

PART I

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AND THE APOSTOLATE OF PHILOSOPHY

VATICAN II AND JACQUES MARITAIN:
RESOURCES FOR THE FUTURE?
APPROACHING THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COUNCIL¹

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Let us seek with the desire to find, and find with the desire to seek still more.

—Saint Augustine

On the last day of the Second Vatican Council, December 8, 1965, as part of the council's final pageantry and symbolic conclusion, messages were addressed by Pope Paul VI and the bishops to several groups representative of those segments of the cultural world that the council most hoped to engage. Jacques Maritain was asked to accept the message for "thinkers and academics" ("les hommes de la pensée et de la science"). Not only did Maritain enjoy the personal admiration and support of Paul, not only had Maritain influenced the council in matters such as religious liberty and human rights, but he represented the kind of echo that the council fathers were hoping to elicit from academics and other intellectuals. At the heart of the council's message was the maxim ascribed to Augustine: "Let us seek with the desire to find, and find with the desire to seek still more."² The message combined moments of humility and criticism, admitting that the Church was still searching for her own way forward, but also

¹ This essay also appears in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 13.1 (Winter 2010), 79-106.

² *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (LVIII 1966), 10-11. Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate* IX 1: "Sic ergo quaeramus tamquam inventuri; et sic inveniamus, tamquam quaesituri." As Brian Daley has pointed out, a similar notion is found near the end of the first chapter of Anselm's *Proslogion*: "Quaeram te desiderando, desiderem quaerendo. Inveniam amando, amem inveniando." The text of the message has been translated into English by Richard Lemp and John P. Hittinger in Timothy Fuller and John P. Hittinger, *Reassessing the Liberal State: Reading Maritain's Man and the State* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2001), 245.

expressing the need for the intellectual world to open its eyes to the light of faith. "Do not forget that, if thinking is something great, it is first a duty. Woe to him who voluntarily closes his eyes to the light. Thinking is also a responsibility, so woe to those who darken the spirit by the thousand tricks which degrade it, make it proud, deceive and deform it."³

That mix of hope and warning belonged to what arguably was best about the council. This article argues that where the council and its reception in the postconciliar Church were the weakest, it was caused by a failure to achieve this studied ambivalence, due to an exaggeration and isolation of the hopes for or the suspicions about our times.⁴ To ask what Maritain and the council can contribute today to the intellectual and spiritual conditions for renewal is to remember where they got that mix right and to accept today together with Maritain's legacy this conciliar commission to engage the world with both hope and critique.

Admittedly, there are reasons *prima facie* for skepticism that the search for a renewal of Church or society could profit by the study either of Vatican II or of Maritain, much less of the two in tandem. Haven't these mines been exhausted long ago? Is there anything we could conceivably "desire to find" in them that would intensify "the desire to seek still more"? Were they even in their heyday perhaps more a source of impoverishment than enrichment? Do we need to choose between the spirit of the council and that Garonne Valley peasant who was so dismissive of novel postconciliar developments? All of these reasons for doubting the potential for renewal to be found in Maritain *and* the council have less to do with individual doctrines than with fundamental perspectives and broader decisions about the hermeneutics of genuine interpretation. As Maritain himself put it in *The Peasant of the Garonne*, the decisive questions here have less to do

³ See Timothy Fuller and John P. Hittinger, *Reassessing the Liberal State*, 245.

⁴ For a more detailed account cf. Richard Schenk, "Officium signa temporum perscrutandi. New Encounters of Gospel and Culture in the Context of the New Evangelisation," in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in Light of the Gospel*, ed. Johan Verstraeten, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium*, CCVIII (Leuven: University Press and Leuven/Paris/Dudley, Peeters, 2007), 167-203.

with “particular clarifications” than with “general approach.”⁵ Correspondingly, this article deals with some of these necessarily broader issues of our “general approach”: first, as regards the council; then, as regards Maritain; both, in the context of the question about our potential today to draw upon these two legacies in order to make a contribution to renewal.

I. THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

As is widely accepted, we no longer can speak “innocently” of the council; innocent, that is, of our views of the postconciliar development and of our own designs to move beyond it. The attempt to unfold so complex a situation in the short space of an article is a task impossible to fulfill well and yet even more impossible to neglect altogether. One aid is provided in this case by John Henry Cardinal Newman’s third note of genuine Church development, the power of assimilation, which Newman positions between isolation on the one hand (the inability to assimilate what had originated elsewhere) and, on the other hand, the loss of identity and unity (being assimilated to what must remain alien to one’s genuine identity).⁶ Another aid is provided by Maritain’s largely non-polemical use of the categories of Right and Left, the characteristics of which I will presume here; the central difference consisted for Maritain in the answer to the question of whether change is sought over the retention or restoration of the present or past status quo.⁷ Maritain distinguished and then reunited a political and a temperamental meaning of Right and Left. I review here two of the leading interpretations of the council by those on the political Left and two by those on the political Right, together with postconciliar developments, in order to argue that the genuine renewal of the council and philosophy demands our moving *per modum remotiois*

⁵ Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), 64.

⁶ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Garden City, New York: Image/Doubleday, 1960).

⁷ Maritain, *The Peasant of Garonne*, 31, drawing on his *Letter on Independence* from 1935, cited here according to Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism, Freedom in the Modern World*, and *A Letter on Independence*, *Collected Works* 11 (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1996), 119–39, esp. 131.

beyond all four of these well-known interpretations. We need to develop the suggestions already made by considering a fifth reading. The two interpretations on the political Left share with one another the goal of departing from many of the concrete forms and formulations of earlier Catholicism, whereas the two interpretations on the political Right seek chiefly to retain and/or retrieve select shapes of the older tradition. Let us begin with the positions most devoted to change.

1. Assimilated Neo-Modern Theology

On the political Left there are especially older proponents (who surprisingly often were temperamentally of the Right),⁸ insisting upon what was arguably the majority view at many Catholic faculties in the first two decades of the postconciliar era: that the only prophetically obligatory voice of the council, despite nonobligatory voices of “conservative opposition,” called the Church to assimilate herself to the Enlightenment legacy in secular culture as regards all three *munera ecclesiae*: in doctrine, with a greater stress on the nonbinding dimensions of the doctrinal tradition and the actual magisterium; in prayer, with a substitution of social service and community building for the direct veneration of God;⁹ and in governance, in an approximation of Catholic social thought to the late Enlightenment hopes for the universal progress of a prosperity driven by the expansion of technology. This movement saw the council as a mandate to seek partnership in global progress and a global ethic through the progressive relativization of specifically Catholic belief and practice.¹⁰

⁸ The impact of a now familiar brand of “intolerant liberalism” upon the theology faculties of the postconciliar period often seemed to confirm Maritain’s formula: “There are no more terrible revolutions than revolutions of the Left made by temperaments of the Right.” Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, 132.

