

FROM EXTRINSICISM TO
A WORLD THAT DENIES BOTH
NATURE AND GRACE:
A POLYPHONIC ANALYSIS
OF SECULARISM¹

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“[I]t is no surprise that reason separated from faith ends up violently irrational, or that nature separated from grace ends up grotesquely unnatural, or that history separated from ontology ends up hostile to tradition and banal.”



Every speculative concept becomes internally dialectical the moment it is removed from its natural context, the moment it loses its relationship to its contrary concept.

—Robert Spaemann

1. This essay was first presented at the conference “Catholicity as Gift and Task: The 50th Anniversary of *Communio*,” St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry, Rochester, NY, October 2, 2022.

AN ANIMATING IDEA OF *COMMUNIO*

One of the earliest ideas animating *Communio* scholarship was Maurice Blondel's critique of extrinsicism—the intellectual habit of decoupling concepts that ought to be held in tension. Henri de Lubac used Blondel's critique to explain how theologians themselves contributed to the secularization of Western culture. As John Milbank, in his First Stanton Lecture, presented the theory, “Philosophy had become autonomous, not because pipe-smoking men in tweed had rebelled against men in clerical gowns, but because the men in clerical gowns had opened up that space for their own peculiar religious reasons.”² Consistent with this historical reading, amplified in the theology of Blondel and de Lubac, a hallmark of *Communio* theology is its opposition to the so-called “bastard dualisms” created by a sharp separation of nature and grace, faith and reason, history and ontology, body and soul. In contrast, a nondualistic *relational* mode of thinking is the frame through which scholars in the *Communio* circles analyze social pathologies. At the same time, the relational approach to these critical couplets supplies the building blocks for a theology of culture. Over the past half-century, the attention given by *Communio* scholars to the moves on the chessboard that have polarized the foundational couplets of Christian anthropology, or canceled them altogether, has deepened our understanding of secularism.

In addition to the opposition to extrinsicism, another hallmark of *Communio* scholarship is the spiritual bond that unites scholars across the international *Communio* circles. Antonio Sicari, OCD, noted this when he affirmed Luigi Sartori's statement that “the value of communion and communication among the greatest possible number of reflective believers, as if all were simultaneously in the circle, co-present today to form the gathering and assembly of today, stands at the foundation of this new conception of theology and of its method.”³

2. John Milbank, “The Return of Metaphysics in the 21st Century” (First Stanton Lecture, January 19, 2011, University of Cambridge, UK), available at http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_StantonLecture1.pdf.

3. Luigi Sartori, “Introduction” to Henri de Lubac's *Meditazioni sulla Chiesa* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1978), xiii–xiv.

With this reality of an international spiritual community in mind, this essay will offer a synthesis of the *Communio* contribution to the understanding of secularism, drawing on the research of scholars from across the Italian, French, German, and American editions of the journal.

AUGUSTO DEL NOCE

The Italian scholar who has contributed most to the understanding of secularism is Augusto del Noce (1910–89). The hallmark of his scholarship is tracking the influence of metaphysical presuppositions embedded in particular cultures or, he would say, embedded in history. As his English translator Carlo Lancellotti observes, del Noce “constantly goes back and forth in a dialectical process between historical situations and philosophical concepts, establishing deep and often surprising connections in a vast gallery of authors and ideas.”⁴ This is similar to the Blondelian approach to the relationship between history and dogma, except that del Noce focuses not so much on theological dogmatics as on philosophical concepts for his analysis.

Del Noce tracked the decoupling of the relationship between faith and reason from the demise of revelation to the triumph of instrumental reason and its embodiment in what he called the affluent society. He declared that the affluent society “represents the bourgeois spirit in its pure state, the bourgeois spirit triumphant over its two traditional adversaries, transcendent religion and revolutionary thought.”⁵ He believed that the affluent society was one that has accepted all of Marxism’s negations of contemplative thought, religion, and metaphysics, and thus it has accepted the Marxist reduction of ideas to instruments of production while simultaneously rejecting what were the more messianic or pseudo-religious aspects of Marxism.⁶ While many philosophers see liberalism and Marxism as alternative

4. Carlo Lancellotti, translator’s introduction to Augusto del Noce’s *The Age of Secularization* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), xiii–ix.

5. Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization*, 12–13.

6. *Ibid.*

moves on the chessboard, del Noce regarded the affluent society as the cultural embodiment of a fusion of ideas taken from these ideological twins of the so-called Enlightenment era.

His summary of these philosophical moves is as follows: first, the reduction of ideas to instruments of production promotes the elevation of science over philosophy; second, the demise of philosophy in turn entails a demotion of interiority; third, the demotion or suppression of interiority sets up the human person to accept/embrace a purely materialist (biochemical) approach to sexuality, voided of all sacrality, and thus sexual practices become lifestyle choices in which Greco-Christian conceptions of virtue are replaced by liberal conceptions of virtue. Finally, the affluent society becomes totalitarian as culture finds itself subordinated to politics.

The key motif in the last movement is what del Noce called sociologism. He defined this as the mentality that all ideas not subject to empirical verification are simply ideological constructions of class or other social power plays. Del Noce regarded sociologism as a major cause of moral relativism, but he did not view its triumph as a crisis for Christianity so much as a crisis for Kantianism, that is, the project of defending Christian ethics without reference to God. The fact that this crisis was not obvious, he thought, was partly due to Christian intellectuals who kept trying to breathe life into the Kantian project. In his preface to *The Age of Secularization*, he argued that, by going down this road, the attempt to defend Christianity at the bar of Immanuel Kant, “religious thought can only absorb the ideas that used to be the secularized version of itself, ultimately absorbing its own negation.”⁷

Del Noce concluded that, “for a large part of today’s religious thought, the quest for *aggiornamento* simply means surrendering to the adversary.”⁸ Moreover, he argued that Kant’s theologically autonomous moral framework cannot halt the slide into sociologism, and that slide or descent can take two pathways. The first he called the classical route—the argument that Kantian morality cannot withstand the Hegelian critique, which in turn cannot withstand the Marxist critique, and that Marxism in its

7. *Ibid.*, 5.

8. *Ibid.*, 7.

turn cannot “prevent its economistic and historical-materialistic aspect from turning completely into sociology.”⁹ The second route is the ruling idea of “being oneself” linked to concepts like self-development and authenticity. It too eschews the notion of a universal moral order. What del Noce calls “instruments to realize the ‘I’—the end of self-development projects—are ‘idols’ and expressions of each individual’s psychology and of the social world in which he lives.”¹⁰ In this sense, the “human sciences” replace ethics, and behold, we are back with sociology.

Sociologism then presents itself as the replacement of the political revolution by the scientific revolution. Del Noce explains,

In Rousseau as well as in Marx there is the idea of replacing religion with politics for the sake of human liberation, which is why both of them elevate politics to religion. Sociologism intends to be the replacement of the metaphysical form of thought with the scientific form, and relies much more on instruments of social diffusion and on pedagogy than on political revolution.¹¹

Antonio Gramsci’s political theory exemplifies this move to replace political revolution with pedagogy. Instead of fighting on the streets, in trade unions, political parties, or parliaments, he recommended that Marxists should focus on taking control of the switch points of cultural influence, such as schools, universities, publishing houses, and the media. Once these institutions had fallen to Marxist domination, the education of a generation, including the social elite of a generation, would be conducted according to Marxist conceptions of reason, ethics, freedom, and so on. Under these conditions, Christians would then be forced to take refuge in what del Noce called “moral catacombs,” presumably underground places where they can talk freely about their moral beliefs without fear of losing their jobs or general social standing.

Del Noce concluded that we are living through a clash between two different conceptions of life: one that acknowledges

9. *Ibid.*, 181.

10. *Ibid.*, 186.

