

On the Prospect of Paradise on Earth

Maritain on Action and Contemplation

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To wish paradise on earth is stark naïveté. But it is surely better than not to wish any paradise at all. To aspire to paradise is man's grandeur and how should I aspire to paradise except by beginning to realize paradise here below? The question is to know what paradise is. Paradise consists, as St. Augustine says, in the joy of the Truth. Contemplation is paradise on earth, a crucified paradise.

—Jacques Maritain, "Action and Contemplation," 1938¹

The order of human virtues come to completion demands that practical action in the world and on the human community superabound from contemplation of truth, which means not only contemplation in its pure forms but, more generally, intellectual grasping of reality and enjoyment of knowledge for its own sake.

—Jacques Maritain, "Thomist View on Education," 1957²

Going out into the deep does not just mean that the Church is to be *much more a missionary Church*, but above all it says that she is to be more intensely contemplative.... Certainly, to contemplate *does not mean to forget the earth*.... *Christian contemplation does not take us away from our earthly commitments*.

—John Paul II, Address to Extraordinary Consistory, 2001³

I

The operative motto of the Dominican Order is St. Thomas's famous expression, *contemplata tradere* ("to hand on what is contemplated"). Things that are to be handed on are, first, things that are personally, interiorly considered, pondered, known, indeed, enjoyed. This short phrase already contains the remarkable realization that the truths that we know and behold somehow are not merely ours, even in being ours; they are likewise to be passed on. Truth, as such, is free in the sense that no one owns it even if everyone is obliged to acknowledge it, freely. In a very real sense, it is better to hand on what we know than merely to keep it ourselves, even

1. Jacques Maritain, "Action and Contemplation," *Scholasticism and Politics* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Image, 1960), p. 182.

2. Jacques Maritain, "Thomist View on Education," *The Education of Man: The Educational Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, ed. Donald and Idella Gallagher (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 56.

3. John Paul II, Address to Extraordinary Consistory of Cardinals, Ascension Thursday, May 24, 2001, *L' Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 30 May 2001, #1, 8.

though we must first attend to it ourselves, an attention in which there is indeed much delight.

The issue was already present in the Cave Myth in *The Republic* of Plato, over the question of whether the philosopher, on beholding the good, ought subsequently to return to the cave and enlighten the citizens held there in darkness, a dangerous mission for the philosopher, as it turned out. But the fact was that in the good that he beheld, the philosopher saw its relation to those who did not know it.

Moreover, nothing Hegelian or collectivist can be found in this Thomistic notion of *contemplata tradere*, as if somehow its subject was some great inner-worldly being that transcended the personal reality that is given to each of us to make us what we are and not something else. The object both of creation and of redemption always remains individual persons, albeit in that very social nature given to them because their minds can, properly speaking “know all things.” The Dominican motto has the implication that we need to set aside much time and effort to know the order of being, of *what is*. But within it, there is also a very vivid feeling that, welling-up within us, is a joy that wants truth to be known, a realization that what is indeed properly “for us” is also “for others.”

Not to be outdone, the early Jesuits have their own, less well-known, motto that comes, I believe, from Jerome Nadal, one of Ignatius’ early and most brilliant companions. It reads: each one is to be *in actione, contemplativus* (contemplative in action). This motto is not conceived to be in opposition to the Dominican tradition or to bypass it or, even less, to surpass it. Rather, *in actione, contemplativus* spells out something implicit in *contemplata tradere*. Without the *contemplata tradere*, there could be no *in actione, contemplativus*, no contemplative in action. One of the striking things about Christianity, in contrast to the Greek notion of contemplation, something Maritain often notes, is that it is, without ceasing to be contemplative, action oriented. The fullness of the virtues superabounds into action. The knowing of the truth always leads to doing something: the cup of water, the teaching all nations, the observing the commandments, the clear statement of the truth.