⁹ The classical formulation was provided by Karl Rahner in the final year of the council: “Über die Einheit von Nächstenliebe und Gottesliebe,” first in *Geist und Leben* 38 (1965), 168–85, then immediately as “Über die Einheit von Nächsten- und Gottesliebe,” in: Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie. Bd. 6: Neuere Schriften* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965).

¹⁰ The late modern concern for universal justice has often been in tension with postmodernization in the theology of religions. Enthusiastic proponents of the pluralistic theology of religions, a phenomenon of postmodern theology,

Because of the conviction that the Enlightenment agenda of modern society did ensure progress, this interpretation's stance toward secular politics was more progressive than revolutionary.¹¹ This interpretation of the Left was propagated in those first two decades typically by the "intolerant liberal," politically on the Left but temperamentally of the Right. In the philosophical world, this reading found its parallel and support in the older works of Jürgen Habermas during that phase when thinkers of one stripe, largely oblivious to the traditionalism behind

have criticized the global ethic program of Hans Küng for its unwillingness to be thoroughly pluralistic in its judgment of religions; cf. P. F. Knitter, "Nochmals die Absolutheitsfrage," *Evangelische Theologie*, 49 (1989): 505-16; Knitter, "Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?," in L. Swidler et al., ed., *Death or Dialogue?*, 19-44; Knitter: "Suche nach Einheit in Unterschiedenheit. Jüngste Ansichten zum Religiösen Pluralismus," *Dialog der Religionen* I (1991): 230-37; and the literature noted by Richard Schenk, "Zwischen Projekt *Weltethos* und *The Clash of Civilizations*. Religioese Identitaet im Zeitalter der Globalisierung," in *Nationale und kulturelle Identität im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, ed. A. Rauscher (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2006): 111-24; Schenk, "Debatable Ambiguity: Paradigms of Truth as a Measure of the Differences among Christian Theologies of Religion," in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie des Forschungsinstituts für Philosophie Hannover*, vol. 11, ed. R. Schenk, V. Hoesle, and P. Koslowski (Vienna: Passagen, 2000): 121-51. Whatever might be the best evaluation of Küng's *Weltethos* vis-à-vis his theology of religions, there is no reason to doubt in principle the possible legitimacy of hybrid forms of thought in addressing the very mixed reality of religious thought and practice.

¹¹ For this reason, key elements of this interpretation, such as the dominant reading of the conscience prior to *Veritatis Splendor*, could be indifferent to geopolitical issues. While no one dreamt of answering the question as to the morality of South African apartheid or South American oligarchy by posing the counter-question as to the good intentions of its proponents and practitioners, that is what is most telling of all: the political paradigm was understated in the theory of conscience dominant in the first postconciliar decades. The rise of political theology did much to end the Rahnerian era; however, this does not indicate that the dominant theologies of those first decades after the council had been completely disinterested in political advocacy, but merely that theologies inclined in this way had assumed that their advocacy would be effectively advanced by the ongoing dynamic of the Enlightenment project, the dialectic of which went largely unnoticed. The strategy was chiefly to join that project, not to challenge it.

their shared “rationality,” still made up the majority of members in the clubs of ideal communication. Transformed directly into a theological interpretation, this style of vision often views the last twenty-five years of postconciliar development (1985–2010) as frustrating the genuine goals of the council and their consistent interpretation in the mold of the majority trends in the theology of the 1960s and '70s. This optimistic position toward the Enlightenment legacy in the council and its immediate postconciliar reception implied the robust rejection of Maritain's legacy, viewed chiefly as a criticism of Cartesian modernism and as an advocate of conciliar hopes for the renewal of the direct veneration of God inside and outside the liturgy.¹² Not Vatican II, considered now as irretrievably highjacked, but only a prospective Vatican III is seen here as a potential basis for renewal, which would consist in shoring up the disintegrating Enlightenment and then assimilating the Church to it.

2. Assimilated Postmodern Theology

Further removed from the memory of the world wars, but also following the growing insight into the limitation of natural resources and the limited possibilities of universal consumerism, there is on the political Left a second and younger interpretation of the council's dynamics. Its proponents are temperamentally to the left of their predecessors, though their desire for institutional change is now restricted even more exclusively to the Church. Their program for change in the realm of social justice is arguably the weakest among the four interpretations to be discussed here; and this qualifies their political Leftism: it is political chiefly with reference to the Church, especially with regard to any universal or perennial teachings in faith and morals. This reading shares with its predecessor much the same narrative of the council's secular redefinition of the *munera ecclesiae*. While even the older interpretation had more suggestions on how to change the Church than on how to change society, this younger postmodern theology, unlike its late-modern predecessor, is skeptical about society's own potential for generating universal progress, world-

¹² Cf. the interpretation of Maritain in Gerald A. McCool, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1994).

wide prosperity, or justice for all.¹³ The theology of postmodern assimilation sees more clearly than the earlier proponents of neomodernist assimilation that the secular society to which it seeks to conform itself had changed radically within a decade after the council. In the philosophical world, this second interpretation has its parallel and support in the vision of postmodernity articulated by Richard Rorty and J. F. Lyotard. At its worst, chauvinistic, at its best, resignative, this branch of postmodern theology calls in effect for the accommodation of faith to the secular culture of the affluent West (in its less militant forms), to which Christian theology should assimilate itself and for which it should provide assurance and confirmation. As society has lost the metanarrative of progress, it, too, is no longer a theology of those who clamor for international justice. It sees the council itself and the first twenty years of its reception *materialiter* as hopelessly marked by the delusional optimism in technological progress, a brief final glow of the last embers of a dying Enlightenment. What it sees as the only abiding message of the council is the formal side of *aggiornamento*, the alleged call of the council to assimilate itself to the spirit of its time, whatever the time, today the time of postmodern regionalism. In this interpretation, the texts of the council belong, together with the likes of Maritain, largely to the past and provide at best a picture of what not to seek to become in our inevitably fragmented future.

