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Love, Faith, and Reason: On Academic Life as a Vocation

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“Love, Faith, and Reason: On Academic Life as a Vocation”

1. A Statement on the Contemporary Situation of Faith and Reason:

“...what for Patristic and Medieval thought was in both theory and practice a profound unity, producing knowledge capable of reaching the highest forms of speculation, was destroyed by systems which espoused the cause of rational knowledge sundered from faith and meant to take the place of faith,” (John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, #45, p. 69).

A. Commentary: John Paul II’s summary observation registers a large-scale truth though he earlier noted a small-scale exception when Tertullian exclaimed, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? The Academy with the Church?” (*De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, VII,9: SC 46, 98; *Fides et Ratio*, 41, p. 61) Ironically, destruction of a ‘profound unity’ of faith and reason began in those late medieval, philosophical currents associated with William of Ockham and conveyed to Luther by his teacher Gabriel Biel. Luther reacted vehemently against Ockham’s claim that reason could guide sterling behavior that merited God’s grace. Yet behind readings of Aquinas by 15th c. theologians Cajetan, Capreolus and Biel lay Aquinas’s original thought that supports Luther or anyone against Pelagian tendencies to exaggerate and thereby falsify human nature’s sufficiency in relation to God and salvation. Later, certain lines of thought in the French Enlightenment, contrary to both Aquinas and Luther, sought to exalt reason as a replacement for individual and societal faith.

Duke theologian David Steinmetz in an August 23, 2005 article in *The Christian Century* recounts a 20th century Protestant return to the original Aquinas. Steinmetz reports that, “Christian ethicists like Stanley Hauerwas have utilized what Aquinas wrote about the cardinal and theological virtues in their own work on the formation of Christian character. Other theologians, newly liberated from the Kantian prejudices of the Enlightenment, have found Aquinas’s subtle and nuanced account on metaphysical questions bracing,” 25.

For Aquinas human reason prior to enlightenment, correction, and renovation by faith already was internal to creaturely dependence on the Creator. Nonetheless in modernity dramatic ruptures between faith and reason occurred in famous conflicts such as that between Galileo and Church authorities, between Darwin’s theory of evolution and belief in creation, between memory of the Christian past formed by church tradition and the Christian past investigated and reconstructed by rational methods of historical research alone.

B. Proposal: But that’s not the whole picture or situation of faith and reason today. Despite a modern history of disunity between reason and faith in theoretical interpretations and explanations, they never parted company in the embodied practices and external products of lived, popular religion. There, reason has been a silent, cooperative partner of faith, and not because of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Faith and theology—even when theology followed Luther’s condemnation of reason--never negated or dispensed with a profound, operational if unnoticed respect for practical reason. The following photos indicate reason working within the ambit of faith and faith spontaneously relying on reason. Practical reason for Aristotle and

Aquinas operated in *poesis*, making by means of some *tekne* or technique and *praxis*, doing or conduct guided by prudence, *phronesis*. *Poesis* provides more appealing photo opportunities so let's focus on practical reason in *poesis* serving faith in church architecture and music.

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2. What's Love Got to Do With It? Reason, Faith, and Love

A. What is reason? For John Paul II, reason represents the defining human search for truth and meaning characteristic of every culture, whose members and leaders ask and settle on answers to questions about what we are, where we come from, what is our destiny, why is there evil, what comes after this life. Inscribed over the temple portal at Delphi, "Know thyself," advised human beings to be faithful to their humanity. Now, John Paul's point of view sits easily in the tradition of Aquinas, as do the outlooks of modern exponents of Aquinas like Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan. For Rahner reason is self-presence or transcendental subjectivity continually objectifying and in thought going beyond sensory experience. For Bernard Lonergan reason is intentional consciousness moving from experience to understanding to judgment to deliberation and decision under the auspices of love. Central to Aquinas, Rahner, Lonergan, and John Paul II is a conviction that a person's and a culture's seeking meaning, truth, and value participates in and moves toward God Whose reality makes possible a horizon within finite realities stand forth as being but not as absolute being.

For Aquinas and I follow that tradition, self-presence, intentional consciousness, or reason is the imprint in humanity of the creating Logos; reason true to itself acts in

intrinsic yet implicit orientation toward God. Nonetheless, for Aquinas and all in his tradition the gift of faith far, even infinitely, exceeds reason, corrects it because of damage done by fallen human sinfulness, and enlightens reason.

