian, but not less human: it is not I that live, but Christ in me and precisely because of that I live (Gal 2:20).

disappointment.[24] He does not simply explain what Dostoyevsky or Rilke said or meant to say but tries to read them through Christian lenses, believing that even non-religious writers can reveal something essential about the human condition. Without reading into their works what they should have said so that it matches the Christian worldview, he looks at things the writers perhaps did not notice. Moreover, let us not forget that Guardini's interest is not oriented only towards some popular novels or poems, but that he attempted a similar project of breaking down, digesting, and retelling a story of no other than Jesus himself.[25] Doubtlessly, Jesus is for Guardini not just another point of reference, one figure among others, to analyze and interpret, but the reference point *par excellence*. His words and deeds cannot be measured against any other human example but the other way around. Unlike in the liberal Christianity of his as well as our days, Jesus Christ is not a model, an inspiration, let alone a thinker or social activist from the past, but rather the moving force and kernel of all existence. Guardini is adamant that Jesus is not an idea but a living God.[26]

Christ's figure (*Gestalt*) exceeds all other figures, meaning it can enter any figure and take form in any person in an ever-original manner.

> The figure that makes the Christian a Christian, which should permeate all his expressions, bind together all the different processes of his life into a unity, be recognized in everything, is the Christ in him. In each individual differently, according to his nature.… In every Christian, Christ lives His life anew, as it were: He is first a child and then matures until He reaches the full age of the mature Christian. However, in this He grows, so that faith grows, love grows stronger, the Christian becomes ever more clearly aware of his Christianity and lives his Christian existence with ever greater depth and responsibility.[27]

Neither knowledge of Jesus nor strength of faith matters, but the existential relatedness with him. In surveying different 'figures of faith'

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[24] I remember a book review on the Japanese Amazon website about Guardini's Dostoevsky book. The reader was probably expecting a summary and/or aesthetic evaluation of the novels.

[25] More precisely, the literary interpretations were for him a preparation for the bigger enterprise, existential analysis of the figure of Jesus. 'I have also carried out a number of sometimes comprehensive analyses of the personality and work of figures who were both philosophically and religiously significant: Socrates, Augustine, Pascal, Hölderlin, Dostoyevsky, Rilke, to name only the more comprehensive ones, and these works, apart from their particular subject matter, were also preliminary exercises in order to get hold of the means necessary to analyze the figure of Jesus' (Guardini, *Die Existenz des Christen*, 270).

[26] See Guardini, *Das Wesen des Christentums / Die Menschliche Wirklichkeit des Herrn* (1991), 185-8; *Die Offenbarung: Ihr Wesen und ihre Formen* (1940), 111.

[27] Guardini, *Der Herr* (2000), 556.

Guardini is not looking for ideal types, but rather looks at how Christ can reveal himself in human life and history repeatedly. These figures embody a Christian existence in their own way, and while being fallible, they help us to do the same in our own existential situation. Strangely enough, even anti-examples of faith or persons with deformed faith have something to teach us about existence in this world. Be that as it may, the Christ–form is not a kind of pattern that should be imprinted on every person of every age and place, but rather a treasure from which each person can draw inspiration and strength while he or she strives to configure their unique life with that of Christ. We can better learn this truth from the lives of real people or fictional personages rather than speculative reflections. What Guardini looks for in the personages he interrogates is what they have to say about the truth, even if they arrive at it gradually or partially. In doing so, Guardini is not scientific or objective in the modern sense; rather, he confuses what Augustine or Pascal are saying, what they wanted to say, and what they would have said with what he has to say. He appropriates something valuable from each of them and adds to it his own observations. This is more important to him than reconstructing what the writer did or did not say. In other words, he looks for what is of universal value and applies to his own period.

Guardini's Lesson for the Christian Mission

What we can inherit from Guardini is this approach and method. In other words, it is important to look for what people are concerned about and interested in by listening to them at any moment. We should endeavor to understand why an author is saying this or that, and what she is trying to express underneath. The topics and sources for our reflections are not to be restricted to theological or other literature of our comfort zone. Nor are they to be chosen simply because they are popular as part of a fad, but because they resonate with people's deep longings. We can imagine what kind of sources Guardini would choose as a target of his interpretation and dialogue if he lived nowadays. We can speculate that he might occupy himself with Umberto Eco, C.S. Lewis, and Dan Brown, besides more demanding authors, such as Richard Dawkins. A church living his legacy cannot stay silent in front of current topics relevant to modern people, especially youth. That is not to say that the Church must adopt all proposals and acquiesce to all the demands of the modern world. However, it should at least show interest in and comprehension of what people inside or outside the Church deal with. For Guardini, even Goethe and Aquinas can ultimately be compared, not because they agree upon everything and not even fundamental ideas. The point is that even people with fundamentally different views can have valid claims, because they partake in the same truth. Therefore there is something we can learn and be inspired even by authors and thinkers we disagree with on

almost everything. Notably, Guardini thought about real truth as 'polyphonic,'[28] commenting on Newman.

Yet, though the Church's mission is to transmit the undiluted Gospel message and measure everything against biblical standards, it must do so in culturally relevant forms and ways. Paradoxical as this may sound, churches can be guardians of what is genuinely human in the arts, culture, and media, helping people discern what is beautiful and true from what is fake or kitsch. This is an especially pressing issue for youth, to whom Guardini dedicated almost his entire ministry—as educator, pastor, and accompanist. By choosing from the vast array of authors what was worth reading or watching, he taught them to appreciate the beautiful and the good wherever it reveals itself.[29] As Guardini talked about new virtues in alternative terms (such as comradeship, reverence, politeness, gratefulness, and composure) and made them attractive and understandable for young people of his age, the Church should do the same in this age, which is yet another time of crisis, albeit for different reasons. Most of Guardini's literary partners in the dialogue were people who lived in a time of crisis, when something was coming to an end and the new reality was not yet visible.

