Ex Latere Christi
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A WORD OF INTRODUCTION
FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

It is again my privilege to present to you this edition of *Ex Latere Christi*, the academic journal of the Pontifical North American College. I am very grateful to Fr. Randall Soto, STD, '97, C'02 (Archdiocese of New York), for his work as Editor-in-Chief of this journal and to his staff, most especially to Rev. Mr. Alexander Wyvill, '22 (Archdiocese of Washington) for his leadership in this project. Deacon Wyvill was aided by Matthew Ludwig '24 (Archdiocese of Washington) and Andrew Westerman, '24 (Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter). I am grateful to the student editors who assisted in the preparation of this volume: Troy Niemerg, '24, Tyler Underhill, '24, Jacob Tschida, '25, Gerard Gayou, '25, and Nicholas Waldron, '25.

Gratitude must also be expressed to the Very Reverend Peter C. Harman, STD, '99, the Rector of the Pontifical North American College for his support and encouragement of the flourishing of the intellectual life in the College. We are pleased to present to you a homily preached by Fr. Harman on October 14, 2021, on the anniversary of the Immaculate Conception Chapel here at the College in this edition. In addition, we have included several fine pieces for your reflection:

Rev. Nicholas Steeves, SJ, STD, a professor of Fundamental Theology and the coordinator of the First Cycle Theology program at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome presents to us “Saint John Henry Newman on Preaching the Word of God.” This was also the topic of Fr. Steeves’ lecture for the Carl J. Peter Chair in Homiletics offered this year in March.
Sister Mary Angelica Neenan, OP, STD, a professor of Theology at the University of Dallas and a sister of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia, Nashville, Tennessee, offers us her thoughts on “Faith and Conscience,” certainly a pressing issue in our world today.

We were blessed to have His Eminence, Wilton Cardinal Gregory, SLD, the Archbishop of Washington, celebrate the diaconal ordination at Saint Peter’s Basilica on September 30, 2021. His Eminence offered a moving and thoughtful homily which he graciously permitted us to share.

I am grateful to present two student works: a piece by Nicholas Edward Waldron, Ph.L., ’25 (Diocese of Rockville Centre) entitled “Humor as Anti-Ascetic in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality,” as well as a critical book review of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s classic Razing the Bastions (1952) by Jacob Daniel Sessions, ’23 (Diocese of Birmingham).

Finally, I would like to offer for your reflection some thoughts on the integral formation of Catholic priests according to the 2016 instruction “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation” from the Congregation of Clergy and through the lens of Bernard J.F. Lonergan, SJ (1904-1984). It is entitled “Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis and the Integral Formation of Priests: An Approach from Bernard Lonergan, SJ.”

Thank you again for supporting the intellectual formation program offered here at the College. Thanks, too, for the many articles you have submitted. We are looking forward to publishing them in future issues.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Academic Dean
Diocese of Brooklyn
Sometimes, your homily isn’t your best preaching. I was concelebrating the Vigil Mass at Sacred Heart, a parish some miles to the North of Boston,1 after a harrowing day: First Confessions at the next parish over, kicking off our new altar server training, plowing through marriage prep on Skype with a testy couple. My best hopes were for a homily that was short and sweet. That Vigil Mass, however, befell Fr. O’Keefe, a fellow Jesuit in his mid-80s, your typical second generation Irish-American Bostonian—tough as nails, with the thickest possible Southie accent, a former marathon runner, dedicated high-school teacher, coach, and counselor, with a bleeding heart for the poor. Fr. Mike had strong opinions and they sure weren’t conservative. The people in the pews that night were largely in his age group, but their political views were diametrically opposite. Fr. Mike had just been reading Fr. Gerry O’Collins’ criticism of the 2010 translation of the Roman Missal and decided that tonight was right to share his new progressive insights with our flock. For 20 solid minutes, he excoriated the Missal and advocated petitioning the rather traditional Ordinary to ban it. His sermon was infuriating on many levels—chiefly for patently ignoring both the Mass readings and his hearers’ mindset and desires. This was not a homily that made folks meet Christ, I judged, so I vowed to berate him at the rectory over supper. Mass went on and we finally got to the announce-

1 Names and places have been slightly altered to protect confidentiality.
ments. Fr. Mike rattled through the items the pastor had written up and then paused while his face went funny. “My own announcement now is that I’m leaving the parish Wednesday for Campion Center, the Jesuit retirement home near Boston. This is my last Mass with you. So I want to tell you how much it meant to me, when you sent me all those cards last year as I lay in the hospital. It meant a lot.” At this point, Fr. O’Keefe’s Dorchester twang broke, he went red in the face, and burst into tears. We were flabbergasted. Then and there, we knew that he really loved our parish with all his gruff, Southie, angry, Irish Jesuit heart. After some seconds in dazed silence, our people started clapping and the cheer grew to a roar. And I, stepping back from my mixed emotions, realized that Fr. Mike had just finally preached the Word of God to our flock. His tearfully grateful announcement spoke millions about his real love for them, who loved him dearly in return. This mutual love spoke to the real love that Christ instilled in that parish. Together, Fr. Mike and his flock had preached the Word of God that night: “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another… if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” (1 John 4:12). The following Wednesday, at his request, I drove him down to Campion with his stuff and he gave me his car-keys. A year and a half later, Fr. Mike passed away of old age. Sometimes, your best preaching doesn’t come through your homilies.

**John Henry Newman and Preaching**

*Prima facie,* Saint John Henry Newman seems a polar opposite to Fr. Mike. The wispy Anglican vicar turned Roman Catholic cardinal is rightly famous for his zealous, carefully crafted sermons, which always revolved around a single verse from Scripture or one definite mystery of the Christian faith. A gentleman at all times, Newman took great pains never to depart from his English “principle of reserve” in all his ministerings, whether at the altar or in the pulpit, in the humble hovels of his poor parishioners, or in the great halls at Oxford. And one certainly can’t picture Newman coaching track and field or running a marathon!
Metaphorically, however, Newman’s life matches the Pauline metaphor of athletes going for the gold: “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it…. I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air.” (1 Cor 9:24–26) Saint John Henry ran the whole course of his life aiming at holiness for him and for others, yearning for a real encounter with the living God in the person of Jesus Christ. And a big part of that race was dedicated to preaching. On Sunday afternoon March 20, 1831, Newman gave a sermon at St. Mary the Virgin, the Oxford university church, entitled “On the object and effects of preaching.” Just a month over 30, he was steadily moving away from the Evangelicalism under which he had experienced a striking conversion to God at the age of 15. He now saw through the Evangelicals’ implicit liberalism and their sensationalist, anti-dogmatic sermons. In order to better grasp how broad preaching was, he turned to Scripture: “In Scripture to preach, is to do the work of an evangelist, is to teach, instruct, advise, encourage in all things pertaining to religion, in any way whatever….In all things and at all times is a Christian minister preaching, in the Scriptural sense of the word—He preaches in his life even more than in his words.” Newman would have understood that a mere parish announcement, if carried out earnestly, could bring about real, efficient preaching of God’s Word. Preaching was key to Newman’s life. According to one Oratorian expert, in 19 years of Anglican preaching, Newman “entered the pulpit around 1,270 times”, preaching once or more 604 carefully numbered sermons. Newman’s parochial preaching grew so popular that “the Heads of the Oxford Colleges became alarmed at the influence these sermons were having and took steps—like changing the time of dinner in their

