

# AMERICA'S TECHNOLOGICAL ONTOLOGY AND THE GIFT OF THE GIVEN: BENEDICT XVI ON THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *QUAERERE DEUM*<sup>1</sup>

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To put the matter in language not easy for moderns . . . Christianity [is at its] center concerned with grace—if that word is given its literal meaning. Grace simply means that the great things of our existing are given us, not made by us and finally not to be understood as arbitrary accidents. Our making takes place within an ultimate givenness. However difficult it is for all of us to affirm that life is a gift, it is an assertion primal to Christianity. Through the vicissitudes of life, . . . to be a Christian is the attempt to learn the substance of that assertion.<sup>2</sup>

In the long run all that is not done through Love and for Love must invariably end by being done against Love. The human being who denies his nature as a created being ends up by

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is dedicated to Cardinal Angelo Scola, in gratitude for his work in theological anthropology and contemporary cultural issues, and for his collaboration and friendship over many years. It appears in "*Sufficit Gratia Tua*": *Miscellanea in onore del Card. Angelo Scola in occasione del 70° genetliaco*, ed. G. Marengo, J. Prades Lopez, and G. Richi Alberti (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup>George Grant, "Two Theological Languages," Addendum [1988], in *Collected Works of George Grant*, vol. 2: 1951–1959, ed. Arthur Davis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 60.

claiming for himself attributes which are a sort of caricature of those that belong to the Uncreated.<sup>3</sup>

No one can understand the world at all, no one can live his life rightly, so long as the question about the Divinity remains unanswered. Indeed, the very heart of the great cultures is that they interpret the world by setting in order their relation to the Divinity.<sup>4</sup>

These statements capture the burden of my argument: any act or order not formed in the logic of love—any act which is forgetful of being and its Source—must invariably end up, by implication, subverting the nature and destiny of things.

Love consists in this, “not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son . . .” (1 Jn 4:10). The love characteristic of the being of the cosmos, in which the cosmos participates by virtue of its creation, is not a love that is first *produced by* the cosmos, but one that is always first *given to* the cosmos. As such it is a love that must first be received, through the power that is most basically that of the giver become effective *in* the gift, a power in which the creature is therefore always properly a filial participant. My proposal is that the mostly implicit ontology of modern culture—and I have in mind here especially America’s “exceptional” form of modernity—is one essentially of technology. Such an ontology abstracts from the logic of love proper to created being, and in so doing assumes a version of power that can only become in the end a caricature of the power of God, a power not of love but of a technical manipulation tending ultimately toward tyranny.

Pope Benedict XVI has made a point during the years of his papacy to affirm the necessity of natural law and the integrity of nature and thus the secular in Christians’ engagement with culture. It was striking, for example, that, on his 2008 visit to France, he said that we needed “a new reflection on the true meaning and importance of *laïcité*,” or what we might call secularity. On this occasion he also affirmed the “distinction between the political realm and that of religion,” while insisting at the same time on the State’s responsibility “to become more aware of the irreplaceable role of religion for the formation of consciences and the contribution which it can

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<sup>3</sup>Gabriel Marcel, *Man Against Humanity* (London: Harvill Press, 1952), 55–56.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 61.

bring to—among other things—the creation of a basic ethical consensus in society.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, I should say more generally in this context that Pope Benedict has affirmed the distinctiveness of America’s form of the Enlightenment, acknowledging the difference between the French Revolution and “Continental” liberalism, on the one hand, and the American revolution and Anglo-American liberalism, on the other.<sup>6</sup>

It is interesting to note, however, that, at a meeting with cultural leaders on this same visit to France, Benedict stated that monastic culture, with its center in the Benedictine *quaerere Deum*, the “search for God,” still has something important to say to us. Indeed, he concluded his lecture with the statement that “what gave Europe’s culture its foundation—the search for God and the readiness to listen to him—remains today the basis of any culture.”<sup>7</sup>

My purpose in this article is to explore the meaning of Benedict’s thought as expressed here, in terms of the problem of secularity and religion, or religiosity, in America; and to consider also in this light the work of the Jesuit theologian, John Courtney Murray, whose arguments apropos of this problem are widely acknowledged to be among the most sophisticated in the history of American Catholicism. The main burden of my reflections will be to provide a reading of America and America’s cultural achievements, vis-à-vis the question of the dignity of human life, and indeed of the truth, goodness, and beauty of all creaturely being, in their *original givenness* as such.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Benedict XVI, “Meeting with Authorities of State,” 12 September 2008, Elysée Palace, Paris.

<sup>6</sup>See Joseph Ratzinger’s contribution to *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, co-authored by Marcello Pera (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

<sup>7</sup>Benedict XVI, “Meeting with Representatives from the World of Culture” [MRWC], 12 September 2008, Collège des Bernardins, Paris. Reprinted as “The Origins of Western Theology and the Roots of European Culture,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2011).

<sup>8</sup>The methodological presuppositions of my argument are indicated in John Paul II’s *Fides et ratio*, 76, which states the legitimate sense of a Christian philosophy, according to which faith enables one to see better what is available in principle to all human inquirers, that is, while not thereby disqualifying one’s thought as properly philosophical. Much of my argumentation with respect to American culture should be seen in this light: my central claims about man, and the search for God that is implied within the depths of man’s being and consciousness, while

## I.

Let me begin by situating my reflections within the Catholic engagement with the meaning of America as first expressed in a formal way in the so-called “Americanist” crisis at the turn of the twentieth century. Those who defended America against the criticisms made by Leo XIII in his 1899 encyclical, *Testem benevolentiae* [TB], typically did so in terms of a twofold claim.<sup>9</sup> Their argument was, first, that America’s philosophical understanding of human nature is consistent with the pre-modern, classical understanding. Thus they held that America’s Declaration of Independence affirms truths about man that were not America’s invention but are already given with man’s nature. These truths, they argued, are evident to all men, even if now expressed in the modern language of equality and rights.

The so-called Americanists argued, secondly, that what is really new about America was to be found in its new understanding of political order, or the state. According to the Americanists, America involves not so much new notions of human being and human virtue as a new political-institutional method for dealing with these notions. The older union-of-state-and-church model of political authority, the purpose of which was explicitly to guide men in the matter of truth, has been replaced with a democratic republican model of political authority. This latter model separates state and church and, while emphasizing the need for moral virtue (often supported by religious belief), adopts the political method of freedom. That is, the American state as an institution, according to the Americanists, does not officially, or *de jure*, have any pedagogical function in the matter of the truth regarding the nature and destiny of man. On the contrary, in accord with the Anglo-Saxon liberal tradition, the state is conceived primarily as a procedural mechanism that creates space for the equal right of each citizen to hold and express his or her own notions of truth. The state, in other words,

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to be sure shaped and deepened within Christian faith, nonetheless carry the implication that this search for God operates in every human being, and that every human being has a deep, even if often only ambiguous, sense of this fact.

<sup>9</sup>See Denis O’Connell’s famous 1897 Fribourg Address, in Gerald P. Fogarty, *The Vatican and the Americanist Crisis: Denis J. O’Connell, American Agent in Rome, 1885–1903* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1974), 319–26.

is to remain neutral vis-à-vis the pluralism of religious faiths, a pluralism that was indigenous to America. Education regarding the truth about man and formation in virtue are tasks proper to cultural institutions of civil society like the church and the family. The American state is said thus to embody a “political” or “juridical” as distinct from metaphysical or theological notion of political authority.

Regarding this second point, however, we should be clear that the intended neutrality of the state, with its detachment from any properly pedagogical function in the matter of metaphysical or religious truth, *did not* imply for America's founders an insensitivity to the importance of religion, or at least of moral virtue, for the maintenance of civic order. On the contrary, the point for the Americanists is simply that government ought not to be the proper agent in educating citizens toward religious truth and morality; that government could in fact *serve* religion and morality *most effectively* by securing free space and equal rights for individual persons and “private” institutions, and allowing these to form the people in religion and morality. The Americanists argued, in sum, that America's political method of freedom stems from the rightful recognition that the state is not the source or final arbiter of the truth about the human being; and they argued further that this new method has not weakened religion but rather strengthened it.

*Testem benevolentiae* identified several problems with respect to Catholics' efforts to adjust to the distinctive demands of the modern age in America. These problems concerned: the modern view of liberty and the tendency to rely more on the individual guidance of the Holy Spirit than on obedience to Church authority or “external” spiritual direction; the primacy of natural as distinct from supernatural virtues, and of active as distinct from passive virtues; and also the preference for active virtues over traditional religious vows in providing an effective apostolic presence in the face of the peculiar exigencies of modern life. The Americanists acknowledged that these problems identified by the Pope Leo XIII were indeed problems, but believed that the problems were *not really significant tendencies within the Church in America*. The Americanists were convinced rather that Leo XIII's central target, the life and theology of Isaac Hecker, had been misleadingly depicted in a French introduction to an American biography of Hecker, an introduction they said had falsely characterized Hecker's approach

as similar to that of the Modernists. There thus arose the term “phantom heresy” as an apt way of describing the criticism indicated by *Testem benevolentiae*: according to the Americanists, the errors the encyclical described may indeed be “heretical,” but they did not exist in America. The America defended by the Americanists consisted rather in the ancient and venerable idea of natural law now simply articulated in the modern language of rights and equality, and in the adoption of a new political method which, by emphasizing freedom as distinct from truth as the proper function of government, could better accommodate America’s native religious pluralism.