Not only is Guardini's choice of authors and his interpretative approach a model for 21st century Christians and missionaries, but also his personal story represents an example of inculturation. Despite being Italian in origin and speaking another mother tongue at home, he accepted Germany as his second motherland. From an early age, he mastered the German language, but never lost connection with his original culture. Rather than being half Italian—half German, he was fully Italian and fully German simultaneously, with a double amount of heredity from which to draw. He accepted German citizenship for practical reasons; however, his cosmopolitan scope was and remains an important lesson, especially in times when one nation, only one's own nationality, had been emphasized. Indeed, this is just another example of how human natural religiosity (detached from faith) can subconsciously mistake and replace anything for God, thus making it an idol. Religiosity is a deep and intrinsic feature of human nature, but precisely because of that it has to be expressed and made explicit; otherwise, we risk that it sublimates and springs into alternative forms. His struggle with and criticism of political tyranny in his new homeland was motivated precisely by this: that no political leader should mimic a savior and that no politician can indeed be a savior.[30] Every utopian promise of an easy, imminent, earthly paradise is a myth and, ultimately, a lie.

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[28] See 'Heilige Gestalt,' in: *Wurzeln eines großen Lebenswerks*, II, 186.

[29] Interestingly, just recently Pope Francis issued an apostolic letter on the importance of literature in priestly and lay formation. For some reason, however, he does not mention Guardini.

[30] See 'Der Heilbringer in Mythos: Offenbarung und Politik,' in: *Unterscheidung des Christlichen,* II.

A Church that walks in Guardini's footsteps, among others, should try to keep the difficult balance between being *in* the world and sharing its needs and worries, while not being *from* the world. Let me quote Guardini yet once more:

> Man does not simply belong to the world, but stands on its border, within it and at the same time outside it, integrated into it, and at the same time having it at his disposal, because he is directly related to God. Not to the spirit of the world, or to the All-Mystery, or the Primordial Ground, but to the sovereign Lord, the Creator of all that exists, who has called him and keeps him in the call, who has given him the world in responsibility, and demands an account of him.[31]

We can change the world only if we maintain a solicitude for it and also have freedom towards it. Accordingly, there is no either – or for Guardini, between the subject, nature, and culture, which have tended to be absolutized since modernity, each on its own; they hold together in front of God. In our days too, faith is born and exists on the border where the encounter between God and the world happens; however, it is a more difficult task than before the dawn of modernity. However, no matter how important it is to be situated in a context—since it is impossible to talk about God abstractly, nor does God talk abstractly!—Faith must not be diluted and resolved into a cultural or natural phenomenon.

Another feature of Guardini to be noted, perhaps a weakness and strength at the same time, is his inconclusiveness and openness. He did not want to offer conclusive statements or definitions but stays always on the path towards a better formulation, offering but new 'orientations' and 'attempts.' Apart from definitive pronouncements of the Church that are part of the Revelation mediated by her, we must preserve modesty in front of the complicated matters of this world, because unlike material objects, human existence is complex and dynamic. In a Guardini-like manner, we had better stay open towards the world, the other, and the truth in the first place, and not closed in our own convictions, in circles of our allies, and in this-worldly realities only.

In Conclusion

Let me conclude by observing that Guardini is not inerrant and that not everything in his method and thought is necessarily relevant today. He could be criticized for not being exact and detailed enough, for not touching more upon concrete and difficult issues of his or our day, and for mentioning many

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[31] Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit / Die Macht,* 177. Note that he does not talk about Christians exclusively but about humans as such.

important points only *en passant* or in a slogan-like way, without digging deeper. However, he himself was aware of this and took the liberty to do so. In addition, he is still a man of an epoch that was coming to an end, in which a lot of knowledge was presupposed and when technical precision, for example, in quotations, was not as strictly required. Nevertheless, he can offer inspiration and stimuli for further reflection. It might seem that he was just a remnant of an age coming to its end, almost like Moses watching the promised land from afar, but it can be quite shocking to realize how modern and open Guardini was for new things. One example of what he was passionate about is cinema, which had started to develop, but on the other hand he was skeptical about the TV transmissions of the Mass.

Although universal truths exist, they must be shaped and reshaped into certain forms. Just as Guardini admires the Middle Ages for its many traits (such as the contemplative attitude that prevails over unbridled activism) while being conscious of not being able to return to it, we too can admire Guardini and learn from him by updating his ideas and applying them to our context. The fundamental principle remains the same: not to dream of an ideal past but to take seriously the present, with eyes open towards the future. The post-modern times in which we live can benefit greatly from the many things emphasized by Guardini. In particular, the need for tightrope walking between different areas, the need for balance and proportion between various spheres of life—especially the need to remain active while being rooting in silence—and the need to protect the human person from whatever might endanger her. The person ought not to be destroyed by pessimism, technological power, or utopian political structures and, in the end, not even by man himself. Human beings are always excellent, but the more they excel, the more they are tempted to pride; therefore, their excellence must be tempered by humility, which is a godly attitude. May Romano Guardini, whose diocesan beatification process has begun, continue to intercede for us all!

Thomas Plant

The Long Shadow of Plotinus

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The way of life of an entire civilization is threatened by an upstart. The new creed started on the radical fringes of society, but over the span of two centuries, it has won the loyalty of lawyers, statesmen, and educators. Conservative intellectuals have tried to resist its weed-like growth. They have poured contempt on its tenets, mocked its lack of rigor. But this was not enough to stem the tide. The generation of conservative thinkers after them realizes that however sound their predecessors' thinking, it will avail nothing without a vehicle to popularize it and to convey it to the masses. To prevent annihilation by the new creed, they will have to revive what their elders scorned. They turn back to the old religion.

This story is familiar, but not new. The civilization in question is that of pagan antiquity, the conservative intellectuals are those we now call Neoplatonists, and the upstart creed is Christianity. One reason the Christian threat was so effective is that, for over a century, the pagan philosophers' own cynicism had hastened the decline of their ancestral religion. Back in the second century, Plutarch had seen philosophy as complementary to the lively cultus of Hellenistic paganism. But by the middle of the third, his successors were cultured despisers, who regarded religion as at best a regrettable concession to *hoi polloi*.