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Nicolas Steeves, SJ

halls—in order to prevent their undergraduates attending.”⁵ Nonetheless, Newman also famously preached in such a way that would have had him fail practicum. Shortly after he died, one critic opined Newman’s sermons were “not far from absolute perfection” when “looked at as pure literature,” but “as pulpit work, as preaching the gospel, they [were] full of the most serious, and even fatal defects.”⁶ In fact, as early as his first anniversary sermon at St Mary’s, Newman had informed his flock that, contra Evangelical tendencies, preaching was not the be-all and end-all of his duties: And here I will notice a further evil which may and often does arise. Preaching being almost the only mode of intercourse between the Minister and his flock, is in consequence unduly exalted in the scale of importance—or at least erroneously viewed in relation to the general system of Christian ministration—Men are tempted to come to their Church, not to pray, but to hear—nay they often [are] impatient at the length of the prayers, if they feel any especial interest in the preacher.⁷ As the years went by, marked by his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1845, Newman would hold ever more firmly that homiletics were but one of the many ways of bringing men to Christ, alongside the sacraments (“prayers”) and “life-preaching”⁸—that silent, continuous ministry of acting in earnest and in love. But how did Newman preach? What made folks flock to him? Here is the “most oft-quoted and impressionistic account of Newman’s preaching” by Matthew Arnold:

Who could resist the charm of that spiritual apparition, gliding in the dim afternoon light through the aisles of St Mary’s, rising into the pulpit, and then in the most entrancing of voices, breaking the silence with words and thoughts

which were religious music—subtle, sweet, mournful.9

What hid behind that charm? What did that spiritual apparition reveal? What art sustained Newman’s homiletics?

**CENTRAL CLAIM**

It is my central claim in this paper that Newman can teach us how to preach because he efficiently used Aristotle’s rhetoric to help his hearers meet Christ and be saved. Let’s explore Newman’s writings, to show that he masterfully used Aristotle’s three “persuasives”—ethos, pathos, and logos—to make Christ a real Savior for his flock. But first, allow me a key caveat. Newman, alas, is often misjudged, misrepresented, and even misused as a stick with which to beat up one’s opponents.10 Because of his theological finesse and his lifelong intellectual and spiritual quest for the truth, he is often quoted out of context to sustain progressivism or traditionalism alike. Please let’s not project our own misgivings and fancies about preaching, theology, or Church matters on Newman! Let us try and simply read him well, so that he might help us improve our preaching—*ad majorem Dei gloriām.*

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10 Edward Ondrako, “The Intellectual and Developmental Character of Cardinal Newman’s University Preaching Style,” *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 70 (2009), §§1.4.: “There is a wide range of misunderstanding of the character of [Newman’s] theological activity which is much more than “theological professionalism.” At one extreme, some dismiss him for overemphasizing piety and rigid obedience to authority. The other extreme is more radical, for it identifies Newman as one who supported revelation as an on-going process, making him a modernist. Both are inaccurate....If his rich wisdom sayings are taken out of context, and his constant personal quest for truth is overlooked as the driving force in his life, he can be misread and misrepresented to support the agenda of competing groups in the Church. He is neither a modernist nor a traditionalist. If read poorly, one can denigrate or abuse his writings to promote one’s agenda. If read well, Newman can touch the reader with his extraordinary gift of clarity to explain the truth for which he ‘panted.’”
In what context did Newman preach, and reflect on preaching? Victorians loved hearing and reading sermons—sort of the same way we indulge in Netflix series. And Evangelical preaching—emotional, rhetorical in a bad sense, imbued with romanticism, was then all the rage. In fact, some of Newman’s harshest criticism stemmed from his scorn for Evangelical preachers who stirred up high feelings through bog-standard fall-and-redemption sermons but failed to make their flock’s faith real. In a draft letter, Newman underlined that he “was particularly uncomfortable with the lack of reserve characteristic of many of the so-called ‘gospel preachers.’ He shrank from the ‘rudeness, irreverence, and almost profaneness’ which [was] ‘necessarily involved in pulpit addresses.’” He deplored equally “the chilly, meagre, timid, secular divinity” which had been in vogue earlier, however. In fact, his beef was not so much with the style as with the result of coarse preaching: hearers raved about preachers, rather than cleaving to Christ. Victorians were religious, but Newman quickly saw that they did not really believe in the Gospel. Liberalism was on the rise, which Newman would fight all his life, defending dogma and Scripture. He would fight just as ardently another soaring ideology—rationalism. Precisely because Newman liked philosophical rationality, especially Aristotle’s, he grew weary of wrong demands for scientific proof, where the faith was concerned. It took Newman several years to work out, in his Oxford University sermons, how to articulate faith and reason in a satisfying way. In general, he was appalled by the sway that liberalism and rationalism held over university men, and, increasingly, the middle and working classes. His reflections on preaching, therefore, offer strong evidence of what Newman rejected in Evangelicalism: superficial, “unreal” Christianity; a faith that lacked works; a form of introspection that wrought anxious hubris

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rather than humble self-understanding; and the populist worldliness of a religion that would not walk Christ’s narrow path of denial to glory.12 In this challenging context, what helped Newman grasp the stakes of preaching? Two things enlarged his heart and his reason. One was his initial Aristotelian formation at Oxford. The second was his enthusiastic discovery of fourth century Alexandrian Fathers, when Oxford forced him to be idle for a year in his late twenties. Thus, in contrast to the Evangelical fixation on Christ’s Passion and Crucifixion, Newman grew to appreciate other great mysteries of our faith: the Incarnation of the Word; Easter and Pentecost; the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the faithful; the sacramental life and the importance of mystery.13 All these things helped expand and deepen Newman’s theory of preaching—and his practice. Let’s turn to a text which is a key to his approach to homiletics.