This Americanist interpretation remained the dominant one throughout the twentieth century, and was given perhaps its most nuanced articulation in the work of John Courtney Murray in mid-century, especially regarding the distinction between the state and civil society, and the state and church. Murray’s interpretation was repeated and developed on the one hundredth anniversary of *Testem benevolentiae*, by spokesmen on both the “left” (for example, Joseph Komonchak, emeritus professor at The Catholic University of America) and on the “right” (for example, Matthew Spalding, a research scholar and political scientist at the Heritage Foundation in Washington).<sup>10</sup> The difference between these latter three thinkers and the original Americanists, however, is that the Second Vatican Council—as articulated, for example, in *Gaudium et spes* and *Dignitatis humanae*—is now invoked as confirmation of the Americanist claim that America’s newness is a matter not so much of *anthropological or “ideological” substance* as of *institutional form*. America’s unique contribution, it is argued, is a matter of freedom as the method par excellence of democratic institutions, above all of the state. Interpreters such as Spalding also invoke the pontificate of John Paul II, and especially his encyclical *Centesimus annus*, as further evidence of the council’s, and thus the Church’s, acceptance of Anglo-America’s distinctive liberalism, which now is also claimed to include America’s liberal economic order. Indeed, Spalding suggests that *Testem benevolentiae* initiated a discussion that led to “the mature

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<sup>10</sup>See Joseph A. Komonchak, “Vatican II and the Encounter Between Catholicism and Liberalism” in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy*, ed. R. Bruce Douglas and David Hollenbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 76–99; Matthew Spalding, “The Rebirth of Americanism” [*RA*] *Crisis* (December 1999): 32–36.

understanding of democracy and its teaching concerning human rights, self-government, and religious liberty" realized in *Dignitatis humanae* and the papacy of John Paul II (RA, 36). In this connection, Spalding says, for example, that John Paul II "has become perhaps [the Church's] most prominent defender of the liberalism of the American founding, calling this nation back to its first principles to bring about 'a new birth of freedom, grounded in moral truth.'"

A final point. It is commonly held that modern patterns of life lead to and presuppose forgetfulness of God, and that modernity thus entails secularism. The Americanists—and indeed the majority of contemporary American Catholics and increasingly even the majority of academics generally—claim that America is "exceptional" in this regard: "exceptional" in the sense that religion has flourished in America's modernity, and indeed has done so not in spite but because of her exercise of "political," as distinct from metaphysical or theological, reason in matters of state.

## II.

Let me now indicate my own argument in relation to the Americanist reading of the American founding and culture. First of all, I agree that the American Revolution and its expression in subsequent political and cultural life are different from the French Revolution and the nineteenth-century continental liberal state and cultural life. I agree that freedom, equality, and rights as affirmed in the Declaration of Independence represent a significant historical achievement, and have their origins in natural law. I believe that the distinction between church and state has roots in the Gospel, and agree also with those historians who hold that America's sense of this distinction, rightly understood, does not justify the "separationism" between religion and the state which has since the 1940s increasingly narrowed the permissible scope of religion in American public life. I agree, in other words, that this "separationism" is an inadequate reading of the dominant understanding of religious liberty in America's founding period. I also agree with those who argue that the aggressive secularism more typical of Europe is restricted in America largely to what has been termed the new "knowledge class" made up, for example, of academics from the

elite universities and representatives of the elite media. This aggressive kind of secularism is surely growing today, but the fact remains that “religion gave birth to America”<sup>11</sup> and that America has “the soul of a church.”<sup>12</sup>

In sum, let me emphasize my agreement that America has, in its origins and in its mainstream culture, always insisted on the importance of moral virtue and religion for civil society. Recognition of the sincerity and vigor of America’s moral and religious sensibility is essential for understanding rightly the sense in which America truly *is* “exceptional” in matters of religion and secularism.

It is basic to my argument, then, that we must acknowledge this sincerity and vigor if we are to grasp the depth and complexity of the cultural problems America now faces. What I intend to argue is not that America’s religiosity and moral awareness have ever lacked intensity or an abundant presence in the culture, but that her intense and abundant religiosity and moral energy have harbored in their roots a seriously inadequate idea of the nature and destiny of man in relation to God. We may recall here the work of the Jewish sociologist of religion Will Herberg, who, in his “classic” *Protestant Catholic Jew* in the 1950s, argued that religion and secularism in America stem largely from the same sources. That is, secularism in America, according to Herberg, is a sign and expression not so much of an absence of religion as of the presence of religion of a peculiar, and peculiarly inadequate, sort. Herberg argues that America’s peculiar secularism is best understood as “secularized Puritanism.” His point is that there is a logical link between America’s distinctive kind of secularism and America’s distinctive kind of religion—i.e., America’s historically prevalent Puritanism—such that secularism and religion in America, while opposing each other in important ways, actually remain implicitly tied, however unintentionally, to a common vision of man. In their explicit opposition to one other at

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<sup>11</sup>See Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, part 1, ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup>See historian Sidney E. Mead, “The Nation with the Soul of a Church,” *Church History* 36, no. 3 (September 1967): 1–22. As Mead notes at the beginning of his essay, the phrase “a nation with the soul of a church” was originally coined by G. K. Chesterton in his essay “What is America,” in *What I Saw in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1922). See also, more generally, Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).



one level, Herberg argues, America's religion and America's secularism paradoxically reinforce each other at another level. Herberg thought that Europeans typically missed this paradox in their analyses of the problem of religion and secularism in America, and he wrote his book with the intention of correcting this widespread tendency to overlook the paradox.

While agreeing in important ways with Herberg's understanding of this paradoxical link between religion and secularism in America, I think this link needs to be qualified more adequately in ontological terms, and also in light of the Catholic faith. The problem we face today in America is not only, or not primarily, that of recovering a religion that was once taken largely for granted, a religion that would seem to be the opposite of secularism. Rather, what we need is to reconsider the nature or logic—the ontological meaning—of America's historical religiosity itself. We need to ponder the profound and paradoxical way in which this religion, *on its own proper self-understanding*, contains the *ontological seeds* of the very secularism that it has always, in its explicit intentionality and with utmost sincerity, resisted.

It might be best to name this defective religious ontology and anthropology before describing it in more detail. My contention, first of all, is that America's historically dominant understanding of man embeds a voluntaristic idea of freedom, an instrumentalist idea of human reason, and a positivistic idea of religion: in a word, what may be termed a technological conception of the human act. These features all presuppose and are driven by a definite, if mostly unwitting, ontology of man and the cosmos in relation to the Creator. Key to this ontology is the lack of an adequate sense of the original givenness of the creature's relation to the Creator, and, inside this relation, of each creature's relation to other creatures. This givenness of relation may be termed "constitutive," in the sense that the relation is first established in us by God in his act of creating us and thus reaches to the inmost depths of our being.<sup>13</sup> The relation to God, in other words, is not something first created or contracted by the creature, is not added simply posteriorly to an already-constituted substance. The creature, I wish to propose, is the *origin*

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<sup>13</sup>Regarding the "constitutive" social nature and "constitutive" relationality of human beings, see, for example, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 37 and no. 109.

of his being and acting only as *always-anteriorly receptive* of that origin. The text of 1 John 4:10 cited above suggests the scriptural ground for what is indicated here: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us . . . .” At the ontological level, and in terms of human being, this implies that man’s first act is a “filial” act which somehow grasps that his being is from another, even if he himself is unaware of the full implications of this fact. As the German philosopher Robert Spaemann says, the act of freedom, rightly understood, consists most basically in an act of “letting be”: *letting be* what is *first given*.<sup>14</sup>

These comments will be developed further in my discussion regarding Benedict XVI and the monastic *quaerere Deum*. Here I wish merely to record what seems to me the most proper name for the inadequate ontology indicated by these comments, which undergirds America’s tendencies toward a technological idea of human action: its voluntaristic freedom, instrumentalist intelligence, and positivistic religion or religiosity. I believe that name is semi-pelagianism, or what may be termed an “ontological pelagianism.”

This suggestion may seem harsh, so let me explain. By “semi-pelagianism” here I do not refer in the first instance to the theological pelagianism that signifies a heresy in the formal sense (although such semi-pelagianism lies at the root of the formal theological heresy, as its ontological infrastructure, so to speak). I refer rather to an ontology or philosophy or worldview that, however unintentionally, assigns to man the wrong sense of priority in actualizing his relation to God that most properly characterizes his meaning as a creature, and thereby assigns to man the wrong sense also of what it means to be a creature and to act *in and by himself* and hence in a legitimately autonomous way (*iusta autonomia*). As Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict has emphasized, it is important to go to the root metaphysical issues when diagnosing the obstacles to the faith in the present cultural situation.<sup>15</sup> Such metaphysical criticism does not, of course, tell the whole story. On the contrary, in keeping with the spirit of Pope Benedict, the point is simply that we must diagnose the problem accurately, if the many positive features of American culture are to be realized in a way that secures rather

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Spaemann, “Natur,” in *Philosophische Essays* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993).

<sup>15</sup>See Joseph Ratzinger, “Difficulties Confronting the Faith in Europe Today,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (English edition), 24 July 1989.

than undermines the truth regarding our creaturely relation to God, a relation which, again, America in its founding core has intended to foster, or at least to allow to flourish.

Notice the presupposition that thus informs the critical argument of this paper. I am assuming with Tocqueville that religion gave birth to America and lies at America's founding core, and that this religion has indeed sustained the moral energy characteristic of America throughout the course of her history. The criticism just introduced carries no intention of denying these judgments. The criticism thus presupposes the legitimacy of the state-church and state-society distinctions, as well as the natural warrant for equality, rights, and freedom. My questions bear rather on how these distinctions and this natural warrant are to be understood, *if and insofar as the truth intended by them is to be secured in an integrated and stable fashion*. The negative burden of my argument in this connection is that America's mostly unwittingly assumed *ontology* of the relation between man and the Creator *fragments* and thus undermines the integrity and inherent dignity of the creature. America's institutions, not only political but also economic and academic and cultural, insofar as they are shaped, however unconsciously, by a semi-pelagian view of human being and action, tend of their inner logic to undermine the dignity of creaturely being in its original defenselessness *qua given*: tend to undermine, that is, the worth of being generally in the "uselessness" of its transcendental meaning as true, good, and beautiful, and as at once ordered toward worship of the Creator; and also tend to undermine the much greater *personal* dignity of human being, which abides in man especially in the silent givenness of his earliest and latest moments of life, and in the patient vulnerability of his most intense moments of suffering.

