

BOOK REVIEW

John P. Hittinger, ed. *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher: From Maritain to John Paul II*

**Washington, DC: American Maritain Association
2010, 1-263**

The “Catholic philosopher” in the title of the book *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher: From Maritain to John Paul II* should not be confused with “Catholic philosophy.” The latter does not exist—more about that later. What does exist and becomes thematic here in relationship to the Catholic philosopher is the persistent, inherent, problematic tension between the *commitment* and the *openness* of the person engaged in work associated with the essential, indigenous interconnections among theology, philosophy, and education. Found in all four parts of the book, this theme pervades the thought of both Jacques Maritain and Pope John Paul II, as reported here. The four main sections of the book are the following: I. “Spiritual renewal and the apostolate of faith,” II. “The vocation of philosophy,” III. “Pope John Paul II’s *Fides et ratio*,” and IV. “Contemporary challenges.” In addition to the four parts, this publication of the American Maritain Association has “acknowledgements,” “contents,” a dedication, an “introduction,” an “index of names,” and an identification of “contributors.”

No one can associate Maritain and John Paul II, as this book does, without serious attention to St. Thomas Aquinas. That becomes evident at the outset of the Introduction by the book’s editor, Russell Hittinger. His (ix-xxxvi) title, “Odysseus’ bow and the Catholic philosopher” (unless otherwise specified, the page references here are from Hittinger’s book), is explained in the first paragraph by a citation from Pope Paul VI (found in John Paul II’s *Ratio et fides* (§43): “Without doubt, Thomas possessed supremely the courage of the truth, a freedom of spirit in confronting new problems, the intellectual honesty of those who allow Christianity to be contaminated neither by secular philosophy nor by a prejudiced rejection of it.” But how did St. Thomas avoid this contamination from opposed directions? According to Paul VI, “The key point and almost the kernel of the solution which, with all the brilliance of his prophetic intuition, he gave to the new encounter between faith and reason was a reconciliation between the *secularity of the world* and the *radicality of the Gospel*, thus avoiding the unnatural tendency to negate the world and its values while at the same time keeping faith with the supreme and inexorable demands of the supernatural order” (emphasis added). Josef Pieper, in his *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, Hittinger says, had proposed “Odysseus’s bow” “to indicate the tremendous tension inherent in such a vocation” (ix-x). This vocation was portrayed by the Second Vatican Council and tied to the calling of the Catholic philosopher by Jacques Maritain in *The peasant of the Garonne*. (Maritain was present at the closing of the Council on 8 December 1965, and wrote the preface to *The peasant* on 31 December 1965.)

VOCATION AND THE CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHER

In his "Introduction," Hittinger notices various features of this theme of reconciling *commitment to the Gospel* and *openness to the world*, which ought to characterize the Christian philosopher—as well as every Christian. Bearing in mind that "Philosophy aims at spiritual renewal through the search for wisdom" (xiii), Hittinger cites Pope John Paul II: "To be consonant with the word of God, philosophy needs first of all to recover its *sapiential dimension* as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life" (xvii). This fundamental orientation of authentic philosophy signifies that "The great questions of meaning about man, God, and the world must be beyond the scope of science" (xiii). While the natural sciences are highly respected, they must be employed in view of the limitations of empirical methodology. This suggests the unity of truth, and an intimate relationship between faith and reason wherein (according to John Paul II) "Each [faith and reason] contains the other, and has its own scope for action," and "Each without the other is impoverished and enfeebled" (xvii). Nor are prayer, love, and suffering (the cross) to be banished from the efforts of the Catholic philosopher. Only along this path, the contributors to the *vocation of the Catholic philosopher* insist, can modern culture be retrieved from the "crisis of meaning," characterized by minds locked within their own immanence "without reference to any kind of transcendence" (xvii). The essays in this book address this crisis, largely by way of interpretations and applications of the principles of Maritain and Pope John Paul II.