The Jesuits were not designed to be a contemplative order in the classical monastic sense, but no one could be Christian without some fundamental contemplative orientation. In the end, in both our theology and our liturgy, we are beholders, not doers. Hence, the Jesuit emphasis presupposes the contemplative. But in addition to the contemplative theological understanding that we find in St. Thomas’s *Summa Theologiae* that ought to stand at the root of any Christian contemplation or action, we can, following these

also found in St. Thomas himself, look to the divine governance and providence as they work their way out in the world of nature and human history. There we see that what actually goes on in human worldly affairs, including in our own lives, is not apart from an active presence of God in being and in redeeming.⁴ This is what St. Ignatius's famous "Contemplatio ad Obtinendum Amorem" ("Contemplation for Obtaining Love") that ended the Spiritual Exercises was all about. Thus, in all we do, no matter how secular, even, paradoxically, no matter how sinful, we can discern, if we are attentive, the presence of God's will and grace leading us, if we choose, even out of evil to that end for which we are created in the first place. This is the contemplative part of our action.⁵

The philosophical and theological traditions of both the East and West have been concerned with the relation of philosophy and politics, of action and contemplation, and their order to each other, to their proper objects. Religious orders, even nations and religions, exist because of differing positions taken on the priority and relation of action and contemplation, on the relationship of truth and fellowship, on the truth of practical things and the truth of speculative things. The place of science in modern culture is, at bottom, a question of the relative worth of action and contemplation. Indeed, if we follow certain theories of modern enlightened liberty and rationalism, we can easily arrive at a view that there is nothing in the universe to contemplate. Either we can know nothing but what we make or we deliberately design what we make to replace what is said to be from nature, as if the latter had no prior order or purpose.

Hence, the contemplations in modernity are mostly our self-formulated operative or artistic ideas presupposed to nothing but themselves or other exclusively humanistic sources. The only action is to carry out what our ideas are, whatever they are. The drama of prudence, the relation between what we ought to do and what we do do, is largely missing. We make little effort to judge what we think and do against *what is*. All of this brings us face to face with the following question rooted in classical contemplative theory or metaphysics: is what we are ourselves a product of design, of a

4. This in part is what St. Thomas's question on "Eternal Law" (I-II, 93) is about.

5. Robert Sokolowski points out that the philosophic act is one of making distinctions about differences found in things so that we can simply know *what is*. Thus, there is a contemplative moment in all we do. "The activity of making distinctions always has something contemplative about it. Whenever we make a distinction, we become somewhat disconnected from whatever practical or rhetorical activity we may be engaged in" (Robert Sokolowski, "The Method of Philosophy: Making Distinctions," *The Review of Metaphysics* 51 [March 1998], p. 524).

certain order and hence of an intelligence that makes us already better than any alternative that we might propose from our own minds? This is not to forget that in classical thought, our freedom is directed precisely to what we ought to be, from nature. The actions that lead to the virtues are themselves part of human nature even though they must be known and chosen, must be put into effect freely.

II

In 1938, Jacques Maritain gave a series of lectures in the United States published under the title of *Scholasticism and Politics*. One of these lectures was devoted to "Action and Contemplation," a consideration that seemed appropriate to present in the United States because it seemed at the time, as it probably still so seems, to be the nation that puts more emphasis on action as a central element in its cultural make up than it does contemplation. Maritain was aware of the tradition of American philosophical pragmatism. He recalled Whitman's poems as examples. Nonetheless, he thought, unexpectedly, that America had great reserves and possibilities for contemplation.⁶ How so?

Maritain's approach to this topic naturally follows the classic discussion of the primacy of contemplation or theory among the Greeks and the relation of Word and Act as those ideas appear in Christian theology—"in the beginning was the Word," "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." But what was striking about Maritain's remarks on American pragmatic activism was his suspicion that "the activism which is manifested here assumes in many cases the aspect of a remedy against despair." Hectic action can distract us from the abyss that we suspect lies under our spiritual surface. This despair would suggest that what is missing from action is any inner content or purpose or coherence that would make it something more than its passing, historical reality. Action for action's sake, a theme we find in someone like Camus, also as a remedy for despair, assumes that reality itself has no inner order or purpose.⁷ Human action thus takes its glory not from its meeting or not meeting eternal norms but from the creative power of the will to do whatever it wants. A despair would arise from the realization that ultimately what was done, however well or furiously, bore no transcendent meaning or sign. We lived precisely "in vain," to use Aristotle's phrase. Thus Maritain continued, "to my mind,

6. Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, p. 182.

7. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage, 1956).

if in American civilization certain elements are causing complaints or criticisms, those elements proceed definitely from a repression of the desire, natural to mankind, for the active response of the soul breathing what is eternal."⁸ Hence, the misunderstanding or rejection of our being and purpose cannot but leave us with a feeling that our personal existence has no meaning beyond itself.

Maritain divides his essay into five sub-headings: 1) Greek Philosophy, 2) Christianity, 3) Superabounding Contemplation, 4) the Call to Contemplation, and 5) Orient and Occident. In the discussion of Greek contemplation, he devotes himself principally to Aristotle. He distinguishes between transitive activities which have their perfection in the thing made or in another being and immanent ones that remain in the one contemplating. He makes the remarkable observation that "people who exercise philanthropy as a transitive activity need the poor to help if they want to be helpful, sinners to preach to if they want to be preachers, victims whose wrongs they can redress. They need *patients*."⁹ This is why, ironically, things like help of the poor and needy, or opposition to war, have in the modern world themselves often become ideological substitutes for God. Obviously, there seems to be some radical limitation to such activity that must use its object for its own perfection. The poor clearly resent those whom they sense are "aiding" them primarily for essentially selfish motives.

Maritain maintains, however, that Aristotle also understood "immanent activity" which he did not confuse with transient activity, nor did he think all transient activity bad. This contemplative activity is the "characteristic activity of life and the spirit." The acts of knowing and loving, however, remain within the soul as their perfection. They are for the soul "an active superexistence, as it were, superior to the merely physical act of existence. Thus the soul, when it knows, becomes thereby something that it is not, and when it loves, aspires toward what it is not, as to another self. This action as such is above time." It is to be noted, in these reflections, how often Maritain comes back to the notion of "superabounding" or "superexistence" to describe the fullness of what goes on in human and divine relationships.¹⁰ It is precisely because of this superabounding contemplation that our relation to others is not merely transitive, why it is not simply in need of objects to prove its own worth.

8. Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, p.182.

9. *Ibid.*, p.164.

10. See James V. Schall, "The Law of Superabundance," *Gregorianum* 72, no.3 (1991), p. 155ff. This essay treats Maritain's overall position on superabundance.

Aristotle held that this immanent action was more perfect than an act of the will or any transitory act. St. Thomas on this basis held that intelligence is "nobler than will" but only when considering the degree and nature of the immanent act itself. Maritain quickly points out that the Greeks, while understanding the intrinsic superiority of the contemplative life on the grounds stated, erroneously concluded from that position that "mankind lives for the sake of a few intellectuals."¹¹ Ironically, in one way or another, this notion that the rest of mankind lives for certain elites is rather widespread today. The Greeks for this reason maintained that ordinary human life in the case of politicians, artisans, and businessmen, while properly human, was something inferior to the contemplative or philosophic life. Indeed, these latter lives, including the political one, were considered to be servile.

III

The confrontation of Christian revelation with Greek philosophy took as its most obvious problem the question of the worthiness of ordinary life. St. Joseph was a carpenter, as was Christ. The Apostles were fishermen. St. Paul was something of a rabbi but he was also a tent-maker. The problem was twofold, since it was not only a question of dealing with the Greek and Roman view of the eternal status of slaves, but also with the Hebrew idea of the difference between Jews and Gentiles, with universalism, in other words. Christianity held that love was higher than knowledge, a position that St. Thomas reconciled with the truth of the Greek position by arguing that the object of love is higher than the internal contemplative activity of the knower or lover.