3. Unassimilated, Metaphysically Grounded Theology

There is a standard interpretation on the Right (both politically and temperamentally), understandably eager to safeguard the council itself, the affirmation of which is indeed necessary for the affirmation of any vital sense of ecclesial magisterium. This stance recognizes the deficiencies of the first two decades of postconciliar theology in accommodating the *munera ecclesiae* so closely to secular society. Yet, ignoring much of the historical data, worked out largely by the studies occasioned by the fortieth anniversary of the council, it interprets the

¹³ Cf. Lieven Boeve, "Gaudium et spes and the Crisis of Modernity: The End of Dialogue with the World?" in *Vatican II and its Legacy*, ed. M. Lamberigts et al. (Leuven: University Press and Peeters, 2002), 82–94; Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (Louvain: Peeters and Eerdmans, 2003).

council itself benevolently but almost exclusively in terms of its continuity with the past, while attributing most innovative aspects to its postconciliar misunderstanding and misinterpretation.¹⁴ There has been more understanding for Maritain as metaphysician and as *The Peasant of the Garonne* in this interpretation than in any of the other three views, but it glosses the fact that Maritain's criticism of certain trends, formulated already in the early months of 1966, could hardly have known the scope and depth of postconciliar development. As I argue later, Maritain's praise and critique of postconciliar developments have to do with forces evident at the council itself, even though Maritain does not say so explicitly. This interpretation, intending to embrace something like the maxim of the young Newman—"speak gently of thy sister's fall"—finds itself today in a quandary as to how to develop the council for future renewal; and even Maritain seems to offer little here outside a nostalgic citation of the past. The relative novelty of the council and its necessity for any future renewal is most often left underdeveloped here.

4. Unassimilated Postmetaphysical, Postmodern Theology

Highly critical of Maritain the metaphysician and of Maritain the proponent of human rights and religious liberty, a younger

¹⁴ One could glean this reading from isolated essays even of the usually even-handed and circumspect Avery Cardinal Dulles, e.g. in his otherwise helpful article, "True and False Reform," in *First Things* 135 (August/September 2003): 14–19, where ill-conceived developments are traced back to postconciliar interpretations of the council, but never explicitly to texts or debates of the council itself. And yet, reading more widely in the Cardinal's reflections, we find the complementary admission: "The council did ... adopt a rhetoric of consensus, service, openness to change and inclusiveness. But that rhetoric did little to prepare people for cases in which consensus could not be reached, or in which people did not want to hear what the church was obliged to preach, or in which ecclesiastical institutions are not subject to change, or in which inclusion would destroy the necessary unity of the flock of Christ. By their tone, if not their content, the council documents exuded optimism and perhaps raised unrealistic expectations. The calls for submission and compliance were so muted that readers could easily overlook them. The difficulty was increased by the condition of Western culture in the years when the council was being received." Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Vatican II, Substantive Teaching," in *America* 188, no. 11 (March 31, 2003).

interpretation on the political (but not the temperamental) Right describes itself as postmodern, but embodies more of the *Antimoderne* than its postmodern cousin on the institutional Left. Despite their self-assigned label of radical orthodoxy, the proponents of this interpretation deviate predictably not only from Maritain's sketch of the temperamental Right, which he had described as more concerned with order than with justice; but, more crucially, the proponents of non-assimilated postmodern theology often also harbor more intense political ambitions to reverse the injustices of neoliberalism than their postmodern cousins on the Left:¹⁵ an example of where the terminology has become "confounded," as Maritain had admitted it would.¹⁶ Both branches of postmodern theory share the rejection of the Enlightenment myths of progress and universality, but the would-be orthodox postmoderns show a more consistent concern for faith-based political advocacy, aimed at a reawakening of Christendom. Although this pathos for political reform does not always carry over to the realm of individual moral theory, it owes much to the Calvinist revival of the later Karl Barth.¹⁷

Postmodern orthodoxy emphasizes the corruption of human nature, reason, and will, but allows God to begin again by a new revelation and

¹⁵ Cf. Stanley Rosen, "Rorty and Systematic Philosophy," in Rosen, *The Ancients and Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (New Haven/London: Yale University, 1989), 175–88. It is in good part Lieven Boeve's continued dependence upon positions such as Rorty's that makes his otherwise attractive claim to have transcended not only the modern/antimodern alternatives, but also the modern/postmodern ones, difficult to accept: cf. Lieven Boeve, "Beyond the Modern and Antimodern Dilemma: Theological Method in a Postmodern Theological Context," in *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in Light of the Gospel*, ed. Johan Verstraeten (Louvain: Peeters, 2007), 150–66, esp. 165.

¹⁶ Maritain, *A Letter on Independence*. For the reasons Maritain offers there, it is also a justified expectation that the political impact of this brand of Anglo-Catholic communitarianism will confirm his observation that "there are no more feeble governments than governments of the Right led by temperaments of the Left."

¹⁷ Cf. James H. Olthuis and James K. A. Smith, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2005), and the foreword by John Milbank to James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy, Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2004).

the community of believers, distinct from nonbelieving society; in this context, the position embraces a moment of communitarianism, even sectarianism. While it finds its positive philosophical resources in thinkers like Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas, it seeks when dealing with the sources of postmodern nihilism to follow roughly the pattern once modeled by Barth in his appropriation of Ludwig Feuerbach: as Barth suggested that Feuerbach's "projection critique" had unmasked the egotism of all religions, but had not called into serious question the possibility of a "religionless faith," or one that at least yearned to be such, so, too, writers such as Laurence Paul Hemming have sought to portray Heidegger's critique of the Christian God and the spiritually gifted human person as a helpful critique of the metaphysical God and the (allegedly) autonomous-Pelagian subject à la Maritain.¹⁸ This interpretation, rejecting as well the advocacy of human rights by Maritain and the council, sees both as already far too accommodating to the Enlightenment project.¹⁹ Unlike the previous

¹⁸ Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2002); and Hemming, "Nihilism, Heidegger and the Grounds of Redemption," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999/2003), 91-108; and Hemming, "In Matters of Truth: Heidegger and Aquinas," in *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. Fergus Kerr (London: SCM Press, 2003), 85-104.