In reviewing *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher: From Maritain to John Paul II*, I intend to summarize and analyze some selections in detail, with an eye to displaying what seem to be the book's major themes: including those already mentioned, as the commitment and openness of each human person to the truth; the secularity of the world and the radicality of the Gospel; and faith and reason, and theology and philosophy. There also are other principles or themes which flow from these or are included within them, as the unity of truth; human nature and authentic humanism; subjective and objective dimensions of our knowledge of the truth; demands of the Word of God on philosophy; varying stances of philosophy toward the Faith; philosophy as wisdom in contrast to analytic and postmodern versions; the notion of Christian philosophy; the prominent (but unofficial) place of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas in Catholic Christianity; and the autonomous nature of authentic philosophy, and its relationship to Catholic theology and the Tradition of the Church.

While all of these topics and challenges are suggested by or entailed in the notion of "Catholic philosopher," how is the term "vocation" employed here? While Hittinger in his "Introduction" does not allude to this part of the title of the book, Sister Prudence Allen (51-76) does so in her article "Mary and the vocation of philosophers." She observes the meaning of "vocation" in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as "a call by God through Jesus Christ to everyone to enter the Kingdom of heaven and to the perfection of sanctity" (§1, 3, 543, 825). She then distinguishes three senses of vocation in order of primacy: (1) concerning our final end, "or union with God and the communion of saints"; (2) concerning our state in life as consecrated religious, married or unmarried and lay, and ordained priest (bishop, deacon); and (3) concerning partial means to attaining our final end, exemplified by the vocation to philosophy. Allen goes on to cite and discuss various

authorities on the notion of vocation, including most prominently St. Paul, but also St. Thomas Aquinas, Martin Heidegger, Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), and Adrienne von Speyer (51-54). The notion of vocation or call pervades Allen's article: at one point, she proclaims that "foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified, Mary fulfilled the end of her vocation by being taken into the heart of the Holy Trinity, as daughter of the Eternal Father, Mother of the Beloved Son, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit" (72-73). Her final statement also incorporates the notion of vocation and the term itself: "May we be reminded whenever we are at an altar of the Eucharist, Cross, banquet, desk, podium, or seminar table, that God and Mary gently but persistently invite us into a deeper love and fidelity to our vocation to become Christian philosophers, foreknown and called to be conformed to the image of the Beloved Son" (76).

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AND THE APOSTOLATE OF FAITH

The first article in Part I ("Spiritual renewal and the apostolate of faith"), by Richard Schenk, O.P., entitled "Vatican II and Jacques Maritain: Resources for the future? Approaching the fiftieth anniversary of the council" (3-29), assists the reader in appreciating an underlying problematic of the Second Vatican Council, viewed against the background of increasing cultural secularism in many parts of the world. For example, he says that the Council must be remembered for "working out by debate a dual hermeneutic of modernity: conjoining a hermeneutic of making sense of the grand projects of modernity to a hermeneutic of harboring suspicion about them." This entails engaging "the concrete, contingent world of our time" and a "continuity with the doctrinal resources of its [the Church's] past." This tension which provokes the need for a delicate balance requires, Schenk observes, "a dual hermeneutic that joins *engagement* to *criticality* in the approach to our times, a disciplined ambivalence that calls for both *retrieval* and *suspicion* of the modern and premodern projects in searching for the renewal of a humane world" (17) (emphasis added).

Schenk then turns to the "not-yet forty-year-old" Professor Joseph Ratzinger to reinforce the notion of this ambivalence and tension confronted by Vatican II. Ratzinger, eventually a *peritus* (expert advisor) of the council, is quoted by Schenk as saying that "The thorough presentation of this (modern) situation and the conscious acceptance of its ambivalence as *danger* and *possibility*, as *threat* and *promise*, is decisive..." (emphasis added) (17-18). The tension demanding a continuous effort to clarify the ambivalence and the balance between extremes is seen in Ratzinger's pairing of the terms (concerning modernity) "danger and possibility," "threat and promise." Elsewhere he associates "the whole struggle between modernity and true ecclesiality" with "the struggle over the true intentions of the Second Vatican Council." He suggests in this context the following dilemma: "either we must reject the whole of the tradition, all the exegesis of the Fathers, relegate it to the library as historically unsustainable, or we must reject modernity." However, he immediately resolves the dilemma: "...the gift, the light of the faith, must be dominant, but the light of the faith also has the capacity to take up into itself the true human lights, and for this reason the struggles over exegesis and the liturgy...must be inserted into this great...epochal struggle over how...the Christian

