

## NEW THINGS AND OLD: JUSTICE AND FRIENDSHIP IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

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The Kingdom of God is a realm of peace, Pope Benedict XVI told his weekly audience on October 26 [2011]. The papal audience took an unusual format, incorporating a prayerful reading of the Scriptures as well as the Pope's usual weekly talk. The Pontiff used the event to begin prayerful preparation for the inter-faith pilgrimage to Assisi that will take place on October 27.

*As Christians we are convinced that prayer is the most precious contribution we can make to the cause of peace*", the Holy Father said in his homily. "For this reason we, the Church of Rome and pilgrims from elsewhere, are gathered here today to listen to the Word of God and to invoke the gift of peace."<sup>1</sup>

When I was invited to speak to the 2012 meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, a meeting looking forward towards the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publishing of Pope John XXIII's encyclical letter, *Pacem in*

<sup>1</sup>*Catholic World News* October 26, 2011. [Internet]; lettering in italics is my addition. – I continue the quotation from that article: "The papal audience had been scheduled to take place in St. Peter's Square, but rain forced a move to the Paul VI auditorium. Because that building could not seat the entire crowd, some people were escorted into St. Peter's basilica, and the Pope held a separate audience there as well. The Pope centered his remarks on the idea of the Kingdom of God. The prophet Jeremiah looks toward a king who brings salvation, the Pope noted, but this king does not base his authority on the force of arms. 'This is a gentle king who reigns with humility and gentleness before God and man, a king quite different from the great sovereigns of the earth'. Jesus fulfills this prophecy, the Pope continued: 'He is a poor king, the king of the poor of God... He is a king who will make the chariots and steeds of battle disappear, who will break the weapons of war, a king who brought peace on the Cross, uniting heaven and earth and building a bridge between all mankind'. This Kingdom is universal, the Holy Father remarked. 'The horizon of this poor and meek king is not the territorial horizon of a state, it is the confines of the world'. Those who are united in Christ, he said, comprise 'a single kingdom of peace in a divided world'. To enter into that kingdom, the Pope said, requires a spiritual journey. 'It is not with power, force or violence that Christ's kingdom of peace grows, but with the giving of self, with love carried to its extreme consequences, even towards our enemies'. Pointing to the statue in St. Peter's Square of St. Paul holding a sword, the Pope observed that this was the instrument of the Apostle's martyrdom. He concluded with the thought: '*It is not the sword of the conqueror that builds peace, but the sword of those who suffer and give up their own lives*'".

*Terris*,<sup>2</sup> and aiming “... to prepare materials that may be helpful to the Church’s observance of this anniversary”, the placing of my talk among the speakers on the very last day already carried the program heading: “Toward a Catholic Understanding of Global Order for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Principles and Practice”. The talks in the group to precede my own were all placed under a general subheading: “Global Governance”. My talk and that following my own were placed under a new general subheading: “Justice and Charity”, and the 30 minute slot provided for my contribution was already headed: “The New Format for Social and Political Virtues in the Globalized Society”. Professor R. Brague was already scheduled as speaking of “Justice in the Globalized World” in the 30 minutes following my own talk. This seemed to indicate a hope that I would speak of a new “format” for charity in a globalized world. Accordingly, I proposed the title: “New Things and Old: Justice and Friendship in the Global Village”, thus giving it a turn that involves the Gospel, charity as friendship (for me a reminiscence of Gerald B. Phelan), and a touch of Marshall McLuhan.

The Gospel connection with “new things and old” is evident.<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, in presenting the theological virtue of charity, makes as his first essential point that charity is *amicitia*, friendship, and not just any friendship, but friendship of the human being with God, the God who loves us with a friendly love, and calls us to share in his own eternal life.<sup>4</sup> Aiming towards the promised eternal life is what constitutes the Catholic;<sup>5</sup> thus, Thomas, at ST 2-2.4.1, presenting a definition of the theological virtue of faith, in rephrasing the Scriptural definition given in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, xi, 1, viz. “What is faith? It is that which gives substance to our hopes, which convinces us of things we cannot see”<sup>6</sup> makes the following determination:

<sup>2</sup> Officially published Maundy Thursday, April 11, 1963 (as noted in Russell Hittinger’s *Introduction* to the programme for the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, XVIII Plenary Session, *The Global Quest for Tranquillity of Order, Pacem in Terris, Fifty Years Later*, p. 3).