The claim introduced here is large and complex, and presupposes a particular philosophy of human being and action, developed in light of the Christian doctrine of creation. The Catholic context of the argument implies also a distinct reading of the Second Vatican Council and of the vigorous debates within modern Catholic thought regarding human being and action and the doctrine of creation. My task here, however, will be limited to indicating the salient points of my proposal in terms of America's Protestant-Enlightened view of man and creation, of Benedict XVI's idea of the cultural significance of the monastic *quaerere Deum*, of John Courtney Murray's reading of America, and finally of *Dignitatis*

*humanae*'s notion of religious freedom, before returning in conclusion to Leo XIII's *Testem benevolentiae*.

### III.

The above criticism regarding America's semi-pelagian tendency may of course seem to fit the Enlightened thought prevalent at the time of the founding, but one might argue that it scarcely fits the Protestant Christianity for which the realities of Christ and God's grace are utterly central in human life. In fact, however, and as already suggested, America's Enlightened thought and her dominant Puritan Protestant thought paradoxically reinforce each other at an ontological level, notwithstanding what are at the same time their emphatic and overt differences in religious sensibility. How so?

I do not necessarily treat the following features of American Protestantism in a definite order of importance. I mean only to say that each plays an integral role in America's original self-understanding.<sup>16</sup> There is, for example, Luther's rejection of monasticism,

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<sup>16</sup>The discussion that follows in the text draws much from the well-known "classical" studies by thinkers such as Max Weber, R. J. Tawney, Robert Merton, and Perry Miller, among many others. Needless to say, these studies have been subject to much scrutiny during the past century, and many of their theses have been vigorously debated. It is not possible to enter into such debates here. My own argument follows many of the main claims of these authors, while nonetheless recasting some of their key terms in light of my own Catholic anthropology and ontology. Indeed, I find that much of the literature taking issue with the arguments of, say, Weber (on the so-called Protestant ethic and the rise of capitalism) and Merton (on the Puritans and the use of modern science), fails to examine adequately the root theological and philosophical assumptions that are in play and indeed that most basically determine the meaning and soundness of such arguments. I have in mind here assumptions concerning the nature of church and sacrament; the relation between time and eternity; the theological meaning of the world and of what it means to live *in majorem Dei gloriam* in and through ordinary life in a "worldly" calling; the meaning of monasticism vis-à-vis the simultaneously incarnational and eschatological meaning of Christianity; the relation between the call to sanctity and the vocation to marriage and family; the relation between creature and Creator ("constitutive" or extrinsic?), and between nature and grace; the integrity of nature in its transcendental truth, goodness, and beauty *as given* by God and thus *qua being*; the nature of knowledge; and so on. The point is that what is meant by "rationalizing" nature *in majorem Dei gloriam*, and by what Weber

which is tied to his re-conceiving of man's worldly calling (*Beruf*), an idea that was accepted by Calvin even as he gave it a more radical meaning. Now, this emphasis on one's worldly calling carried the important positive claim that ordinary life, the life of marriage and worldly labor and the like, is a proper context for the realization of holiness in one's earthly existence. The problem, for the Protestant Reformers, was that sin created a vast distance between God and man, so that the eschatological feature of the monastic vocation consequently seemed utopian, or prematurely "otherworldly." The fundamental presupposition of monasticism, that eternity is already present in time, or that some genuine anticipation of heavenly life is possible already in earthly existence, seemed to the Reformers too presumptuous.

The Protestant elimination of monasticism, together with Protestantism's, especially Puritanism's, particular way of understanding the Christian's worldly calling, thus presupposed a distinct view of the relation between eternity and time and the temporal order. God is no longer to be found properly *in*, but only *by means of*, the things of the world. Heaven can never be said to be truly *at home* on earth, with its *immanent presence giving form* to the things of this world. The purpose of our lives, emphasized especially by the

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terms the "disenchantment of the world" (*Entzauberung der Welt*), and thus also by a legitimately Christian sense of secularity—and in particular of secular economics and indeed of wealth and work and "worldly calling" (*Beruf*) as well as of science and knowledge—can be properly determined only by working carefully through the foregoing issues. Only by working through them, for example—given the argument advanced in the present paper—in terms of the different anthropological and ontological views developed respectively in the Catholic tradition and the Anglo-American Calvinist tradition. The controversies back and forth regarding the soundness of the arguments of Weber and Merton seem to me all too often to beg the deeper questions raised in this anthropology and ontology. Indeed, those who basically dismiss arguments such as those of Weber and Merton, that is, all the while begging the deeper questions raised by those arguments, typically fail to notice, or (*a fortiori*) remain unable to provide any reasonable account for the existence of, the voluntaristic, instrumentalist, and positivistic intelligence and freedom that this paper has suggested characterize American thought and behavior in peculiarly subtle and virulent ways. A good example of the problems of interpretation to which I am referring here can be seen in Baylor University social scientist Rodney Stark's *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005). But again it is well beyond the scope of the present paper to provide an adequate argument regarding all of this.

American followers of Calvin, is thus not so much to *inform*, and hence also *transform*, the world as simply to *use* the world in order to get beyond it to one's individual salvation. The relation between heaven and earth, in other words, is less ontological than moral in nature: a matter most properly, not of what is always already given in creation and renewed in redemption, but of what is realized by man's will under the power of God's merciful grace. It is important to be clear: I do not deny that every aspect of earthly life was for the Puritans to be ordered by the call to sanctity. The pertinent point, rather, is that heaven and earth have for them no intrinsic relation, such that the call to sanctity would entail a movement *simultaneously* (albeit asymmetrically) toward *both* heaven and earth: toward the Creator already present within his creation, and toward creation as naturally open to the Creator.

The Anglo-American Calvinists, or Puritans, emphasized the idea of predestination even as they also emphasized man's sinfulness, and eliminated the sacramental nature of the church. The church thus plays no infallibly effective role as mediator of God's presence to and in the world. Specifically, and most pertinently, the church plays no infallibly effective role (*ex opere operato*) in the mediation of God's forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of Penance. The result is that signs of God's forgiving grace of mercy have to be found elsewhere: not in the church as such, or as sacrament, but in the individual lives of Christians themselves. These signs cannot be found via any properly contemplative or mystical acts, for reasons that I will note in a moment. On the contrary, the signs are to be found in the behavior of individual Christians. The pertinent question is whether this behavior exhibits signs of a life organized in terms of glorifying God, indicating thereby the presence of God's salvific will in the believer. Note, in other words, that this virtuous behavior was not emphasized as a *cause* but as an effective *sign* of God's grace, of one's being among the *salvati* rather than the *damnati*.

The Puritan rejection of a sacramental church, along with its doctrine of predestination, involved an individualizing of ecclesial and also social-political life. The idea of a "holy community," with its notion of "Christocracy," of course suggests a kind of corporate body, but it is one that nevertheless has its roots primarily in each individual's realization of his ethical duty to preserve and show the effectiveness of his divine election. Moreover, sin has fractured the

natural integrity of man's originally given relation to God, and thereby also of each man's relation to others. The consequence, for the Puritans, is that social-political relations are held to originate in the voluntary action of each toward the others. The classical view of antiquity, that the state is naturally necessary because of the originally-given social nature of man, was thus rejected. However complicated the concrete relations between state and church according to Puritanism, the inevitably "congregationalist" tendency of the Puritan church logically required a "contractualist" reading of the origin of the state, and a corresponding shift as well of the purpose of political authority away from the classical idea of the common good.

As mentioned, the Puritans sought to organize life around the call to glorify God, and this meant "rationalizing" life in all its aspects. Every activity, every act of freedom and intelligence, every doing and making, has to be harnessed and made into an instrument of God's glorification. Leisure and the "useless"—that which is rested in for its own sake—may be said to be the *bête noire* of Puritanism. One must rather be busy "rationalizing" everything, with no natural sense of an anterior *letting be*, of a patient indwelling of the other that gives the first form of knowing and acting toward the other. This activist or "constructivist" temper of mind, again, must be understood in light of the Puritans' sense of the sinfulness of man and the consequent disorder within creation. Such sinfulness implied a God who can no longer be seen *in his creation*, in a contemplative or mystical manner. Nature, consequently, cannot be seen in its originally given truth and goodness, a truth and goodness given by God, which makes nature true and good already in itself, thus existing, in the most basic sense, for its own sake. Nature cannot be seen in its goodness *qua being*, but only *quia factum* or *actum*, as made or enacted by man in his dynamic of rationalization *in majorem Dei gloriam*.

We can also understand in this light why the Puritans were particularly disposed to adopt modern science. As Columbia University sociologist Robert Merton argued in his important work in the first half of the twentieth century, the Puritans of the seventeenth century largely embraced the modern scientific methods as developed, for example, by Francis Bacon (and Descartes), among

others.<sup>17</sup> These methods are characterized by a utilitarian-empiricist temper, and thus by the idea of knowledge as a matter primarily of power and control rather than of “seeing” or understanding. Central to the methods of modern science, in other words, is a kind of “theoretical manipulability” (in the terms of the twentieth-century Jewish philosopher, Hans Jonas), or again a conflation of making and knowing (in the terms of the twentieth-century Canadian philosopher, George Grant—as well as Joseph Ratzinger).<sup>18</sup> Consistent with their acceptance of these methods, which fell in line with the Puritan tendency toward rationalization discussed above, the Puritans also embraced a mechanical worldview resting on the assumption that matter is essentially passive.<sup>19</sup> In so doing, they rejected Aristotle’s physics, which understands movement in nature in terms of principles and powers internal to things. And they also rejected Aristotle’s ethics, which stresses human nature’s capacity for being virtuous and performing virtuous acts. These emphases of Aristotle in his study of physical nature and human nature were deemed a threat to the sovereignty of God and an enemy of grace. The methods and content of modern science so understood were thus assumed by the Puritans as necessary aids in the complete “rationalization” of life.