responds to modernity . . .” (*Let God’s light shine forth: The spiritual vision of Pope Benedict XVI*, edited by Robert Moynihan 2005, 34-35).

In other words, in this “struggle of enormous historical importance,” says Schenk (Moynihan 2005, 35) “every Christian must address the need to discern the good of “the concrete, contingent world of our time” in relationship to a “continuity with the doctrinal resources..” of the Church. The proper balance must be sought in regard to modernity, as he says, between “engagement” and “criticality” (17). This theoretical-practical principle represents a fundamental theme in *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher*, as we will continue to see. Schenk eventually turns his attention to “Maritain as a Model of a Conciliar Renewal” and concludes his article as follows: “Maritain’s life and works can help philosophers to renew the vocation that has been theirs at least since Socrates: to serve their cities by helping their fellow citizens to live well-examined lives” (29).

One dimension of the serious challenges which the title of this book conveys is the distinctions and relationships between faith and reason, theology and philosophy. That is, here is a serious challenge for one who has not resolved it by eliminating religious faith and theology—as much of Western Civilization has done in the past 100 years. For some discussion of the secularization of Western culture and the need for a realistic response from Catholic philosophers, the reader can consult in this book the article of John Trapani Jr., “Gatekeeper of small mistakes: An example of the philosopher’s ‘other’ vocation” (132-41). Trapani attributes the initiation of the demise of philosophy in the modern era to Rene Descartes: “demise” in the sense of a narrowing of scope and diminished relevance in the public eye. He clarifies and exemplifies both facets of the diminution of philosophy, claiming that they rest upon a false understanding of human nature, including the elimination of the spiritual dimension, due to rampant materialism, the natural outcome of identifying truth with the results of investigations in the empirical sciences.

Trapani introduces his article with the statement that, “Aristotle and Aquinas rightly identified the philosopher’s vocation as one that seeks and acquires wisdom” (132). However, due to the onset of relativistic secularism, “. . . the time is long overdue for philosophers, especially the realist philosophers, to reassert the ‘other’ responsibility of their once nobly regarded profession; they need to become the gatekeepers of those proverbial ‘small mistakes in the beginning that lead to large errors in the end’” (133-34). He goes on to say that “This is especially true concerning those first principles about human nature which serve as the starting points for the biological and social sciences; if these principles are mistaken, they become perfect examples of those initial small mistakes that lead to very serious ethical consequences in the end” (134).

Trapani elaborates his theme with references to Peter Singer’s materialist argument “against the idea that humans possess any unique, inherent dignity and sanctity” (134). This position, of course, is an amplification of Darwin’s naturalistic claim that “the human animal differs only in degree from the rest of the primates from whom humans have evolved. . .” (137). On the other side of the ledger, there is Mortimer Adler, Trapani says, who recognizes in *Ten philosophical mistakes* (1985) that all ten mistakes “concern some relation to the first principles of human nature.” This fits Trapani’s own resolution: “With the materialist hypothesis so scientifically persuasive and pervasive, the materialists completely ignored the rational argument that rescues the moderate immaterialist position: the position that argues in favor of the claim that human beings do possess a *spiritual*

dimension which not only accounts for their abilities to understand and to love in ways that are unique to the human species, but which also establishes their intrinsic dignity and sanctity” (emphasis added) (138).