“University Preaching” (The Idea of a University)

In the early 1850s, as Rector of the newly created Catholic University of Ireland, Newman gave some lectures, later published jointly as The Idea of a University. The sixth lecture in the second part of the book, entitled “University Preaching,” gives us a clear grasp of how Newman used Aristotelian rhetoric to help preach the Gospel. First, Newman clearly defines “the preacher’s object.” It is simply “the spiritual good of his hearers.”14 How definitely this object (or goal) is set forth is echoed in an image: “As a marksman aims at the target and its bull’s-eye, and nothing else, so the preacher must have a definite point before him, which he has to hit.” Throughout this lecture, the three “persuasives” of Aris-

totle’s *Rhetoric*—*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*—are shown to serve this definitiveness of purpose. “Definiteness is the life of preaching. A definite hearer, not the whole world; a definite topic, not the whole evangelical tradition; and, in like manner, a definite speaker.”¹⁵ “A definite hearer:” Aristotle’s *pathos*. “A definite topic:” his *logos*. “A definite speaker:” his *ethos*. Herein lies the principle of Newman’s preaching: *the definiteness of the object of preaching calls for the definiteness of speaker, hearer, and topic*. Let’s examine all four points with Newman, keeping in mind that our goal is not erudition, but to improve our own preaching by understanding its real stakes.

### 1. A RHETORIC THAT HELPS MAKE FAITH REAL, THROUGH THE IMAGINATION

I mentioned earlier that Newman shunned rhetoric in the bad sense of the word. And so should we! Hucksterism, theatrics, manipulation, and sophistry all show how rhetoric is abused to convince the credulous of the unreal. Plato and Aristotle rejected such debased discourse. But Aristotle also shrewdly noted that dialectic syllogisms did not always work as a means of knowing the truth. Most of life is not regulated like geometry by demonstrations. In many instances, we act on belief, and our thought is of an intuitive, associative kind. When we are dealing with concrete matters whose outcome is merely probable, rhetoric teaches us to “observe…the available means of persuasion.”¹⁶ Aristotle (and Aquinas!)¹⁷ knew that, in addition to logic, poetry and rhetoric can help order thought.¹⁸ Although Newman initially rued studying Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* at Oxford, he later admitted that it grew on him, because “it is a sort of analysis of one’s ordinary thoughts, doings, plans etc.”¹⁹

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In this last quote, Newman’s realism shines forth. He was deeply interested in understanding how we think and act, especially—although not exclusively—in faith matters. Newman’s personal encounter with the living God when he was 15 gave him a lifelong zeal for helping others meet Christ. If Aristotelian rhetoric could help him grasp how to better lead others to a real, loving faith, then Newman would use it for the best. “I would have Christ set forth from the first as the object of our worship,” wrote Newman in 1831. To meet the real Christ was his life’s goal—for him and for others. This sense of an urgency of conversion paradoxically prevented Newman from giving in to the urgency of “relevant preaching.” As W. D. White astutely notices, what makes Newman a special preacher is not just “his superb intelligence, his astute knowledge of language and his creative, disciplined use of it, his utter abandon of all human ambition and desire for personal aggrandizement in his austere pursuit of truth, his lucid and intense spirituality.” What makes Newman still stand out as a preacher today is his “rejection of the urgency of relevance in preaching.” For Newman, to preach on topical matters was to doubt the actual, permanent relevance of the first principles of faith; it would have been a concession to the spirit of liberalism.

What Newman sought to foster by preaching was nothing less than the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in his hearers. Of course, he knew that grace was God’s purview. But Newman’s goal in preaching was to help his flock possess the “Thought of God”: Life passes, riches fly away, popularity is fickle, the senses decay, the world changes, friends die. One alone is constant; One alone is true to us; One alone can be true; One alone can be all things to us; One alone can supply our needs; One alone can train us up to our full perfection; One alone can give a mean-

ing to our complex and intricate nature; One alone can give us tune and harmony; One alone can form and possess us.\(^{23}\) To the One God who dwelled in the soul, obedience was thus due as an act of faith. Newman knew how hard this was: “We must become what we are not; we must learn to love what we do not love, and practice ourselves in what is difficult.”\(^{24}\) He knew that the Christian life is tough, and that he who preaches it will not be popular\(^{25}\). He also knew, however, that this life grows easier with habit: “Happy he whose way is God’s way; when he is used to it, it is as easy as any other way—nay, much easier, for God’s service is perfect freedom, whereas Satan is a cruel taskmaster.”\(^{26}\)

Some commentators\(^{27}\) point out that Newman did not believe that preaching itself ought to convert people, but rather to prepare them for the conversion that happened through the sacraments of the Church. Newman asserted, in fact, that: Certainly in my judgment Preaching is not the means of conversion—but a subsidiary, as rousing, convincing, interesting, and altogether preparing the way; a work especially necessary now...The Church with the Sacraments etc., and the life of good men seem to the great persuasives of the Gospel, as being visible witnesses and substitutes for Him who is Persuasion itself.\(^{28}\) Nonetheless, I do not think that this one comment should detract us from the fact that the preacher’s one object, for Newman, is “the spiritual good of his hearers”—and what greater good could there be, if not the conversion of one’s hearers through a real, personal encounter with Christ our Savior? Newman eloquently expressed that belief in the title of one of the few Catholic sermons he published: “The Salvation of the Hearer the Motive


\(^{27}\) See Skinner 124 quoting Ian Ker, John Henry Newman, 113; also see Werse 116.

The real ultimate motive of preaching, for Newman, whether directly or indirectly, was to elicit salvation. The definiteness of that object now leads us to study the definiteness required by Newman of the preacher, his hearers, and his topic, following Aristotle’s persuasives. Let us observe, as we go along, how the imagination is especially helpful in persuading the faithful to “realize the Gospel,” as Newman says—i.e., to make it real for them.

2. Ethos: Definiteness of the Preacher

Aristotle first underlines that the very person arguing rhetorically for or against a case is a persuasive. All speakers must be perceived by their audience as honest and trustworthy in order to convince them. The speakers' ethos, so to say, goes a long way. Obviously, this rule applies to preachers. We know how hard it is to listen to, let alone believe a preacher who has lost credibility due to sin or scandal. Not only should Christian preachers be virtuous and perceived as such, they must strive to be holy. Newman thus really demands that preachers at least be earnest:

We ask questions perhaps about diction, elocution, rhetorical power; but does the commander of a besieging force dream of holiday displays, reviews, mock engagements, feats of strength, or trials of skill, such as would be graceful and suitable on a parade ground when a foreigner of rank was to be received and fêted; or does he aim at one and one thing only, viz., to take the strong place? Earnestness expresses the preacher’s focus on a single object: the spiritual good of his hearers. For, Newman adds, Earnestness creates earnestness in others by sympathy…for what is powerful enough to absorb and possess a preacher has at least a primâ facie claim of attention on the part of his hearers. On the other hand, anything which interferes with this earnestness, or which argues its absence, is still more certain to blunt the force of the most cogent

argument conveyed in the most eloquent language. We see here how earnestness can be flow from the preacher to the hearer via the imagination of both. Newman explicitly refers to Aristotle here: Hence it is that the great philosopher of antiquity, in speaking, in his Treatise on Rhetoric, of the various kinds of persuasives, which are available in the Art, considers the most authoritative of these to be that which is drawn from personal traits of an ethical nature evident in the orator. In fact, as Newman points out, Jesus himself was a prime example of such natural, persuasive earnestness: “Who could wish to be more eloquent, more powerful, more successful than the Teacher of the Nations? yet who more earnest, who more natural, who more unstudied, who more self-forgetting than he?” Let me make two more comments about earnestness. The first is that, as Newman aptly points out, “I do not mean that a preacher must aim at earnestness, but that he must aim at his object, which is to do some spiritual good to his hearers, and which will at once make him earnest.” A preacher who strives for earnestness itself, as Newman wryly writes, is like a man who beats his cold hands together till they are warm, only to feel cold again when he stops. The second comment is that the preacher can build up his earnestness for the spiritual good of his flock by developing good habits: faith, obedience, zeal, realism, love, a desire to be saved and to help save others, integrity and purity of heart, humility... It goes without saying that these virtues must not only be cultivated at a natural level but asked for in prayer and elevated by grace. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the preacher is therefore key in eliciting his earnestness. I hasten to add that this does not mean that Newman didn’t have doubts. In fact, it was said that “he was governed by an infinite skepticism, countered by an