11. *Ibid.*, 194.

a religious dimension, the “precondition that makes it possible for the act of faith to germinate in man, inasmuch as it is man’s natural aptitude for apprehending the sacred,” and the sociological approach that “reduces all conceptions of the world to ideologies, as expressions of the historical-social situation of some groups, as spiritual superstructures of forces that are not spiritual at all, such as class interests, unconscious collective motivations, and the concrete circumstances of social life.”¹² Given this situation, he believed that what matters is “the preservation of that religious dimension connatural to the human spirit which, on the one hand, is the only ground on which the action of grace can bear fruit and, on the other hand, is the only condition to save the world from catastrophe.”¹³

CLASHING CONCEPTIONS OF TRUTH

This clash between two different conceptions of life is the logical outcome of the primary clash of two different conceptions of truth. In an article published in the journal *Cross Currents* in 1973, the English theologian Charles Davis reported on what he perceived to be the enthusiasm of theologians in Holland and Belgium for the Frankfurt School’s critical theory. Karl Rahner had used the expression “gnoseological concupiscence” for the tendency of theologians in those times to connect elements of Catholic theology to novel conceptions of rationality, which were often discovered in quarters formerly regarded as hostile to the faith (e.g., journals of Marxist sociology). Dutch and Belgian theologians were particularly susceptible to this. The journal *Concilium*, from whose editorial board a young Joseph Ratzinger resigned, showcased the ideas of those whose thought became infected with critical theory. Davis succinctly points to the principle at issue:

Is theology, as [Edward] Schillebeeckx says, the critical self-consciousness of Christian *praxis*, or is [Leszek] Kołakowski right when he says: “Theology begins with the belief that truth has already been given to us, and its intellectual

12. *Ibid.*, 219.

13. *Ibid.*, 233.

effort consists not of attrition against reality but of the assimilation of something which is ready in its entirety?"¹⁴

Similarly, in *The Dutch and Their Gods*, James C. Kennedy argued that the greatest deadly sin for the Dutch in the 1970s "was a refusal to engage the world *on its own terms*" lest, in the words of one neo-Calvinist scholar, the Church become "a pietistic cell, a museum piece, an old city wall around which traffic is directed, a ghetto, an ivory tower, an exclusive club."¹⁵ Though he did not refer specifically to the Dutch and the Belgians, del Noce described so-called Catholic "progressives" as those who have "accepted the myth of the scientific explanation of present social reality."¹⁶ They are people for whom reason, in relation to faith, is represented by contemporary social theory. Sociology replaces philosophy, and, for many, Marx or one of his disciples replaces Plato. Del Noce observed that for both Marx and Nietzsche anti-Platonism and anti-Christianity coincide; thus, "starting from here one can find the formula that describes the error of the new Catholic Modernism: it wants to replace the agreement between Christianity and classical metaphysics with an agreement between Christianity and the philosophy of the primacy of action, which is intrinsically atheistic."¹⁷ By giving priority to *praxis*, "Catholic progressivism is forced to break with the entire tradition of the philosophers of 'participation': [namely,] Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and Antonio Rosmini. This means that such theology is radically novel, because it *transcribes the truths of Christianity within the categories that depend on the instrumentalist conception of the homo faber*."¹⁸ For

14. Charles Davis, "Theology and Praxis," *Cross Currents* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1973): 154–68, at 167.

15. James C. Kennedy, "Recent Dutch Religious History and the Limits of Secularization," in *The Dutch and Their Gods: Secularization and Transformation of Religion in the Netherlands since 1950*, ed. Erik Sengers (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2005): 27–42, at 35–36.

16. Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization*, 239.

17. Augusto del Noce, "The Roots of the Crisis," in *The Crisis of Modernity*, trans. Carlo Lancellotti (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 140n8.

18. Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization*, 251 (emphasis original). Here it is worth noting that the dominant criticism of Joseph Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity*, his best-selling work in the late 1960s, was that it was too Platonist.

this reason, liberal Catholicism ends up with a completely new list of virtues. As del Noce decodes their intent, “ascetic Christianity” must now be replaced by “secularized Christianity,” “in which the fullness of the virtues destined to advance the human condition will wipe away the passive and mortifying virtues (which they consider ‘repressive,’ even if they do not dare say that explicitly).”¹⁹ As del Noce concludes, this implies that Catholics must adopt a “new attitude toward sexuality,” one that represents a “complete reversal of the traditional Catholic position.”²⁰

Del Noce died in 1989, the year in which many thought that the battle against Marxism, at least in its European manifestation, was over. He recognized, however, that the victory was only partial because Marxism’s crude dialectical materialism and corresponding atheism are only part of the problem. Del Noce understood that after being freed from these typically “old left” elements of the Marxist cocktail, the Marxism of the “new left,” typified by people like Antonio Gramsci and the social theorists of the Frankfurt School, “reaches a much deeper form of irreligiosity than [a simple] atheistic negation, and in this form it allies itself with the bourgeois-secular spirit pushed to its final conclusion.”²¹ In short, contemporary liberal Catholicism is built upon this alliance of the bourgeois-secular spirit with forms of “new left” Marxism. It is logical, therefore, that liberal Catholic attacks on the tradition of moral theology, and especially the moral theology of St. John Paul II, almost always take the form of an appeal to the social sciences and a corresponding diminution of the authority of Sacred Scripture by recourse to the argument that the Scriptures are limited by their social contexts.

Today, some half-century after 1968, the project of re-educating Western humanity through the subordination of its cultural institutions to political ends and the redivinization of the political domain itself, a project that reverses the Augustinian separation of the political and the sacred, is playing itself out precisely according to del Noce’s predictions.

19. Del Noce, “The Ascendance of Eroticism,” in *The Crisis of Modernity*, 181.

20. *Ibid.*, 181.

21. Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization*, 242.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM FRANCE

Turning now from Italy to France, eldest daughter of the Church and home of many of the early luminaries of the *Communio* journal, a central theme of Rémi Brague's *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* is composed of the various forms taken by the confusion of the political and the sacred. Brague argued that, as a general principle, "the emergence of a profane domain, and its consequences in European history, including the possibility of 'secular' societies—and even of radical atheism—is made possible by the idea of incarnation."²² This is another way of saying that an analogy may be drawn between the Chalcedonian adverbs used to describe the relationship between Christ's divinity and Christ's humanity, and non-Chalcedonian approaches in political theory to the relationship between the political and the religious. There may be, for example, Monophysite constructions of the relationship between the religious and the political (typically found in Islamic states) or Nestorian conceptions typical of some forms of early liberal political theory, though not the most recent liberal theory that fosters the neo-pagan worship of the state as an idol.

Christianity, Brague observed, paradoxically "unites the divine and the human just where it is easy to distinguish them" and "distinguishes the divine and the human where it is easy to unite them."²³ Specifically, he argues that distinctions are easy at the level of ontology—for example, "nothing is easier than to oppose, term by term, the attributes of God and the characteristics of man"—and unity is easy when the two are assigned a domain of action, such as the domain of the sexual and the domain of the political.²⁴ Brague suggests that these facts give rise to "two symmetrical temptations: a certain way of separating the divine and the human, a certain way of uniting the divine and the human. One will separate the divine and the human where they are already separated by

22. Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 165.

23. *Ibid.*, 165.

24. *Ibid.*, 156.

their level of being. Inversely, one will unite them where they cooperate already.”²⁵

Brague believes that authentic Christianity resists these two temptations: it distinguishes the temporal and the spiritual, the religious and the political. It resists the temptation to absorb the political into the religious or the religious into the political. Moreover, it unites what other religious traditions seek to separate. Instead of “assigning to the divine and to the human distinct and incommunicable spheres, Christianity professes the incarnation.”²⁶ God enters into history, and the Paschal event is “perpetuated in the sacraments of the Church.”²⁷

This Catholic understanding of sacramentality is radically different from the Calvinist understanding of sacramentality. As Cardinal Charles Journet once explained, the Catholic conception is ontological while the Calvinist conception is mnemonic. For Calvinists, in other words, there is no ontological change, but merely a memorial. Brague concludes,

In this way [the way of Catholic sacramentality], the history of Christianity is not that of interpretations given to a foundation text. It is the history of the saints. In two senses: it is the history of the *sancta* (in the neuter), of the “holy things,” of the sacraments and of their effects; it is also the history of the *sancti* and of the *sanctae*, of the holy men and women who are the culmination of the Church’s effort to assimilate itself to Christ.²⁸

The same argument was made by Jean Daniélou in his *Essai sur le mystère de l’histoire*, where he remarked that Christians who live the sacramental life of the Church are the true vanguard of history.²⁹ Moreover, St. John Paul II, who, under the nose of communist officials, found a way of publishing a Polish edition of *Communio*, made the point in the first sentence of his first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis*, that Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of

25. *Ibid.*, 156–57.