The Ascetic

Plotinus (205-270) was instrumental in this respect. He taught by word and example a strenuously ascetic form of Platonism with an individualistic slant. The true philosopher, he taught, could escape the prison of the body and the world, and so ascend to spiritual union with God, the One. This was

something that anyone with suitable intellectual faculties could achieve, entirely by their own merits. It was a universal system, unrelated to any local religious cult. On David Goodhart's polarity of 'somewheres' versus 'anywheres,' Plotinus was very much an 'anywheres' man. According to his biographer and chief disciple Porphyry (c. 234-305), Plotinus refused to discuss his parentage or nation, proclaiming his true homeland as the realm of the Forms and his true father as God alone. His kingdom was not of this world. But unlike the Nazarene before him, whose claims to universality were grounded firmly in the specificity of his Jewish tribe and nation, for Plotinus, bonds of blood and soil were social chains from which the superior soul should strive to be liberated. By the time he died in 270, he was renowned as a spiritual master who had several times actually managed to achieve this liberation from the flesh and union with the One. Plotinus' muscular philosophy of ascetic 'flight from the alone to the alone' offered a fitting spirituality for the ambitious classes of an empire striving for political unity. His counsel was widely sought among the wealthy Roman elite.

The shadow side of Plotinus' success, though, became apparent even among his immediate disciples. His spirituality offered great rewards for the few, but little if anything for the many. In the old, local cults, any son of the parish might be designated priest, fulfilling ritual duties without special training or spiritual experience. Now, it seemed, only the great philosophers could be true priests, for the only true temples were those interior ones accessible to their prodigious minds. In this regard, Porphyry echoed his master's view. He graciously condescended to indulge his wife's participation in the local sacrifices, but when pressed, considered such religiosity unnecessary, or worse—and this may be the fruit of Christian influence—he deemed the local rites efforts to appease unsavory and inferior daemons. So, Porphyry recognized the widening gap between civic cult and the philosophical ideal, but he thought it not worth the effort of bridging. As long as the philosophical elite could continue their spiritual and intellectual pursuits unhindered, it mattered little what the plebs offered at their village altars.

The Priest

It was Porphyry's contemporary, Iamblichus (c. 240-325), also part of Plotinus' circle, who saw that the threat to Greek religion implied, more seriously, a threat to Greek culture as a whole. Iamblichus understood that the universal Platonic philosophy proclaimed by Plotinus could not be excised from its local, culturally specific instantiations in popular religion without the risk of killing both. It was in the myriad stories of local deities that the singular truth of philosophy was conserved in particular forms. In the ritual outworking of those stories, the Platonic pursuit of union with God was made accessible not just to the few, but to the many, and indeed to the whole cosmos,

according to the spiritual capacity of each being. The village temple was a local repository of universal memory, indeed a local expression of the universal soul. And this was true, averred Iamblichus, whether it was a temple to a Greek divinity, one of his own native Syrian gods, or one of the Egyptian pantheon which he came to adopt. These divinities were not to be rejected, as Porphyry had suggested, as malevolent daemons: rather, Iamblichus countered, time had proven the local gods the most effective means of warding against such malicious spirits. The old religion protected the people and inspired virtue, not vice, in them, channeling the power of the One through localized instantiations. Far from being an obstacle to philosophy, local religion was necessary for its preservation and propagation, and for that of the rich cultural inheritance of Greece.

Iamblichus' mission to reconcile philosophy and pagan religion ultimately failed. For while pagan philosophy had been busy digging up its own religious roots, a wild mustard bush had spread prodigiously over the topsoil of the Empire. Christianity was popular among the masses, but even in Plotinus' day held increasing influence in the elite schools of pagan philosophy, too. His frequent invective against those he calls 'gnostics' indicates this much. At the end of the third century, Emperor Diocletian launched a final wave of persecutions against the new religion, which strengthened the pagan philosophers' hands, but not for long. Oppression also served then, as it has through the centuries, to consolidate Christian resistance, and the numbers of the faithful grew. So, by 312, when the emperor St Constantine converted and the next year proclaimed the toleration of Christianity in the Edict of Milan, the writing was on the wall for the pagan philosophers. By the middle of the fourth century, the best way for them to survive was to move away from the religious brand of Platonism espoused by Iamblichus and again to separate philosophy clearly from religion, teaching only what would not rouse the ire of the Christian authorities.

The Emperor

Pagan philosophers enjoyed a brief reprieve in 361-363 under Emperor Julian the Philosopher, known better to posterity by his Christian moniker, 'the Apostate.' He enthusiastically revived Iamblichus' project. Offering firm intellectual grounds for the restoration of pagan religion for the masses, Iamblichus' religious Platonism had the potential to replace Christian thought as the official theology of the Empire. Having learnt from his forefathers' examples that violent persecution of Christians watered the seedbeds of martyrdom, Julian tried instead to cut them off from the intellectual life of the Empire. Think of today's 'cancellations,' as he deposed Christian teachers of philosophy from their academic posts. What he could not do, however, was prevent the churches from feeding and clothing the pagan poor. Nor could Julian's desire to decentralize and dissipate power along the boundaries of

local deities' patronage, essentially a reversion to pagan parochialism, halt the Constantinian momentum towards political unity to which Christian monotheism had lent its formidable mass. After Julian's death in 363, the remainder of the fourth century saw Christian reprisals against pagan philosophers, including the execution of Julian's mentor Maximus, a disciple of Iamblichus.