¹⁹ Cf. Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003), where Maritain is seen as a principal voice within "Whig Thomism," particularly in his "efforts to reconcile Thomistic natural law with the Liberal natural right doctrine and his endorsement of the natural rights in the United Nations' *Declaration on Human Rights* in 1948" (16). Following Alasdair MacIntyre (148 et passim), Rowland sees Maritain's efforts in this regard as a failure and the chief cause to be named for the tragic weakness of the understanding of culture in *Gaudium et Spes*, which "bear(s) witness to Maritain's general political project of *rapprochement* with the Liberal-humanist tradition" (22; for the centrality to the argument of the book of identifying this alleged mistake cf. 11). This example of radical orthodoxy is unable to differentiate "the affirmation of the secular in Rahner and Maritain" (30-32), despite its stereotype dismissal of Maritain as a representative of "implicit extrinsicism" (of which Rahner could hardly be accused) and despite its claim to pay constant attention to the provenance of thinkers (need one compare their respective debts—and those of Anglo-

interpretation on the Right, it sees the first twenty years of postconciliar development as the direct fruit and the genuine, if unfortunate, continuation of the council itself. Of all four interpretations, it is the most critical of the council. De facto, its proponents have in common with the interpretations on the Left the global rejection of Maritain, joining their postmodern cousins in spurning metaphysics and the language of universal rights.²⁰ As a whole, they gloss over what they might have claimed as common ground with Maritain: the concern for the revival of Christendom and the renewal of Christian worship,²¹ the insight into the irreligious and

Catholic communitarians—to Hegel?). One need only recall the peasant's critique of Teilhard to suggest the distance between Maritain and Rahner in their evaluations of the council. For Rahner's postconciliar stance of the 1970s toward the relationship of his own evolutive worldview to Teilhard's evolutionary programmatic cf. *Grundkurs des Glaubens* (Sämtliche Werke 26, Zürich/Düsseldorf/Freiburg: Benziger/Herder, 1999), 176: "Wir suchen Theoreme zu vermeiden, die von Teilhard de Chardin her geläufig sind. Treffen wir uns mit ihm, ist es gut, und wir brauchen das nicht absichtlich zu vermeiden." No other authors are named here as sources of or parallels to this central Motiv of Rahner's thought.

²⁰ Tracey Rowland's neglect of Joseph Ratzinger's (resp. Benedict XVI's) concern for human rights discourse makes even her newer and in many ways kinder view of *Gaudium et Spes* and its reception more difficult to accept; cf. Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially 30–47; for Rowland on Boeve cf. 41, 44, 144ff; and again on Maritain as the naive "flagship of neo-Thomism," "Natural Law: Neo-Thomism to Nuptial Mysticism," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35 (Fall 2008): 374–96.

²¹ For a plausible theory of how to complement Maritain's concern for universal human rights with MacIntyre's Christian communitarianism, cf. Deborah Wallace on Jacques Maritain, and Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Person, the Common Good and Human Rights," in Brendan Sweetman, ed., *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 1999), 127–40. A more extreme position, claiming Maritain as a communitarian, is offered by Michael Moreland, "Jacques Maritain, Thomism, and the Liberal-Communitarian Debate," in Sweetman, *The Failure of Modernism*, 141–54. For an opposing view cf. John Milbank's gentle but firm dismissal of Maritain for (just) missing the Blondelian denial of secularism and exerting a pernicious influence on Y.

pernicious character of bourgeois liberalism,²² and the dismissal of the modern project in the tradition of Descartes and Kant along with the far-reaching, if selective, retrieval of premodern wisdom.

5. A Fifth Interpretation: The Theology of Critical Engagement

Prescriptive as well as descriptive in intention, none of these four well-known readings of recent Church history is without merit, and each of them would deserve its own conference: the zeal for justice in the social action of the first; the “disillusioned” realism of the second; the dedication of the third to the Church and to human rationality; the pious impatience and the awareness of initial human finitude in the fourth. Three of the four see the first twenty years after the council as its genuine development, although only one of them desires to perpetuate its concrete agenda. Two of the four miss the power of assimilation by excess, the other two by defect. All four, however, share a common feature—while knowing of the debates at the council between majority and minority positions, they see its genuine interpretation and its legitimate postconciliar development in, at most, one of the opposed forces. An alternative to all of these interpretations would have to integrate much of their individual strengths, even while avoiding their particular weaknesses, striving to the greatest degree possible, as Maritain put it, “to be neither [merely] of the Right nor of the Left” in a political sense,²³ or, more concretely:

In the application required by the present state of things, a sane Christian politics (I mean inspired by Christian principles

Congar et al., *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990/2004), 223ff.

²² Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (New York: Scribner's, 1947), 87ff.

²³ Maritain, *A Letter on Independence*, 132ff.; *The Peasant of the Garonne*, 31–38, especially 32ff. The title of the *Letter* refers to independence from both political extremes. To the options of being Right, Left, neutral to both, or combining both, Maritain adds a fifth variant in the conclusion to his *On the Church of Christ* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1973), 240: “I have an idea that this book will displease everybody, I mean all those who today have taken position ‘on the right’ or ‘on the left.’ (And this does not displease me, although I certainly did not have this intention in writing it.)”

but appealing to all non-Christians who would find it just and humane) would doubtless appear to go very far to the Left as regards certain technical solutions, in appreciation of the concrete movement of history and the need for the transformation of the present economic system—all the while having absolutely original positions and proceeding in the spiritual and moral order from principles very different from the conceptions of the world and of life, of the family, and of the city that are held in honor by the various parties of the Left.²⁴

A fifth interpretation, though articulated soon after the council, has gained wider currency only in the last twenty-five years (1985–2010) of the nearly fifty years since the beginning of the council; but it seems to offer the interpretation of recent history most capable of the synthetic task that Maritain was calling for. This theology of critical engagement takes the two sides of the debates at the council as defining together the parameters of ideal postconciliar faith: an expansion into religious and societal discourse beyond the narrow boundaries of the Church, but in critical conversation with these non-Catholic worlds. It seeks to avoid both the isolation and the assimilation of Catholicism. Like all but the third interpretation, this position sees the immediately postconciliar trends rooted in the council itself. Like the two postmodern trends, it sees the folly of hoping for the self-perfecting of the *saeculum*. It shares with the interpretations of the Left the desire to engage the non-Catholic world of its time in its “*gaudium et spes*,” but it shares with the analysis of the Right the greater sensitivity to the “*luctus et angor*” of our day.