<sup>3</sup> *Mt.* 13.52.

<sup>4</sup> See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [henceforth “ST”] 2-2.23.1: the treatment of charity and its associated topics extends from q. 23 to q. 46, a matter of 144 pages in the Ottawa edition.

<sup>5</sup> See ST 1.1.1, where the need for divine revelation of the goal of human life is the starting-point for Thomas’s teaching. Cf. also. ST 3.57.6. *ad* 3: ... Christ, by ascending once into heaven, obtained for himself and for us the perpetual right and dignity [*ius et dignitatem*] of the heavenly dwelling.

<sup>6</sup> Here I use the translation of Ronald Knox, in *The Holy Bible, A Translation of the Latin Vulgate in the Light of the Hebrew and Greek Originals*, London, 1957: Burns and Oates, Macmillan and Co., Ltd. – The Latin is: “... est autem fides substantia sperandarum rerum, argumentum non apperentium”.

Therefore, if someone wanted to rephrase such words in the form of a definition, he could say that faith is a habit of mind by which *eternal life is begun in us*, making the intellect assent to things that are not apparent...<sup>7</sup>

I mention one of my teachers, Monsignor Gerald Phelan, a priest of the Archdiocese of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and one of the founders, along with Etienne Gilson and the Basilian Fathers of Toronto, of what became the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. Mgr. Phelan, in a paper entitled “Justice and Friendship”, originally published in *The Thomist* in 1943, speaks of the difference between Aristotle’s conception of the relation of humans to God and that of Christianity, wherein the call is to share in God’s own beatitude, *friendship* with God beginning already in this present life.<sup>8</sup>

However, I do not mean to give the impression that Phelan’s paper was a mere contrast between the Greeks and Christianity. It was much more a presentation of how important the realities of justice and friendship were to Plato and Aristotle, and how St. Thomas took them further in the presentation of Christian truth, but that they subsequently have been forgotten by the intellectual and political elite of the 1940s when he is writing. He tells us:

In this paper I propose briefly to discuss two of these basic concepts, which modern men have either completely lost or distorted beyond all recognition, viz. the concepts of justice and friendship – those two virtues which pagan Greece and pagan Rome regarded as essential to sound social life and which the sublime teachings of Christian revelation, particularly as expressed in the philosophy and theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, transformed into forces of incredible beneficence and elevated to a realm of efficacy transcending, while preserving intact, the whole order of man’s temporal social and political life. Our Holy Father the Pope has sadly noted the fact that men no longer understanding the true meaning of the words justice, charity, and

<sup>7</sup> ST 2-2.4.1 (ed. Ottawa, 1427a49-b2): Si quis ergo in formam definitionis huiusmodi verba reducere velit, potest dicere quod fides est habitus mentis, qua inchoatur vita aeterna in nobis, faciens intellectum assentire non apparentibus.

<sup>8</sup> See G.B. Phelan, *Selected Papers*, edited by Arthur G. Kirn, C.S.B., Toronto, 1967: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, pp. 213-230: Justice and Friendship – The bibliography of Phelan in this book, at item 51, tells us that this paper was published in *The Thomist* 5 (1943), 153-170 – In Phelan’s footnote #1, he tells us: This paper, the substance of which was given as the St. Thomas Aquinas lecture, 1942, at the College of the Sacred Heart, Manhattanville, was written at the suggestion of M. Jacques Maritain after a long conversation about justice and friendship in the teachings of Aristotle and St. Thomas.

friendship. The consequence is that our leaders, thinkers, responsible guides, and legitimate rulers are at a loss to find a stable basis upon which the upbuilding of a just and peaceful human order of society could even be envisaged, much less actually accomplished.<sup>9</sup>

Things have hardly improved since the 1940s.

Another of my teachers and friends, Marshall McLuhan, (whose conversion to Catholicism was certainly directed in important part by his meeting Mgr. Phelan)<sup>10</sup> taught us to reflect upon the new instantaneity of communication, and take *global* influences (both good and bad) seriously.