The Successor

By the turn of the fifth century, pagan devotion was largely forbidden in public and retreated to the private sphere. Persecution of pagan philosophers progressed, climaxing in 415 with the mob execution of Hypatia in Alexandria under the alleged approval of the city's bishop, Cyril. Nonetheless, the teaching of pagan philosophy was tolerated there to the degree that it did not conflict openly with Christian theology. So, sixteen years later, a prodigious nineteen-year-old would travel there to study Aristotle, whose works were deemed theologically neutral enough not to attract the suspicion of the Church. This young man was Proclus (412-485). Though born in Constantinople and educated at first in Alexandria, his name would come to be suffixed with that of Athens, protectorate of the eponymous goddess of wisdom and home of Plato's Academy. Restored by Marcus Aurelius in the 170s following the sacking of the city by Rome in 86, the Academy continued to flourish. There, Proclus was guided from his Aristotelian rudiments to the higher mysteries of Plato. His master was Syrianus, the head of the Academy, who bore the title Successor or *Diadochus* of the great father of philosophy. Proclus progressed so quickly that when in 437 Syrianus died, he took his place, serving as *Diadochus* for almost half a century. Never marrying, he devoted himself to teaching, writing—and to religion. On the foundations laid by Iamblichus, Proclus built a complex and subtle philosophical edifice, sharing the conviction that the various local cults of the world were divine revelations of a single truth, so that, in words recorded by his biographer Marinus, the philosopher ought to be 'the common priest of the entire world.' Under Proclus' leadership, the Academy became as much a religious house as a school of the intellect. Unlike the school in the more Christian-dominated Alexandria, pagans under his tutelage in Athens not only survived, but thrived. It was decades after his death that, in 531, the Academy was closed for good on the orders of the Christian Emperor Justinian.

The Fathers

This story of Platonic philosophy's bifurcation between rationalism and ritualism is salutary to modern Christians, with analogues repeating through the history of the Church. At the broadest level, the more rationalistic,

Western Platonism of Plotinus and Porphyry had greater influence on the Western Church, typified particularly by St Augustine. The ritualistic, Eastern Platonism of Iamblichus and Proclus was more influential in the Eastern Church, via the anonymous monk who identified himself with St Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian philosopher won to Christ by St Paul in Acts 17.

St Augustine had little time for what he knew of Eastern Platonism. Cicero's *Hortensius* and the *libri Platonicorum* which he tells us he studied in the *Confessions* were products of the Western school. In book 10 of the *City of God,* Augustine amplifies Porphyry's objections and condemns the ritualistic practices promoted by Iamblichus as necromancy and discourse with demons. The particular target of his ire was theurgy. This literally means 'divine work,' and constituted a sort of ritual magic by which certain tokens of a god were used to invoke that divinity's powers. For example, in a fragment of an otherwise lost work, *De sacrificio et magia,* Proclus cites the movement of heliotrope flowers, the luster of the sunstone, the cockcrow at dawn, and the mane of the lion as symbols of the sun-god which are immanent in the cosmos. These could be ritually used to channel the power of Helios. Under the more Plotinian, Western kind of Platonism, the material world was something from which the adept should strive to escape by an inward turn to the soul, a motif which reappears in Augustine's spirituality. But under Eastern Platonism, the entire cosmos offers multifarious revelations of God. The universe is replete with divine images which, however dim and blurred, participate in the energies of the gods whose likeness they bear. Through proper ritual use of these symbols, humans too can participate in the divine energies. Despite Porphyry and St Augustine's objections, however, to participate did not mean to control. Iamblichus himself countered Porphyry's complaints directly in a letter still extant, insisting that theurgy in no wise implied that mortals can manipulate the gods, but rather, the symbols inherent in nature are vehicles by which the gods' wills are accomplished through human hands.

St Dionysius certainly did not share St Augustine's hostility towards theurgy. He made it the intellectual basis for his sacramental and liturgical theology. Borrowing directly from Proclus, in some instances almost verbatim, he articulates a vision of the cosmos as a theophany, the revelation not of gods but of the One, true and Triune God. To describe this theophanic cosmos, he coined the term 'hierarchy,' by which he means not the power structure that serves as a bogeyman to modern progressives, but in the literal sense of the term, a 'sacred order.' Everything flows from God, whose Oneness and Threeness demonstrates that He is beyond even the distinction of unity and multiplicity. God is utterly transcendent, yet simultaneously immanent, and so patient of participation through such effective symbols as water, oil, bread, and wine, as revealed by the Divine Word Incarnate and in Scripture. The elements of baptism, anointing, and Eucharist are each compounds of God's work and man's. On the one hand, they are the product of the seasons moved by the celestial spheres, which is to say, God's work; yet also of the human

work of harvesting, pressing, mixing, and baking. The sacraments therefore express a synergy between the Creator and the created. In this, they are a microcosm of true reality, the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man. As the Logos which gives form to all creation, He reveals Himself in everything that exists.

Dionysius drew on Proclus' Eastern Platonism to clarify that precisely because God is Incarnate, He is known not despite, but through the things of this world, and that the vehicle for knowing Him is the communal practice of religious ritual. Like Proclus, he does not limit this commonality, or Communion, to the human mind alone. All things symbolize God according to their capacity and so speak a non-verbal language of adoration, a cosmic hymn to God redolent of Psalm 19 and the Benedicite sung by the Three Children. As Proclus put it in the *De Sacrificio*, 'all things pray according to their own station, and sing hymns' through 'vertical chains' of reality. Whereas those 'chains' for Proclus meant the various strata of pagan heroes, daemons, and demigods linking the lower world to the One, for St Dionysius and his successors they are the saints and angels, headed by the Blessed Theotokos, who lift up the prayers of the Church and cosmos to Christ.

This hierarchical vision in no way compromises the unique mediation of Christ, for it is always Him working through the saints and angels, and indeed throughout the entire created order. Christ alone intercedes to the Father, yet all beings may participate in His intercession according to their capacity. There is no mistaking Proclus' influence here, but this is not just the fanciful elaboration of pagan Hellenism over some pristine and simple substrate of Hebraic thought. One can find analogous angelology in Second Temple Jewish literature, including 1 Enoch and Jubilees, and in non-canonical Christian writings of the Apostolic age. What Dionysius does with Eastern Platonic theurgic philosophy is to amplify the full cosmic significance of the liturgy of the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ through which all things may be all in Him, with Him as Head governing the whole.