This fifth option, prepared in the conciliar and immediately postconciliar writings of Karol Wojtyła and Joseph Ratzinger (despite the seemingly opposite temperaments of the authors), suggests a way for post-Rahnerian theology to be in dialogue with the world without “kneeling before it,” to borrow a phrase from the Garonne valley. Rejecting conformity to both secularism and sectarianism, avoiding the extremes of left and right that Maritain had described in archetypes as the lemming-like sheep of Rabelais’s Panurge and the Manichean Ruminators of the Covenant, the fifth reading sought to embrace the

²⁴ Maritain, *A Letter on Independence*, 133.

legacy of the council as pointing the way toward promoting dialogue with secular forces, with philosophies of non-Christian provenance, and with non-Christian religions, even while affirming the eschatological importance of Christ and our faith in him: *Fides et Ratio, Veritatis Splendor*, interreligious dialogue within and because of the horizon of *Dominus Jesus*.²⁵ This understanding of the council's commission suggests the need to correct and complement the reasoning of the speculative and practical intellect as it is given prior to faith, but not a need to start all over again by bracketing the world outside the Christian tradition; indeed, it called upon theologians to profit from the contributions of philosophical and historical disciplines. It finds its philosophical parallel and support in thinkers such as Robert Spaemann, who confronts many of the more problematic conclusions of our age with the ordinary moral intuitions that endure beneath them.²⁶ As in what has been at least the mainstream of Catholic faith, the human intellect appears here wounded, not hopelessly corrupted. Because of these remnants of health, the council deemed it right to engage the non-Catholic world, to listen to its voice for more than just an admission of contemporary depravity and bankruptcy, for more than just a confession of the complete loss of metaphysics and the natural law. But because of human woundedness, the council was also right to caution against self-assimilation to the age or ultimate reliance upon it. According to this interpretation, the council must be read today in continuity with both sides of its debates, one of which, in relative isolation, dominated its theological and pastoral reception in the first two decades after its conclusion, before in the last twenty years the two currents could begin to be brought back together again in greater continuity with the council's historical reality and textual legacy.

The council must be read today again as what it most closely was, taking as prescriptive the duality often merely described in it, and

²⁵ Cf. Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne*, 36, using the two images as "Archetypes" of the extremes on the Left and the Right; cf. F. Rabelais, *Gargantua et Pantagruel IV (resp. Pantagruel III)*, 6-8.

²⁶ Cf. Richard Schenk, "The Ethics of Robert Spaemann in the Context of Recent Philosophy," in Brian J. Shanley, ed., *One Hundred Years of Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2001), 156-68.

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. It is reminiscent of Kant's dictum that concepts without experience are empty; and experience without concepts, blind. Without the innovative call to engage the concrete, contingent world of our time, the council would have been empty of forces for renewal. Lacking continuity with the doctrinal resources of its past, the council would have been too blind to offer orientation and support to its own age. The only historically adequate and pastorally responsible reading of the council demands attention to the two sets of voices in the debates and the final texts of the council, 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. A reading that isolates one or the other voice of the council will necessarily be either blind (not knowing how to provide orientation to our times) or empty (not knowing how the times concretize, individuate, and make urgent the faith: *caritas Christi urget nos*).

In one of his several published reflections on *Gaudium et Spes* in the mid- and late-sixties, the not-yet forty-year-old Professor Joseph Ratzinger portrayed the Pastoral Constitution as articulating the theological anthropology necessary not only for education, but for a genuinely Christian engagement of culture.²⁷ In its interpretation of a technological world, the council is shown here as having explicated an aspect of the Church's mission both novel and important. In Ratzinger's reading of 1966, the council also had addressed here a novel ambivalence of the human situation in our day. Despite accurately

²⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, "Das Menschenbild des Konzils in seiner Bedeutung für die Bildung," in Kulturbeirat beim Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken, ed., *Christliche Erziehung nach dem Konzil: Berichte und Dokumentation* (Cologne: J. P. Bechem, 1967), 33-65. Less than five months after the close of the council, Ratzinger, then professor of dogmatics and the history of dogma at the Catholic theology faculty in Tübingen and just returned from the council, took up here the question of the significance of the council's understanding of the human being (i.e., its theological anthropology) for education (April 23, 1966 at Bad Honnef).

perceiving and criticizing the self-delusion that often accompanies contemporary talk of the historical character of humanity and the new humanism of our own age, the council also acknowledged our characteristically modern need and opportunity to develop global responsibility and solidarity as the necessary but not sufficient condition of fulfilling the abiding vocation of full humanity. As Ratzinger insisted, this was a relative and important *novum* of the council. Whereas the patristic period knew of the development of the one Adam of humanity through the six epochs of its history, the modern view of historical humanity has interpreted the new duties of the globalized future in strongly technological terms. The ambivalence of our times is reflected in "the danger and the possibility" of speaking today of the human being as a project of history.²⁸ "The thorough presentation of this (modern) situation and the conscious acceptance of its ambivalence as danger and possibility, as threat and promise, is decisive, because the acceptance of the contemporary situation in both its faces provides anthropology from the start a historical index."²⁹ Ratzinger's central thesis was that not every change calling for a new embrace of global responsibility is humanizing, but the task of humanization will not be fulfilled without embracing the historical demands of our epoch for greater global responsibility (the necessary but not sufficient condition of genuine humanization).³⁰ The cultural and educational mission of the Church must be viewed, he argued, in this qualitatively new anthropological context. This conscious acceptance of the ambivalence that is implied in accepting the modern situation both "as danger and possibility, as threat and promise," characterized Ratzinger's other commentaries on the council as well.³¹

²⁸ Ratzinger, "Das Menschenbild des Konzils in seiner Bedeutung für die Bildung," 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 34-37

³¹ As an example of the Tübingen professor's affinity to the peasant's analysis from the same time cf. especially Joseph Ratzinger, *Die letzten Sitzungsperiode des Konzils* (Cologne: J.P. Bachem, 1966), from the central section on "The Battle about Schema XIII" (25-58), notably the paragraph on "The chief substantive problem: belief within the technical world" (39-43), e.g. 40ff. with reference to the "tendency towards Teilhardism": "As for the Council's final draft [of *Gaudium et Spes*], there remained even there, despite all the

A close study of the writings of the man who would become Benedict XVI reveals at least two flaws in the usual way in which his development as a theologian is understood: the early work contains an expressed critical potentiality in reference to the modern world, inside and outside the Church, and the later work retains its affirmation of the relative novelty and importance of the council's advice on engaging modern culture. His interpretation of the council still offers us the help of Ariadne's thread to escape the labyrinth into which the council would be banned by the first four interpretations discussed above.

