

Preface

ALISDAIR MACINTYRE ARGUES that the vitality of the contemporary universities in which Catholic philosophy can be pursued and more deeply understood holds great importance for the educated Catholic laity as a whole. When the Catholic intellectual tradition flourishes within strong universities, the important insights of Catholic philosophy can be brought to bear upon the pressing cultural and political questions of our time. This is so in particular because, in MacIntyre's view, the Catholic philosophical tradition is one "within which a Catholic allegiance is inseparable from recognition of philosophical enquiry as a secular and autonomous activity."¹

An examination of the three key terms in MacIntyre's new book—*God, Philosophy, Universities*—brings this position into focus. He begins by showing that the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim devotion to a good, omnipotent, and loving God is philosophically problematic even while believers find through experiences shaped by their participation in their religious traditions that belief in this God is compelling. (MacIntyre uses the term "theism" to describe such belief.) Theists can therefore either shun philosophical questioning, or they

can maintain a strict separation between what they regard as the truth of philosophy and the truth of faith, or they can pursue the philosophical questions that inevitably emerge in an examination of human life while expecting that faith and reason will be reconciled within a single field of truth. This expectation depends on the confidence that “faith in God, that is, trust in his word, can include faith that, even when one is putting God to the question, one can be praising him by doing so and can expect to be sustained by him in that faith” (14). The theistically engaged pursuit of philosophical understanding requires a cultural institution in which such enquiry can be carried out, and the university was created for that purpose, emerging first in Islam, next in Byzantium, and finally in Western Europe.

The relationship between theism and philosophy in MacIntyre’s account is reciprocal. He argues that one of the great insights of St. Thomas Aquinas is that theology would reach a defective understanding of God if it attempted to develop such an understanding apart from an understanding of the world of finite created beings. But it is also the case that any area of secular knowledge that tries to understand the world and the human person apart from God will be incomplete. As MacIntyre makes clear throughout the book, the disagreement between atheists and theists is not only about whether God exists, but it is also a disagreement about what it means for something to be understood—to be intelligible—in the first place, since theism holds that the world is fully intelligible only when understood in relation to God.

A key question to ask at this point is why the secular and autonomous nature of philosophy plays such an important role in the emergence of the Catholic philosophical tradition in MacIntyre’s argument. It would seem, strictly speaking, that this is not a logical necessity. But a core principle in MacIntyre’s history of the development of the Catholic philosophical tradition is that the social and cultural settings in which key questions are posed and the possibilities of alternative responses that can be envisioned are an essential part of the ongoing philosophical conversation and must be considered in our efforts

to understand and participate in that conversation. The Islamic tradition (at certain periods, says MacIntyre) offered early examples of a cultural practice in which “not only Islamic thinkers but also Jews, Christians, and thinkers independent of all three religions, could participate” (58). This tradition also kept extant and philosophically alive some of the key texts of Greek philosophy while also producing Islamic and Jewish commentaries on those texts; and eventually by the early thirteenth century the Latin West was confronted by a rich set of divergent voices. “It was out of these disagreements and conflicts that the Catholic philosophical tradition came to be” (59).

But the question can be pressed again: why should a secular and autonomous cultural setting in which philosophical conflict can be pursued be essential to the development of the Catholic philosophical tradition? Here a fuller account of what constitutes the “secular and autonomous” nature of a cultural institution proves helpful. The distinctive contribution of the Latin West, argues MacIntyre, “was . . . a conception of a need for and the legitimacy of genuinely secular institutions through which God is to be served, of the existence of areas of human activity and enquiry in which the authoritative standards are independent of the authority either of the Church or of secular rulers, and this in a way that is in accord with God’s will” (62). This conception makes it clear that the university as the key secular institution in which such philosophical conflicts could be pursued establishes the territory in which the relationship of the various areas of knowledge can be investigated and articulated. Within the university, philosophy can explore the relationship between theology and the academic disciplines and can keep active the ideal of the wholeness (the oneness) of knowledge. The secular and autonomous institutions to which MacIntyre refers remain open to the perspective and guidance of theism and participate in the human search for communion with God.

It is already evident at this point that MacIntyre has in mind the grave difficulties posed by the dominant practices within most contemporary universities, according to which neither theology nor philosophy holds a distinctive and central importance, and in

which the ideal of the wholeness of knowledge has been largely abandoned. I will return to this problem, but here it will be helpful to turn to the penultimate chapter of the book for further illumination of the relationship between Catholic philosophy and secular cultural institutions.