St Dionysius' theurgic Platonism continued to influence the Eastern Church through the likes of St Maximus the Confessor, St John of Damascus, and St Gregory Palamas, but he was also far from inconsequential in the West. Mediated by translation into Latin by John Scotus Eriugena, Dionysius went on to influence such fathers as St Bonaventure, the Victorines, and, most famously, St Thomas Aquinas. The Angelic Doctor took the Areopagite's sub-apostolic identity as read and cited him as an authority higher even than St Augustine. Eastern Platonism also stole covertly into the medieval West via the Arabic recension of the so-called *Liber de causis*, long mistakenly attributed to Aristotle, but in fact a paraphrase of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. It is evident too in the hierarchical strata portrayed in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

The Reformers

But later, the West would be riven by disputes between rationalists and ritualists over much the same territory as that delineated centuries before among the Platonists. By Luther's time, Dionysius' authenticity was in doubt. When the great Reformer dismissed the pseudo-Areopagite, 'whoever he was,' as *magis Platonizans quam Christianizans*, what irked him was not only his apparent appropriation of apostolic authority, but the ritualistic, sacramental application of Platonism. Luther was not anti-sacramental; nonetheless, for him, the inward turn of conscience trumped communal ritual obligation, and the theology of the Cross took precedence over the theology of God's glory revealed in the cosmos. Calvin's hyper-Augustinianism bears further marks of his master's more Plotinian inward turn, particularly in his receptionist interpretation of the sacraments. For the Calvinist, the sacraments are not objective vehicles of divine grace, but their efficacy depends on the recipient's inward state of faith. And while the 'book of nature' bears its artist creator's fingerprints, it can hardly be described as sacramental. Hence the devotional media of art, music, or incense are ephemera at best, and at worst idolatrous distractions from the pure, inward worship of a contrite heart. While the churches of the Reformation have always harbored a diversity of opinions towards ritual, an underlying hermeneutic of suspicion against beauty is undeniable.

The Moderns

Nonetheless, the pendulum between Eastern Platonic religious ritualism and disdainful Western rationalism did not stop swinging at the Reformation. It has carried on right to the present. It swung from the rationalist Reformers to the ritualist Caroline divines, from the Puritan Commonwealth to the monarchist and sacramentalist 1662 Prayer Book, from high-and-dry Anglican verbosity to Methodist weekly communion, and from Cartesian and Kantian interiority to the Romantic, Arts and Crafts, and Oxford Movements which reacted against the moralistic deism and the utilitarian, technocratic spirit of their age. It swung from the scientific occultism of the elite Blavatskyite salons, through the Great War, to the climax of inter-war Anglo-Catholicism which offered the requiem masses so needed by the people to commend their sons' souls to God. From this swing emerged the conscious medieval aestheticism of the Inklings.

Nor, however, did the pendulum stop there. The 1960s marked a decisive swing away from the ritual of organized religion. The liturgical reforms which followed the Second Vatican Council were a part of this swing, betraying a certain lack of faith by the Roman Catholic Church in her ancient rites which Protestant churches would soon mimic. Instead, within the whole Western Church there was a boom in interior and experiential forms of spirituality,

including the charismatic movement. Outside arose a new fascination with East Asian religions and paganism. All of these subjective spiritualities eased the way towards mass apostasy and atheism, embraced even by certain Christian theologians of the day. Liberal deism, historical-critical Biblical scholarship, liberation theology and its particularist offshoots have also played their part, subjecting the veracity of divine revelation in the Church to external, rational criteria, respectively psychology, empiricism, Marxism, and postmodern theory. Hence, liberal churches today offer the same thing as secular modernity: individual self-fulfillment via liberation not through, but from the hierarchies of Church, nature, nation, and family. If there is any divinity at all, it is only to be found within the self, not mediated through the other. The saints are no more than exemplars, the angels an unnecessary hypothesis. The sacraments can be received in the heart by online livestream. The created order is barely relevant to salvation. Revelation is direct, or not at all. There is now only me and my God, and like Plotinus, I must fly to him alone.

But there are signs of another swing today. Like the ancient philosophers, Christianity has been busy rationalizing itself into obscurity. And now, as in the days of Iamblichus, the old religion faces the threat of an upstart. A cuckoo nests in the Church, academy, business world, and political establishment. However, the ancient pagans' enemy was easier to identify. Ours is more nebulous, driven by a shadowy coalition of agents with uncertain motives. The progressive new religion of race and gender critical theory which has swept through Western society plays all too conveniently into the cynical machinations of Communist China, Russia, and political Islam, none of which have shown particular interest in the preservation of Western culture and liberties: hence the swing.

Though one might hesitate to put Richard Dawkins into the same camp as Plotinus, it is surely noteworthy that the old guard of cultured despisers of religion are beginning to admit that even if it is not true, it may be needed to save the culture they enjoy. They are threatened with the same cancellations that once befell their opponents. In the post-Dawkins generation, Tom Holland and Jordan Peterson are among those who, like Porphyry, concede psychological and historical value to their historic religion, but do not think it necessary to adhere to it themselves, instead taking its stories as motifs for the creative pursuit of ultimately individual spiritual growth.

But there are also those of the younger generation yet who, like Iamblichus, see the necessity not only of the mythos, but of religious practice and adherence. Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Paul Kingsnorth are exemplars of these protégés, a former atheist and pagan respectively, who have now reverted fully to the old religion in its most ritualistic and sacramental of forms, Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Among Protestants, too, there are those such as the Anglican Hans Boersma who follow the Dionysian path, calling for a reappraisal of classical metaphysics and its concomitant sacramental worldview. Peter Leithart and Phillip Cary call for a renewal of the

sacramental life from their respective Reformed and Lutheran perspectives. Across the Christian spectrum, the gap between ritual and reason is closing again.