Maritain explained the point in this way: "considering the things we know and love, these things exist in us by knowledge according to the mode of existence and the dignity of our own soul, but by love they attract us to them according to their own mode of existence and their own dignity, and therefore it must be said that to love things that are superior to man is better than to know them. It is better to love God than to know him."¹² Following St. Albert the Great, Maritain differentiates Christian and Greek contemplation, the latter looking to the good of the contemplator, while the former seeks the reality of what is loved. Maritain cites the famous medieval Latin phrase, "Ubi amor, ibi oculus"—where is thy eye, there is thy

11. Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, p. 165.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

love.¹³ These two positions, of course, can be reconciled. The beatific vision remains primarily contemplative, in some sense, by grace, a possession of what is loved.

Maritain wrote "Action and Contemplation" before the reflections of Josef Pieper on leisure and work appeared, but he treats of many of the same issues, though, like the present pope, Maritain is more prone to use the word work to include intellectual activities than is Pieper.¹⁴ Maritain first recalls that we must distinguish between craft or artistic production, which would have continued without a Fall, and the labor or sweat connected with work that is a consequence of the Fall. The point serves to enhance the dignity of manual activity as such. "Man's labour in its first and humblest state is a co-operation with God the Creator, and Christianity's rehabilitation of labour in the moral order is bound up with revelation, in the dogmatic order, of creation *ex nihilo*."¹⁵

Maritain sees the basis of labor ethics in this teaching that man is a co-creator. He recognizes that industry can be made into an idol, but "work has a value of natural redemption; it is like a remote prefiguration of the communication of love." Maritain points out that everyone instinctively recognizes that work is not just for its own sake, but ought to have a purpose for some good. If someone is told to dig ditches and fill them up, even at the highest of wages or salaries, and to continue to do so all one's life, most people would soon go mad because they see the futility of it all.¹⁶

This sense of the orientation of work is related to Maritain's notion of Christian contemplation overflowing into the good of real beings. Man is thus "both *homo faber* and *homo sapiens*, and he is *homo faber* before being in truth and actually *homo sapiens* and in order to become the latter."¹⁷ Maritain sees the consequence of this dignity of work to be the implicit rejection of the erroneous Greek practice of slavery. This spiritual understanding of work had to be accomplished long before any purely political rejection of it was possible.

Maritain, however, does not in fact deny the essential point of the Greek position on contemplation among Christians.

13. See James V. Schall, "Ubi Amor, Ibi Oculus," *Idylls and Rambles: Lighter Christian Essays* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), pp. 195-99.

14. See Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. G. Malsbary (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, [1948] 1998).

15. Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, p. 167.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

It is true that contemplation itself is not work, not a thing of utility. It is a fruit. It is not ordinary leisure; it is a leisure coinciding with the very highest activity of the human substance. According to the profound views of St. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, those who go beyond the socio-temporal life achieve in themselves the supra-social good to which the social tends as to a transcendent term, and by that very act are free from the law of labour. There remains no more for them but Thee and I, Him whom they love, and themselves.¹⁸

The priority given to contemplation is rooted in the fact that, precisely as an immanent activity, it superabounds. In this sense it is a "protection and a benediction to society." It is not itself a work or something of utility. Nonetheless, the very seeing of the relation of all things cannot but overflow into a realization of the worthiness of all things, especially all human things.

IV

Maritain next deals with this very notion of superabundant contemplation, which turns out to be a key to his understanding of both Greek philosophy and Christian revelation. The priority is not ultimately on action, however legitimate action is and however much theoreticians need to revert to action when something needs to be done in the world. Obviously, the understanding of what goes on in Christian contemplation means that the capacities or powers to do what is asked of Christians in revelation is not solely under their own power; as Maritain puts it, it is "beyond anything that the energies of human nature, left to themselves, can achieve."¹⁹

This position is, no doubt, hard doctrine for moderns who are told not only that autonomous humanism is not enough, but that in addition to grace, they need also the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Even in pious circles, we hear more of the active needs and obligations than we do of grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit needed to achieve them. But the logic behind these teachings is pretty clear. Man is in fact called, through Creation, Incarnation, and Redemption, to an end higher than might be expected from his essential ontological condition. If he is to see God face-to-face, something that he can at least imagine on philosophical grounds to be something he would want, it is clear that no finite being can by his own powers experience something of the divine goodness or essence. The reality of revelation is addressed to human culture at this very point.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Maritain, interestingly, anticipates the current discussion in *Dominus Jesus* (“Christ and His Church,” cited below #20) about how salvation outside the confines of Christianity is to be understood. The Document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith explains the contemplative traditions found outside of Christianity.