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. Robert Merton, “Science, Technology, and Society in Seventeenth Century England,” *Osiris* 4 (1938), especially 414–95. Regarding Descartes, Tocqueville said that, of all the countries he visited, it was in America that the precepts of Descartes were most widely practiced—and also least studied (cf. *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, part 1, ch. 1).

<sup>18</sup>See Hans Jonas, “Seventeenth Century and After: The Meaning of the Scientific and Technological Revolution,” in *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (New York: Atropos Press, 2010); George Grant, “In Defence of North America,” in *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America*, in *Collected Works of George Grant*, vol. 3: 1960–1969, ed. Arthur Davis and Henry Roper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) [reprinted in the present issue of *Communio*], and also his book-length interview with David Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1995). Grant, a Canadian, is increasingly recognized as one of the most significant cultural critics of the twentieth century in North America. See also Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 57–69.

<sup>19</sup>Gary B. Deason, “Reformation Theology and the Mechanistic Conception of Nature,” in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 167–91.



With all of this in mind, let us return to the criticisms noted earlier regarding America's voluntaristic freedom, instrumentalist or technologicistic intelligence, and positivistic religion, all of which I suggested are bound up with semi-pelagianism, or ontological pelagianism. It should now be clear why I take such patterns of life and thought, rooted however unconsciously in pelagianism, to be characteristic not only of those who were more avowedly Enlightened, but also of the deeply religious Puritans: why these patterns are in fact reflective of what was a paradoxical relation between Enlightened thought and Puritan thought in America. The profound differences in religious sensibility that founded the *opposition* between Enlightened thought and Puritan thought carried, from within their radically different religious starting points, a *common ontological sense* of God as distant from the world. Such an ontology fractured the integrity of the originally given, and thus intrinsic, relation of the creature to the Creator and of each creature with all others, and thereby also the relation of earth to heaven and time to eternity.

But let me once again highlight the paradox of ascribing to Puritans the implication of pelagianism. It is the basic burden of Puritanism to reject any hint of pelagianism. As we have noted, all of the Puritans' patterns of life and thought are meant expressly to affirm the primacy of God in earthly affairs, the absolute primacy of God's grace in bringing about and sustaining man's virtue and justice. As I have been at pains to make clear, my criticism presupposes this fact, and bears rather on the implied *logic*, or *ontological order*, of human being and action before God that the Puritans took to be necessary for sustaining God's primacy. This logic is expressed, again, in a thorough "rationalizing" of human life and thought, a rationalization understood to provide an indispensable *sign* of the effectiveness of God's merciful grace.

My criticism, then, presupposes the positive achievements of Puritanism in generating and supporting an abiding sense of the importance of moral virtue for civic life in America. Indeed, in light of what we have stated in the preceding paragraphs, we should now also highlight Puritanism's contribution to the recovery of the importance of ordinary life in realizing the call to holiness, and, in this context, the importance also of the lay dimension of the Christian presence in the world and its public order. This strong moral sensibility, and the "worldly" or lay dimension of the call to

holiness, are distinctly important marks, and accomplishments, of American Christianity. My criticism means to identify the ontological assumptions that will allow us to sustain these achievements in a more integrated form, in light of what seems to me a more adequate understanding of creation: by indicating, in the name of Pope Benedict and the monastic *quaerere Deum*, a way of uniting America's indigenous moral sense with a more adequate religious sense, and America's indigenous concern for ordinary life and for the lay or "worldly" dimension of holiness with a more adequate view of the relation between time and eternity.

Here, then, is the point: there is in America's dominant religiosity no adequate sense of the *givenness of man's relation* to God and to others, within the church, within men themselves, or within the world around them. Not within the church, because the church lacks a sacramental character. Not within themselves, because the relation to the Creator has been fractured by sin in such a way that man no longer retains a naturally given integrity of relation to God and is thus no longer naturally *homo religiosus*; and he is also, consequently, no longer naturally related to other creatures inside a relation to the Creator. Finally, not within the world, because man does not indwell a cosmos of being that remains, despite the profound effects of sin, transcendentally true and good and beautiful in *its natural givenness* as created by God.

In a word, there is for Puritan Protestantism no always already given supernatural presence of God mediated to man in and through the church, in support of an always already given natural order of things that truly image God and refract his presence in the world. On the contrary, there is in man only a human act of freedom and intelligence that, because it does not initially and naturally participate in but rather lacks relation to God and others, must go in quest of that relation, if only as a necessary sign of the reality of this relation's effective presence. The basic human act, lacking participation in an *anteriorly given order of relations* to God, to others, and to the world of created things, must now itself first enact this order, if only as a sign of a relation that one otherwise cannot be sure of. This at root is what I mean in identifying America's will as voluntaristic, its reason as instrumentalist, and its religion as positivistic, all of which are summed up in an (unwitting) ontological pelagianism. The crucial point in each case is that the human act is initially empty of any order of relation to God or to others that is

always already—that is, naturally—given, and that can thus always be *first trusted* and *rested in*: an order of relations that the self can, and should, most basically *let be*.<sup>20</sup> It is just this lack of an *original letting be*, in the face of the *original givenness of being*, that most properly identifies America's false sense of creaturely autonomy, and thus her secularism, which coincides with her sincere and vigorous, but ontologically inadequate, religiosity.

#### IV.

Let us move on to consider Benedict XVI, focusing especially on Benedictine monasticism and its search for God, which the pope has emphasized a number of times throughout his papacy, most recently during his trip to the United Kingdom.<sup>21</sup> We should now be prepared to see that this question of monasticism is scarcely arbitrary with respect to the question specifically of America. For, as we have noted, the elimination of the monastic search for God is integral to the logic implicit in the unfolding of America's characteristic patterns of life. What does Pope Benedict have to say about this monastic search for God, and what does it suggest with respect to America's peculiarly liberal culture? What does the monastic search for God and the readiness to listen to him say about the nature of the Christian's relation to and presence in the world, and indeed about the nature of created reality itself as a place where truth, goodness, and beauty can be found already in their being as naturally given?

As the pope said in his "Meeting with Representatives from the World of Culture" in France (cited above), the Benedictine

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<sup>20</sup>To put the matter in its largest terms, the root problem is that the religiosity most characteristic of American culture lacks a Church that has a sacramental (Petrine) office, on the one hand, and a naturally-given world that is ordered in and through transcendental truth, goodness, and beauty, on the other. Which is to say, simultaneously, that there exists at the heart of American culture no Marian letting-be (*fiat*) understood as both the earthly originate of the sacramental Church and as the archetype of creaturely being and action. But this must be developed elsewhere.

<sup>21</sup>Benedict XVI, "Celebration of Catholic Education" [CCE], 17 September 2010, Chapel and Sports Arena of St. Mary's University College, Twickenham, London.

“*quaerere Deum*—to seek God and to let oneself be found by him . . . is no less necessary than in former times. . . . What gave Europe’s culture its foundation—the search for God and the readiness to listen to him—remains today the basis of any genuine culture.” “[W]ithin the monks’ seeking, there is already contained, in some respects, finding”: there is “always an initial spur [that] arouses the will to seek.” Benedict calls this search for God and readiness to listen to him “the truly philosophical attitude.” It is this “philosophical attitude” that guides the monks in their study, enabling them to “perceive in the world itself the Word, in the midst of words.” It disposes the monks to recognize “‘with the ears of the heart’ the inner laws of the music of creation, the archetypes of music that the Creator has built into his world and into men,” and this prompts the monks’ speech to break into the song of praise that is the liturgy. Further, as the pope says elsewhere,

since the search for God . . . requires active engagement with the means by which he makes himself known—his creation and his revealed Word—it was only natural that the monastery should have a library and a school. It was the monks’ dedication to learning as the path on which to encounter the Incarnate Word that was to lay the foundations of our Western culture and civilization. (*CCE*)

We may thus say, in a word, that the search for God and the readiness to listen to him enabled the monks to recognize the world of being as true and good and beautiful in its *givenness* as created, indeed to show forth the reality of God and incline them toward both study and worship.

To be sure, this recognition involved not only study and liturgy, but also *labora*, or work. But note how work is now understood. Monastic work does not leave behind “the philosophical attitude,” with its contemplative “letting be.” On the contrary, the monks’ culture of the word is both presupposed in and gives rise to the culture of work, which is now understood as “sharing in the work of the Creator.” This *sharing*, or *participatory*, character is the key. Human work rightly understood presupposes and is informed by the readiness to listen to God and to the creatures created by God. Without this anterior readiness to listen, human beings inevitably tend to confuse their work with the absolutely originate work of God the Creator, thus arrogating to themselves what

Benedict terms “the status of a god-like creator.” They tend to become precipitous masters over the world.

Benedict, of course, is not suggesting by these statements that everyone needs literally to become a monk, but only that everyone needs to undertake the filial search for God and readiness to listen to him that is characteristic of the monk. This, then, leads to my second point regarding Benedict's appeal to the necessity of monasticism for any authentic human culture. The God whom the monks seek, says Benedict, is the “unknown god” proclaimed by Paul at the Areopagus: the god “whom men do not know and yet do know—the unknown-known; the one [all men] are seeking, whom ultimately they know already and who yet remains the unknown . . . .” “The fundamental structure of the Christian proclamation,” the search and finding characteristic of the monks, in other words, presupposes roots that are present already in non-Christians, indeed, in man as such as he exists in history. “The deepest layer of human thinking and feeling,” Benedict says, “somehow knows that [God] must exist, that, at the beginning of all things, there must be not irrationality but creative Reason”—though this implicit “knowledge” slides toward unreality in the absence of Revelation and the Christian proclamation.

What Benedict says here is undergirded by what he says elsewhere regarding what he calls the “ontological dimension” of conscience: namely, the *anamnesis*, or deep-seated memory of God, which is “identical with the foundations of our being.”<sup>22</sup> We bear in our depths a movement toward God that carries a memory of having come from him and having been initiated by him. We recognize him somehow implicitly not only as our end but also as our beginning. This *anamnesis* of God lies at the root of what is termed natural law.