B. Reason and faith: When it comes to hearing the gospel, reason cannot by itself cross an irremovable gap yawning between evidence-based conclusions of reason (e.g. Jesus was crucified, died, his whole life and purpose thereby discredited before Israel and the Roman Empire) and gospel faith (e.g. ‘He has risen as he said’, ‘Rabboni’, ‘Jesus Christ is risen from the dead’, ‘They recognized him in the breaking of the bread’, ‘It is the Lord’, ‘My Lord and my God’). Before the event of cross and resurrection, as well as afterward, how did Jesus’ disciples and apostles cross that gap between experience, observations, interpretation, and new faith in the resurrected Jesus? How do we whom Christ has blessed as those who believe without seeing, how do we cross that gap between hearing the Word of God about Christ’s public ministry up to and through the crucifixion and hearing the good news of Jesus risen? How does divine grace enable any of us, first disciples or ourselves, to cross that gap?

C. What’s love got to do with it? Aquinas’s answer in the *Summa Theologiae, IIaIIae, Q. 1-7* is that only the graced love for God stirring in our hearts (*caritas*) leads us across the gap between any point of arrival in human knowledge and on to belief in the gospel as a whole or in any individual article of faith. Love for God above all things and for eternal life enables a graced, free, voluntary act drawing a person from reason’s interest, doubt, opinion, or suspicion to the self-surrender of faith. Belief is voluntary and free because graced willing moves past absence of conclusive evidence or conclusive argument to assent to the good news as true. Jesus remarked on an absence of this love for God in

criticism of the Pharisees for hardness of heart, for not knowing or loving the God of Moses. Love for God moves a person to a free choice that is faith in Christ and that love becomes internal to the act of belief. And that is why spiritual formation involves love for God above all things, and its signal opportunity for exercise, love for neighbor. ‘Keep the faith’ is inadequate and should be, ‘keep the love’.

A person makes an assent of belief only because the grace of God first moves the person’s affections and love for the good and for God.¹ That love and attraction draws the person from doubt, suspicion, or opinion toward and into the act of faith, belief. The role of love allows the content of faith to be appreciated as good, from God and of God so that the assent of belief in the truth of revelation is also a decision in freedom, a free choice, an option for God. The good loved is, at a minimum, salvation and eternal life promised to those who accept God’s gospel .

3. Spiritual Formation in Love for God Above All:

A. Love Involves Affectivity. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* Aquinas expounds John 6: 65 in a way that opens a door to an affective aspect of belief Aquinas

¹ See Michael S. Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005). Sherwin discusses Aquinas on faith mainly in chapter 4, “Intellect and Will in St. Thomas’s Theology of Faith,” 119-146. He reports a scholarly consensus on two things. First, in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas analyzed the movement of intellect by will in terms of a thinking about what had been heard in preaching while later in *On Truth* the act of will was prompted by a known good, 139-144. Second, by the time of the *Summa*, after acquaintance with the Second Council of Orange’s condemnation of semi-Pelagianism (people prepare for and initiate faith, God completes it) and his discovery of Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics* (intellect and will are moved to act by God) he taught movement of the will by grace, 141. The role of grace is unmistakably clear in 2a2ae 6, 1-2.

remarks that, “An interior *instinctus* also impels and moves us to believe. Thus, the Father draws many to his Son by an *instinctus* of divine operation moving the human heart interiorly to believe....”.² If the whole Gospel of John including John 15-17 enters the picture to fill out what the Father’s drawing and the divine operation are like, then Christ’s own engaging of people with respect, love, care, and without coercion indicates that the meaning of Aquinas’s terms “*instinctus*,” has to do with a gentle, affective suasion by the Holy Spirit opening hearts to love for God within those open to hearing the gospel. What Aquinas grasped in theology about love in faith also entered Christian life in the praxis of spirituality, for example in the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola.