Here MacIntyre argues that traditions come into focus especially during periods when those who participate in the tradition can look back at its development while also engaging in responses to strong and ongoing contemporary challenges from outside of the tradition. Pope John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio* powerfully incorporates both of these perspectives and thereby marks the moment in which an especially clear understanding of the Catholic philosophical tradition can be attained. It is important to note immediately that the encyclical first brings forward a defense of the secular and autonomous character of philosophy before developing an account of the complementarity of faith and reason. MacIntyre says of the encyclical: "Although it emphasizes the interdependence of philosophy and theology . . . it is uncompromising in its assertion of the autonomy of philosophy as a secular enterprise in its search for truth" (167). We can note that this latter point was recognized by St. John's College (Annapolis) tutor Eva Brann shortly after the publication of the encyclical when she wrote that the encyclical is "not only an exhortation to professional philosophers to return to foundational rationality, but an invitation to all and sundry to realize their natural philosophical capability. I find this call absolutely remarkable, not only as a Magisterial pronouncement for the faithful, but especially as an incitement to us all to reflect on the relation of faith to thought."²² And here we find further justification for MacIntyre's argument that the emergence of universities was crucial to the development of the Catholic philosophical tradition because they provide a setting in which the secular and autonomous character of philosophy can be developed while also providing an institutional context in which the relationship between philosophy and theology can be explored and the functions of philosophy and theology in ordering and illuminat-

ing the interdependent coherence of the various areas of knowledge and academic disciplines can be brought to fulfillment.

But do contemporary universities, including Catholic universities, accomplish this? While philosophy and religious studies (in secular universities) or theology (in faith-based universities) have a place in the contemporary university, they are often seen as areas of knowledge that are as separate and self-contained as all other academic disciplines. Relatively few scholars would acknowledge that theology is essential to the interdependent coherence of the academic disciplines and that philosophy has the function of exploring and establishing the interconnections among the disciplines. Given the separate status of the academic disciplines, responsibility for investigating the interdependence of the disciplines remains for the most part unassigned and is taken up here and there by scholars who have the freedom to pursue such inquiries even though the structure of the university is likely to remain impervious to the results of their investigations. MacIntyre summarizes the condition of modern secular universities by arguing that they have lost “any large sense of and concern for enquiry into the relationships between the disciplines and, second, any conception of the disciplines as each contributing to a single shared enterprise, one whose principal aim is neither to benefit the economy nor to advance the careers of its students, but rather to achieve for teachers and students alike a certain kind of shared understanding” (174). Don Briel, drawing upon the insights of Christopher Dawson, speaks of this transformation of the university as the product of “a technological culture that has succeeded in instrumentalizing all of reality, even those elements that seemed least susceptible to its claims.”³ Because our culture as a whole has been distorted by this instrumentalizing tendency, it is difficult to establish a shared public understanding of education in which the central claims of theology and philosophy as a source of the unity of the university can be properly recognized.

Within the broader territory of the university in the contemporary world, do Catholic universities provide the institutional setting within which the Catholic philosophical tradition can continue

to thrive? MacIntyre laments that “the most prestigious Catholic universities often mimic the structures and the goals of the most prestigious secular universities and do so with little sense of something having gone seriously amiss” (179). But we should also recognize that Catholic universities (whether prestigious in the broader culture or not) have available to them as a source of a renewed understanding and vision of their core purpose John Paul’s 1990 *Ex corde ecclesiae*, in addition to *Fides et ratio*, and, of course, Newman’s *The Idea of a University*, all of which articulate an understanding of the university and of the essential role of theology and philosophy that remains rich in still unfulfilled potential. And now we can add MacIntyre’s *God, Philosophy, Universities* to this list as a book that can help contemporary scholars recover the insights of these seminal texts within the long and fruitful development of the Catholic philosophical tradition and that can contribute to a stronger understanding of the distinctive nature and importance of the Catholic university as a key component of that tradition.

Perhaps one of the most promising signs in the world of the contemporary Catholic university is the emergence of Catholic Studies programs. Such programs usually explicitly assume the challenge of exploring the interdependence of the academic disciplines within a theologically informed vision of the unity of knowledge and bring into focus the interdependence of faith and reason. It must be acknowledged that the need for such programs arises in part from the attenuation of such a vision in the university as a whole and that such programs frequently need to struggle on their own campuses with the perception that they are not so much a center as an enclave. But such programs—and we understand this journal to be an active participant in these programs as broadly and internationally as possible—provide at the very least an ember through which the nature of the Catholic university as an essential component in the ongoing life of the Catholic philosophical and intellectual tradition as illuminated by MacIntyre can be rekindled.