II. MARITAIN AS A MODEL OF A CONCILIAR RENEWAL: "UN BRAS D'ATHLÈTE ET UNE HAUTE VOIX DE LAMENTATEUR"

1. Maritain and the Council: The True New Fire

As the interpretations of the Right mentioned above had recognized, Maritain's praise for the council was not ingenuous. "The true new fire" that he expected from the council with regards to the *munera ecclesiae* shone for Maritain all the more brightly in contrast to

distancing from such ideas, an almost naive sounding pleasure in the idea of progress, in that little was said of the ambivalence of all external progress that the human race might make. In dismantling that resentment against technological civilization which previously had dominated attitudes influenced by the medieval orientation of ecclesial thought, there was something grand in the Council, a step forward of decisive historical significance, which may not and should not be reversed. But at the same time one will have to add that such resentment will only be fully dismantled when we have become free to see soberly what is negative and what is regressive in that "progress" and to recognize without glossing the distance between technological and genuinely human progress. The authentically decisive question at stake here goes deeper still. This question can be formulated with the alternative: How are technological salvation and the salvation of faith related to one another? How are technological progress and Christian hope related to one another? The solution offered by a crass form of Teilhardism answers that the two are identical. The weakness of the draft text on the Church in the world of our times was that, put simply, it failed to distance itself sufficiently from that identification."

the "masked Manicheanism ... superimposed" on that preconciliar Church that the peasant describes in terms no less bitter than those referring to many of the postconciliar excesses that, in his view, had followed directly from previous ecclesiastical inexperience in engaging the non-Catholic world. Indiscriminate affirmation had followed indiscriminate condemnation; assimilation had been facilitated by prior isolation. Maritain hoped that the "true new fire," if ignited by the council, would bring light and warmth to the Church from a comparatively dark and frozen state in her relationship to non-Christians (chapter 4), in the dialogue of minds capable of the truth in conversation with both contemporary (chapter 5) and medieval thought (chapter 6), as well as in genuine veneration and sanctity (chapter 7). At the same time the peasant knows that the world has a "fundamental ambivalence,"³² that "history progresses at the same time in the line of evil and in the line of good,"³³ and that in the latter days of the Enlightenment "logophobia" and "chronolatry" are twin dangers (so much so that in the postmodern world they can move beyond that love-hate relationship of Enlightenment reason to fuse into one as a trendy irrationalism).³⁴

What was perhaps somewhat ingenuous, if well-intended, was Maritain's ascription of the excessive affirmations of Enlightenment hopes exclusively to the misinterpretations of the council, when in those early months of 1966 it was evident that there were important voices in the debates and final texts of the council itself, which, when taken in isolation, would amount to much the same positions. Maritain asserts that the Pastoral Constitution was well aware of this ambivalence and dedicated to avoiding the dual dangers of "practical Manicheanism and Pelagianism," even while observing closely the resurgence of these dangers in the first months of the postconciliar era.³⁵ To choose one example, Maritain's sustained criticism of the "Teilhardian" belief in self-propelled, technological progress is discussed in much the same sense, if at greater length and in more

³² Maritain, *The Peasant of Garonne*, 39.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21ff.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

polemical terms, as Ratzinger, who, writing in that same spring of 1966, understands these overly optimistic passages as unfortunate remnants of an earlier phase of the discussion that remained, though not without counter-texts, in parts of the final text of *Gaudium et Spes*.³⁶ What the peasant seems to be reaching for throughout his affirmation of the council, coupled as it is to warnings of its aftermath, is arguably close in substance to that fifth interpretation mentioned above, so too in his desire to engage in novel but critical ways the non-Catholic world. Maritain's ambivalence toward the council is often understated, such as when the council is portrayed as expressing a naive, so-called "Maritainian optimism," or when conversely Maritain is portrayed as simply rejecting the council and caricatured as being in contradiction to *Nostra Aetate*: "a metaphysical anti-Semite," simply because he affirms the eschatological mediation of Christ.³⁷

The two other arguments *prima facie* for doubting the value of Maritain's legacy as a source for renewal in the genuine spirit of the council pull in opposite directions from one another: while his involvement in the human rights debate has been dismissed recently as a naive accommodation to modernity, his conversation with the modern project as a whole is often dismissed *in globo* as nostalgic and reactionary. Let us recall first the Maritain of the human rights movement.

2. Maritain at the United Nations: Facing Babel

In November 1947, as president of the French delegation to the Second UNESCO conference in Mexico that was to prepare the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Maritain delivered one of the signature addresses of his life—"The Way of Peace" (*La Voie de la*

³⁶ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Die letzten Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, 39–43.

³⁷ Cf. the late Leon Klenicki, "Jacques Maritain's Vision of Judaism and Anti-Semitism," in Robert Royal, *Jacques Maritain and the Jews* (Mishawaka/South Bend: American Maritain Association, 1994), 72–88; and the less differentiating contribution by John Hellman, "The Jews in the 'New Middle Ages': Jacques Maritain's Anti-Semitism in its Times," in Royal, *Jacques Maritain and the Jews*, 89–103.

Paix)³⁸—a talk to which he returned repeatedly in later works from *Man and the State* to *The Peasant of the Garonne Valley*.³⁹ Not without a certain poignancy, this thinker, who had first made his start in fame and fortune as the semi-official philosopher of *Action Française*,⁴⁰ begins his reflections here by a generous and universalist interpretation of what might easily have sounded like chauvinist remarks delivered by Léon Blum at another UN conference held in San Francisco just three years before.⁴¹ In keeping with his “second conversion” of 1926, Maritain seeks to confirm the best instincts of the age, whose memory of the recent past had sharpened the willingness of an increasingly polarized world to agree, despite itself, upon a list of human rights, the violation of which was widely acknowledged to produce injustice and profound suffering. In one of the most telling differences between Maritain and recent postmodernism, Maritain sums up the tendency to have only regional acknowledgements of rights as “Babelism,” obviously without the undertone of Derrida’s or even Herder’s approval of Babel.⁴² Maritain is far from thinking or pretending for his colleagues at UNESCO that this consensus is secure or self-evident to our times, much less to all times. Our times continue to suffer, Maritain thought, under the pragmatic perversion of justice (Machiavellianism or *Realpolitik*), under collective violations of justice, and under “the problem of human value [or dignity] and the human use of science and technology.”⁴³ From our vantage point today, it is clear that these

³⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. IX (Fribourg/Paris: Éditions Universitaires/Éditions Saint-Paul 1990/2000), 145–64.

³⁹ Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951), 77–79; Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne*, 81.

⁴⁰ For the role of Léon Blum in the Dreyfus affair and for the weight and public meaning of Maritain’s remarkable shift in 1926, cf. Ralph McInerney, *The Very Rich Hours of Jacques Maritain, A Spiritual Life* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2003), 60–65.

⁴¹ Cited according to the translation of the revised version of that inaugural address, “The Possibilities for Cooperation in a Divided World,” in Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Scribner’s, 1952), 172–84, here 172ff.

⁴² Contrast Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, 179, with James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation, Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2000), 57–60.