What Benedict is pointing toward here is also affirmed in John Paul II's notion of “original solitude,” which Benedict embraces and develops further. “Original solitude” characterizes the primordial structure of man's being, referring to his original being alone with God—“original” here in the sense not simply that it occurs first, but that it is recuperated in some basic if only implicit way in every one of man's acts in history. This “original solitude”

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<sup>22</sup>Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (New York/San Francisco: Crossroad Publishing Company/Ignatius Press, 2006), 91–93.

means not only that man is different from all other creatures of the visible universe, but that man's relationality begins most radically in his "aleness" before God. The point of this "aleness," in other words, is not that man is originally without relation, but that man's relationality, his original being-with, is a being-with God (ontologically) before it is a being-with other human beings. Man's being-with God, as creaturely, is first a *being-from*, in the manner of a child: it is a filial relation.

This "constitutive" relationality to God, or "original solitude" with God, of course becomes at once for John Paul II an "original unity" between man and woman, which is to say, an original community of relation among all human beings. This "original unity," together with "original solitude," is the ground for Benedict's emphatic affirmation in *Caritas in veritate* that humanity is a single human family (see 53–55). Human beings bear a common relation to the Creator that establishes a common relation to one another. Benedict insists in this encyclical that this common relatedness needs to be recovered today in its metaphysical infrastructure.

An important indication of what is implied by this twofold original relatedness is given in a 1996 article by Ratzinger on "Truth and Freedom,"<sup>23</sup> where he states: "Since man's essence consists in being-from, being-with, and being-for, human freedom can exist only in the ordered communion of freedoms" (34). Order, in other words, is the condition of freedom, "a constitutive element of freedom itself" (29). Ratzinger concludes with the profound statement that "the child in the mother's womb is simply a very graphic depiction of the essence of human existence in general" (27).

In sum, all of what Pope Benedict says about the monks and their way of life, and in different terms about *anamnesis* and the nature of original solitude/unity and constitutive relations, is understood by him to have its roots already in the nature of historical man as such. The monks' search for God presupposes the unknown-known god in whom all men live and have their being. The memory and original experience of God embedded somehow in the heart of every human being from the beginning carries the

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<sup>23</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 16–35.

natural seed of the “philosophical attitude” that approaches the world most basically in a non-utilitarian fashion, enabling men to view being as at once, “convertibly,” true, good, and beautiful, in its givenness as such by God. It is within the framework of this presupposition that Pope Benedict’s claim is warranted that monasticism is the basis of any authentic human culture. At the root of human action as understood by the monks is a readiness to listen to God, and to all creatures in relation to God. At the root of human action, in other words, is a “letting be” vis-à-vis all of created being in its being-given as gift from God and thus as good. It is this primordial *letting be* in the face of *being as gift* that alone can sustain an authentic human culture, displacing the ontological pelagianism that today threatens the integrity and dignity of the human being—and indeed, in an analogically proportional way, of being as such—in its rightful creatureliness.

I turn now to the question of where Father John Courtney Murray stands with respect to the earlier discussion of American culture and in terms of the anthropology implied in Pope Benedict XVI’s appeal to the monastic search for God.

#### V.

In treating Murray, I will focus on three points. (1) First, and most generally, in a well-known chapter in *We Hold These Truths*,<sup>24</sup> Murray asks what Catholics should make of the achievements of America, framing his question in terms of the relation between nature and grace. Acknowledging impurities in these achievements, he nevertheless says that the American economy, the American polity, and the American “mastery of nature” via science and technology each represents a realization of what he calls the *res humana*. Each represents an instance of “nature confronting grace” (*WHTT*, 182). The American economy does so in the sense that poverty has been abolished at the level of principle. Although people still live in unacceptable conditions of poverty, “the means for its solution exist and are known. A general freedom from want is not a politician’s promise, but an economic certainty” (*WHTT*, 179).

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<sup>24</sup>John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* [*WHTT*] (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1988).

The American polity does so in the sense that the sovereignty of the people now lies in the equal footing of everyone in the power to judge “the prince and the legislative act” (*WHTT*, 181). Furthermore, in America the competence of the government “was confined to the political as such and to the promotion of the public welfare of the community as a political, i.e., lay, community” (*WHTT*, 182). “In matters spiritual the people were committed to their freedom,” and to this spiritual task “the contribution of the state would be simply that of rendering assistance in the creation of those conditions of freedom, peace, and public prosperity in which the spiritual task might go forward” (*WHTT*, 182). Finally, regarding the “mastery of nature,” America “illustrates in uniquely striking fashion the commonplace that there has been a constantly ascending progress in man’s knowledge and control of nature” (*WHTT*, 183). This of course does not mean that a similar situation obtains “in matters of man’s spiritual and moral progress” (*WHTT*, 183). Nonetheless, says Murray, “the ‘Cartesian dream’ of men ‘*comme maîtres et possesseurs de la nature*’ has assumed real substance” in America (*WHTT*, 183).

According to Murray, in sum, “the problem of a Christian humanism is really in [America’s] midst in an indigenous form, not elsewhere paralleled” (*WHTT*, 183). America’s characteristic achievements are thus understood by Murray to be authentic realizations of nature such that, given the Church’s preference for incarnational humanism—which rests on the dictum that “grace perfects nature, does not destroy it” (*WHTT*, 189)—the Church’s task relative to America is most basically one of completing what is a naturally perfected *res humana*.

(2) But we need to examine this general cultural judgment of Murray in light of two further elements of his interpretation of America. Also in *We Hold These Truths*, Murray sets forth his argument regarding America’s distinctive idea of civil unity in the face of religious pluralism. The key, he says, is that the one civil society in America, while accommodating all of the religious communities that are divided among themselves, “does not seek to reduce to its own unity the differences that divide them” (*WHTT*, 45). “Neither may undertake to destroy the other. Each subsists in its own order. And the two orders, the religious and the civil, remain distinct, however much they are, and need to be, related” (*WHTT*, 45).



In America, this civil unity that respects religious differences takes legal form in the religious articles of the First Amendment to the Constitution. As is well-known, Murray argues that these articles are best understood as “articles of peace” as distinct from “articles of faith.” Were these articles of the First Amendment actually “articles of faith,” Murray argues, they would somehow express “certain specifically sectarian tenets with regard to the nature of religion, religious truth, the church, faith, conscience, divine revelation, human freedom, etc.” (*WHTT*, 48). As “articles of peace,” on the contrary, they “have no religious content. They answer none of the eternal human questions with regard to the nature of truth and freedom or the manner in which the spiritual order of man’s life is to be organized or not organized” (*WHTT*, 49).

Murray says in this light that those who dogmatize about the meaning of the First Amendment do so, given America’s peculiar historical circumstances, in the name of either certain Puritan-Protestant religious tenets; or in the name of certain ultimate suppositions of secular—deistic and rationalistic—liberalism; or, finally, in the name of a secularizing Protestantism that “consider[s] the church to be true in proportion as its organization is commanded by the norms of secular democratic society, and bring[s] about a coincidence of religious and secular-liberal concepts of freedom” (*WHTT*, 49). If the religious clauses of the First Amendment could be read as “articles of faith,” then, according to Murray, their dogma would surely be one or another, or some mixture, of these three. What alone allows Catholics to accept the juridical order of the American state, Murray therefore says, is not that this state implies “truthful” answers with respect to the eternal questions regarding truth and freedom, but that it implies no answers at all—Enlightenment, Protestant, or Catholic—to these questions. The state is simply incompetent in such matters. The First Amendment to the Constitution contains only “articles of peace.”

(3) The third point regarding Murray concerns his interpretation of the Second Vatican Council, in relation to his argument with respect to America. The council’s affirmation of the right to religious freedom in *Dignitatis humanae*, says Murray, is “identical” in “object or content” to that affirmed in the United States Constitution.<sup>25</sup> He emphasizes that the right to religious freedom is a

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<sup>25</sup>John Courtney Murray, “*Declaration on Religious Freedom: Commentary*,” in

matter of formal recognition of religious freedom in *political*, as distinct from metaphysical or theological, terms (*DRF*, 568). This right, in other words, is to be conceived in the first instance as “negative, namely an immunity from coercion in religious matters” (*DRF*, 568). However, Murray suggests in this connection that *Dignitatis humanae* is not as clear as the American Constitution that the right to religious freedom should be understood as “political,” and not “ideological,” in nature (*DRF*, 569)—as “articles of peace” with no implication of “articles of faith.” Given the distinction between the continental-laicist and American liberal traditions, Murray puzzles over “the prominence given [in *DH*] to man’s moral obligation to search for the truth, as somehow the ultimate foundation of the right to religious freedom” (*DRF*, 570). In the same vein, he questions the emphasis of *DH* on the need for government to foster the religious life of the people. As he puts it, the right to religious freedom is “simply an immunity” (*DRF*, “Discussion,” 580), and “I don’t see how you can promote an immunity—making someone more and more immune. This just doesn’t make any sense to me; it never has” (*ibid.*). Hence Murray concludes that the demand that government show religion favor is actually tied, not to the *logic* of the right to religious freedom, properly speaking, but rather to the fact that “society itself may benefit from [such favor] in terms of justice and order” (*ibid.*), or indeed to what is otherwise at best a legitimate pastoral as distinct from strictly theoretical-political concern (*DRF*, 571). In short, Murray contends that *DH*’s emphasis on the moral obligation to seek the truth, and on the state’s need to foster conditions favorable to religion, is due primarily to the Council Fathers’ failure to appropriate fully the distinction between the continental-laicist and American liberal traditions, and hence to appreciate the properly juridical nature of the latter’s idea of rights. Indeed, tying the right to religious freedom to man’s duty to search for the truth, according to Murray, leads to problematic tendencies he says are evidenced in both contemporary communist and some Catholic governments: namely, “that they already have the truth;

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*American Participation at the Second Vatican Council*, ed. Vincent A. Yzermans (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 668–76, at 668. See also Murray’s “Declaration on Religious Freedom” [*DRF*], in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John Miller (Notre Dame: Associated Press, 1966), 565–76, at 568. Citations in the text are from this second article.

that they represent the truth, which is also the good of the people; that, consequently, they are empowered to repress public manifestations of error" (*DRF*, 571).