A crucial distinction within the spiritual dimension subsistent in human nature Trapani attributes to Adler: that between “private subjective experience and public objective experience,” which “involves the realist/idealist disagreement concerning the functioning of ideas for consciousness” (138-39). While the idealist claims that ideas are “that which” the mind grasps directly, the realist maintains that ideas are “that by which” the mind apprehends things. That is, the direct object of the mind (that *which* it knows) is the idea for the idealist; whereas the direct object of the mind for the realist is reality itself, the idea being that *by* which reality is known. Failure to recognize this distinction easily conduces to the denial that truth is “the conformity of the mind with reality” and the acceptance of “the post-modern conclusion that truth and reality are only a matter of perspective” (139). While our knowledge of the truth always entails subjectivity, reduction of the criterion of truth to pure subjectivity leads to the conclusion that *all* truth is *radically* relative: the true and real are whatever a human being deems to be true and real. The eventual criterion for social decisions then becomes dependent upon some expression of power, democratic or otherwise.

Trapani’s concluding statement pertains to two “model gatekeepers of small mistakes,” Maritain and Adler, who “defended the truth of those rational first principles that, if uncorrected, lead to large errors in the end, errors that endanger the ethical values of not just the present age but future ages as well” (141). Central among those “rational first principles” is the *spiritual* dimension of human nature, “given through a causal participation with the Divine Creator” (140), differentiating essentially the human species from lower animals.

FROM THOMAS AQUINAS TO JACQUES MARITAIN AND POPE JOHN PAUL II

Cornelia Tsakiridou consults especially Maritain’s *The peasant of the Garonne* (1968) in her article “‘Redeeming modernism’: Jacques Maritain and the Catholic vocation” (94-109). She reminds us of Maritain’s admiration of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas not only for its realistic truthfulness, but also (commensurate with this) for its being “an instrument for constructive cultural criticism and renewal” (95). She points out, however, that it is “Maritain’s conviction that the authentic initiatives of the modern age could not be captured without first exposing the fallacies of modernist thought” (94). In *The peasant* Maritain identifies “the most grave problem affecting the Church and his times” as “the reduction of the Christian vocation to social activism, of theology to anthropology” (95).

Tsakiridou attributes to Yves Simon the notice of Maritain’s having re-infused “an academic and ecclesiastical” Thomism with “the epistemic, poetic and existential vitality that it had lost” (100), thereby recapturing its vitality *and* capacity to reject “philosophical thought that discards extramental reality,” such as Husserl’s phenomenology. For Maritain, she says, the rejection of realism in life begins in philosophy—“deeper yet, it begins from the loss of spiritual life” (104). Her final conclusion capsulizes the “simple message” of *The peasant*: “Thought uninformed by spiritual life [associated earlier with prayer and

contemplation] loses its object and itself. Being in this way loveless toward being, it is also loveless toward the One who brings all things to life" (109).

Unfortunately, in two instances Tsakiridou refers to "Catholic philosophy." She says, "There are many examples of Maritain's attempts to open Catholic philosophy, art and culture to the secular world" (101); and later asserts that "the fundamental idea remains that Catholic philosophy (and life) is committed to the radical love of all beings" (107). Nor is Tsakiridou alone in this maneuver: Hittinger, in his "Introduction," refers to "Catholic philosophy" three times in four pages (xxxii, xxviii, xxxiv). I would like to suggest that while there is Catholic theology, and there are Catholic philosophers, and philosophies compatible with the Catholic faith, there is no such thing as Catholic philosophy. It does not exist. But do not take my word for it; listen to Pope John Paul II in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (§49): "The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others." This statement is cited by John F. Wippel in his article in this volume, "*Fides et Ratio*'s call for a renewal of metaphysics and St. Thomas Aquinas" (151). He comments on John Paul II's position as follows: "His major reason for saying this is to protect the integrity and the legitimate autonomy of philosophy itself. Philosophy, even when engaged within theology, must remain true to its own principles and methods and proceed according to the light of reason" (151). Later in the same article Wippel points out the fact that John Paul II accepts the legitimacy of "Christian philosophy" providing that it "not be taken to imply that the Church has its own official (*publicam*) philosophy since the faith as such is not a philosophy" (157). John Paul II's praise for the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is not an attempt "to canonize any particular philosophical positions nor to impose them," "but to show how St. Thomas is an authentic model for those who seek after truth" (159). Certainly, we can conclude that there never has been and there never will be a Catholic philosophy.