35 See Skinner 121 ss. on integrity and purity of heart of the preacher. See Skinner p. 127 about humility of preacher. See what Ker has to say about Newman’s spirituality: realism, obedience as the means to holiness (“Newman is a preacher not of glowing words but of harsh realities” Ker p. 45)
infinite devoutness.” It is precisely because Newman took unbelief seriously, in himself and in others, that he was able to preach so efficiently about belief and faith. Nor does this mean that Newman was without flaws. White points out, somewhat exaggeratedly perhaps, that Newman lacked social awareness as Victorian England went through the horrors of the Industrial Revolution. While Newman never preached on such topics, he did, however, sincerely tend for his poor parishioners, first as an Anglican vicar with poor farmers, then as a Catholic priest in the slums of industrial Birmingham. In any case, earnestness, like holiness, does not mean a total lack of flaws or sins. But as Newman himself pointed out, the preacher must deal with the harsh realities of parish life and his parishioners’ lives, if he is to be real in the pulpit. In 1831 already, after a mere three years as a vicar, he criticized the lure of “Town-preacherships” in fashionable parishes: “The realities of our profession are in parochial and such-like engagements—the sickbed, the schoolroom, the accidental intercourse of the week—but a pulpit makes one unreal, rhetorical—conceited.”

In short, the preacher must be himself in the pulpit, identifiable, human, relatable, and earnestly striving for his hearers’ spiritual good. This warrants his definiteness. To put things colloquially, the preacher must be the “real deal.” If you try and strike a pose in the parish, the folks in the pews will quickly see through you. Preaching and presiding do relate to theatrum sacrum, but they are not to be some kind of “liturgical cosplay.”

3. PATHOS: DEFINITENESS OF THE HEARER

How about the definiteness of one’s hearers? Werse rightfully asserts that “one of the chief characteristics that granted Newman such power from the pulpit was not his ability to exegete and expound a biblical

text, but rather his ability to exegete and exposit his audience.” Again, Newman bows to Aristotle: Aristotle, then, in his celebrated treatise on Rhetoric, makes the very essence of the Art lie in the precise recognition of a hearer. It is a relative art, and in that respect differs from Logic, which simply teaches the right use of reason, whereas Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, which implies a person who is to be persuaded. As, then, the Christian Preacher aims at the Divine Glory, not in any vague and general way, but by the enunciation of some article or passage of the Revealed Word, so further, he enunciates it, not for the instruction of the whole world, but directly for the sake of those very persons who are before him. He is, when in the pulpit, instructing, enlightening, informing, advancing, sanctifying, not all nations, nor all classes, nor all callings, but those particular ranks, professions, states, ages, characters, which have gathered around him. Proof indeed is the same all over the earth; but he has not only to prove, but to persuade; —Whom? A hearer, then, is included in the very idea of preaching; and we cannot determine how in detail we ought to preach, till we know whom we are to address. It is no disrespect to God, adds Newman, that we harken to pagan philosophers to learn how to convince our hearers, for grace builds on nature.

Newman, of course, is not advocating for preachers to point their fingers at sinners present in the pews! What he means is that the preacher must try and identify the mental framework, the aspirations and desires, but also the prejudices and dislikes that a particular congregation and its individual hearers may have. This is why preaching at funerals and weddings is so daunting—hosts of unknown hearers with variable levels of unbelief. When we preach, we must enter the world of our hearers and bring Jesus to heal and save them in their particular woes. Newman’s cardinalatial motto, “Cor ad cor loquitur” (the heart speaks to the heart), inspired by St. Francis de Sales, bespeaks his concern for convincing a soul to be saved. As Newman famously wrote, “The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagi-

nation, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us.”  

As preachers, we must know not only what lies in our hearers’ imagination, but also how our words and deeds in the pulpit might touch their imagination to bring it closer to Christ. This means that we must make Christ real for our hearers. With our words, we must paint a portrait of Our Lord that impresses him more deeply into their hearts. And that portrait must in turn elicit a faith that is real, i.e., that expresses itself in deeds of love, and in obedience to God and to one’s conscience.  

As Werse aptly reminds us, this also meant for Newman that Catholic laity had to be well formed. Newman saw his congregation “as actively engaging the message, rather than passively receiving it. He spoke to them as intelligent minds capable of thinking for themselves.” Of course, it helped that Newman often addressed a university public. But he also trusted his parochial audiences and sought to educate them. As for us, this should make us take the theological formation of our parishioners seriously. Our preaching itself can help form responsible, intelligent Catholics, whose obedient faith is also characterized by graceful liberty. But there are also many other ways of fostering such glowing qualities in a parish—while keeping our hopes realistic! The “pathos” in our preaching, therefore, should not only, or even primarily, address our hearers’ feelings or passions, but who they are integrally as persons. A real speaker, speaking to real persons. How about the content of our homilies?

4. **Logos: Definiteness of the Topic**

It should now be evident what kind of definite discourse preach-

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42 See Ker 16–18 about the fact that Newman wanted deeds more than feelings from real Christians. See Strange 126 on how Newman understood preaching for the heart: to make religion real. To kindle faith: “to live by faith is to live in obedience to conscience.” Strange 129

ethos should hold. Ethos, pathos, and logos are all connected as the great rhetorical persuasives. First, every homily should focus on one topic only. Newman really belabors this point in “University Preaching”: the preacher “must aim at imprinting on the heart what will never leave it, and this he cannot do unless he employ himself on some definite subject, which he has to handle and weigh, and then, as it were, to hand over from himself to others.”\(^4^4\) We recognize here, of course, the great Dominican motto “praedicando et docendo contemplata aliis tradere.”\(^4^5\) But Newman further instructs that a single homily must communicate but a single point of contemplation. Newman helpfully suggests that the preacher hold “a distinct image before the mind”\(^4^6\) to be communicated by translating it into words: “I would go the length of recommending a preacher to place a distinct categorical proposition before him, such as he can write down in a form of words, and to guide and limit his preparation by it, and to aim in all he says to bring it out, and nothing else.”\(^4^7\) In fact, Newman drily asserts, “Nothing is so fatal to the effect of a sermon as the habit of preaching on three or four subjects at once.”\(^4^8\)