Further in this context, Murray says that, in conceiving freedom and rights as juridical, we can see that the purpose of government is best expressed now in terms of maximizing freedom, and of securing the public order that enables each person equally to exercise his freedom. Thus, although the common good includes much more than public order, it is the concern for *public order* that is for Murray the specific function of government (*DRF*, 575–76).

## VI.

What are we to make of Murray's position as outlined, in light of our earlier reflections?

(1) As a proper foundation for the distinctly political-juridical meaning of the right to religious freedom, and indeed of rights generally, Murray provides an argument that, he says, can be constructed from "the principles of the Declaration [*DH*] itself, assembled into an organic structure" (*DRF*, 571). His argument, in brief, is that the foundation for human dignity, and consequently for the right of religious freedom, resides most basically in man's personal autonomy: his exigence to act on his own initiative. This exigence, according to Murray, is tied to a responsibility of man to his conscience, to nature, and to a transcendent order of truth. The exigence, however, is able to be detached from this responsibility in such a way that the latter is deemed *juridically irrelevant*: no authority in the juridical-political realm is empowered to judge with respect to the responsibility of the self's conscience to God and others. Given the exigence to act on one's initiative as basic in one's conception of the human act, it follows for Murray that the basic meaning of a right is negative: immunity from coercion. Because my primary and most fundamental exigence as a human being is to *exercise initiative* with respect to the other, the basic duty of the other, from the point of view of the state, is to *avoid obstructing* as far as possible my exercise of initiative (*DRF*, 571–73).

To be sure, Murray is at pains to point out that his idea of the human being as exigent to act on his own initiative is meant merely to provide a *foundation* for the rights that remain *juridical* in

their “content and object” as concerns of the state. But that is just the point: the juridical conception of rights, in the priority it grants to the human act in its would-be purely formal character as an exercise of choice or initiative, itself, *eo ipso*, expresses a *particular ontology of freedom*. As Murray’s argument itself makes clear, it is this “formalist” reading of the human act that alone warrants the *purely juridical idea of rights*. His metaphysics of human freedom and his juridical notion of rights, in other words, express in different, respectively philosophical and “political,” contexts what is a *single understanding of the human person*.

The point, then, is that the political right to religious freedom is for Murray a matter of ordering external relations between persons in such a way as to protect equally each person’s exercise of freedom. This juridical idea of rights is founded in and mediated via a human act conceived in terms of the exigence of each person to exercise his own initiative, an exigence that, viewed formally, is understood in abstraction from relations to God and others. While affirming that these relations are given with man’s nature, Murray takes them to be separable from the self’s exigence for initiative such that they can be bracketed without significant loss to our understanding of the foundations of human dignity *as pertinent to political order*. Such relations, in other words, are for Murray not strictly necessary or relevant for an adequate idea of human rights in their various public contexts: “in what concerns the search for truth, the communication of opinions, the cultivation of the arts and sciences, the formation and expression of political views, association with other men for common purposes, and, with privileged particularity, the free exercise of religion” (*DRF*, 571).

The problem, then, is that Murray’s formally-conceived human act fails to take sufficient account of the *immanence* in man of the Creator’s activity that is implied in his act of creating man. Each person does indeed originate his own human action, but only as *participant* in what has always, first and abidingly, been originated by another. The heart of the matter, as stated above, is that each human act presupposes a memory of God, a seeking of God that is in some significant sense already a “finding.” Each exercise of the human act presupposes an order of relation to God, and indeed to other creatures inside this relation to God, an order that is *given in and with* the foundations of our being. This memory and this givenness imply a “letting be” as the originary form of the free-intelligent human act

(*agere*). The order of relations to God and others thus, in a word, is not merely the *object* of the human act, but also the always already *given*, and *immanent*, condition of the human act that gives the latter its anterior and most basic form.<sup>26</sup>

This originary form of the human act carries an implicit logic at once of *gratitude*, as the expression of one's sense of being somehow *from another*, and of *service*, as the expression of one's sense of being somehow *for another*. The logic consists in a *responsive movement* toward God that, however unconsciously, desires to worship him, and toward others that first and most basically *lets* them *be* in their inherent, transcendently given, truth as good.

It is crucial once again to see, with Pope Benedict, that recognition of this original sense of being from another, with its implied logic of gratitude and service and worship, is not simply a function of Christian faith. On the contrary, it is inchoatively present in every human being. It involves an originary unknowing-knowing and loving that comes to full awareness only in the encounter with Jesus Christ. The pertinent point here is simply that this sense is first *given to* the human creature, to *every* human creature, in and with his act of being created.

The upshot, relative to Murray, is not that man's "exigence to act on his own initiative and on his own responsibility" is not in a basic sense the foundation of human dignity, but that this exigence originates *in response* and *as a response* to God and others: it is *called forth* by what is always anteriorly given to man by God, at once in and through others. Acting on one's own initiative thus always involves a *filial spontaneity*, even as acting on one's own responsibility presupposes a simultaneous-anterior responsibility to others.

Because he overlooks the implications of the immanent presence of God in the creature, Murray, in his account of the human act that serves as the foundation of man's dignity and rights, leaves us logically, however unintentionally, with a primary (or primarily original, so to speak) cause of human agency (the Creator) and a secondary (or secondarily original) cause of human agency (man) that remain simply outside of, and in this sense extrinsic to, each other. This extrinsicism is perhaps best understood as a subtle

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<sup>26</sup>Cf. D. C. Schindler, "Freedom Beyond Our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 618–53.

version of what Servais Pinckaers calls “freedom of indifference”: a freedom defined in terms of a self-determination that initially excludes being determined by anyone or anything, one that looks on initially determining factors as intrusions upon rather than as intrinsic to the proper and most basic activity of the will.<sup>27</sup> This *extrinsicist* understanding logically, if unintentionally, shifts the burden of accounting for the relation between the self and God onesidedly to the self: to the one who, not finding the Giver somehow already *given to* and *present within him* and *calling him forth*, must now elect on his own to go in search of him. Such an extrinsicism thus logically backs into what we earlier termed semi-pelagianism, or the idea that the creature goes forward first (ontologically, not temporally) on its own power, in order to meet the power of the Creator. This semi-pelagianism, with its understanding of the human act as originally-ontologically empty of the implication of relation to God and others, expresses itself in a moralistic and instrumentalist idea of freedom and intelligence and a positivistic idea of religion and religiosity.

I do not mean to impute such a conception of semi-pelagianism to Murray in the exact form characteristic of America’s dominant Puritan-Enlightened tradition. I mean rather to suggest that there exists in modernity an extrinsicist account of the human act relative to God that has a distinctly Catholic theological provenance; and that this modern Catholic version of extrinsicism has tended to obstruct thinkers like Murray from identifying in their proper religious and ontological nature the problems of American cultural life as shaped by Puritan-Enlightened thought.

Recall in this context Murray’s statement that, if one were to read “dogma” into America’s First Amendment, that dogma would be a mix of certain Puritan or Protestant tenets, on the one hand, and certain ultimate suppositions of secular—deistic and rationalistic—liberalism, on the other. He denies the legitimacy of this dogmatic reading, and concludes his argument by asking two summary questions: “is the no-establishment clause a piece of ecclesiology, and is the free-exercise clause a piece of religious philosophy?” (*WHITT*, 51). His answers are “no” and “no.” My answers, on the contrary, are “yes” and “yes”: yes, in the sense, not that America legally or explicitly sanctions one church over another,

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<sup>27</sup>Servais Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), especially 327–53.

but that she sanctions, unwittingly and thus unintentionally, religious communities and approaches to religion that involve a positivistic conception of religiosity and that characteristically express themselves in moralistic-instrumentalist conceptions of human action.<sup>28</sup> America, I am proposing, legally sanctions the extrinsicist notion of the relation between God and man, and eternity and time, that are presupposed in and that drive these conceptions.

The relevant point, then, is that such conceptions of religion and human action and the relation of eternity and time are not empty of implications for one's understanding of the church and of the secular in relation to the church. On the contrary, they imply an ontology of creation that denies the idea of man as naturally *homo religiosus*, an idea which is presupposed, for example, by churches of a sacramental nature. They imply, in a word, not no ecclesiology and religious philosophy, but merely those complicit with America's dominant Puritan-Protestant and Enlightened traditions. The difficulty, in a word, is that Murray, in his formal notion of freedom, overlooks the memory of God lying at the interior core of the human act. He thereby renders Puritanism and the Enlightenment invisible *as ontologies with ecclesiological and religious, and thus "dogmatic," implications.*

(2) This examination of Murray's argument regarding America, with its hallmark claim of a juridical idea of human rights founded in a formalist account of the human act, yields, in sum, the following consequences:

First, in the name of defending a state that is incompetent in matters of the truth regarding the ultimate origin and end of man, Murray defends a state that hiddenly imposes an implied view regarding just such a truth. No government can in fact avoid claims regarding the meaning of man in relation to God: ontological claims bearing religious and (natural) theological implications. No government can thus legitimately claim simple incompetence in matters of ontology and religion. This does not mean that the state as such ought to be directly concerned with judging the truth of any particular religion, or can, or ought to, make itself the first or final

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<sup>28</sup>On this point, see the chapter, "Civil Community Inside the Liberal State: Truth, Freedom, and Human Dignity," in my *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

arbiter of the truth about man. It means simply that the state, in making judgments about the right to religious freedom, necessarily invokes, one way or another, and however unconsciously, some implied view of man relative to his ultimate origin and end.

Second, in the name of defending the state's constitutional-legal indifference with respect to God and religion, Murray defends a state whose constitutional order hiddenly embeds the idea of a "substantively indifferent" human act, leading logically to legal enshrinement of a positivistic as distinct from natural religiosity, and thus of what is already a paradoxically secularized religiosity.

