

**Response to Tracey Rowland Lecture, “Faith, Reason and Love,”  
Scholarship at the Cathedral, Sydney, 6 September 2018  
David Collits**

Your Grace, Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP, Rev. Fathers and Sisters, Professor Tracey Rowland, distinguished ladies and gentlemen. Thank you to Professor Rowland and the organisers of this event for the invitation to respond to the lecture we have just heard. As is typical, we are indebted to Professor Rowland for traversing the ‘complex and tortuous’ terrain concerning the faith, reason and love relationship. She has guided us through the magisterial developments concerning the possibilities and limits of reason, and the new horizons for knowledge that faith and love generate, from *Dei Filius* to the ‘new theological epistemology’ of the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath, culminating in St John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio*. She has placed these developments within the context of what Fergus Kerr, in another of his works – *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* – describes as the move in twentieth century Catholic thought from neoscholasticism to its eclipse by nuptial mysticism.<sup>1</sup> We could add in between the important philosophical influences of personalism and existentialism, to which she also alluded. Her affirmation of the symphonic character of Catholic epistemology offers a decisive way forward in our present context.

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<sup>1</sup> Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), vii.

Professor Rowland suggestively quoted paragraph 34 of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. In connecting hope to the faith, reason and love relationship, she has opened up for us the core difference that separates a neo-Augustinian account of reason and the alternative epistemologies peddled in modernity, namely the former's affirmation that truth is "greater than we are", approachable ultimately only in love, and not manipulable by humanity.<sup>2</sup>

Let me attempt to explain how. As we heard, Benedict says that truth is not a product of our ingenuity and, like love, cannot be planned or willed. It comes to us in the manner of a gift. Likewise, in Joseph Ratzinger's mind, the idea that hope and its object – eternal life – cannot be produced by us, and so subject to our willing and planning, is what distinguishes a Christian account of hope from a Hegelian-Marxist one, which rests on a dialectical philosophy of history that purports to comprehend the meaning and direction of history.<sup>3</sup> The idea that hope and its object can only be received in the manner of a gift is alien to such a philosophy of history's immanentized hopes, which in various guises is still prevalent today, be it in the form of Cultural Marxism or in platitudinous desires to 'make poverty history' and the like.

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<sup>2</sup> CV, 34

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., Joseph Ratzinger, "On Hope," in *Joseph Ratzinger in Communio, Volume 2: Anthropology and Culture*, ed. David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), esp. 31-32.

More fundamentally, the Ratzingerian idea that truth, hope and love are ultimately beyond our capacity to produce, relates to a particular dimension of the Augustinian-Thomist account of the nature-grace relationship, which is broadly but not universally accepted. It correlates with the Gilsonian ‘intrinsic and symbiotic’ reading of the philosophy-theology relationship. Such a reading, to quote Hans Urs von Balthasar, sees “nature and grace *together* form[ing] a unity [in which] nature exists for the sake of grace and is ordered to it”.<sup>4</sup> It takes as its starting point the human person, as he concretely exists in an “indivisible world order” originating from the Word and directed to him as the Second Adam. According to this reading of the human desire for beatitude, the ‘real man’, to borrow Gilson’s phrase, has “only *one* end, a *supernatural* one”.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the “nature of created spirit is directed beyond itself”.<sup>6</sup> Put another way, the human spirit – a created spirit like the angels – has a natural desire for a supernatural beatitude unobtainable by its own powers. It thereby hopes for a gift, which only God can gratuitously give. Consequently, human nature – and human reason –paradoxically searches for a fulfilment ‘beyond itself’.

Professor Rowland pointed out that the nature-grace relationship is the broader context of the faith-reason one. Balthasar quotes Josef Pieper’s argument that genuine philosophy must step “beyond the border that divides philosophy from

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<sup>4</sup> Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Communio Books/Ignatius Press, 1992) 268; emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 267, 353.