B. Spiritual Formation of Affectivity in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

In the 16th century, grounded in a spiritual formation at the direct hand of God through mystical experiences joined with trial and error, St. Ignatius Loyola while a layman initiated a path of spiritual formation for others known as the “Spiritual Exercises.” They are ways of examining conscience, meditating, contemplating, vocal and mental prayer and other spiritual activities. They are a propaedeutic to God’s own teaching of the person. They dispose a person, called a ‘soul’ by Ignatius, to, in his language, “rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul.” Ignatius divided the Spiritual Exercises into Four Weeks, one on coming to know our sinfulness and to appreciate God’s mercy. That Week is followed by a meditation on the Kingdom of Christ that asks “of our Lord the grace not to be deaf to His call, but prompt and diligent to accomplish His most holy will.” A Second Week looks to the public ministry of Christ

² Aquinas, *Super Joannem*, 6.5.

in the New Testament, the Third Week to His passion and crucifixion, and a final Fourth Week to the resurrection.

C. Affectivity Formed by Love for God Above All. The whole spiritual praxis revolves around but cannot produce a unique conversion so subtle and so suited to a person that only the direct influence of the Creator brings it about. But what does Ignatius mean by “inordinate attachments,” liberation from which opens a person to the guidance of God. They are affective pre-commitments that steer us. Ignatius moves from the centrality of love in Christina life to the role of affections as the operation of that love. Not turning to our idealized version of who we are or want to be, do our actual desires, demands, inclinations, aversions, fears, and hopes etc steer us in the direction of God or to an exaggerated love for some creature is the question.

What are those affective dynamics within us? Making the Spiritual Exercises in prayer and discernment lets the Holy Spirit stir movements in human affections responding to Scriptural texts or moving a person as a mood that then can be noticed and related positively or negatively to the Christian way. Attention to God acting in the affective realm is a significant part of how a person can be led by God to Christian freedom in making decisions that pertain to following Christ in his mission of work for the Kingdom, his suffering, death, and resurrection.

D. Examples of Disordered Affections. What might be some examples of “inordinate attachments” or “disordered affections”? The implied alternative is not apathy, not an absence of spontaneous attractions or felt orientations, but affectivity renewed and re-organized by love for God and salvation above all things.

- 1) Suppose a parent has so overwhelming a desire for financial success that he or she neglects spouse and children in order to concentrate almost exclusively on increasing wealth. That likely is an inordinate attachment to wealth, which doesn't say wealth is bad.

- 2) Suppose a young person wants to be as thin as possible, and does not eat much to the point at which the person is skin and bones. That likely signifies an inordinate attachment to a specific self-image exemplified by runway models, which doesn't say high fashion or being slender is bad.

- 3) Suppose a graduate student has so much work that he or she feels regular Sunday worship just is not feasible and disconnects from a faith-community. Apart from exceptions or exceptional circumstances this practice might well indicate inordinate attachment to success in studies, not that hard, diligent work or academic success is bad.

- 4) Suppose someone has a grand-daddy of disordered affections in an out-of-control addiction to alcohol, or drugs, or sex, or Internet pornography. That person probably is not ready to make the Spiritual Exercises, which are not a problem-solving mechanism, but definitely needs some external assistance to regain some equilibrium and come into alignment with a peaceful path to God and salvation. Addiction is inordinate attachment writ large.

D. 'First Principle and Foundation'. What differentiates a spontaneity that is disordered from one that is on the right path? The criterion at the start of the Spiritual Exercises sounds like the catechism answer to the question, why did God make me? Another way to look at it is as a *praxis* of the First Commandment in more detail. At the outset of the

Spiritual Exercises Ignatius presents what he calls the First Principle and Foundation for everything that follows. It runs this way:

- ✚ “Man [we are] is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord and by this means to save [our] his soul[s].
- ✚ The other things on the face of the earth are created for [us] man to help in attaining the end for which [we] he is created.
- ✚ Hence, [we] man is to make use of them in as far as they help in attaining [our] his end, and [we] he must rid [ourselves] himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to [us] him.
- ✚ Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.
- ✚ Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.”

4. Ecumenical Mischief: Is Aquinas a Protestant?

A. Protestant Theology Is Dialectical: Much Protestant theology has a dialectical structure that emphasizes to great effect that, as Helmut Thielecke stated, “Faith believes *against* as well as *in*” (*Modern Faith and Thought*, 7) Consequently theology has what he calls a “polar structure.” One pole is belief in the gospel and a positive theological exposition of the content of faith. The other pole is negative critique of historically

various spirits of the age that contradict faith. Belief is always believing in the gospel and disbelieving some rival outlook or value-orientation, such as.