Third, in the name of a formal exigence for exercising initiative, and a "political" idea of rights attached to this formal exigence, Murray defends a primarily negative sense of rights as immunities from coercion. But this idea of the human act and of rights implies an essentially formalistic conception of justice, according to which the proper purpose of government becomes that of refereeing between competing exercises of initiative, or of securing public order as distinct from realizing the common good. The problem, however, is that such a justice contains no principled or substantive way of adjudicating between human beings when their exercises of initiative directly conflict: when the presence and activity of one person appears profoundly and directly intrusive, and thus indeed "coercive," with respect to another person.

Consider again what is implied by the exigence to act on one's own initiative as the foundation of human dignity, and by the idea of rights derivative from such a foundation. On such a view, the fundamental right, according to Murray, is the right to immunity. He then says that a right in this sense implies "a juridical relationship, within which to the right of one there corresponds the duty on the part of the others with regard to whatever the object of the right is—in our case immunity from coercion" (*DRF*, 573). But note what this implies. The juridical duty of the state extends to the protection of each person only *qua the immunity from coercion that flows from each person's exigence for exercising initiative*. To put it another way, the right of each self, as legally enforced by the state, is to secure this exigence for initiative *precisely against* the possible intrusive action of the other. The relevant point, then, is that the duty of the state properly includes no principled reference to what the self is *from* or *for*, to the order of relation to others that originally and abidingly "co-constitutes" the self and his free act.



The result, then, again, is that there can be no principled adjudication between the self and the other in the hard cases where such principled adjudication is essential: in those cases where the “intrusiveness” of one person relative to another appears to be most profound and direct, and the exigencies for initiative that found the respective rights of the one and the other appear to be radically disproportionate and thus unequal. I have in mind, for example, cases where the “strong” person in the health and maturity of life is “involuntarily” burdened by the “weak” person existing at the most fragile, and silent, origins or end of life, and who thus apparently lacks, or only minimally possesses, an exigent capacity for exercising initiative. What Murray’s “formalist” foundations of human dignity and juridical-negative rights can properly do in such cases is merely balance the “exigencies” of these competing persons as formally-fairly as possible in light of the interests of public order. What such a formal-juridical understanding cannot do is sustain a principled legal way for recognizing the inherent, unconditional rights of the “weak” in the face of the “strong,” for the sake of a genuinely *common, or social, good*.

Note that I am not suggesting that Murray himself did not reject a purely “proceduralist” reading of rights. On the contrary, he insisted that such a proceduralist reading overlooks the foundations of rights in man’s natural human dignity. My point, rather, is that the formal exigence for exercising initiative which for him most basically establishes that dignity, and yields the essentially negative conception of rights as immunities, itself logically entails a proceduralist legal order, a proceduralism, that is, which *eo ipso* implies a relativism. The point, in other words, is that Murray can avoid this logical entailment only by revising his “formalist” account of the foundations for human dignity: that is, by integrating man’s naturally given order of relations to others into the formal exigence for initiative that he takes (in a significant sense rightly) to establish human dignity.

Fourth, in the name of defending a legitimate secularity and thus autonomy of the state and the institutions of civil society, Murray gives us what is already, from the perspective of a natural *homo religiosus*, the first meaning of secularism, even if not (yet) of an aggressive sort.<sup>29</sup> He conceives the ends of temporal-terrestrial

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<sup>29</sup>The implication of my argument is that, although Murray does take note of

structures and processes in abstraction from the relation to God and thus order toward (and from) eternity that is operative in the depths of every human being. He therefore provides no principled way for either the state or the church, in their respective ways and in legally-supported public order and institutions, to recognize the inherent-implicit openness, as distinct from logical indifference, of these structures and processes to the transcendent and eternal order.

Finally, and in sum, we return to Murray's reading of America's achievements. As we have noted, Murray argues that, in its economic order, its political order, and its "mastery of nature" and attendant science and technology, America presents Catholics with instances of "nature confronting grace." However, we can now see the sense in which these arguments fail to take account of man's originally given order of relations to God and others. Wealth, for instance, in its proper ontological sense, is richness in these relations that are integral to man's original meaning—even as such relations themselves of course, rightly understood, demand a sufficiency of wealth in its more customary quantitatively measurable forms.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, an adequately conceived notion of political rights needs to take integrated account of man's original responsiveness to God and others, with its implicit logic of gratitude and service: take integrated account, that is, of the sense in which this "exigence" for gratitude and service to God and others provides not only the context but already the incipient anterior form of one's right-ful claim on others. Finally, a mastery of nature rooted in an adequate ontology of creation needs to take account of the human act as most basically a letting be, and hence of knowing as anteriorly contemplative *in* its doing and making, especially in light of the modern Western conception of science and technology as a matter most basically of power, or of experiment formed in theoretical manipulation.

Elsewhere I have developed the further cultural implications of America's mostly unwitting fragmented ontology of creation, with its voluntaristic, instrumentalist, and positivistic human act,

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and criticize a growing secularism in America, he fails to see that his own argument, with its lack of integration of man's ontological memory of God, is already logically vulnerable to just such a growing secularism. But more on this below.

<sup>30</sup>See my "Market Liberalism and an Economic Culture of Gift and Gratitude," in *Ordering Love*.

attempting to show how this ontology imposes a hidden monolithic unity on what is typically, and in an obvious sense rightly, taken to be liberal culture's ever-increasing pluralism; how this peculiar unity tends logically toward what Benedict XVI and John Paul II have referred to as the paradoxes within liberal democratic societies of a "dictatorship of relativism" and a totalitarianism of "the 'strong' over the weak"; and finally how this unity, for all of its hiddenness, yields not a religiously neutral or legitimately secular, but on the contrary already logically secularistic, idea of statecraft.<sup>31</sup>

## VII.

We return in conclusion to the issue of Americanism. (1) First, are not those theologians who defend the "Americanist" project right that the Second Vatican Council vindicated the theology of Murray as it concerns the distinctly American liberal order? Given present limits, I will respond here only in terms of *Dignitatis humanae*. The council's defense of the inherent right to religious freedom is a significant achievement, and a significant development in the Church as she faces the secular order. The proper question is not *whether* we should recognize this right to freedom, but *in what sense*. Murray is correct that *DH* affirms this right in its "negative" or "political" sense as an immunity from coercion. Insufficient attention, however, is typically given to the fact that Murray himself had significant reservations regarding the "Declaration on Religious Freedom" in its final form (cf., e.g., *DRF*, 569), for the later redactions of which he was not present due to health problems. Specifically, as indicated above, Murray puzzled over "the prominence given to man's moral obligation to search for the truth, as somehow the ultimate foundation of the right to religious freedom" (*DRF*, 570), thereby acknowledging that *DH* in its final form did not unambiguously adopt his own argument.

*DH* states, for example, that "everybody has the duty and consequently the right to seek the truth in religious matters so that, through the use of appropriate means, he may prudently form judgments of conscience which are sincere and true . . ." (n. 3). The document says elsewhere that "all men are bound to seek the truth,

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<sup>31</sup>Cf. "Civil Community Inside the Liberal State," in *Ordering Love*.

especially in what concerns God and his Church, and to embrace it and hold on to it as they come to know it,” and that “these obligations bind man’s conscience” (n. 1). It is crucial to see, however, with respect to my own argument regarding Murray, that *DH* affirms these duties in the context of affirming an ineliminable right to freedom:

Truth can impose itself on the mind of man only in virtue of its own truth, which wins over the mind with both gentleness and power [*suaviter simul ac fortiter*]. So while the religious freedom which men demand in fulfilling their obligation to worship God has to do with freedom from coercion in society, it leaves intact the traditional Catholic teaching on the moral duty of individuals and societies toward the true religion and one Church of Christ. (n. 1)

It is in accordance with their dignity that all men, because they are persons, that is, endowed with reason and free will and therefore bearing personal responsibility, are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth. . . . But men cannot satisfy this obligation in a way that is in keeping with their own nature unless they enjoy both psychological freedom and immunity for coercion. . . . Therefore the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it. (n. 2)

The religious acts whereby men . . . direct their lives to God transcend by their very nature the order of terrestrial and temporal affairs. Therefore the civil authority, the purpose of which is the care of the common good [*bonum commune*] in the temporal order, must recognize and show favor [*favere*] to the religious life of the citizens. But if it presumes to control or restrict [*dirigere vel impedire*] religious activity, it must be said to have exceeded the limits of its power. (n. 3)

[The civil authority] must help create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life so that citizens will be really in a position to exercise their religious rights and fulfill their religious duties . . . . If, in view of the circumstances of a particular people, special civil recognition is to be given to one religious community in the constitutional organization of a State, the right of all citizens and religious communities to religious freedom must be recognized and respected as well. (n. 6)

Complex issues arise here regarding the intentions of *DH* in the matter of truth and freedom that cannot be addressed properly in the present forum. I cite statements from this document only for the purpose of clarifying what seems to me the right direction for resolving this matter. It is commonly accepted that, in its unequivocal affirmation of the principle of the right to religious freedom, *DH* did not resolve the questions of the foundations for this right and thus did not attempt to resolve how the right was most properly to be conceived.<sup>32</sup> As we have seen, Murray argues that the foundations of the right to religious freedom lie in a human dignity understood primarily in terms of a formally conceived exigence to act on one's own initiative, thus differentiating his view from that of those who would tie this right primarily to the truth and man's obligation to seek it and embrace it. My proposal is that those who take human dignity or freedom, on the one hand, and the obligation to truth, on the other, to represent exclusive or opposing foundations for this right share, however paradoxically, a *common ontology of human being and action*, vis-à-vis the ontology outlined in the name of Benedict above. Both of these claims regarding the nature of these foundations presuppose, albeit from their opposite directions, an extrinsic—tending toward inverse—relation between truth and freedom. Thus Murray, on the one hand, separates the question of freedom from the question of truth for purposes of political-public order because he thinks that affirming a link between the two risks attenuation of, by failing to yield a principled commitment to, the right to freedom. Archbishop Lefebvre, on the other hand (to take the most famous example on the opposing side), thinks affirmation of the primacy of human dignity with its presupposed freedom undermines the importance and indeed necessity of truth for an adequate civil order. But both views, precisely from within what is their otherwise stark difference, and vis-à-vis the ontology of human being and action implied in the monastic *quaerere Deum*, share a common failure to see that the human person, and thus human dignity, are constituted at once by an order of truth at the heart of