Perhaps no contemporary voices more forcefully deny the possibility of the interdependence of theological and secular knowledge

than those of the the so-called “new atheists,” a term now frequently used to designate the authors of a number of recent and popular books that denounce religious belief as an illusion. Although MacIntyre’s new book does not directly address the issues raised by these authors (and it would be beyond the scope of the book to do so), he does happen to provide a historical comment on the Enlightenment antecedents of these contemporary voices, identifying the key eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers as “not only non-Catholic but anti-Catholic,” stating that “the Church to them represented the forces of reaction and superstition and the beliefs of Catholics, on their view, were unfortunate survivals from those dark ages between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance, when, so they believed, secular learning had been in decline.” As **Brad S. Gregory** shows in the first article in this issue of *Logos*, the attitudes and arguments of most of the new atheist writers do indeed echo and recycle the perspective of Enlightenment thinkers, even though the new atheist authors themselves seem to be largely unaware of this. In “**Science Versus Religion? The Insights and Oversights of the ‘New Atheists,’**” Gregory repudiates the efforts of the new atheists to eliminate religious belief and theological knowledge from participating in contemporary discourse about human knowledge while at the same time he recognizes the legitimate claims to knowledge of science and the errors of some religiously based claims to truth. For instance, when young-earth creationists claim that the earth is only six thousand years old, asserting religious authority for such claims by basing them on literalist interpretations of the Bible and on an inadequate understanding of religious language, most Muslims, Jews, Protestants, and Catholics, including Pope Benedict XVI, agree with the critics who regard such claims as false. But the new atheists seem not to discriminate among the many religiously based claims to truth and seem to proceed in ignorance of serious theological thinking as they mock all religious claims to truth. Moreover, they seem to be unaware of the philosophical presuppositions that underlie their positions; Gregory explores the many problems that emerge in this territory. The article goes on to focus

with great precision on issues concerning the relationship between God and the natural world, concentrating especially on the significance of Duns Scotus in this regard, and then articulates a more complex ontological framework according to which

God is not conceptually domesticated, but is rather regarded as radically distinct from and noncompetitive with his creation, as the traditional doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* implies. This is the framework with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God whom traditional Christians believe became incarnate in Jesus, the God whom Augustine said is closer to us than we are to ourselves, the God of whom Aquinas explicitly argued that *nothing* can be univocally predicated—including even God’s being.

The article concludes with reflections concerning the wonder awakened by scientific accounts of the “overwhelming complexity, order, and beauty of the natural world disclosed by science,” suggesting that the complementarity of science and theology, of reason and faith, remains within our grasp.

Sr. Damien Marie Savino, FSE, takes up these same problems from another perspective in “**Atheistic Science: The Only Option?**” After noting the pervasive and worldwide transformation effected by the development of science and technology in the modern period, she observes that this development has been a recurrent source of cultural controversy and nowhere more so than in the contemporary claims that scientific thinking and religious belief are mutually contradictory and since science is demonstrably true, religion is certainly false. Savino concentrates on two important lines of argument in her response to these claims. First, she examines Aristotle’s concept of four causes, showing that science relies exclusively upon material and efficient causes in its arguments while ignoring formal and final causes, and argues for restoring a concept of formal cause in science. Second, she points to the religious concept of the dignity of the human person, building upon reflections on the distinctive-

ness of the upright posture of the human being and then linking the human status developed on the basis of that upright posture to St. Bonaventure's concept of human mediation according to which the human person is created by God to stand as mediator between God and the rest of the world through the human capability of turning both toward God and toward the world in which we live. "For Bonaventure, Christ is the prime exemplar of mediation. Human persons, created upright to be in a special middle position between the created world and God, are called to follow and imitate Christ in mediating these two realities." Savino concludes with a call to move toward an integrative understanding of science and theology.

We saw in the discussion of MacIntyre that the contemporary university has generally lost a sense of the inner coherence according to which the academic disciplines are interdependent with theology, providing a vision of the created order in its relationship to God. In **"The Boutique and the Gallery: An Apologia for a Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Academy,"** Tim Muldoon retrieves an understanding of how a university grounded in the Catholic intellectual tradition can foster "an integral exploration of reality" in its students. He offers a pair of contrasting heuristic images through which to consider the nature of the university: should it be considered as a set of clustered but independently operating boutiques, each academic discipline its own boutique or set of boutiques, each offering its wares but all operating more or less independently of one another? Or should it instead be imagined as an art gallery, organized in accord with different time periods and types of art but with each room in the gallery providing some perspective through which to better understand the others, all ordered finally toward the beautiful and the good? Having offered these contrasting images through which to consider the purpose of the university, Muldoon argues that Christianity came to regard itself as standing in a complementary relationship to the ancient Greek conception of philosophy and reason and that universities first came into existence as a place where faith and reason could explore their interrelation-

ship. But with the advent of the modern period, the contemporary fragmentation of the disciplines began to unfold, resulting in the loss of a vision of the underlying purpose of the university. His proposal is that a reinvigorated understanding of the Catholic intellectual tradition can contribute to the renewal of the purpose of the contemporary university, and his article reviews the prospects and challenges involved in the effort to make this tradition the core of the contemporary Catholic university.