26. *Ibid.*, 162.

27. *Ibid.*, 171.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Jean Daniélou, *Essai sur le mystère de l’histoire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953), 79.

man, is the center and end of human history. In this way, entirely consistent with the way that Brague and Daniélou read history, he countered the Marxist notion that material forces are the center of history. St. John Paul II endorsed the theological anthropology of Henri de Lubac as it found expression in paragraph twenty-two of the conciliar document *Gaudium et spes*, the paragraph that links anthropology directly to Christology and thus to the Trinity.

As examples of opposite understandings of history and human nature, Brague suggests that one can distinguish two Marcionite tendencies in the culture of modernity; one in relation to history and one in relation to nature.³⁰ Brague defines Marcionism as a movement of total rupture with the past. In his work *Moderately Modern*, he explained,

We love and defend nature to the extent that it constitutes a controllable domain that we can enjoy: as a reality, we take pleasure in nature mastered or set aside for our leisure, a place to stroll under the rubric of “landscape”; as a concept, we use nature as a reservoir of facts defined to relativize everything that is human, deemed to be purely “cultural.” On the other hand, we hate nature to the extent that we sense its presence within each of us, as what imposes its own rules on us. For that nature we have found a name designed to devalue it: the “biological.” We represent “culture” not as the development and flowering of nature (as in “agricultural”), but as a “wrenching” or “wrestling” from it.³¹

The modern approach to history is similarly schizophrenic, as Brague observes:

We love the historical past to the extent that it is held at a distance for us by a historical science that “prepares” it for us (as a butcher prepares a cow), and reduces it to the status of an object of knowledge. The past thus becomes what is other than us. It constitutes a kind of temporal landscape in which we can stroll in our imagination. . . . As with the natural past, we willingly use the historical past like a supermarket of outmoded anthropological models that

30. Brague, *Eccentric Culture*, 181.

31. Rémi Brague, *Moderately Modern* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2019), 35.

nourish our relativism. On the other hand, we distrust the historical past to the extent that we feel in ourselves the presence of something that more or less consciously determines us to a particular behavior; here too we have found a pejorative term and we speak of “traditional.” We thus represent historical development not as a creative extension of the past, but as an overcoming of it that should be continued.³²

Brague also tracks these Marcionite tendencies in his work *The Kingdom of Man: Genesis and Failure of the Modern Project*. Its theme is the transition from the humanism of the late scholastic era, which affirmed the inherent goodness of nature, the benevolence of God, and the convertibility of the transcendentals, to what Brague describes as the *exclusive* humanism of the nineteenth century and beyond. Exclusive humanism views nature as a project to be mastered, opposes man to God, and severs being from the good, and the good and the true, from one another. Brague endorses the paradoxical observation of the historian of liberalism, Pierre Manent, that the man of modernity claims to be natural without having a nature.³³ Such moderns, Brague suggests, have “become barbarians, no longer Hellenized barbarians, but barbarized Greeks, only half conscious of their own barbarism.”³⁴

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM BAVARIA

On this note we will move from France to Germany, or at least to Bavaria, since there is arguably no one in the constellation of theologians of the past century who has done more to defend the Greek contribution to the Catholic intellectual tradition and the culture it created than Joseph Ratzinger. For Ratzinger, it was a matter of divine providence, not a mere historical accident, that St. Paul went to Greece, and that there followed a synthesis of Hebraic, Christian, and Greek ideas.³⁵ Ratzinger

32. *Ibid.*, 35.

33. *Ibid.*, 26.