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<sup>32</sup>Cf. in this connection the careful overview of Walter Kasper, *Wahrheit und Freiheit: Die "Erklärung über die Religionsfreiheit" des II. Vatikanischen Konzils* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1988) (Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophische-historische Klasse, Jahrgang 1988, Bericht 4).

which lies freedom, and by a freedom that is exercised only within an always anteriorly given order of truth. Both views share a common failure to see that human dignity and freedom and truth are thus at root *indissolubly united*.<sup>33</sup>

In other words, Murray is correct that realization of the right to religious freedom represents a major achievement of the Second Vatican Council. But this achievement is not correctly conceived as an achievement of freedom *alongside* the truth about man and God. Indeed, such a conception of the relation between freedom and truth, as indicated, itself expresses a *claim of truth*, one that already—paradoxically—binds freedom and truth together in an extrinsic, hence “forced,” manner, in and through what is a *single formalist conception of human action*. In contrast, the council, as developed in the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, binds truth and freedom in an *integrated* way, in and through a conception of the human person as an *ordered unity* of truth and freedom.<sup>34</sup> More precisely, the individual human person is, in the act

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<sup>33</sup>Cf. in this connection the statement by Gilles Routhier regarding how, in the course of the discussion of the schema that became *Dignitatis humanae*, most of the objections “sprang from a misunderstanding of the purpose of the schema; that is, confused civic freedom in religious matters with other kinds of freedom (moral, ontological, psychological, and so on)” (“Finishing the Work Begun: The Trying Experience of the Fourth Period,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 5, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006], 65). The burden of my argument, however, is that civic freedom cannot in fact be cleanly detached from freedom in its ontological meaning, from the question regarding freedom’s true ontological nature. On the contrary, as we have shown with respect to Murray, the effort cleanly to separate freedom in its juridico-civic meaning from freedom in its ontological meaning (cf. Murray’s “articles of peace”) *eo ipso*, necessarily albeit hiddenly, imports into civic freedom a primitive formalistic ontological structure. The point, then, is that the question of civic freedom in religious matters is not, and in principle cannot be, properly resolved by detaching it from questions regarding the natural ontological meaning and truth of freedom. On the contrary, the question of civic freedom in religious matters can be properly and consistently resolved only by showing how *freedom in its ontological nature* as integral to the wholeness of truth about human dignity *itself requires, and indicates the proper sense of, civic freedom* in religious matters.

<sup>34</sup>For an argument that contrasts strongly with the present one apropos of the differences between Murray and John Paul II in the matter of religious freedom, see Hermínio Rico, S.J., *John Paul II and the Legacy of Dignitatis Humanae* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002). Rico is right to see important differences between Murray and John Paul II in their conceptions of

of creation, originally constituted at once in his substantial unity and within an *ordered community of relations*, above all to God but also including other creatures. Each human being is a unique actualization of a personal order of *truth qua love* that is *first given*, and herein lies the foundation of human dignity, and thus of rights. The free and intelligent human act that properly signifies and expresses this personal order of being is at root a *naturally ordered act of love*. Because this act, as spiritual, is self-reflexive, man remains of his nature free to act contrary to the order of love. But because this free act is already ordered in and for and by a love that is originally given to him, man, even when he acts contrary to this order, cannot but retain in his depths some “exigent” desire to love and know the truth about God and others implied in this original givenness. It is not possible in the present forum to show the particulars of how this unity in the natural structure of the human person, between a truth that is inherently free and a freedom that is inherently “truthed,” resolves the key issues evoked in the debates regarding the rightful meaning of *Dignitatis humanae* or, *a fortiori*, regarding the anthropology of the council more generally. I have meant only to indicate here how this unity secures a principled way of accommodating simultaneously the legitimate concerns of *both* those who would found the right to religious freedom on human dignity *and* those who would found this right on the truth about man.<sup>35</sup>

(2) Second, and finally, let us return again to where we began: to *Testem benevolentiae*, the document standing at the historical origins of the problem of Americanism. As noted earlier, this encyclical identifies the problem of how Catholics in America are to adapt to modern civilization in its American form, and points out particular problematic tendencies in this regard. These tendencies revolve around a certain emphasis on freedom, and a relative

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religious freedom, but he criticizes John Paul II for what he takes to be the latter's effort to reintroduce the question of truth into civic freedom in religious matters. Rico argues that John Paul II intended to correct what was, according to Rico, the proper interpretation of civic freedom in religious matters—that, basically, of Murray—in the light of what John Paul II judged to be the growing threat of secularization in liberal countries.

<sup>35</sup>For discussion regarding what this implies in terms of the state–church and state–civil society distinctions, see my chapter, “Civil Community Inside the Liberal State,” in *Ordering Love*.

primacy granted to the natural over the supernatural virtues, and the active over the passive virtues and also over the traditional religious—and monastic—vows, all for the purpose of enabling Catholics to realize an effective apostolic presence in America's modern culture. The tendencies thus all concern the question of what, from the perspective of Catholicism, might be a legitimate secularity or autonomy; and it was this question that Leo XIII, at root, was posing.

Murray and his disciples take the Second Vatican Council to represent the Church's mature understanding and acceptance of the American liberal tradition and its essential ideas regarding human freedom and rights, and thus to vindicate the basic terms of the earlier Americanists in their responses to *Testem benevolentiae*. And indeed, as we have indicated, it is true that the Second Vatican Council, and the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, affirm a principled commitment to the human freedom and rights that inspire the best intentions of American liberalism. At the same time, however, the council and these pontificates call deeply into question the *ontology that tacitly informs the logic* of freedom and rights proper to this liberalism. Again, as indicated above, Murray was concerned about a growing secularism in America. However, his privileging of freedom's formal exigence for initiative had already manifested its own inner logic, in his judgment that American culture—economic, political, and academic, or scientific-technical—was in its structural natural order healthy. According to Murray, what the culture needed to avoid a slide into secularism was the perfecting addition of morality and supernatural virtue: a moral and spiritual correction meant to be sure to express an “incarnational” and not merely “eschatological” humanism (see *WHTT*, ch. 8), but nevertheless not a correction that reached inside the ontological order undergirding the American liberal tradition's idea of human freedom and intelligence, thus requiring a transforming conversion of that tradition. It is my contention, however, that it is just this liberal ontological order, as inclusive of a positivistic morality and religion, that most basically, however hiddenly and unintentionally, expresses the kind of autonomy that establishes America's logic of secularity as already, in its own peculiar, and peculiarly virulent, way, a logic of secularism.

My proposal is that it is the influence of this peculiar Anglo-liberal form of autonomy on Catholics in America that Leo XIII was



attempting, even if not in completely adequate language, to get at in *Testem benevolentiae*. The positive content of the religious anthropology and ontology latent in his criticisms has been developed and clarified over time, to be sure, notably in the Second Vatican Council and the pontificates of Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI. But the issues raised in *TB* are at root those raised by Benedict when he says that we need today to reconsider the legitimate meaning of “*laïcité*,” and to recover a living sense of the monastic search for God and the readiness to listen to him, and a sense of man’s primitive “philosophical attitude” with its original patience or letting be, as implied by this search, if we are to recuperate an authentic human culture. It is these issues, now more amply and precisely formulated, which lie at the root of Leo’s concerns regarding a rightful sense of adaptation to modern American liberal culture.

What lies at the heart of Leo’s concerns, in a word, is the proper meaning of the independence and autonomy, of the “activity” and “passivity,” of human being and action, and indeed of the traditional religious or monastic vows, in their basic meaning before God.

Once again, this insistence on the legitimacy of Leo’s concerns with respect to America, and on the ontological character and depth of the issues raised by him, entails no denial of what I affirmed at the outset as America’s “exceptional” achievements regarding the method of freedom in politics and economics, and creative intelligence in science and technology. *These indicate in important respects permanent human achievements.* At the same time, in their Anglo-American liberal form, *they are profoundly ambiguous.* Their ambiguity is such that, within America’s positive achievements themselves, there remains an ontological vulnerability to nothing less than what we have referred to as a “dictatorship of relativism” and a “totalitarianism of the ‘strong’ over the weak,” rooted in a technological idea of human being and action. These achievements thus stand in need not only of perfecting moral or supernatural addition, but of inner *ontological re-formation*, if their just intentions are to be truly secured, and if America is truly to realize an authentic human culture.

Pope Benedict XVI, in *Caritas in veritate*, retrieves the idea of “integral human development” that was first introduced by Paul VI. Benedict also recalls John Paul II’s statement in *Centesimus annus* affirming “the positive value of an authentic theology of integral human liberation.”<sup>36</sup> Benedict reminds us that *Centesimus annus* calls for a comprehensive new plan of integral human development, not only in the formerly Communist countries of Eastern Europe but also in the West. Benedict notes explicitly that this duty with respect to the West is “still a real duty that needs to be discharged” (*CV*, 23). *Caritas in veritate* demonstrates in this light that the West’s institutions, economic-social but also political and academic and indeed technological, stand in significant need of integral human development in terms of the call to love God and others that is given to, and hence shared by, all human beings from their creation. The present article has attempted to indicate the ontological core of what this integral human development implies with respect to America’s peculiarly liberal institutions and peculiarly religious-secular culture. □

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<sup>36</sup>*Centesimus annus*, 26. This statement references the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s “Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation,” *Libertatis conscientia* (26 March 1986): AAS 81 (1987), 554–821.