⁴³ Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, 178.

problems would not disappear in the second half of the twentieth century, so that Pope John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae* (§4) could echo and intensify Maritain's analysis, while naming one of the practical irritations with our contemporary human rights discussion:

Unfortunately, this disturbing state of affairs, far from decreasing, is expanding: with the new prospects opened up by scientific and technological progress, there arise new forms of attacks on the dignity of the human being. At the same time a new cultural climate is developing and taking hold, which gives crimes against life a new and—if possible—even more sinister character, giving rise to further grave concern: broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the State, so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of healthcare systems.

Maritain's answer was not to accept the nationalization, regionalization, confessionalization, or bourgeois privatization of rights, but to seek the codification of as many genuine and universal rights as the collective memory of suffering and the experience of totalitarianism could achieve. He openly admits that not all participants in the conference will have the same sense of the foundations of these rights, rooted as they are in natural law and eternal law; theirs will be a practical, not a theoretical or foundational agreement.⁴⁴ Maritain knows, too, that without this common and adequate foundation the danger of an eroding consensus is heightened.⁴⁵

Maritain's rights' programmatic is evident in his development of a key, if imprecise, tool for defending rights in the public forum: the distinction between person and individual. Even prior to the critical

⁴⁴ Cf. already Jacques Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (New York: Scribner's, 1943).

⁴⁵ For Maritain's proximity to the fifth interpretation suggested above, cf. the address of now Pope Benedict XVI before the UN on April 18, 2008.

intervention by Pius XI,⁴⁶ Maritain had referred to a passage that he had discovered in the second edition of Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange's first major work, *Le Sens Commune, la Philosophie de l'être et les formules dogmatiques*.⁴⁷ Immediately after the 1907 condemnation of so-called "modernism" (a broad movement that, by its frequent reduction of thought to more voluntarist drives, often showed a greater affinity to postmodernism than to the Cartesian-Kantian project),⁴⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange had published this monograph,⁴⁹ citing the support found in *Lamentabili*,⁵⁰ and detailing his extensive critique of the Bergsonian theologian Édouard Le Roy (1870–1954),⁵¹ whose life-philosophical or

⁴⁶ Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1970), 25; Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (New York: Scribner's, 1947), 3, n. 2.

⁴⁷ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le Sans Commune, la philosophie de l'être et les formules dogmatiques* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1909).

⁴⁸ In a recent work on the council, Hubert Wolf draws the convincing distinction between the modernism of the strong Cartesian subject and that of the far more voluntaristic "modernist" movement at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century: "Einleitung: (Anti-) Modernismus und II. Vatikanum," in Wolf, ed., *(Anti-) Modernismus und Modernismus in der katholischen Kirche: Beiträge zum theologiegeschichtlichen Vorfeld des II. Vatikanums* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998), 15–41, here 20. The study uses the distinction to analyze the appeal in 1977 by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre to his students at Ecône to continue their schism and reject what he claimed was the modernistic "liberalism" of the council and of Pope Paul VI, due in good measure to the influence of "the bad Maritain"; cf. *Priesterbruderschaft Pius X*, ed., *Damit die Kirche fortbestehe* (Stuttgart, 1992). Lefebvre implied here that there was also a "good Maritain," presumably both *Antimoderne* and anti-modernistic.

⁴⁹ Cf. the lengthy pre-study of 1908, the year of Maritain's break with Bergsonianism: Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le sens commune, la philosophie de l'être et le formules dogmatiques*, in *Revue Thomiste* vol. 16 (1908): 164–85, 259–300, 566–616, especially the third part.

⁵⁰ No. 26: "Dogmata fidei retinenda sunt tantummodo iuxta sensum practicum, id est tamquam norma praeceptiva agendi, non vero tamquam norma credendi" (DH 3426).

⁵¹ Cf. Richard Peddicord, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism, An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2005). A portrait in broad, expressionistic strokes, this free-wheeling essay

pragmatic hermeneutic of doctrinal development exemplified the modernism of his day. Garrigou-Lagrange's study first appeared just as Maritain was distancing himself from Bergson's work. Recalling the dogmatic development of the notion of person, Garrigou-Lagrange's defense of the intelligible content in doctrine and of the spiritual dimension in the human person against their reduction to subspiritual aspirations for communal or individual existence recurred in the lengthy quotes found in *Three Reformers* (1925). Concerned chiefly with the anthropological distinctions, spiritual/material and intellectual/voluntative, Garrigou-Lagrange had mentioned only in passing the distinction of *totum/partes*, and this without reference to the state as *totum*, much less the totalitarian state. Already in 1925, Maritain developed the part/whole analysis of the person/individual distinction and its political implications for freedom of the person vis-à-vis the state.⁵² After 1926, Maritain would come increasingly to dwell on the distinction between person and individual chiefly in terms of wholes and parts and to use the mereologically enhanced distinction as one of his chief arguments for the rights of the person against the totalitarian claims of those states that deemed their citizens and residents to be completely plastic to the goals and desires of the community. At the heart of Maritain's argument is his insistence that the person is more than merely a part of the state as *totum*. While not reducing the dogmatically clarified notion of person to this *sensus practicus* as a *norma agendi praeceptiva* (which would have violated the very point of *Lamentabili*), there is no doubt that Maritain's mereological analysis of the distinction between person and individual provided him with one of his principal tools for the defense of persons in an age of totalitarianism. It was a defense that carried weight not just with the faithful who believed in the persons of the Trinity, but with all those

makes no mention of Maritain's reception of this distinction nor, more importantly, of the controversy on the causality of sin that played so central a role in Garrigou's estrangement from Marín-Sola and Maritain. For a more detailed and penetrating but no less critical study cf. Michael D. Torre, *God's Permission of Sin: Negative or Conditioned Decree? A Defense of the Doctrine of Francisco Marín-Sola, OP, based on the Principles of Thomas Aquinas* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, Editions Saint-Paul Fribourg Suisse, 2009).