We have already noted that Newman shunned “relevant” or topical preaching and always preached on a point of dogma to help his hearers’ faith become more real. According to the great distinction Newman formalized in A Grammar of Assent between notional and real assent, this does not mean that the topic of preaching should be “dry dogma,” controversy, or systematics,\(^4^9\) but rather some trait of Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, that touches both the heart and the mind, leading to concrete, charitable deeds, and a deeper, realer, more obedient faith. Newman criticized preaching that led “to regard the Savior of the world in an irreverent and unreal way—as a mere idea or vision; to speak of Him so narrowly and unfruitfully, as if we only knew of His name”, but

\(^4^5\) Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae III, q. 40, art. 1, ad 2.
\(^4^9\) See White p. 44.
“Scripture has set Him before us in His actual sojourn on earth, in His gestures, words, and deeds, in order that we may have that on which to fix our eyes.” 50 This, of course, Newman adds, requires that preachers always “lay great stress on the preparation of a sermon.” 51 He debates at length whether it is better to preach with a written text, according to the custom of the country (French clergy then famously preached without notes). In any case, serious preparation means “study and meditation [as] imperative,” 52 but also, if possible, drafting the text beforehand, even if one will not read it in the pulpit. Newman, however, does make allowances for pastors: “Such a formal preparation of course cannot be required of a parish priest, burdened, as he may be, with other duties, and preaching on elementary subjects, and supported by the systematic order and the suggestions of the Catechism; but in occasional sermons the case is otherwise.” 53 In today’s world, however, where communication is key, and rhetorical training is all but absent, I would strongly advise all preachers to prepare their homilies seriously, with a detailed structure, and, at the very least the full text of one’s opening and closing lines. One can memorize them or not, but one should have them ready, lest definiteness be lost.

**Conclusion**

What have we learned from Newman on preaching? To express it with humorous tediousness: have I convinced you that Newman should convince you to convince people while you preach? There is a paradox which Newman helps us hold, disclosing a mystery in preaching. Preaching is key to conversion—both for the preacher and his flock. But ultimately, the preacher must lead his hearers to a personal encounter with the living God that chiefly takes place in the sacraments, as well

as in personal prayer. Christ himself, the greatest Rhetor of all times\textsuperscript{54}, left this earth for his Father, and gave the Church his sacraments as a perennial actualization of his Word. Let us end with Newman’s own words: What remains, then, but to make our prayer to the Gracious and Merciful God, the Father of Lights, that in all our exercises of Reason, His gift, we may thus use it,—as He would have us, in the obedience of Faith, with a view to His glory, with an aim at His Truth, in dutiful submission to His will, for the comfort of His elect, for the edification of Holy Jerusalem, His Church, and in recollection of His own solemn warning, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”\textsuperscript{55}

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\textsuperscript{54} See Meszaros, conclusion.
Faith is a gift from God. Technically, it is a habit of the soul, that resides in the intellect, perfecting the intellect regarding its proper operation—that of knowing the truth. The intellect is, in a sense, “expanded” by the gift of Faith. The intellect can know by faith, those truths that are also accessible to reason, but more importantly those truths which are above reason—supernatural truths regarding God Himself, and His Creation (that would be us). Since it is proper to human beings to love the truth, when we discover the amazing fact that the truth is a Person, God Himself, we experience a profound love for Him Who first loved us.¹ Thus we understand the meaning of our own existence—to be united with Truth itself, which is the same as loving Love itself.

What does this mean for the conscience? There will be four points to consider here: 1) first, Faith enlarges the basis from which the conscience will operate, that is, Faith provides more truth from which the conscience makes judgment and application. 2) Secondly, Faith provides more certitude regarding those truths as revealed by God. 3) Thirdly, Faith allows us to experience the action of the conscience as an integral part of the soul’s relationship with God, where the human person meets God and grows in relationship with God. And 4) fourthly, Faith assists the conscience directly in its operation, where man acts freely in accordance with the truth. Man’s freedom and God’s truth come together in the conscience.

¹ “…[F]or nothing can provoke love more than to know that one is loved.” Aquinas, *De Rationibus Fidei*, Ch. 5.
Straight away we must deal with one fundamental presupposition—the issue of truth. We are presupposing that truth exists. This presupposition needs a moment of explanation because the conscience cannot work without truth.

All human action is based on what the agent perceives to be true. This is very important. The agent must perceive something as true to act. To the person who insists that there is no truth, I must ask, “Do you think that’s true?” (yes, indeed, he really is convinced that it’s true). For those who say, “There are no moral absolutes,” I ask, “Except for that one?” For those who say, “Truth is relative,” I ask, “Including that truth?” For those who say, “you can never be sure if you have the truth,” I ask, “Are you sure about that?” (and yes, they are very sure.) The list goes on. These absolutist statements make no sense because they are self-contradicting, that is, quite simply, against reason. What they are really evading is the question of what the truth is. When they say, “my truth is different from your truth” (which is a statement against reason), I think they really mean to say, “What I think is true is different from what you think is true.” Well and good; now we can dialogue.

This presupposition then is enough established. Truth (the conforming of the mind to reality) exists. How we can know it is a separate problem. And whether we act according to it, is yet another problem (which is the proper arena of the conscience). We can know the truth by Faith or by reason. Both are valid, and each cannot contradict each other. Here,

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2 There is an explanation for why this anti-rational thinking has become so rampant, going back 700 years to the nominalist influence on philosophy, but we do not have time for that here. Cf. Servais Pinckaers, Sources of Christian Ethics.

3 This modern allergy to truth, I think, is partly due to the jaded reaction to the past century (not just a few people have done very evil things in the name of “truth”), and due to the fact that knowing the truth makes demands on a person. If something is true, it has consequences. It might require some sacrifice if one really believes that there is a truth. It will cost you something, maybe even your life.
because no one of us is God, we must allow for some disagreement.\(^4\) No one pretends to know ALL truth—only God knows that. What we, as humans, need is sufficient truth to act, that is, to obtain a true good and to avoid evil. This is called a free choice—acting according to a perceived truth.

Now, some of the truths that we perceive have been revealed by God, for our sake, out of His loving Mercy for us. And this brings us to our first point.

I.

Faith enlightens the intellect regarding truth itself. The conscience, as an act of the intellect, applies what the agent believes to be true to each human act, judging it to be good or evil. Faith gives the intellect a valid source of truth and enlarges the store of truths from which a person draws on for good human action. The major world religions claim to have truth from God. To believe this is called Faith, and it is not unreasonable. It is reasonable to believe that God would reveal Himself somehow. And if He did, what He revealed would have to be true. Because this is something that is believed to be true by Faith, not provable by science (yet can be demonstrated to be NOT Unreasonable), we respect the consciences of those people who claim to be following God’s truth, the truth that God has revealed. This is something that we acknowledge to be noble of itself because God is God.