<sup>6</sup> Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 268.

theology, faith and revelation”.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, Pieper argues that, in so doing, philosophy can make “statements of import... that [get] to the root of things”, but that such statements come not as a result of human striving to know but must be received or accepted. An epistemology along these lines links to the distinction of Pieper’s, to which Professor Rowland drew our attention, between *ratio* and *intellectus*. Pieper argues that the knowledge that comes from the simple intuition of *intellectus* gives the human mind “super-human” knowledge akin to that of the angels. The human mind is drawn out of itself into a vision that it cannot produce through *ratio*, human intellectual work. At play, then, is the dynamic of the natural being taken up into a reality greater than itself, even if such an elevation remains “truly human”.<sup>8</sup> Tellingly, Balthasar discusses Pieper’s elaboration of the philosophy-theology relationship in the context of elucidating twentieth century positions on nature and grace. He argues that the philosophy of such thinkers as Pieper “[live] from a theological a priori”, which treats truth as a gift.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, Pieper suggests that philosophy necessarily depends upon a theological, pre-philosophical foundation.<sup>10</sup> On display here is a synthetic account of faith and reason matching a unitary view of nature and grace. On a Pieperian/Balthasarian account of faith and reason, natural reason is in fact linked with faith in the one “concrete supernatural order”, though for that

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<sup>7</sup> Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 347-348.

<sup>8</sup> Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, trans. Gerald Malsbury (South Bend, Indiana: St Augustine’s Press, 1998), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 352-3.

<sup>10</sup> Pieper, *Leisure*, 120-121.

reason is not collapsed into faith.<sup>11</sup> The underlying claim is that this unity is actually how faith and reason operate in the real world, a graced world created by God with a specific end in mind, peopled by ‘real [men]’.

An important parallel to the idea that the human person has a desire for an end that can only be received as gift is present in Ratzinger’s conception of the faith-reason relationship. In an essay of Ratzinger’s, which Nichols suggests takes Gilson’s “synthesis of philosophy and theology” even further, Ratzinger argues that philosophy “always remains a question and awaits an answer which it cannot give on its own”.<sup>12</sup> In that essay, Ratzinger quotes Pieper’s borderline ‘apocalyptic’ idea that at the end of time, only those who believe will be able to perceive the “ultimate meaning of existence – i.e., the specific object of philosophical speculation”.<sup>13</sup> Ratzinger’s purpose in quoting Pieper is not to say that we are in the end times – tempting though it is to think sometimes – but to point out the necessity of faith, revelation and theology to reason’s search for truth. Bearing this necessity in mind is vital to counteract the totalising claims of gnosis (a concern of Eric Voegelin’s), found precisely in those systems of philosophy – such as Hegel’s and Marx’s – that claim that planning can produce truth and utopia, and which seek to arrogate to reason the capacity to know all

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<sup>11</sup> Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 351.

<sup>12</sup> Nichols, *Conversation of Faith and Reason*, 200, Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission of Theology*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Pieper, *Problems of Modern Faith*, 276, Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission of Theology*, 29.

of truth. Reason, like human nature, needs something outside of itself for fulfilment, and depends on humble love to reach it.

All of this is not to suggest that reason does not have its own autonomy – Pieper and Ratzinger, for example, clearly think that reason is not faith and that reason has important things to say to faith. What it might suggest, though, is that, in a post-modern context in which the Church's reputation is, to a large degree, in tatters, it might be time paradoxically to be less shy of the theological foundations that grounds all genuine philosophy in the public square. Appeals purely to reason may have had a place in a modernity confident of the power of reason and willing therefore to listen to syllogisms but the depiction of a narrative might better speak to people in a post-modern context. As Professor Rowland pointed out, there is currently an endemic problem of unbelief. People today are furnished with no narratives and follow incoherent lives, desperately needing the light of truth. Such an approach will not fall into relativism, though, because the Christian narrative – and all natural reason itself – is grounded in a Person, who is *λογος*, both Reason and Truth calling us to communion with the God who is Love.