In his article, "*Fides et ratio* and John Paul II's call to Catholic philosophers: Orthodoxy and/or the unity of truth" (184-200), John F. Morris discusses three stances of philosophy concerning the Catholic faith, following the lead of the Pope in *Fides et ratio*. The first of the three "recognizes a philosophical approach completely outside of faith and revelation" (192) (which, in fact, John Paul II does extol), and the third of the three is associated with instances in which theology needs philosophy, a circumstance nevertheless recognizing—and demanding—the autonomy of philosophy. The second of these three stances of philosophy relative to the Catholic faith entails the concept of "Christian philosophy." What does this mean in terms of Morris's analysis of *Fides et ratio*?

As observed above, while John Paul II condones such an endeavor (as Christian philosophy) he negates the possibility of "an official philosophy of the Church, since the faith as such is not a philosophy." However, there can be an authentic "Christian way of philosophizing [understood as] a philosophical speculation conceived in dynamic union with [Christian] faith." For John Paul II, in *Fides et ratio*, as cited by Morris in his article, "Christian philosophy includes those important developments of philosophical thinking which would not have happened without the direct or indirect contribution of Christian faith." Yet, this activity retains its philosophical as distinct from theological character since the Christian philosophers "have continued working on their own terrain [and not on the truths of Revelation] and with their own purely rational method, yet extending their

research to new aspects of truth.” According to Morris, in his interpretation, “the ‘Christianity’ of the ‘Christian’ philosopher opens reason to new areas of thought and new realms of action by lifting the intellect beyond physical reality, all the while remaining within the proper sphere of philosophical enquiry” (192-93). Thus, philosophy and theology are *distinct* but not separate enterprises within John Paul II’s characterization of Christian philosophy.

For evidence that the theme of “distinct but not separate” regarding philosophy and theology is not always completely obvious, we can notice Michael D. Torre’s *attempt* to portray Jacques Maritain as a theologian in his article, “To philosophize *for* the faith: Jacques Maritain’s intellectual vocation” (110-31). In an effort to support his thesis, Torre considers Maritain’s upbringing and education, his relationship to Raissa before and after their marriage, and brief analyses of selected writings. Perhaps, I would be more inclined to see validity in his argumentation if I had not recently read a book entitled *G. K. Chesterton, theologian* (and responded with a review article “G.K. Chesterton: Theologian?”), wherein the author overlooks or ignores a very simple fact: Chesterton in effect denies that he is a theologian. Why not take the man seriously?

Maritain claims to be a Christian *philosopher*. To counter by contending that he is a theologian requires at least two assumptions: that the man is not truly or fully aware of what he is doing, and/or that he is being deceitful. We can rule out the second: although I am no scholar of Maritain’s life and writings, I suspect that the evidence for his personal honesty is superabundant. The first assumption Torre addresses is in the opening sentences of his article: “I do not think that Jacques entirely understood himself” (110). That might very well have been the case; in fact, the statement might be applied accurately to all human beings. However, as I noted in the margin of my copy of the book, there is no doubt that he understood himself better than Michael D. Torre understood him! Maritain was a brilliant man, and he understood the distinction between philosophy and theology as well as anyone. Of course, after his conversion, he became a zealous Catholic scholar; however, as in the case of Chesterton, that does *not* make him a theologian. Torre does indicate his own definition of “theology,” but does not offer any comparisons of his views of philosophy and theology with those of Maritain (see the *Arlington [Virginia] Catholic Herald*, 20 June-3 July 2013, 26).

THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE OF BIOETHICS

Perhaps, it is misleading in reviewing a book of articles by various individuals such as *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher* to single out one author and selection for enhanced acclamation. However, Edmund Pellegrino [d. 13 June 2013] was an eminent scholar and educator, and his article here on bioethics is unique in this book in view of its attention to the philosophy of science. He was the eleventh president of the Catholic University of America, serving in 1979 during the historic visit of Pope John Paul II. At the center of his work as a physician, educator, philosopher, and scientist, was ethics. Among his enormous achievements are the following: over 600 published items in medical science and philosophy, twenty-three books authored or co-authored, founding editor of the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, founder and director of Georgetown University’s Center for Clinical Bioethics (recently renamed the Edmund D. Pellegrino Center for Clinical

Bioethics), and recipient of fifty-two (52) honorary doctoral degrees, plus numerous other outstanding honors and awards.

Pellegrino's contribution to *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher* is entitled "Humanism and Bioethics: The prophetic voice of Jacques Maritain (1882-1973)" (203-217). While elaborating Maritain's conception of "integral humanism," Pellegrino appears to be proposing his own version as well. He initiates this article by noting that "Jacques Maritain was, among 20th century philosophers, the most prescient about how the changing relationships between science and philosophy would affect our presuppositions about what it means to be human, and therefore what the good for humans might be" (203). Maritain "distinguished the congruence and the conflicts... [among] the ways of knowing and thinking of science, philosophy, and theology" (203-04). The "integral humanism" which he (and Pellegrino) sought was "one that could provide a unified idea of human beings...." Thus, one's conception of human nature is the key, and "Maritain sought this ontological unity in a Christian humanism, one fully in communion with the Christian tradition yet responsive to the positive elements in modern culture" (204). Pellegrino points out that while there are many kinds of humanism, in terms of moral philosophy, "they are reducible to two, based on whether or not they accept a source of moral authority beyond man in a personal God, or whether they see man as the sole determinant of right and wrong, good and bad" (208). "Maritain's humanism," says, Pellegrino approvingly, "grounds man's dignity not only in Genesis but in the Incarnation" (210).

What does Maritain's Christian humanism have to do with bioethics? Pellegrino observes that "in the brief 35 years or so of its existence, bioethics has expanded from its earlier focus on medical ethics to the larger issues of how to use the capabilities of modern biotechnology wisely and well" (206). Using these capabilities "wisely and well" depends upon a realistic conception of the human person, according to Pellegrino: "The idea we hold of man is the foundation stone for our normative guidelines in bioethics, as in any system of ethics. It is the unavoidable starting point, explicit or implicit, for any moral line of reasoning" (207). Moving it a step further, this bioethicist claims that "the most profound and relevant question [in bioethics] is deciding what is good for man. To answer that question, we need to know who man is and the meaning of his existence" (206). This is why Maritain's integral humanism appeals to Pellegrino, who notes in his opening statement (cited above) that Maritain foresaw practical implications of his view of the human person.

Near the conclusion of his article in *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher*, Pellegrino says again, in different words, "The only measure by which to calibrate how much of genetic, regenerative, and enhancement medicine or nanotechnology and reengineering of the human species are morally permissible is our idea of man." Pellegrino cites Henri De Lubac's renowned statement from *The drama of atheist humanism* at this juncture: "It is not true, as is sometimes said, that man cannot organize the world without God. What is true is that, without God, he can ultimately organize it only against man. Exclusive humanism is inhuman humanism" (216). Although De Lubac was a theologian and is speaking theologically, his statement is not unrelated to philosophy, at least philosophy which is a search for wisdom and the meaning of life. Not incidentally, in this regard, Pellegrino also associates the need for implementing Maritain's view of humanism (in bioethics) with "the need for philosophy itself to be reconciled with its own intellectual tradition," noting that the "melancholy science," identified as postmodern and

postmetaphysical philosophy, Maritain did not envision (216-217). This theme is noted also in other articles in the book in associating philosophy with wisdom and the meaning of life: no effort which abandons a primary search for an extra-mental reality, including an Ultimate Being, qualifies for the “intellectual tradition” in question. Pellegrino concludes by observing that “Though Maritain had no direct contact with bioethics even in its nascent years, it has become a beneficiary of his wisdom” (217).