34. Brague, *Eccentric Culture*, 183.

35. Ratzinger points to the passage in the Acts of the Apostles (16:6–10) where St. Paul has a vision in a dream of a Macedonian imploring him, “Come

is not embarrassed to argue that Christianity is the religion of the Logos. He observes that “when the Gospel of John names Christ the *Logos*, . . . it means to say that the very foundation of being is reason, and that reason is not a random by-product of the ocean of irrationality from which everything actually sprang.”³⁶ It follows, then, that “the reasonableness of reality must be an essential part of the Christian faith.”³⁷ Further, the reasonableness of reality includes the reasonableness of ontology. Ratzinger believes that the “exclusion of ontology from theology does not emancipate philosophical thinking, but *paralyzes* it.”³⁸

Ratzinger does not begin his analysis of the separation between faith and reason in the eighteenth century but a few centuries earlier. In a lecture he delivered in 1985 in the Austrian province of Carinthia, he remarked,

I think that the path that led to this point begins with the massive changes brought about by the Renaissance. That is to say, it starts with the return to pre-Christian Greek ideals. By now, however, the world has changed, and those Greek ideals are no longer embedded within a mythical framework. Instead, the demythologization of the world by Christianity is something that people take for granted; at the same time, however, they are also beginning to leave the Christian God behind, or to push him to the periphery, seeing him as a deistic God. So this new path begins with the return of Greek ideals in a world that is no longer Greek; and, at the same time, with the rejection of the Christian worldview for the sake of the Greek. An example that is in some way quite symptomatic of this way of looking at things can be found in a statement by Galileo, who once said, in essence, that if nature does not voluntarily yield its secrets when we seek to wrest them from it, then we will subject it to torture and scrupulous interrogation; and

here and help us.” “Here” was Greece. For Ratzinger, this passage is scriptural evidence of the providential nature of the union of biblical revelation with Greek philosophy.

36. Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 148.

37. *Ibid.*, 149.

38. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding Its Role in the Light of Present Controversy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 22 (emphasis added).

in this racking inquisition, for which we have the proper instruments, we will force it [that is, force creation and reason] to give us the answers that we demand of it.³⁹

Ratzinger went on to remark that “this is quite an evocative definition of what would become of the natural sciences, with their tendency, as it were, to view nature as a criminal defendant who must be subjected to rigorous interrogation, even torture, if that is what it takes to produce a confession.”⁴⁰ He also noted that “it was not until after the Enlightenment that this new mentality acquired its concrete, epoch-defining form and then found its full political momentum with Karl Marx.”⁴¹

Of all the players on the Marxist team, the one who has received the greatest attention by Ratzinger is Ernst Bloch, who was Ratzinger’s academic colleague at the University of Tübingen. Ratzinger has expressed his opposition to Bloch’s understanding of hope and beauty. *Spe salvi* was, in part, his *summa contra* Bloch’s notion of hope. As for Bloch’s understanding of beauty, Ratzinger wrote,

[According to Bloch] beauty is not *splendor veritatis*, as Thomas says, the inner radiance of the truth, the truth shining through things, but the glimmer of the future. What is beautiful is that which shows us a glimpse of what is to come, the future toward which we are moving and which we ourselves are trying to build. And this is why [Bloch] says that the “cathedral of the future will be the laboratory,” that the “Basilicas of San Marco in the new era will be electric plants.”⁴²

Ratzinger concluded his reflections on Bloch’s understanding of hope and beauty and their relationship to truth with these words:

Personally, I am glad I will never have to experience those times; because then, so he claims, people will no longer need to distinguish between Sundays and work days;

39. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Divine Project: Reflections on Creation and Church*, trans. Chase Foucheux (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 59–60.