Beyond Atheism

Is the story of the pagan philosophers repeating itself with new actors in our lifetime? Iamblichus, Julian the Apostate, and Proclus' efforts to revive the old religion were too little, too late. It may not yet be so for us. But we should be clear about what is necessary. Attempts at preserving an entire culture at the purely intellectual level, by elites pursuing wisdom in elevated enclaves, did not work for the ancient pagan philosophers, for the high-minded Reformers or the Enlightenment rationalists. The intellectual trickle-down they desired has watered the canopy but failed to soak into the soil. A universal religion of reason practiced in the temples of the mind is not earthy enough for us creatures of blood and dust. The growing numbers of younger people turning to traditional Catholicism and Orthodoxy are a sign of our need for altar, sacrifice, and sacrament, for this is how God reveals Himself in the cosmos and calls us into Communion with Him. But in Iamblichus' day, it was the loss of the local cultus that accelerated the collapse of Greek paganism. Now that Christians are beginning to reclaim lost ground on the battlefield of universal reason, we need to turn more attention towards the local, to the mediation of the universal through the cult of our national and regional saints, rites, and customs. We need to rediscover the supernatural in the natural, the Logos in the cosmos, certainly—but also God in ordinary, the universal in the particular, in each man and woman, parish and nation, story, sacrifice, and song.

Meg Nakano

What We Need to Learn from the NSKK Harassment Prevention Program

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Churches are responding to abuse scandals around the globe, and each accusation or instance of abuse is another black mark on the institutions and beliefs that we hold dear. One by one, these scandals and court cases become a barrier to the full message of the Gospel, and the development and expression of faith. The problems are too much the same, worldwide and across denominations. Human nature, regardless of age, sex (or, these days, gender), education, or even the best of intentions, is empowered by hierarchies, and what ensues lays bare the fallibility of all, intentional or not. There are worldwide variations in the response to these problems, how the problems are defined, and how compliance is carried out.

One variation can be seen in the *Nippon Sei Ko Kai* (NSKK), the Anglican Church in Japan. I am not alone in my view that the church worldwide could learn from the attitudes and practices of the NSKK. Newly-ordained deacon, Rev Frances Caroe, described in a July 3 article on the Church of England website how his time in Japan led to a return to faith. He arrived in Tokyo as a PhD student, and noticed St Alban's church. St Alban's is the English-speaking congregation for the Anglican Church in Tokyo, and canonically under Bishop of Tokyo, Rt Rev Hiroyuki Takahashi. St Alban's uses an English translation of the Japanese liturgy. From 1923, the NSKK has not been a mission outpost of a Western church. Rev Frances became a member of the community worshipping at St Alban's, and said 'I was struck by the sense of fellowship. People were looking out for each other. It shows us how to live a quiet dedicated faith in a society that doesn't understand why that is important anymore. It was Church as Church being lived to the full, and what it could and should be.' This is not to say that the NSKK does not have its problems, including harassment and abuse, but that they have dealt with the problems on their own terms.

How to handle abuse in the church setting is one of several problems where the global Anglican Communion could benefit from adopting some of the perspectives of the NSKK. Their approach demonstrates a clearly differentiated way of dealing with this problem. Some of the overall features in the NSKK model may prove key to the survival of the global church in a real sense. Japan is one of the most secular societies in the world, and societies around the world are becoming more secular. Individual Christians are committed and robust in Japan, but Christianity as an institution may prove somewhat fragile, in Japan and elsewhere.

We will draw a contrast between the approach taken by the NSKK Harassment Prevention program and the strategy of the U.S. Safe Church program. Both programs started within roughly the same time period, but their cultural background differed in significant ways. Japan's history has given it a keen view of the effects of power hierarchies on everyday social interactions, particularly from their experiences during WWII, when the decision to join or defy the government control of Christianity resulted in government harassment. Many people in all walks of life in Japan today have given considerable thought to harassment and bullying. The U.S., in contrast, has a history where church presence can be assumed, and it also scores low on the aspect of hierarchy in its culture. And people in the U.S. will quickly turn to legal action and financial settlements for any wrongdoing, as opposed to a reticence for doing so in Japan.

The NSKK Harassment Prevention Program

The NSKK program started from discussions at the nationwide General Conventions held every two years, and the Diocese of Tokyo took up the challenge, at several of the Diocesan Synods held twice a year. NSKK General Convention #56 set up their Sexual Harassment Consultation Desk in 2006, and in 2010, General Convention #58 set up a separate Harassment Prevention Committee to cover a broader range of problems. Prevention was seen as better use of their limited resources than handling incidents after the abuse took place. Between those two nationwide General Conventions, the Diocese of Tokyo took action. Diocesan Synod #107 in late November 2008 voted on a proposal that established a Preparatory Committee, and in March 2009, at Synod #108, that committee submitted their report, outlining a proposed plan of action and specific revisions that would need to be made to the canons.

The Preparatory Committee proposals were approved and initial funding allocated promptly. The report was the result of just six Preparatory Committee meetings between December and March. Their proposal set up an approachable low-key consultation desk, where complaints were forwarded for independent investigation of the facts, and a report including both complaints and investigation results was sent to the Executive Committee within a time

frame set to 2 months. When the complaint was found to be factual, both the accuser and the accused would be referred to a panel of outside professional counselors and legal counsel, who would work separately with both parties.

Who was on the Preparatory Committee, enabling such rapid response? There were just six members. The chair, Masato Matsuda, was an independent businessman, church elder, and one of three lay people frequented elected by Diocesan Synods to the Diocesan Executive Committee to advise and support the bishop in his deliberations. Three clergy are similarly elected each year at the Diocesan Synods. This meant Matsuda had the recognized business management skills to organize swift responses and the personal contacts at a wide range of levels within the diocese. Another member was Rev Shigeko Yamano, one of the first women ordained in the NSKK, who taught at the Central Seminary in Yoga, Tokyo, and served as head of the Women's Desk at the Provincial level. The other four members included Mari Uchida and Sachiko Kobayashi, lay members of the Diocesan Human Rights committee, and Norihisa Iwaasa and Yutaka Abe, lay members of St Mary's Church and St Luke's [Hospital] Chapel congregations respectively. There was a 50-50 balance of men and women, an awareness of human rights abuses and their legal implications, and front-lines lay congregation members aware of what initiatives would be resonant and get traction. All the members were concerned volunteers, no one was a celebrity, expert, or career academic consulting on gender issues.