A person belongs to a certain religion because he/she thinks what that religion teaches is true, and that this truth comes from God—not from some human being. One cannot belong to a religion and then claim that

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\(^4\) Disagreement by the way, implies truth. The reason why people disagree is because they disagree about what is true.
“my conscience” disagrees with its teachings. You disagree with its teachings in your judgment of truth itself (this is not the conscience), and then your conscience applies whatever you think is true to some action at hand.

This distinction is extremely important. The conscience does not decide what is true. The conscience does not create truth. The conscience begins with truth as its principle, and judges according to that truth. The conscience judges the application of a truth to a particular action as good or evil, well-done or not-well-done. Whether or not what a person thinks is true is really true or not is crucial to human action but is not exactly the arena of the conscience. If I think this glass is filled with apple juice and I drink it, but it is really gasoline, I will die (or at least be seriously harmed)—regardless of what my intellect really thought was true. It’s not against my conscience to drink apple juice, but the fact is, that was not really apple juice. A mistake about truth can be deadly, but this is not exactly a mistake of conscience. It is a mistake about what is true.

Now the conscience must start with what is true. A false premise in the intellect will automatically cause an erroneous judgment. This is why it is extremely important that moral teachings are clearly stated by the major world religions, so that everyone knows what that religion really teaches. And those teachings can be judged to be against reason or

5 If you disagree with an important teaching of your religion, then you might not belong to that religion. If an employee of Dunkin Donuts decides to open his own shop and sell macaroni and cheese, and claims that he is part of Dunkin Donuts, Dunkin Donuts has a right to say, “No, you’re not. And furthermore, you cannot use our logo.”

6 Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor (VS)* (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 60: “The dignity of this rational forum and the authority of its voice and judgments derive from the truth about moral good and evil, which it is called to listen to and to express. This truth is indicated by the ‘divine law’, the universal and objective norm of morality. The judgment of conscience does not establish the law; rather it bears witness to the authority of the natural law and of the practical reason with reference to the supreme good, whose attractiveness the human person perceives and whose commandments he accepts.”
Faith and Conscience

not. An interesting side note—the Catholic Church teaches that all its moral teachings are accessible to reason, that is, rationally based. This is an important point for specific moral debates. The Church will always claim that its moral teachings are knowable and defendable on rational grounds, while also using arguments from Faith. But with Faith, we have the surety that some truths have been given to us by God Himself.

This brings us to the second point of consideration:

II.

Faith provides more certitude regarding truth as revealed by God Himself (who cannot deceive nor be deceived). Faith provides more certain knowledge about God Himself, as He is in His divine nature, and of the meaning and purpose of human life as created by God—union with God in love, perfect and complete happiness. We need this certitude because there are many truths that we “know” by natural reason, but we are unsure about them. Faith gives us the conviction, the absolute trust in God’s own word, that some truths are worth dying for—whether it be a general truth, such as God is to be worshipped (a belief held by most religions), God is to be obeyed rather than men (Acts 5:29), or a particular truth like Jesus Christ is God and man (early Christian martyrs), rape is always evil (St. Maria Goretti), one can never be forced to act against his conscience (St. Thomas More).

When the conscience applies truth to the matter at hand, it has full authority and binding power, precisely because the norms or principles

7 Pope Benedict XVI, Papal Address given at the University of Regensburg, September 2006.
8 Vatican Council I, Dei Filius, Ch. 3, #2.
9 Slavery as an objectively evil institution, for example.
being applied are thought by the agent to be true,\textsuperscript{10} and thought to be coming from God.\textsuperscript{11} Truth is binding because it’s true. In the Catholic view, we are convinced that truth comes from God to man.\textsuperscript{12} To act against truths given by Him would be to act against God. A mistake in the application of these truths to our actions then becomes very serious. \textit{This is the real problem of conscience}. Not only must the conscience make a correct judgment, but this judgment holds the agent accountable in his actions. God has a rightful part in this process.

This brings us to the third point:

\textsuperscript{10} Pope John Paul II, \textit{Fides et Ratio} (FR) (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), 66: “It is necessary therefore that the mind of the believer acquire a natural, consistent and true knowledge of created realities—the world and man himself—which are also the object of divine Revelation. Still more, reason must be able to articulate this knowledge in concept and argument. Speculative dogmatic theology thus presupposes and implies a philosophy of the human being, the world and, more radically, of being, which has objective truth as its foundation.”

\textsuperscript{11} VS, 58: “The importance of this interior dialogue of man with himself can never be adequately appreciated. But it is also a dialogue of man with God, the author of the law, the primordial image and final end of man. Saint Bonaventure teaches that ‘conscience is like God’s herald and messenger; it does not command things on its own authority, but commands them as coming from God’s authority, like a herald when he proclaims the edict of the king. This is why conscience has binding force.’ Thus it can be said that conscience bears witness to man’s own rectitude or iniquity to man himself but, together with this and indeed even beforehand, conscience is the \textit{witness of God himself}, whose voice and judgment penetrate the depths of man’s soul, calling him \textit{fortier et suaviter} to obedience. ‘Moral conscience does not close man within an insurmountable and impenetrable solitude, but opens him to the call, to the voice of God. In this, and not in anything else, lies the entire mystery and the dignity of the moral conscience: in being the place, the sacred place where God speaks to man’.” The quote from St. Bonaventure is from his commentary on the Second Book of the Sentences of Peter Lombard, In \textit{II Librum Sentent.}, dist. 39, a. 1, q. 3, conclusion; Ed. Ad Claras Aquas, II 907b.

\textsuperscript{12} We claim that every truth that God gives us can be shown to be “not unreasonable.” This is the rationality check. If someone were to claim that a Catholic teaching is against natural law or against reason (“unreasonable”), then we would have to show something wrong in the assertion. This is one of the duties of Theology. The truth cannot contradict itself.
Faith and Conscience

III.

Faith transforms our understanding of the arena of a judgment made by the conscience as integral to the relationship with God. Doing good and avoiding evil is not just a private affair between me and my conscience, accountable to no one else. But now, with Faith enlightening the intellect, we have a higher perspective of the action of the conscience. It is now concerned very much with acts that are of crucial importance to the soul’s relationship with God Himself. God’s revelation of Himself was not just so that we would have truth in our intellects, but so that we would respond to Him in love and have the relationship with Him that He so desires and has desired since the Creation of the world. That is the real purpose of revelation, the real purpose of human life, the real basis for human dignity. God established a covenant with humankind to restore the right relationship that was lost by sin. This is open to every soul, simply by the soul desiring it. This is attested to by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. That is why the Jewish religion and the Christian religion are religions of “covenant.” God establishes His people in a covenant relationship, and the entire raison d’être of both these religions is that covenant of love. Every human act is either good or evil and contributes to this relationship for good or for ill. The imagery of marriage is the perfect imagery for the relationship because we more easily intuit that every act of one of the spouses has some effect on the other spouse.