I aim, then, in my contribution, to speak of the theological virtue of charity, particularly as it must characterize our answering the challenge issued by Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in terris*. Only so will our understanding of the chances for global order for the 21<sup>st</sup> century be an authentically Catholic understanding.

Again, I begin my recalling of St. Thomas on charity with a bit of personal history. In doing so I mean to testify to the fruitfulness of correcting our adversaries. While I had much benefit from my teachers, still it was when I disagreed with the publication of a former fellow-student, Leslie Dewart, and undertook to express my disagreement in print, that I learned a most important lesson about the doctrine of St. Thomas on charity. Dewart, in his book entitled *The Future of Belief*,<sup>11</sup> had presented St. Thomas as conveying a doctrine of “spiritual hedonism”. Criticizing Dewart’s reading led me eventually to a study of St. Thomas’s ST 1.60.5: “whether an angel, by natural love, loves God more than its own self”. This led me to a new appreciation of the metaphysics of love in St. Thomas.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Phelan, *Op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>10</sup> On McLuhan’s conversion to Catholicism in 1936–1937, and the role of Mgr. Phelan, see Philip Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan, the Medium and the Messenger, A Biography*, Toronto, 1990: Vintage Books, pp. 44–45 – Phelan, who at the time was president of the Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, wrote to McLuhan, who then was a teaching assistant in the English Department at the University of Wisconsin, because Phelan was impressed by an article on Chesterton published by McLuhan in a Dalhousie University (Halifax, N.S.) quarterly.

<sup>11</sup> Dewart, Leslie, *The Future of Belief*, New York, 1966: Herder and Herder.

<sup>12</sup> Originally titled: “Leslie Dewart and Spiritual Hedonism”, and published in *Laval théologique et philosophique* 27 (1971), 25–39 – This is now titled: “Is Thomas Aquinas a Spiritual Hedonist?” and is ch. 6 in my book, *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue: Essays in Thomistic Ethics*, New York, 2008: Fordham.

The general lesson is that it is natural for every creature, on its own level, to love God more than its own self.<sup>13</sup> Still, there are different levels of such love as regards the human being. By nature one loves God more than oneself, inasmuch as God is considered as the author of nature, while by the gift of grace and the supernatural virtue of charity, one loves God more than oneself inasmuch as God is the author of supernatural beatitude.<sup>14</sup> This doctrine, already carefully spelled out in ST 1.60.5, is repeated in ST 1-2.109.3 and 2-2.26.3. Thomas obviously took it as foundational for one's view of the creature's relation to the Creator.

### Reading the Signs of the Times

*Here, by way of an appendix*, I propose to offer materials for a meditation on certain current situations. I am afraid that the situations I have in mind are not all occasions for reassurance, but testify to the need for the kind of planning that will help public order.

From my diary:

December 30, 2011

[Charles] Krauthammer has a very sobering column this week [in the Washington Post]. The general line is that we haven't been able to find human life elsewhere [in the universe], and the conclusion is that other humans in other parts of the universe have destroyed themselves, i.e. that intelligence has so far been self-destructive. He juxtaposes this with the sort of people who now have nuclear arms and the development of germ warfare that could be impossible to control.

I went to the archive and dug it out:

*Are we alone in the universe?* By Charles Krauthammer, Published: December 29 The Washington Post.

The general line of thinking is that we here on earth should by now have found much intelligent life in the universe, and yet we have not. Why not? The suggestion is that intelligent life, in terms of cosmic time, quickly eliminates itself. I quote in part:

... So why the silence? Carl Sagan (among others) thought that the answer is to be found, tragically, in the final variable: the high probability that advanced civilizations destroy themselves.

In other words, this silent universe is conveying not a flattering lesson about our uniqueness but a tragic story about our destiny. It is telling

<sup>13</sup> Original Sin has weakened the human natural inclination as regards our loving God more than our own selves (cf. ST 1-2.109.3, Ottawa edition, 1354b39-49).

<sup>14</sup> See ST 1-2.109.3. *ad* 1.

us that intelligence may be the most cursed faculty in the entire universe – an endowment not just ultimately fatal but, on the scale of cosmic time, nearly instantly so.