40. *Ibid.*, 60.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, 61.

there will no longer be any need for a Sabbath, because in every respect man will be his own creator. And he will also cease to be merely concerned with mastering nature or shaping it to his liking, but will understand nature itself as transformation. Here, perhaps precisely due to Bloch's skillful use of hyperbole or the directness of his poetic language, we find the very thing that threatens our age formulated with the rarest clarity.⁴³

In the final of his Carinthia lectures, Ratzinger also drew attention to the phenomenon noted by del Noce and Davis, cited above: the enthusiasm of Catholic theologians for Marxist sociology. Ratzinger spoke of "theologians and their communities becoming the most effective proponents of the neo-Marxist movement."⁴⁴ He remarked that there is an interesting paradox here:

It was only Marxism, at least in this particular situation, people thought, that could help the ailing field of theology back onto its feet and give it back its self-confidence as a true academic discipline. And it was only an influx of religious passion that could restore in Marxism, already scientifically and politically depleted outside those areas where it still held sway, the splendor of hope for humanity.⁴⁵

Countering the enthusiasm of some theologians for Marxist social theory, Ratzinger declared, "Because faith represents an ultimate bond to God, who is Truth, it provides man with norms for concrete social action within the social order; yet it is not in social or political praxis that the community of believers finds unity, but only in the truly binding nature of the truth itself."⁴⁶ Accordingly, Ratzinger is critical not only of the project to synthesize Christianity and Marxism but also of "a Christianity and a theology that reduce[s] the core of Jesus['] message, the 'kingdom of God,' to the 'values of the kingdom' while identifying these values with the main watchwords of political moralism, and proclaiming them, at the same time, to be the synthesis of all

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, 152.

45. *Ibid.*, 153.

46. *Ibid.*, 156.

religions.⁴⁷ On this practice of self-secularization, Ratzinger's fellow *Communio* founder, Hans Urs von Balthasar, remarked,

The Gospels and the Church are plundered like a fruit tree, but the fruit when separated from the tree goes rotten and cannot be used. The "ideas" of Christ cannot be separated from him, and hence they are of no value to the world unless they are fought for by Christians who believe in Christ, or at least by men who are unconsciously open to him within themselves and are dominated by him. Radiance is only possible if the radiating center remains constantly active and alive. Here there is no question of stars that have long become extinct continuing to shine.⁴⁸

Cardinal Angelo Scola, a luminary of the Italian *Communio*, drew the logical conclusion from this when he said that "only Christians can make the Antichrist possible since the Antichrist is possible only if he maintains a Christianity without Christ as the point of reference."⁴⁹

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ANGLOSPHERE

Moving now to the Anglosphere, the most important scholarship deepening our understanding of secularism has been published under the name of Schindler—both David L. Schindler and D.C. Schindler. David L. Schindler's achievement has been to take the theological insights of Balthasar—particularly his notion of the presence of a logos within every practice and culture, as well as Blondel's and de Lubac's critique of extrinsicism, the theological anthropology of St. John Paul II, and the nuptial mystery theology of Angelo Scola—and use these to analyze the spiritual pathologies of Western, and in particular American, culture. For David L. Schindler it is axiomatic that "nature is never neutral

47. Joseph Ratzinger, "Europe in the Crisis of Cultures," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 345–56, at 346–47.

48. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 174–75.

49. Angelo Scola, "'Claim' of Christ, 'Claim' of the World: On the Trinitarian Encyclicals of John Paul II," *Communio: Catholic International Review* 18, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 322–31.

with respect to religious form And thus the practice—the activities and productions—in and through which we extend nature into a culture are likewise never without a religious form.”⁵⁰ Following Bernanos and Balthasar, Schindler explains how “modern man” has taken on the form of the machine:

The link between the form of liberalism and the form of the machine is externality of relations. What the language of the machine brings out is the preoccupation with power (understood in terms of physical force or displacement of physical bodies) and technique, and control or manipulation, which results from such externally conceived relations. Or again, the language of the machine indicates the materialization of relations, in a Cartesian sense of matter: things and persons are approached as though they had only an “outside” as it were.⁵¹

Moreover, David L. Schindler’s work has been distinctive because the Anglosphere is heavily infused with Calvinist ideas. If del Noce had been writing in the United States or the United Kingdom, or in parts of the British Commonwealth, he would have had to contend with Calvinist thought patterns as deeply as he dealt with the influence of Marxism. David L. Schindler’s work has done this. Whereas del Noce tracked the cultural embodiment of Marxist metaphysics—or anti-metaphysics—in Europe, Schindler tracked the intellectual shock waves of Calvinism and their fusion with different strains of liberalism in the Anglosphere. Calvinism is as hostile to sacramentality as Marxism is hostile to truth.