The conscience becomes the meeting place between God and the soul.13 This is where the soul communes with God, where the obligation to follow one’s conscience is crucial to the relationship, because God Himself is Truth (Jn 14:6). An act against the conscience will be an act against God. An act according to conscience will unite the soul more closely to God in love. Every act is now a matter of love. This is why the conscience is considered a sacred place. God speaks to the soul, and the soul speaks with God. And this relationship of love is played out in every free choice.

13 Vatican Council II, Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), 16.
As testimony to this divine relationship of love, one will not easily make excuses when the conscience is mistaken. Even St. Paul said, “My conscience is clear, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Cor 4:4). The soul is enabled by grace to commune with God—the soul doesn’t become God. The soul in love with God knows herself in truth and is not surprised by her own ignorance or weakness. She wants to make sure that her conscience is right. She wants truth, not to dominate, but in order to love more, to love better, to love rightly.¹⁴

This brings us to the final point:

IV.

Faith assists the conscience directly in its operation. We observe and we know profoundly by our own experience that we have trouble 1) knowing the truth (even when it has been revealed), and 2) acting according to it (even when we are convinced of the truth).¹⁵ The conscience can be in error for a variety of reasons.

Thomas Aquinas says that the conscience binds, but it does not always excuse.¹⁶ This is because the conscience does not create truth, but applies it. The truth, if it is true, binds. We are responsible for what we should have known but did not know.¹⁷

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¹⁴ When St. Augustine finally has a mystical (intellectual) experience of God where he understands something about the truth of God’s nature, the nature of goodness, and the nature of evil, he says, “I was astonished to find that I already loved you.” *Confessions*, VII, xvii, 23.

¹⁵ Aristotle attested to the great distinction between knowing what justice is, and being just oneself, *Nicomachean Ethics*.


¹⁷ Rom 1:19–12: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all… who suppress the truth… For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse. Because, knowing God, they didn’t glorify him as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened.”
We are also responsible for being unwilling to apply the truth correctly—whether out of fear, selfishness, ambition, greed, lust—the seven capital vices cover most of the possible motivations for failure to act according to the truth, as we all well know. This second type of failure will actually harm the judgment itself. St. Augustine teaches, “Sin obscures sight.”18 Our own failure to act according to our conscience will cause spiritual blindness and further sins. This is not a problem of the intellect itself knowing the truth; this is the more serious problem of an evil will that wants to create its own “truth” rather than conform to the reality that is given. The underlying reason for this type of erroneous conscience—when one knows the truth—is an evil will. The agent simply does not will to apply the truth to a situation, albeit in different ways and for different reasons. Although the conscience is found in the intellect, we see the vital impact of the will on the operation of the conscience. Using the example of Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Pope John Paul II comments on conscience:

Here we encounter two different attitudes of the moral conscience of man in every age. The tax collector represents a “repentant” conscience, fully aware of the frailty of its own nature and seeing in its own failings, whatever their subjective justifications, a confirmation of its need for redemption. The Pharisee represents a “self-satisfied” conscience, under the illusion that it is able to observe the law without the help of grace and convinced that it does not need mercy.19

The one who admits his faults before God honors his conscience; the one who tries to excuse himself incurs more guilt. One goes home justified, and the other does not. The one who tries to live by the truth by his

18 Confessions, II, 2.
19 VS, 104.
own power lives under an illusion.\textsuperscript{20} After being convinced of the truth of the objective moral order, man sees the depths of his need.

But \textit{corraggio!} Fear not. God Himself has come to save us.

Faith opens the soul to the reception of grace. Grace does not abrogate the nature of the conscience, nor any of man’s faculties, but rather enlightens, enhances its capabilities, and elevates its action to correspond to this divine calling. No one would aspire to this by his own power, or even on his own initiative. It is God Himself Who throughout all the Old and New Testaments “convinces” man that this is the true plan for him. We have help from the teaching of the Scriptures, the Church’s tradition, the Sacraments, the guiding help of the Magisterium, prayer, and last but not least the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (which is the New Law given and promised by Christ). Grace supplies truth to the intellect, corrects faulty reasoning, and rectifies poor judgment. Grace repairs the will, by strengthening the will toward the true god and protecting man against temptations to evil. Grace even heals the emotions which tug (sometimes vehemently) on the intellect and will. The Holy Spirit gives power and fortitude to withstand opposition to goodness, so that those who love God will have eternal life.

One does not have to be perfect to have Faith. Even the tiniest act of Faith calls down abundant grace from God. “Oh God, You are strong and I am weak.”\textsuperscript{21} “Oh God, I believe, help my unbelief” (cf. Mk 9:24). God is always ready to help, ready to enlighten, strengthen, purify, and perfect man in his actions. But He will not barge in unwanted. He is a perfect gentleman, and (respecting our freedom), He waits to be asked.

\textsuperscript{20} VS, 61: “If man does evil, the just judgment of his conscience remains within him as a witness to the universal truth of the good, as well as the malice of his particular choice. But the verdict of conscience remains in him also as a pledge of hope and mercy: while bearing witness to the evil he has done, it also reminds him of his need, with the help of God’s grace, to ask forgiveness, to do good and to cultivate virtue constantly.”

\textsuperscript{21} St. Catherine of Siena often exclaimed in the midst of temptations.
“Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find” (Mt 7:7). “Come to me all who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). He wants all people to come to Him, to receive the truth, to delight in the consolation of living with a conscience that bears witness to that truth, and to bring that truth to the end of the world.

CONCLUSION

When, on his first visit to Poland in 1979, Pope St. John Paul II said, “Do not be afraid,” there followed 14 minutes of resounding applause. Why? Because after decades of unbelievable suffering and oppression, the Holy Spirit was liberating those people from their fears, and the pope was giving (rather loud) expression to it with the efficacious words of Jesus Christ, which echo throughout all centuries: “Do not be afraid.”  

Fear is the number one obstacle that keeps us from following our consciences. But we know that perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18). Faith allows us to love what is truly good, to seek it with all our being, and this enjoying the consolation of a clear conscience, to delight without measure in He Who is the Supreme Good, He Who comes to us in every moment in the secret depths of our conscience. “Every happening, every event, every suffering, as also every joy, is a sacrament that give God to the soul.”  

Every act has the potential to unite us with God, and the conscience is the judgment that incites us to make such acts, as well as warning us against acts which do not lead to God.

“Happy the man whose conscience does not condemn what he has chosen to do.”