The Preparatory Committee's stated basic concept and aims were unequivocally rooted in faith, rather than in realpolitik:

> We human beings are created from dust, but at the same time, in the image of God; we are God-breathed beings, and our community, the Church, stands on this belief. Yet we also forget God's will, and alienate and harm one another.
>
> We believe that every human being, as an irreplaceable being whose life has been given by God. We believe that each person's dignity and human rights must be protected. Harassment is an act that violates the dignity and human rights of the individuals, and is physical, sexual, or psychological violence between human beings.
>
> Therefore, we declare that we will not tolerate or overlook harassment and have established a Harassment Prevention Committee in our diocese. In addition to taking steps to prevent harassment involving parishioners, we will confirm the facts of any claims of victimization and strive to resolve and reconcile such claims. We will also ensure that the victim's pain is not left unresolved and that secondary damage is not caused. Furthermore, we will continue to examine the circumstances that give rise to harassment in the Church, and work to prevent its recurrence.

Focus of the Harassment Prevention Program

The focus on harassment was broad and holistic, unlike the single-focus global focus on sexual abuse. The Preparatory Committee report defined harassment as falling into four main types: Moral Harassment, Power Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Gender Harassment. Harassment is a fact of life for most in the hierarchies of Japanese society, and Christianity is a very minority religion. Members of the committee had given long, deep thought to harassment, and it was evident in their report and proposals.

Attention was paid to Moral Harassment, which appears in the form of verbal or written attacks on others, taking the form of an exaggerated sense of superiority or moral rectitude. Examples include threats and complaints, but also include ignoring or shunning specific persons or people, making condescending gestures, laughing at the other person in public, making fun of the other person's shortcomings, and so on. Kindly attention was given to the psychological damage caused, as well as the dynamics of the cause of the abuse, which they defined as commonly being based on distorted narcissism, or sometimes simply arising from defective communication skills. Both causes can be addressed by counselling.

All harassment flourishes in a hierarchical environment, but the most egregious use of status and resources shows its face in Power Harassment. This type is common in the workplace as well as in churches. Government officials can abuse the privileges of their office, managers can exert illegal pressure on employees, and clergy are not immune to the temptation to 'relieve stress' by engaging in power harassment either.

Sexual Harassment is similarly broken down into Compensatory (to meet some psychological or physical sense of need) and Environmental (Visual, Verbal, and Physical actions that stop short of criminal assault). Gender Harassment is noted to 'exist not only between people of the opposite sex, but also between people of the same sex. Discrimination against or disparagement of sexual minorities also constitutes gender harassment.'

Second-stage Development in Harassment Prevention

The Harassment Prevention Committee's attention then moved, in line with its original Preparatory Committee intent, to prevention. In 2014, the General Director of Japan's Provincial Office appointed an officer in charge of harassment prevention on the national level. After annual discussions with the people in charge in each of the eleven NSKK dioceses, a study program was set up in 2019 headed by Kayuri Kim, a 3rd-generation *Zainichi* (resident Korean-descent) specialist, speaker, training facilitator, instructor and author with 20 years' experience. She started her career in the Osaka YMCA and its programs to help a wide range of people struggling with self-esteem, human rights, and natural disaster trauma, and expanded into holistic education and

volunteer training activities. I attended one of the courses, where attendees were coached to be mindful and urged those who were 'only' onlookers not to turn a blind eye to harassing behavior. Specific ways to avoid blaming the victim, and responses in common situations were practiced. No one is to pretend 'nothing happened' in order to protect their organization or position.

These programs were open online to members of church congregations, regardless of status, including seekers and those who only attended parish events. Employees and those using of church-related institutions and facilities, including faculty, staff, students, and pupils of church-related schools have been asked to participate in these courses, which is why I attended.

The overall NSKK program does not intend to change the world. Those who are not members of a parish are able to bring complaints, but if any organization to which they do belong has a department or organization that handles harassment, they are advised to consult with that department or organization. Only if for some reason it is difficult for them to raise the issues in their own organizations will their consultations be accepted.

The initial Harassment Prevention Preparatory Committee proposals outlined revised articles in the Diocesan Canons, and stated the scope, staffing, qualifications, procedural timelines, and privacy protection, from first contact at the Consultation Desk to the resolution of the situation. From the start of their activities and through their activities today, the largest part of the Diocesan budget for the Harassment Prevention Committee goes to the qualified professionals: the counselors, lawyers, etc., who work with the victims after the facts have been clarified by the Investigation Committee. Throughout the process, however, there is emphasis on the spiritual aspect: respect for the dignity of all involved, and the effort to restore all to health within the church.

The Episcopal 'Safe Church' Program

The driving force for the 'Safe Church' program started in the U.S. differs greatly from the NSKK program. Lawsuits started awarded increasing compensation for sexual impropriety and abuse from around 1991, for a cumulative total that had reached over US$6 million. This prompted the Church Insurance Company (CIC) to cap the amount of coverage, then demand that a program be put in place as a precondition for any future liability insurance coverage. The Episcopal Church of the United States of America, (ECUSA), officials discussed the problem with CIC and selected an outside company that satisfied the insurance firm's requirements to handle the program response.

The firm selected, Praesidium Inc., is a private company in Arlington, Texas, founded in 1992. The firm is defined by the U.S. Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) as a 'consumer reporting agency' and is commonly referred to as a background screening company. Their website announces,

'Our services are the most scientifically advanced tools in the business for preventing sexual abuse in organizations,' and 'For more than 30 years, our experts have worked to prevent sexual abuse. Put our experience to work for you and those in your care.'

Their framework of eight organizational operations (which include an insurance agency) helps identify where abuse could occur, then trains staff and leadership, and issues accreditation for completing their program. According to their website, Praesidium accredits Catholic Congregations, Churches, Faith-based Organizations, K-12 Schools, Higher Education Institutions, Child Care Centers, Camps, YMCAs, Park and Recreation, Community-based Programs, Hospitals and Healthcare Centers, Long-term Residential Care Facilities, Social Service Agencies, Resorts and Theme Parks. This background gives it excellent secular credentials in the area of preventing sexual abuse.

