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Book Review

The Great Life: Essays on Doctrine and Holiness in Honor of Father Ronald Lawler, O.F.M. Cap. Michael Aulina and Kenneth Ogorek, Eds., Emmaus Road Publishing, Steubenville, OH 2005

When one opens this "Festschrift" in honor of Father Lawler – priest, teacher, author, theologian, catechist, spiritual advisor, mentor and friend, one can "hear" Father Ronald's always joyous voice echoing in the writings of many friends. From Bishop Donald Wuerl's Foreword to the life of his co-editor of *The Teachings of Christ* to the individual chapters, each reflects the love and esteem for this very learned priest who had reached such simplicity that he could approach, and respond to those in high and low places with equal ease. Two of his Capuchin students, Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver, and Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston reflect their teacher's priorities, first, the teachings of Christ which must be passed on lovingly and joyously by the Church as Mother and Teacher (Chaput) but also with precision and completeness in catechesis (O'Malley). Each person is called to know God through his intellect in the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Eucharist which call us to a full sharing of Christ's life, a sharing which takes us out of ourselves and into the infinite mystery of God (Fr. Thomas Weinandy). Katrina Zeno traced her path to preparing people for confirmation, a path which required that she understand it first, again helped by Fr. Lawler. Russell Shaw expanded on the neglected aspect of each person's particular vocation as a Christian which precedes a vocation to a state of life. Scott Hahn wrote of his deepening understanding of men's universal call to fatherhood, whether in family or clerical life. Jan and Brian Benested expanded on the heart of Catholic social teaching which only makes sense if one first understands one's own God-given dignity and the nature of the personal moral life before one can attain an understanding of social justice and select one's area of insertion to practice it.

Robert George explained Church teaching on direct killing of innocents and applied this to the situation of Catholic politicians who, aware of this obligation nevertheless legislate in favor of abortion. He examines the bishop's obligation to a member of his flock who must be warned of serious peril to his eternal salvation, as well as the weakening of regard for the moral law which results when scandalous behavior is not challenged. The morality of homeschooling is examined by Gerald Bradley in light of an earlier ecclesial pronouncement which insisted that parents were obliged to send their children to the parish school if available. Bradley finds that parents, who are the primary educators of their children,

are the final arbiters in this matter, after having weighed all pertaining factors. (Many of Fr. Lawler's friends homeschool their children, at considerable sacrifice of time and energy.)

William May, a renowned moral theologian who, with Father Lawler and Joseph Boyle, wrote *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, contributed an insightful chapter on John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, with fresh insights drawn from his life-long study of the field. His explanation of the structure of JPII's work, going back to the original texts, is the more insightful, in light of the more recent analysis of the original Polish text which Michael Waldstein has just published.

Father Lawler was a strong and joyous supporter of all of us who worked in Natural Family Planning. The chapter on the biological justification of *Humanae Vitae* by John and Evelyn Billings reflects the encouragement for seeking the truth, which Father gave to us physicians, and which Paul VI had requested from us with prophetic insight. The Billings, like many, have given their lives to this work, and often drew on Father Ronald's support and encouragement.

Father Augustine DiNoia O.P., now with the CDF in Rome, was mentored by Father Ronald in the critical connection between doctrine and catechesis, which demands a confluence of doctrinal and biblical sources. The synthesis is the new Catechetical directory which has as its task the closing of the many lacunae left to the post-conciliar generation who did not receive adequate grounding in either scripture or doctrine. Father Kris Stubna, Secretary for Education in the Pittsburgh diocese, expanded on this theme. Pat Riley recalls the challenge by Cardinal Wright to write a proper catechism, a challenge which became *The Teachings of Christ*, edited by Frs. Ronald Lawler, Donald Wuerl, David Maloney and Mr. Thomas Comerford Lawler. This catechism is still selling thousands of copies in many languages. William Saunders found that Father embodied catechesis by his life, and helped him find his way into the Church. The topic is expanded in Father's own essay, "Has Christ only One Church?" in which he explains the conciliar statement that Christ subsists (fully) in the Catholic Church, but that all Christian communities belong to Christ and are also instruments of salvation for their members. One has to have known Father, to know his deep love of the Church, his deep love and affection for all he met as members of Christ, to know that he was truly the Lord's man, and as such, was, as a true Franciscan, an instrument of His peace.

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