We are pleased to offer an extensive interview with contemporary Irish artist Breda Catherine Ennis, who for more than twenty years has been affiliated with the American University of Rome. In **“An Interview with Artist Breda Catherine Ennis”** conducted by **Sean Patrick Lovett**, Ennis speaks extensively of the relationship between Catholicism and art. The interview includes discussions of the importance of sacred art and architecture, Ennis’s development as a painter, and her comments on some of her paintings that are reproduced in this issue of *Logos*. Ennis draws upon Pope John Paul II’s “Letter to Artists” in giving an account of the relationship between art and faith and generously offers an intimate glimpse into the way faith animates her own artistic work: “Christ is the depth and luminosity of a color. The nuances of his intervention are blended into the tonality of my painting palette. He is the energy in a strong brushstroke and his gentle breath hovers over the light strokes and gestures that touch the canvas. His love is the driving force behind my desire to create art.”

Our timing in offering **“The Church and Economic Development: The Legacy of *Populorum progressio* after Forty Years”** by **Fr. Thomas C. Williams, LC**, is good: Pope Benedict XVI in his most recent encyclical titled *Caritas in veritate* (June 29, 2009) has just commemorated the fortieth anniversary of that encyclical by Pope Paul VI. Benedict calls *Populorum progressio* “the *Rerum Novarum* of our age” (8) and expresses his intention in his new encyclical “to pay tribute and to honour the memory of the great Pope Paul VI, revisiting his teachings on *integral human development* and taking my place within the path that they marked out, so as to apply them

to the present moment" (8). Williams in his analysis of *Populorum progressio* provides an account of the concept of progress in modern thought, pointing carefully to the ambiguity of the term, and reminds readers that contrary to the dominant trends within contemporary political thought, "Paul insisted that economic and technical development alone is insufficient to meet the deepest needs of humanity, and must walk hand in hand with development in other areas, notably the cultural and spiritual." Williams addresses the "three vexed questions" that must be considered to properly understand the encyclical: given that the Church emphasizes an "integral development" that always includes spiritual development, what is the Church's view of economic progress strictly speaking? And how important is the concept of economic progress to the Catholic idea of progress? Finally, how do we reconcile the call for international assistance with the concept of personal responsibility and accountability? After an extensive review of these important questions, Williams concludes his appraisal of Paul's encyclical in these words: "His call for world solidarity and a greater attention to the plight of the poor and underdeveloped is as timely today as in 1967."

Andrew Dinan begins his article titled "**Manual Labor in the Life and Thought of St. Basil the Great**" with the observation that there are relatively few references to authors from the patristic period in the social encyclicals of the Church even though John Paul II especially has emphasized that the Church's social teaching has been developed ever since the first centuries of Christianity. His article offers an insightful account of the importance of work in the writings of St. Basil the Great from the fourth century. Dinan enables us to see that Basil's observations about manual labor do not emerge from a distanced, patronizing perspective but that on the contrary labor played an essential role in his conversion and was of fundamental importance in the life of asceticism he practiced. The article demonstrates that Basil developed his understanding of manual labor as a repudiation of the objections to labor that were dominant in the Greco-Roman tradition up to his time. Charity, in Basil's account, provides the deepest

motivation for labor and “the entire purpose of a life of labor is the welfare, harmony, and communion of ascetic persons.”

In “**Hospitality as the Gift Greater than Tolerance: G. K. Chesterton’s *The Ball and the Cross*,**” **Ralph C. Wood** provides an insightful analysis of Chesterton’s 1909 novel, setting his reading in the context of a survey of the history of tolerance and an outline of the Christian alternative to tolerance. The modern concept of tolerance addresses an inevitable problem that emerges in the context of freedom: how can people who hold radically different views of reality reconcile their differences? But mere tolerance undermines the importance of a commitment to truth, and Wood explores Chesterton’s alternative view in *The Ball and the Cross* that Christian hospitality provides a superior approach to important human differences. “Hospitality thus becomes a Christian practice and discipline, a fundamental responsibility regarding those who are alien and perhaps even antagonistic toward us. It requires, among other things, the willingness to welcome the gift that others represent—not the gift that we expect or desire from them, but their often surprising and troubling gift, especially when others have convictions that are fundamentally hostile to ours.” Wood goes on to offer an insightful reading of the novel in this light, establishing that it provides “a powerful fictional demonstration that the mad earth requires the even madder Cross.”

Michael C. Jordan

Editor

Notes

1. Alisdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 41.
2. Eva Brann, “A Call To Thought,” *St. John’s Review* 45, no. 1 (1999): 118.
3. Don J. Briel, “The Idea of a University,” in *Wisdom and Holiness, Science and Scholarship: Essays in Honor of Matthew L. Lamb*, ed. by Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 15.