THE WORLD AS CHARACTERIZED BY TENSION: SECULARITY VERSUS RADICALITY OF THE GOSPEL

The vocation of the Catholic philosopher, according to the essayists in *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher: From Maritain to John Paul II*, appears to be first and foremost not so much the resolution of problems as the recognition of unresolvable tensions indigenous to our lives in the world which God has created. The basic sources consulted are Jacques Maritain, Pope John Paul II (*in Fides et ratio*), and St. Thomas Aquinas. There are various ways of characterizing these tensions; I will mention several while attempting to utilize the terminology of the authors in this book. Perhaps, the centerpiece of the challenges confronting the Catholic philosopher in the twenty-first century is the twofold reality, consisting in the secularity of the world and the radicality of the Gospel. This suggests most immediately to all Catholics the necessity of an openness to the world in the context of a commitment to the Gospel. However, there is also the related matter of a commitment to the truth on the part of every person, and an openness to the truth wherever it may be found. This raises the question of relationships between faith and reason, theology and philosophy: faith is distinct but not separate from reason, as theology is distinct but not separate from philosophy. Morris, in his article noticed above, says in referring to *Fides et ratio* that John Paul II “continuously emphasizes the compatibility of faith and reason, and more specifically philosophy’s contribution to helping the believer reflect on the faith” (given philosophy as a sapiential discipline, in search of the meaning of life). “However, even though philosophy can [and does] complement faith, it is in itself an autonomous and independent discipline.” In fact, as Morris cites John Paul II, “. . . even when it engages theology, philosophy must remain faithful to its own principles and methods.” Why is this so? How can it be? The Pope goes on to say that “At the deepest level, the autonomy which philosophy enjoys is rooted in the fact that reason is by its nature oriented to truth and is equipped moreover with the means necessary to arrive at truth” (188).

Appreciating the relationships between faith and reason, and between theology and philosophy rests upon an understanding of the *unity of all truth* and a rejection of the “two truth theory” (by faith and by all other means), as portrayed by Hittinger in the “Introduction” (xv). Morris refers to the unity of truth as “the ultimate foundation upon which the wisdom of the Church in all of its teaching is based.” John Paul II asserts (in *Fides et ratio*) that “The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reason, as the principle of noncontradiction makes clear.” That truth is one does not imply that there is a single path to the truth. In fact, according to John Paul II, “There are many paths which lead to truth, but since Christian truth has a salvific value, any one of these paths may be taken, as long as it leads to the final goal, that is to the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (195).

Thus, while philosophical inquiry must remain open and independent, there is a primacy, from the Catholic viewpoint, which must be accorded Catholic faith and theology. These few comments, while grossly sketchy, indicate a modicum of the complexity and the indigenous tension attending these matters.

Not unrelated, of course, is the nature of the human person, as such, the so-called “bridge between heaven and earth,” a bridge which features body and soul. At stake is the possibility of distorting rather than balancing extremes (heaven and earth, body and soul) in human thought and action. Likewise, attentiveness is required in realizing properly the subjective and objective features of human comprehension. These considerations bearing upon human nature require recognizing tensions between realities and responding responsibly—realistically, one could say—to them. For example, concerning subjectivity and objectivity, a person can claim a total dependence upon one’s inner states of consciousness in distinguishing between good and evil, or one can ignore the subjective and rely totally upon an external source; the realistic person will search for objective realities outside the self (including the Divine) and respond properly in a subjective manner from within.