This is not mere theory. Look around. On the very day that astronomers rejoiced at the discovery of the two Earth-size planets, the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity urged two leading scientific journals not to publish details of lab experiments that had created a lethal and highly transmittable form of bird flu virus, lest that fateful knowledge fall into the wrong hands.

Wrong hands, human hands. This is not just the age of holy terror but also the threshold of an age of hyper-proliferation. Nuclear weapons in the hands of half-mad tyrants (North Korea) and radical apocalypticists (Iran) are only the beginning. Lethal biologic agents may soon find their way into the hands of those for whom genocidal pandemics loosed upon infidels are the royal road to redemption.

And forget the psychopaths: Why, a mere 17 years after *Homo sapiens* – born 200,000 years ago – discovered atomic power, those most stable and sober states, America and the Soviet Union, came within inches of mutual annihilation.

Rather than despair, however, let's put the most hopeful face on the cosmic silence and on humanity's own short, already baleful history with its new Promethean powers: Intelligence is a capacity so godlike, so protean that it must be contained and disciplined. This is the work of politics – understood as the ordering of society and the regulation of power to permit human flourishing while simultaneously restraining the most Hobbesian human instincts. ...

Another item, concerning something more directly observable, I owe to Mark Steyn. Item from SteynOnline [the title being “Weird Politics”] *National Review's Happy Warrior*, March 20, 2012.

He presents the fact that there was considerable agreement among people on the right as well as on the left that the candidate Rick Santorum was “weird”, and uses it to locate the real “weirdness” in present-day society. [It is I who introduce the italics on two key passages so that the reader will not overlook Steyn's very sarcastic but entirely just assessment of the situation].

As Congressman Mike Pence said a year or two back, “To those who say we should simply focus on fiscal issues, I say you would not be able to print enough money in a thousand years to pay for the government you would need if the traditional family collapses”.

But Pence's doomsday scenario is already here: What “traditional” family? Seventy percent of black children are born out of wedlock, as are

70 percent of the offspring of poor white women, as are a majority of Hispanic babies. Forty percent of American children are born outside marriage; among women under 30, a majority of children are. Well, so what? It's the same in Scandinavia, isn't it? Well, not quite. Our progeny are fatter, sicker, riddled with childhood diabetes. Dennis Prager wrote a couple of years ago that Obama saw the United States as a large Sweden. A large Sweden is a contradiction in terms, and out there in the Dependistans of America we're better at being large than being Swedish. Well, okay, say the Santorum detractors, but you guys are supposed to be the small-government crowd. Why is this any business of the state? A fair point, but one that cuts both ways. Single women are the most enthusiastic constituency for big government: A kiss on the hand may be quite continental, but statism is a girl's best friend. One can argue about whether the death of marriage leads to big government or vice versa, but simply raising the topic shouldn't put one beyond the pale, should it?

*Let's take it as read that Rick Santorum is weird. After all, he believes in the sanctity of life, the primacy of the family, the traditional socio-religious understanding of a transcendent purpose to human existence. Once upon a time, back in the mists of, ooh, the mid-20th century, all these things were, if not entirely universal, sufficiently mainstream as to be barely worthy of discussion. Now they're not. Isn't the fact that conventional morality is now "weird" itself deeply weird? The instant weirdification of ideas taken for granted for millennia is surely mega-weird — unless you think that our generation is possessed of wisdom unique to human history. In which case, why are we broke?*

Look, I get the problem with a Santorum candidacy. And I get why he seems weird to Swedes and Aussies, and even Americans. If you're surfing a news bulletin en route from *Glee* to *Modern Family*, Santorum must seem off-the-charts weird, like a monochrome episode that's been implausibly colorized from a show too old even for TV Land reruns. It would be healthier to thrash these questions out in the culture, in the movies and novels and pop songs. But Hollywood has taken sides, and the Right has mostly retreated from the field. And somebody has to talk about these things somewhere or other. Our fiscal crisis is not some unfortunate bookkeeping accident that a bit of recalibration by a savvy technocrat can fix. In the United States as in Greece, it is a reflection of the character of a people. *The problem isn't that Rick Santorum's weird, but that a government of record-breaking brokenness already busting through its newest debt-ceiling increase even as it announces bazillions in new spending is entirely normal.*

End of my quotation from Steyn.