David L. Schindler and his colleague Nicholas J. Healy Jr. also contributed to the *Communio* scholarship on secularism through their critique of the liberal readings of *Dignitatis humanae*, contrasting the interpretation of John Courtney Murray with a more Lubacian-Wojtylian reading. The liberal reading they reject assumes something like a Nestorian understanding of the relationship between Church and state.

D.C. Schindler’s achievement has been to track the mutations in the concept of human freedom, so central to liberal

50. David L. Schindler, “Grace and the Form of Nature and Culture,” in *Catholicism and Secularization in America: Essays on Nature, Grace, and Culture* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1990), 15.

51. Schindler, “Grace and the Form of Nature and Culture,” 18.

concepts of rights, in his works *The Perfection of Freedom* and *Freedom from Reality*. He notes that outside Christian circles there is a tendency for people to think that freedom is an end, all the while, however, they define it as a means. He writes,

If we make a means an end in itself, we do two things at once: we both eliminate its goodness and we elevate its status; we transform the absence of goodness into a purpose. Inside of this confusion of ends and means is therefore what we could justifiably call a kind of nihilism. To the extent that we exclude those features of freedom that would qualify it as an end, and at the same time continue to promote it as such even in this reduced form, our notion of freedom becomes a source of nihilism.⁵²

Alongside the work of the two Schindlers there is the contribution of Michael Hanby's *Augustine and Modernity*, which also deals with the subject of freedom. As Hanby wrote, "At issue within the culture of modernity is the Trinity itself and specifically whether the meaning of human nature and human agency are understood to occur within Christ's mediation of the love and delight shared as *donum* between the Father and the Son, or beyond it."⁵³ In his later work, *No God, No Science?*, and in his essay "The Descent of Man," Hanby also drew attention to the Darwinian reduction of being to history, as well as the reduction of conceptions of historical "progress" to the history of functional adaptation. Both moves presuppose and absolutize the Baconian reduction of truth to utility, and find themselves arriving at the same bus stop as the Marxian reductions of truth to utility.⁵⁴

Finally, in the Anglosphere, there have been the essays by Margaret McCarthy on the theology of gender distinctions. McCarthy has tracked the attack on sexual difference as a fact

52. D.C. Schindler, *The Perfection of Freedom: Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel between the Ancients and the Moderns* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2017), xiv.

53. Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 73.

54. See Michael Hanby, "The Descent of Man: On Evolution and the De-
volution of Nature, History, and Truth," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 46, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2019): 412–42, at 435. See also Michael Hanby, *No God, No Science? Theology, Cosmology, Biology* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016).

of human nature to its replacement by ideologies of so-called gender fluidity.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we take our cue from Robert Spaemann's words: "Every speculative concept becomes internally dialectical the moment it is removed from its natural context, the moment it loses its relationship to its contrary concept."⁵⁶ If this is so, then it is no surprise that reason separated from faith ends up violently irrational, or that nature separated from grace ends up grotesquely unnatural, or that history separated from ontology ends up hostile to tradition and banal, or that the body separated from the soul ends up as a machine, or that a "humanism" divorced from God ends up as an anti-humanism. The works of the above surveyed scholars show this to be true. As Balthasar insisted, "It is not only a part of the world that is redeemed by the Lord on the Cross and laid at the feet of the Father: rather, the whole of creation is to be recapitulated in him (1 Cor 15:24–28)."⁵⁷ □

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55. Margaret Harper McCarthy, "The Emperor's (New) New Clothes: The Logic of the New 'Gender Ideology,'" *Communio: International Catholic Review* 46, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2019): 620–59.

56. Robert Spaemann, "Nature," in *A Robert Spaemann Reader: Philosophical Essays on Nature, God and the Human Person*, ed. and trans. D.C. Schindler and Jeanne Heffernan Schindler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 30.

57. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 148–49.