⁵² Maritain, *Three Reformers*, especially paragraph 3 in the section on M. Luther: "The Individual and the Person," 14–28, here 24ff.

whose memory of recent suffering still enabled them to acknowledge the human person's practical rights, even if they lacked the conviction of their divine origins. Although the mereological analysis provided here was in many ways a rather blunt tool (for the state surely must provide for persons as such, just as persons with their properly personal needs and obligations need something like a state), Maritain discovered that this notional development could benefit those whose knowledge *quoad nos* still included the aversion to totalitarianism, not just in its communist and fascist forms, but also in "bourgeois liberalism," where the same "conflict between the whole and the part" recurs: "Bourgeois liberalism with its ambition to ground everything in the unchecked initiative of the individual, conceived as a little God, and the absolute liberty of property, business and pleasure, inevitably ends in statism."⁵³ He continues, "The moral crisis of our occidental civilization and the disastrous spasms of our liberal capitalist economy exhibit all too clearly the tragedy of bourgeois individualism."⁵⁴

3. Maritain in Conversation with Modern and Postmodern Projects

The texts of Maritain on universal human rights do not support the interpretation of his work between 1926 and 1965 as an easy self-assimilation to contemporary culture; the critical voice is too strong, the identification of the open and hidden sufferings of the times too programmatic. But what about the opposing interpretation, the one that paints Maritain the metaphysician as too dismissive of the modern project to be a source for the renewal of our engagement of it, much less a source for the engagement of the postmodern movements on the Right and Left that share with one another the definition of our times as postmetaphysical?

Certainly there is no lack of texts in which Maritain sets his program for the revival of metaphysics against the whole modern development from Descartes on: texts where Maritain declines to choose, for example, between Kantian and Hegelian options, but simply claims to dismiss them all. This topic, too, would deserve its own conference, but I would like to suggest here briefly that this is not the only side of

⁵³ Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 81ff.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

Maritain's engagement with our age, nor the one that best promises renewal. Ralph McInerny has recently recalled how the Maritain of *Existence and the Existent* was offering an alternative to contemporary existentialism, itself a throwback to the attitude dominant between the wars and at the same time a foretaste of the postmodern reflex to come; for the leading brands of postmodernism today are little more than existentialism minus the pathos of authenticity, replaced now by the pathos of sub-personal (structuralist) or suprapersonal (post-structuralist), of regional, forces, traditions, and trends. Maritain affirmed the importance of human action and history in determining the shape of human existence, in appreciation of this side of existentialism, even while criticizing this newest exaggeration of the *homo faber* narrative and its axiomatic atheism (paradigmatically in Jean Paul Sartre).

The same study by McInerny recalls Maritain's cultural circle with its many difficult friendships, the search for conversion mingled with solidarity in the sense of living in difficult times: solidarity by which Maritain sensed that somehow the whole age shared in the plight of a Georges Rouault, born under the bombardment of modern warfare.⁵⁵ Maritain's advocacy for the human rights movement reveals this same critical solidarity. His critique of modernity and his search for the renewal of metaphysics, though surely at times overstated, was part of what *Gaudium et Spes* would say is true of all genuine Christians, that they share not only "the joys and the hopes," but also "the griefs and the anxieties" of this age, its *luctus et angor*, those forgotten words, the equally forgotten part of the intentionally mixed message of the Pastoral Constitution. Already by 1912, Bloy had recognized just this sort of necessary programmatic ambivalence in his godson, identifying in his philosophy this unique combination: "Un bras d'athlète et une haute voix de lamentateur": the powerful arm of what would become an advocacy for our times precisely by lamenting what was harmful within them.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Georges Rouault* (New York: H.N. Abrams/Pocket Books, 1954).

⁵⁶ Cited by Raïssa Maritain from Léon Bloy, *Le Pèlerin de l'Absolu*, October 17, 1912, in: *Les Aventures de la grâce*, cap. viii: *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. XIV (Fribourg/Paris: Éditions Universitaires/Éditions Saint-Paul, 1993), 1017; *We*

The legacy of Maritain seems to call us today to reject the claim, for example, that the priority of the right to life before the right to privacy is exclusively a religious, never a rational conviction: Maritain's example suggests that we should deny that such an insight requires *de iure* great sanctity or special revelation (although the experience of our times reminds us of just how much these can be of help *de facto*).⁵⁷ The right to life must rather be insisted upon with the tools of public advocacy and of reason: jurisprudential, historical, and metaphysical. How far this "paracletic" vocation of the philosophizing Christian can accommodate the postmodern demand for the "burial of metaphysics" need not be decided in advance; the cause of strong reason need not beat its chest and boast of its power. But in an age when the transcendental at the center of the loudest debates is the *verum* of things, Maritain's legacy leads us to ask: how much of a decline can metaphysics endure before we have lost even the ability to say that a claim is false, before we lose the age's (here not so postmodern) still-treasured ability to criticize injustice?⁵⁸ Domestic and international disputes about the hierarchy of rights discredit neither the very notion

Have Been Friends Together/Adventures in Grace (New York: Image), 338: "Everyone knows my lack of enthusiasm for philosophy, in my eyes the most boring way of wasting life's precious time; beside its Hyrcanian jargon discourages me. But with Jacques it is all singularly different. . . . I did not expect to see so strong an arm come forth from the tattered outfit of philosophy. The arm of an athlete and the lofty voice of a bewailer [of olden times: addition of the translator]. I felt at the same time something like a wave of sorrowful poetry, a powerful tidal wave coming from a far distance." I want to thank John Hittinger for his assistance in locating this passage.

⁵⁷ Cf. Robert Spaemann, "Is Every Human Being A Person?" *The Thomist*, 60 (1996): 463-74. On the significance of faith for attempts to preserve the sense of personal dignity in times of acute challenge cf. Richard Schenk, "Von der Hoffnung, Person zu sein. Theologische Überlegungen zur Diskontinuität von Verheißung und Vertrauen," in Schenk, ed., *Kontinuität der Person: Zum Versprechen und Vertrauen*, Collegium Philosophicum, vol. 2 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1998), 147-77.

⁵⁸ Cf. Richard Schenk, "Praktische Unwahrheit und Metaphysik," in Schenk et al., ed., *Jahrbuch des Forschungsinstituts für Philosophie Hannover* (Schriftenreihe des Forschungsinstituts für Philosophie Hannover) vol. 7 (Hildesheim: Bernward, 1993), 11-44.

of rights nor our obligation to articulate and defend above all the rights of persons who are treated as mere instruments of more powerful interests. 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.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ In the year that he shifted from philosophical to theological studies, Karl Rahner, still some fifteen years shy of the decisive formulation of his theological system, said of Maritain's small monograph on *Religion and Culture* that it could serve as a basis for Christians' (but sadly not, Rahner adds, for Christendom's) examination of conscience. While Rahner's theology would manage to challenge the Church far more than it did the extraecclesial culture, Maritain's work would come to show ways to distinguish "is" from "ought" in both, expressing by this twin application of dialectic to the Church and the world of our times the genuine spirit of the council; cf. Karl Rahner's review of Jacques Maritain, *Religion and Culture* (1936), in Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke* 4 (Solothurn/Düsseldorf/Freiburg: Benziger/Herder, 1997), 453ff.