Safe Church Implementation

The ECUSA rollout of the program was ordered, and from the top. The enrollment fees are not cheap, and charges are calculated in tiers, according to the number of people to be screened. Small churches, where people tend to be known to each other for years if not decades, were required to enroll, but the financial burden could be assumed by the ECUSA Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society [DFMS], which hosts the Safe Church program and website. The Praesidium Inc. website is easy to find online, and their advertising states that in their view, 'Harassment Prevention' is inadequate.

In the 80th ECUSA General Convention in July 2022, an Interim Body task force reported on Best Practices, and a Task Force was established with the mandate for the development of Anti-Harassment Best Practices, Model Policy Examples, and Varied Training Materials. A thirteen-member Task Force, ten women and three men from a specific variety of backgrounds and experience, drawn from eleven different dioceses across ECUSA, was the result. The Policy Summary and Best Practices Guide were to be based on feedback from diverse communities and actual use of the original model policy. Their Summary of Work Report was submitted at ECUSA's 81st General Convention in June 2024.

Later Developments in the Safe Church Program

They discovered that Praesidium's 'robust abuse prevention techniques' and narrow focus on sexual harassment had generated questions and a desire for programs that reflect the church's goals to a greater degree. As noted in the Task Force report to the 81st ECUSA General Assembly, for the 2018 House of Deputies Special Committee on Harassment and Exploitation report,

data had been informally collected from lay and ordained members throughout the Church, but not included in any formal report. This data included first-hand experiences of systemic sexism, misogyny, misuse of power, sexual harassment, exploitation, and violence in the Church as well as in other employment and institutional settings. The Task Force confirmed that many of the Church's members, lay and ordained, experience various forms of harassment that interfere with their ability to live fully into their vocations or roles and to participate in the life and work of the Church.

The Task Force discussed their thoughts with Praesidium Inc. prior to the 81st General Convention. As soon as the Best Practices Guide is reviewed and approved, Praesidium will assist in creating additional modules to be added to the Safe Church Training. The new modules would work along the lines of the Best Practices Guide, and train people on 'Anti-Harassment Best Practices.'

The Task Force noted that 'As our discussions unfolded, we continued to recount how the Church has fallen short of its goal. Many of the Church's members, lay and ordained, experience various forms of harassment that interfere with their ability to live fully into their vocations. When any member harasses another, they abuse the trust of the whole Body, violate the baptismal covenant, and act contrary to Christian character. Harassment (whether by lay or ordained members of the Body) must be taken seriously by the whole Church, because when any member harms another, the whole Body is harmed.'

Conclusions

In reality, it would be counterproductive to say either program is right or wrong. Not only would doing so cast doubt on the worth and dignity of the people who worked out their best answers, it would give us the ego-lift of being the ones to decide what is right. It would limit what we can take away from looking at these two different approaches.

The U.S. is said by many to be a 'Christian nation,' and being a Christian in the U.S. does confer advantages in much of society. The nation is geographically large, possessing great wealth on many levels. In contrast, Japan is one of the most secular societies in the world, with Christianity in the margins, and with personal income levels that do not bear out the '#2' or '#3' global economic status of the nation as a whole. Meanwhile, societies around the world are becoming more secular, and the social advantages to being 'a Christian' are under attack. ECUSA has responded in a way they find works in their environment, and the NSKK response works best in theirs.

Setting up the problem of abuse within a spiritual context where we need to exercise our religious beliefs is a very good first move. ECUSA started from a financial problem when the CIC threatened to revoke liability coverage, primarily due to legal settlements in instances of sexual abuse. ECUSA then reached for a speedy resolution which could be fine-tuned if needed later, as

proved to be the case in 2024. The NSKK wanted to have their solution strike the right note from the start, because in their secular society environment no later corrections would be noticed if they got their priorities wrong on their first attempt. And in the secular view, if church action is primarily motivated by financial concerns, their spiritual concerns are probably worthless.

If individual churches have a program where children are taught that there are secrets that must not be kept, and desks staffed by people who can listen without blame or judgment are accessible, the children (and other vulnerable people) can go to a desk and say, 'I didn't like it when this happened.' If mandated action is taken within the next few months, lawsuits and abuse escalations may never happen. If deep attention, counseling, and prayer, instead of condemnation and exclusion, are devoted to the perpetrator as well as the victim, I have faith that the arc of their respective life-narratives would be changed. This requires a personal scale (not attempting to have one location covering vast geographic areas) and long-term involvement.

The NSKK choice to be involved with counseling the perpetrator also interested me. I'm not advocating the wrong but emotionally satisfying tactic of tying proven pedophiles to millstones and tossing them into the ocean, but I'm equally not in favor of simply distancing predators geographically, or expelling them into spiritual darkness. It is true that having the local investigators, counselors, and legal advisors needed to run the smaller, more personal programs would all cost money, but it is also true that insurance and settlement awards also cost money, and the smaller program would be living out its mission to walk alongside those in trouble. Anything reducing the black marks against the church is good.

The prevention and the solution would not be screening-to-exclude, or mandated training sessions lead by experts. It might involve small discernment groups to determine together with the volunteer where their talents might be best applied, not the binary simplistic granting self-declarations of interest, or the imposition of industrial-strength screening.

Instead of training sessions, the program would benefit from ongoing discussion groups. Participants could discuss issues such as 'What does "holistic" look like in coffee hour, or in the workplace?,' 'Are we calling snarky remarks a sinful pleasure that we have to deny ourselves?,' 'What can we do to help managers feel valued and validated in our workplaces, in ways that preclude power harassment?,' and even 'Is love something we should demonstrate by having sex?' Whether or not a sufficient number of people gathered for these discussions, the topics of discussion would be lively.

I'll leave further thoughts on harassment prevention to your imagination, and if possible, for your discussion.