[Contemplation] can be called Christian in a different sense, ontological or metaphysical, since it lives by the grace of Christ. In that sense it can even be found, —substantially the same, whatever the difference of mode, degree, purity, or human setting, —in eras or lands where Christianity is not professed. It is the supernatural contemplation of the Old Testament and the New, of Moses and St. Paul, such as is exercised by the living faith and supernatural gifts. The existence of these divine gifts is taught us by Christian revelation, but they are alive in all who have the grace of Christ, even when not belonging visibly to His Church (for instance, some of the Jewish Hassidim whose story was told by Martin Buber, or that great Mohammedan mystic Al Hallaj, whom Louis Massignon has studied).²⁰

Notice that Maritain, in “Action and Contemplation,” has kept the essential point that if there is true supernatural contemplation outside Christianity, as there may well be, it is not caused by itself, but through the grace of Christ, even operative outside Christian confines for the general purposes of the one redemption in Christ.

There is a natural aspiration to contemplation that supernatural contemplation, in its turn, achieves and completes. Natural knowledge of the highest being no doubt can spark a desire for its reality. Yet, Maritain sees that in some sense all that we do, whether it be work, study, or natural contemplation, can and does prepare us for supernatural contemplation without directly causing it. This natural contemplation itself makes one open to and curious about what it does not know.²¹

How is action directed to contemplation? “The contemplation of the saints is not a proper and direct end of the political life,” Maritain acknowledges. The same would be true of economic or other cultural activities. To answer the question of how human activities can be preparatory to contemplation, Maritain recalls the classical notion that the end of work is not just a kind of cessation of physical labor or a preparation to go back to work. Relaxation is a good thing in itself but “human work, even on the plane of social terrestrial life, must be accomplished with a view to an

20. Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, “Christ and His Church: Unique and Necessary for Salvation,” Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 6 August 2000, in *The Pope Speaks* 46 (January/February, 2001), pp. 33-52.

21. Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, p. 171.

active and self-sufficient rest, to a terminal activity of an immanent and spiritual order, already participating in some measure in contemplation's supertemporality and generosity."²²

Maritain does not think that the leisure provided by the good civil order that enables the highest of things to be considered is supernatural contemplation. Yet, it is, at even a higher level, preparatory to it. What is at stake here is the gift status of the things of revelation in the light of which all else is illuminated. The natural leisure of which Aristotle speaks, then, is a worthy and helpful thing, indeed it is that to which everyone in society ought to attend. It is not only professional philosophers who contemplate. "If in this kind of leisure, instead of shutting up human concerns in themselves, man remains open to what is higher than himself, and is borne by the natural movement which draws the human soul to the infinite, all this would be contemplation in an inchoate state or in preparation."

V

Maritain next turns to St. Thomas concerning the intrinsic superiority of the contemplative life. Contemplation is not an instrument of the active life or a tool for the acquisition of moral virtues. Rather it is "the end to which those things have to be directed as means and dispositions."²³ Christian contemplation is not confined to the intellect alone but in faith it is the fruit of love; it can enter "the sphere of action, in virtue of the generosity and abundance of love, which consists in giving oneself. Action then springs from the superabundance of contemplation." The Lord thus can use any instrument for His purposes. Maritain thinks that it is this superabundance in contemplation that makes it tend to practical, and not merely to theoretical, considerations. That is, the objects of contemplation through love's tendency are seen also in their own needs and purposes. Hence, the direction of the supernatural contemplative life is not transient or selfish, but in fact rooted in something seen, something capable of moving and worthy of being moved even within contemplation. Time also is redeemed, to cite St. Paul.²⁴

22. *Ibid.*, p.173.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, p.174.