Returning for the moment to our starting point in regard to the indigenous tension in confronting reality as human persons, that is, the secularity of the world and the radicality of the Gospel, we notice that a major challenge faced by the Catholic philosopher in the coordination of teaching, researching, and living lies in the question of *how* one confronts modernity. That is, *how* will the authentic Catholic philosopher (with implications for all Catholic and non-Catholic Christians) evaluate and respond to the modern world in the context of a commitment to Christ? One thing is certain: the person’s commitment in relationship to openness represents an ongoing saga. The attitudes toward modernity on the part of the Catholic philosopher should be confronted in relationship to the continuity with the doctrinal resources of the Church.

Toward modernity this signifies “balancing” such attitudes and actions as the following:

engagement—criticality
 retrieval—suspicion
 possibility—danger
 promise—threat
 making sense—harboring suspicion.

This balancing act requires pursuing authentic initiatives and exposing fallacies, employing multiple paths to the truth in view of Catholic orthodoxy, and searching by means of the light of faith along with truly human lights. The responsibility of the Catholic philosopher in regard to these tensions in teaching, research, and life is not to attempt to resolve them once and for all since that is impossible. What is possible—and necessary—is to recognize them and explicate them for oneself and others, and secondly, to continue to respond and to assist others to respond (theoretically and concretely) to them in every instance. This obviously requires self-motivation and extraordinary effort to motivate others. This kind of awareness and effort is essential to the “pilgrim Church on earth.” Everyone likes to win, as I heard a deacon-preacher (who also was a basketball coach) say

in a sermon mass, but we must focus on engaging in the battle with enthusiasm—done for Christ this can be salvific.

SUMMARY: THE INCOMPARABLENESS OF THE CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHER

I would like to reemphasize one more point in concluding this review of *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher: From Maritain to Pope John Paul II*. The Pope is cited by Hittinger in the “Introduction” as follows: “To be consonant with the word of God, philosophy needs first of all to recover its *sapiential dimension* as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life” (xvii). In a similar spirit, Pellegrino points out the need for philosophy “to be reconciled with its own intellectual tradition” (216). These assertions can be associated with a call for the realism of St. Thomas Aquinas, but not only Aquinas: the demand is for philosophy which seeks a reality outside of the human mind, ultimately, the Ultimate Being. This means processes of reflection beyond the empirical sciences, analytic philosophy, phenomenology, and postmodernism.

Finally, the philosophy to be pursued by the Catholic philosopher is not to be confused with *ideology*, “a system of propositions which, though indistinguishable as far as expression goes from statements about facts and essences, actually refers not so much to any real state of affairs as to the *aspirations* of a society at a certain *time* in its evolution” (87-88). This definition is proposed by Yves Simon (*The tradition of natural law*) and cited by Ralph Nelson in his article “Yves R. Simon: A question of calling” (79-93) in *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher*. The three major components of ideology, according to Simon, are the following: (1) a utilitarian, sociological, and evolutionistic notion of truth; (2) the purpose of change or preservation; and (3) embodiment of the aspirations of a definite group “when that group expresses its timely aspirations in the language of everlasting truth” (88). Since philosophy (which seeks a “pure object”) is to examine the truth-value of ideology (which seeks an “object of desire”), Simon admits that it is not an easy task to prevent the contamination of philosophy by ideology. In fact, sometimes circumstances might find them identified. According to Nelson, Simon sees “an inevitable tension between the philosophical vocation and the ideological temptation” (89).

Finally, I would like to suggest a point which, in my view, is seriously overlooked in *The vocation of the Catholic philosopher*, which is that the vocation of the Catholic philosopher is unintelligible if it is not allied directly with the work of Education. As someone once said, philosophy requires patronage. While philosophizing can be carried on as simply individual and personal reflection, the truth discovered *must* be taught. Considering the interrelationships between philosophy and theology, the significance of the path identified as human education becomes magnified inestimably.

Peter M. Collins

*Institute for the History of Philosophy and Pedagogy
Rockville, Maryland*