David Tracy too locates negative dialectics as a primary dynamic in much Protestant theology. That is, faith and theology involve not only affirmation of belief but negations of “human efforts to save oneself, the negation of all poisonous dreams of establishing easy continuities between Christ and culture, the negation of all claims to a deluded self-propelling ‘progress’ within society and culture, the negation of all aesthetic, ethical, and ‘pagan’, religious possibilities” (*The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, 415).

For Aquinas and his followers on the other hand faith would seem to be all about passage from non-belief to belief in the gospel without attention to specific, concrete rival claimants for one’s allegiance. In that tradition there seems to be no believing *against* something that accompanies believing *in* the gospel. In Aquinas’s tradition what alternative did conversion to Christ oppose? Non-belief does not have a precise historical identity even though ostensibly he wrote the *Summa Contra Gentiles* to set forth truths held in faith against the other two monotheisms, Judaism and Islam. However a missionary or apologetic purpose in that work has come into doubt, replaced by a purpose to set forth kinds of truth, from truths accessible to human reason to those accessible only in revelation and faith. So it would seem that Aquinas does not conceive belief *in* the gospel to be belief *against* some spirit of the age, to borrow Thielecke’s phraseology. Nonetheless, in my view a dialectical principle has an unnoticed place within Aquinas’s understanding of faith, as I will point out.

B. Aquinas's Analysis of Faith Too Contains a Dialectical Principle: For Aquinas belief is an act of assent to the totality of the gospel or to a specific article of faith. Yet in this analysis every assent is also a dissent because assent is “adherence to one of two contradictories,” belief or non-belief. Non-belief might take the form of a stalling doubt about the gospel being true, or an enervating suspicion that it might not be true, or a lightly-held opinion that it is true but only on someone's say-so and without moving into commitment to the gospel. The act of belief dissented from these alternatives which like belief too arose in the absence of demonstrative knowledge. Faith, the act of belief, dissented from doubt, suspicion, and opinion. Belief enacted dissent as well as took the gospel to heart. Belief rejected and not just ignored alternatives contradictory to faith and to the gospel.

Still, a difficulty is that Aquinas left that contradictory position of non-belief implicit. T.C. O'Brien notes in reference to 2a2ae 2, 1 that assent “does not mean that two contradictories are proposed explicitly....”³ The alternative to belief is implied not explicit. Nonetheless, every judgment or assent, not only that of faith, is “the intellect's auto-resolution of an implicit option.” O'Brien points to the fact that every assent opts for a true proposition and in doing so rejects or dissents from a false contradictory. Aquinas's non-belief remains unformulated, unnamed, and without historical particularity.

Nevertheless, that implied dissent has ecumenical implications because it allows for historically-conscious development of what in a given cultural context the assent of belief

³ T. C. O'Brien, “Appendix 4. Belief: Faith's Act (2a2ae. 2, 1 & 2),” in Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31, *FAITH (2a2ae. 1-7)* 205-215 at 209.

is *against* when it is *in* the gospel. Catholic development of Aquinas on this point could learn from Protestant development of a more dialectical theology.

5. A Statement on Academic Life as a Vocation:

In an academic life a Christian answers a call to human, divine, and for theologians, Christian wisdom. Whatever the discipline, an academic life is being in love with expressed meaning, truth, value, and practice that actualizes the redemption of reason within a horizon of loving faith. The Lordship of the creating and saving Word/Son of God envelops, blesses, and yet also keeps academic activities of teaching and research accountable to the revealed purposes of human existence.

Research puts a Christian into a demanding life-style that is or can be a 'spiritual sacrifice' offered with Christ in prophetic zeal for knowledge, truth, wisdom, and value that overcome a dimming of mind due to original sin. A person teaching in a personal horizon of faith assists in bringing about a wider, gradual, reforming effect in society. Educated Christians and others are in a position to support practices, policies, institutions, and meanings that recognize a creative, transcendent dimension in human existence, that more nearly approximate a rough sketch of the kingdom of God, and that more fully accommodate a healthy family life, friendships, and a flourishing civic society. Faith fortifies reason in resistance to reduction of people to means, life to competition, culture to an economy, politics to manipulation, truth to slogans, values to satisfactions.

6. A Final Consideration: Is There A Faithful Doubt?

A. Frank D. Rees's *Wrestling with Doubt: Theological Reflections on the Journey of Faith*

B. Response

2.