The “gift” nature of Christianity has been a constant theme of the present pope.²⁵ Maritain’s reflections on the difference between transitive action and Christian contemplation are related to the notion of gift and that theology that relates to the Holy Spirit and the inner life of the Trinity itself. Action is redeemed because it can, through contemplation, also be seen and carried out as a gift. Christian philosophy is not merely a philosophy of being but of “the superabundance of being.” Maritain notes that in the Hindu philosophy of being, reality tends to be absorbed into contemplation, the very opposite of the Christian idea of secondary causality, of the goodness and permanence of *what is*. This is how Maritain states the difference:

Immanent activity is ‘generous,’ because, striving to be achieved in love, it strives to achieve the good of other men, disinterestedly, gratuitously, as a *gift*. Christian theology is a theology of divine generosity, of that superabundance of divine being which is manifested in God Himself, as only revelation can tell us, in the plurality of Persons, and which is also manifested, as we could have discovered by reason alone, by the fact that God is Love, and that He is the creator.

The Redemption is itself an expression of what God did not have to do. God, Maritain teaches us, is a God of risk. He has given us “His Truth.”²⁶ Amusingly, Maritain cites Nietzsche’s admonition that we should “live dangerously.” To which Maritain responds that this is merely a “pleonism.” “One is out of danger only when one is dead,” replies Maritain. But this leads him to discuss the classic question of whether we should pray for supernatural contemplative graces. Maritain thinks that there is a growing consensus among theologians that “all souls are called, if not in a proximate manner, at least in a remote one, to mystical contemplation as being the normal blossoming of grace’s virtues and gifts.”²⁷ This is what the notion of “gifts of the Holy Ghost” meant. St. Thomas even says that such gifts are necessary for salvation because by ourselves we could not avoid all sins.

Maritain remarks, furthermore, that three of the gifts, Counsel, Force, and Fear concern action while Intelligence and Wisdom refer to contemplation. The body of the faithful will display these gifts in different degrees in different lives. As the variety of such gifts will correspond to the human

25. See John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery* (New York: Doubleday, 1996); see Michael Waldstein, “Pope John Paul II’s Personalist Teaching and St. Thomas Aquinas: Disagreement or Development of Doctrine?” (The Thomas Aquinas College Lecture Series; Santa Paula, California: Thomas Aquinas College, 2001).

26. Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, p. 176.

27. *Ibid.*

condition of man in which, as Aristotle said, the contemplative life is divine while the active life is human, we can expect this variety of gifts of action or contemplation to be distributed proportionately.²⁸ Maritain acknowledges that the language in which we speak of gifts and contemplation is oftentimes difficult and confusing so that Aquinas, John of the Cross, or St. Theresa may describe the same thing in different ways.²⁹

VI

Maritain finally comes back to the question of civilization in the East and West. At the time, he was particularly concerned about the effort to create in the West a purely activist culture, one fraught with great dangers because the very civil community “became the soul of a dynamism which is purely activist, industrial and warlike, and mobilizes for that active end both science and thought.”³⁰ But again, Maritain sees that this enthusiasm for an activist culture is what happens to a “truly great thing” led astray.³¹ In the East, he sees the search for a liberation of the soul led by techniques and formulas of meditation that is subtle but somehow is apart from “the testimony that God expects from mankind.”

Maritain sees that the resolution of this active-contemplative discussion to be found in St. Thomas when he points out that the Incarnation, in its reality and symbolism, gives the concrete basis of both the meaning of the gifts of the Holy Ghost and the meaning of a Christian contemplation that superabounds out of love for its object so that it includes others in their lives of action. This dynamism is not from the bottom up, but, as it were, from the top down. We may be seeking God, but He is certainly seeking us. In this sense, the descending movement, that is, God coming to man, is more important than the ascending movement, man searching for God in philosophic contemplation, however much this in principle remains good in itself. As members of Christ’s body, the “divine plenitude superabounds within us in love and activity.”³²

Maritain saw the crisis of the West to be centered in its not seeing the importance of the descending element in contemplation, that element that made its tendency to activity one of love and not of servitude

28. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

32. *Ibid.*

or self interest. Of the East's tendency to contemplation, Maritain thought it was too philosophical and hence veered in the same inner direction as the Greek philosophers to the neglect worldly conditions. The sanctification of the profane depends on the "law of contemplation superabounding in action."³³

It is at this point that we come to the passage in Maritain, cited in the beginning of this reflection, and to which the whole of these considerations has been directed. This is the question of, as it were, "paradise on earth." In one sense, following scholars like Eric Voegelin, we can legitimately interpret the whole of modernity as a gigantic effort to, as he called it, "immanentize the *eschaton*."³⁴ This is but another way of seeking to make the Kingdom of God to be on earth at the expense of any transcendent purpose.³⁵ Voegelin, as Maritain, saw a certain despair in Christian peoples, especially intellectuals, about the slowness of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Voegelin himself considers this effort towards making the Christian religion to be exclusively of this world to be caused largely by Christian men who lack the faith to believe in the reality of the supernatural destiny spelled out for them in revelation.³⁶

Maritain, for his part, recognizes that the effort to place the kingdom of God on earth is itself "naive." However, following his earlier remarks about excessive activism being something of a cover for a despair that does not see the truth of the transcendent order, Maritain actually defines paradise, following St. Augustine, simply as "the joy of truth." That is a remarkable phrase; paradise is the joy of truth. That is to say, paradise is primarily a contemplative happiness, even when it overflows to inspire action as it does in the Christian notion of gift and superabundant contemplation. The good and its source are really found in existing things, particularly human persons, however much these finite things are not God. The role of the philosopher in society, in Maritain's view, is precisely a contemplative one to keep alive the sense of the priority of the transcendent order.³⁷

33. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

34. Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Gateway, 1968), p. 89. See Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), pp. 108-11.

35. See James V. Schall, "From Catholic Social Doctrine to the 'Kingdom of God on Earth,'" *Communio*, III (Winter, 1976), pp. 284-300: "The Altar as Throne," in *Churches on the Wrong Road*, ed. Stanley Atkins and T. McConnell (Chicago: Gateway-Regnery, 1986), pp. 193-238.

36. Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, p. 109.

37. See James V. Schall, "On the Political Importance of the Philosophic Life," *Jacques Maritain: The Philosopher in Society* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998),

Rather than completely ridiculing this notion of the Kingdom of God on Earth in a political or worldly sense, however, Maritain is rather inclined to see it as just another manifestation for man's natural desire to know and imitate the good. Indeed, from any fair reading of what Scripture tells Christians to do in this world, that is precisely what they should do. In this sense, Maritain's theoretical position about the manner in which Christian contemplation, by remaining contemplative, still superabounds into action and puts back together in a surprising way action and contemplation in the descending order, as it were. That is, what is contemplated includes not only what the philosophic mind, both practical and theoretical can know, but also what the mind infused by revelation receives. The graces and gifts of revelation descend to illuminate and respond to those questions and issues that seem to be unable to be answered by natural contemplation and action alone.³⁸

What Maritain's essay on "Action and Contemplation" does, in conclusion, is to defend the truth in the classical Greek (and Eastern) notions of contemplation. It also explains the erroneous consequences often drawn from this position. It shows how the Christian notion of contemplation and its superabounding gift-nature expands contemplation to include all the beings who themselves can have an inner spiritual and contemplative life even while seeing the seriousness of the projects of the world. We can, following Maritain, call this latter effort, if we see it merely as a finite effort to put the good revealed to us in our own temporal world, a "paradise on earth." But this is something that is generally not seen or even begun to be carried out without revelation's emphasis on the sanctity of each person and the transcendent destiny for which he was created and redeemed. The joy of the truth, given to each of us in precisely supernatural contemplation, that contemplation is not merely illuminated by our own inner powers but proceeds, as Maritain put it, from grace and the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

pp. 39-58; see also Josef Pieper, "The Purpose of Politics," *Joseph Pieper: An Anthology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), pp. 121-23.

38. This is the argument that I have tried to spell out in *At the Limits of Political Philosophy: From "Brilliant Errors" to Things of Uncommon Importance* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).