1. Opening Statement: Some academics but not all are Christians. There are Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, secularist, atheist academics. Some Christians but not all are academics. Except for Theology, an academic specialization is not specifically Christian in method and content. For those who are Christian and non-theological academics, how do the Christian and the academic fit together? Can academic life be a Christian vocation for them? A short answer for disciplines other than Theology is that, yes, academic life is a vocation that actualizes our creaturely existence precisely in a relationship with the creating Logos through Whom we and all creation come to be.

Embarking on an academic life ordinarily does not occur simply from reviewing a catalogue of possible jobs in a high-school guidance counselor's office. Nor does an undergraduate major in the sciences or humanities, then advance into graduate studies spring directly and only from someone's belief in the gospel and in Jesus. Many people who are not Christian similarly undertake advanced studies, and many Christians do not.

Studying in such a way as to end up qualified for graduate studies takes its rise as a falling in love with knowledge, truth, meaning, value in some specialized field or discipline. The love arises in a person's response to particular teacher(s), texts, statements, experiences, conversations, research, or attainment of theoretical knowledge, etc. But these particulars intimate further true judgments, meaning and value that lie beyond one's present grasp but that are attainable. That falling in love

is a process of an appropriating of one's own creaturehood. Academic life is a way of being in love with truth.

What is Christian about being in love with truth in a specialized area of knowledge?

Academic life, which is not specifically Christian, also can be par excellence a Christian vocation. Here's why. The created light of reason, self-presence, the transcendental of subjectivity (Rahner), intentional consciousness (Lonergan) enables activities of mind in various academic specializations. That light of reason, contrary to most modern ideas of what reason is, signals dependence on God. With Aquinas we can say that the light of reason is the imprint in humanity of the creating Logos through Whom we have come to be (John 1:1-14). Our interior light of understanding is a primary, creaturely relationship with the creating Logos. Our faith in the incarnate Logos, Jesus, through Whom we are saved elevates and fulfills that created relationship by bringing it into the realm of witness to Jesus as the

The assent was midway between holding an opinion as truth learned from others (Jesus, apostolic witnesses, New Testament authors, early councils, preachers) and arrival at 'scientific' knowledge of a truth from evidence or argument in light of known principles (a conclusion in geometry from geometrical premises for example). Nonetheless, unlike opinion and with greater excellence than certainty in conclusions from human knowledge, propositions received in faith were how believers gained truth with a certainty coming from God, although the many composed truths of faith cannot fully or adequately communicate the simplicity and unity in the undivided First Truth Who is God.

The act of believing differed from these three and not only in content. Upon hearing the Word of God a person assenting in faith came to the firm conclusion that, for example, the gospel was saving truth from God. But coming to that conclusion after earlier pondering of the matter did not follow ineluctably from initial or eventual, additional evidence or argument. Rather, in the absence of results of an inquiry then or ever delivering rational certainty about the content of faith

4 Themes & Terms: Love & Faith—motive, act, content, light, way of life.

Motive=graced love for God; act=graced assent to gospel moved by love with hope; content =God's Word in Christ; 'light'=interpretative capacity of faith; way of life=discipleship. In faith the whole person freely repents and believes the gospel as divinely revealed in Christ and lived in community.

What 'moves' someone to belief in the gospel and in Christ? Touched by grace evoking love for God=motive. The motive is not transient but remains as a new relationship with God dependent on God's grace.

What happens in the act of believing? Surrendering to God and love for God, a person gives an assent, agrees to, accepts, takes as true and real, believes in what God reveals, above all the person, words and deeds of Jesus=act. Communion with God results from the act of belief and baptism into the Body of Christ.

What is believed? What God, Christ, Scripture, church, preacher presents about what God has done in Christ for us=content.

How does faith or belief affect the life of the believer? In addition to new truth, meaning, and values, the act and content of faith become a 'light', a supreme interpreting perspective, an enveloping horizon opening a believer to moving in the direction of the mind and heart of Christ.

Discipleship=the common way of life into which faith and baptism bring a person

Reason =act and content; activities of mind from experience through judgment to decision, the enabling 'light' in which the activities arise, and outcomes of those activities; 'light' of reason =self-presence, or the transcendental of subjectivity (Rahner), or transcendental notions (Lonergan) generating intentional consciousness.