22  Cf. Gen 15:1; Is 43:1–5; Mt 10:28; Mt 14:22–23; Mt 28:10; Lk 1:30; Lk 12:32; Jn 12:15; Jn 14:27; Acts 18:9; and Rev 1:17.
24  Rom 14:22.
“Select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom.” Today the portion of Christ’s Church that gathers here in Saint Peter’s Basilica as well as the faithful of those eager dioceses in Australia and the United States of America keep on making that very same requirement of those we now present for the Diaconate. The Church always has had exceedingly high standards when it comes to choosing those whom she summons to Sacred Orders.

Although by today’s criteria, the ancient prerequisites may seem somewhat benign to our deacon candidates this morning. The first deacons did not have to undergo long years of seminary education and formation. They did not have to pass exams in Scripture, Moral Theology, Church History, Liturgy, and Dogma. They were not subjected to endless faculty evaluations and formation reviews. They did however have to demonstrate by their lives that they were men of integrity, responsible, holy, and trustworthy. Even in that ancient Church where so many of the ordained ministers commonly had to hand over their lives as martyrs in witness to the Faith, the community of the Church was very careful to choose only worthy and committed candidates for the ministry as the Book of the Acts of the Apostles testifies—so must we today.

Even our ancestors in faith—the Hebrew people chose ministers who were specially designated for Divine worship because the adoration of the Sovereign God could be no careless activity. Public ministerial office for people of Faith is no casual undertaking—for the ancients and most certainly not for us. That is why the Word of God selected for this Ordination today seeks to remind us to be careful in choosing our candidates
for the Diaconate. I believe before God that we have such worthy aspirants in these men who come to this venerable basilica today to become our new Deacons.

They are not perfect; perfection has never been a condition for ordination to any office in the Church. In fact, the Church consciously chooses men who may have flaws and weaknesses because God’s grace works most effectively, as Saint Paul wisely reminded the Corinthians, in weakness so that God receives the glory rather than mere mortals.

These men come from loving families whose support and affection have prepared them for this day in their lives. In my name and in the name of the Church in the United States of America and in Australia, I thank all those parents, siblings, relatives, and friends who gather this day to witness the ordination of these men. We thank you for nurturing them, encouraging them, preparing them to become our servant ministers in the Order of the Diaconate. Continue the work of calling them to holiness of life and to integrity so that they will carry on the work of the Church and their pursuit of sanctity that they first began in your homes and around your family tables.

My sons who today also become my cherished brothers, the Order of the Diaconate will serve as a transitional moment in your lives as you continue your preparation for the Priesthood. It is, however, not an unimportant opportunity for your growth in Christ. The Office of Deacon from the earliest memory of the Church has been associated with the ministry of charity. It still bears that ancient relationship. To be a deacon must first of all be an indication that you are a man of charity—real and heartfelt compassion and concern for the poor, the neglected, and the marginalized members of our world. A deacon without a heart for charity will be a hollow and worthless sign. The first deacons were selected to extend the Church’s compassion to the poor in very practical and recognizable ways. As deacons, you must also make visible the Church’s concern for those who today live without so many of the ordinary necessities of life that most of us take for granted. Your ministry should always be offered under the careful guidance of Our Blessed
Mother who is the Mother of the Church—and the image of that Woman who constantly reminds the Church of the compassion of Her Son.

Deacons are called to visit the sick, to work for justice for immigrants, to comfort those who are in sorrow, to help the hungry find food, the naked clothing, and the homeless a dwelling place. Deacons must visit those in prison and in nursing homes. Deacons are never far removed from those that the Lord Jesus has identified as the least of His sisters and brothers.

My young sons, while those same tasks might also be undertaken by many other people within the Church—and indeed they are—you are about to be ordained for the Office of Charity—the Diaconate. God’s Holy Spirit will fill you with the grace of that office that the Church has dedicated to and identified with that charity that is generated around God’s Holy Altar. You will assume a place at the Lord’s Table of Charity and from that table you will go forth to exercise a ministry that is far more than mere social work.

From the Altar of the Lord, you will offer the hungry a Bread that promises not merely to satisfy their physical hungers but to assure them of Life Eternal. When you proclaim the Gospel, you must do so realizing that the Good News you announce is also a summons for every person to seek that Kingdom where God’s Reign will be perfect in every respect. In that Kingdom Justice will be complete for all people.

Today you become preachers—please do so with fidelity to the Truth of the Gospel and to the Church’s traditions. People are looking for inspiring preachers who challenge them, encourage them to deepen their faith, and help them discover God’s presence in their lives. Become such preachers because in that way you truly will be heralds of the Good News that Christ came to reveal.

Be attentive celebrants of the Church’s liturgical life. Consider carefully the details of the rituals so that people will be edified by Church’s worship and sanctified by the Sacraments and the Church’s prayer and never distracted by your too casual or too obsessive comportment.
Today you willingly and freely embrace the gift of celibacy. In so doing, you are telling the Church and the entire world that you will strive for all the rest of your life to live as Christ Himself lived in the midst of the world. Christ was a Man of transparent modesty and innocence. He drew His strength from His constant prayer and conversation with His Father—and so must you. Celibacy is wedded to simplicity of life and to prayer. When these elements become at variance within your life, you will find your celibacy a heavy and unbearable burden. However, when your prayer life is strong and faithful, when your lifestyle is unencumbered by too many possessions, comforts, and distractions, your living and loving will reflect the same appearance as Christ Himself provided for people who found His teaching and ministry so compelling.

Today you become a member of the clergy of our Church—it brings with it a serious obligation of humble service to the people of your local Churches rather than a right or status of entitlement and privilege. You also promise through me and to your bishops and their successors respect and obedience. Those promises bind you and your bishop to one another. That relationship is not one of servant and master, but of a mutual love and affection that will be made perfect as you grow in your desire to listen to one another and come to understand that both the episcopal and diaconal offices are destined to serve God’s People through your fidelity to the mission of His Church. May you do so always with joy and enthusiasm so that the Gospel will reach to the ends of the earth and God’s People will be served in all that we do with and for them. Amen.
INTRODUCTION

One of Friedrich Nietzsche’s most influential works, the *Genealogy of Morality*, sought to give an historical account of the origins of Christian morality. In the third essay of this suggestive work, Nietzsche offers a treatment of his view of the ascetic ideal of truth. The ascetic ideal is a view of truth from the standpoint of the beholder; one views truth as transcendent and not entirely attainable. In this essay, Nietzsche offers his account of the history of ascetic truth, which is accompanied by an extensive critique of it. Nietzsche also offers a detailed criticism of those who attempt to replace this objective approach to truth. It is important to acknowledge, at the outset, that the ascetic ideal for Nietzsche is not merely limited to religious practices such as purity, chastity, or simplicity. Rather, for Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal is something that has motivated several other fields that seek truth. Namely, Nietzsche focuses on the ascetic ideal as it is also manifested in art, philosophy, and science. As will be shown, the ascetic ideal for Nietzsche is not limited to religious practices but concerns a variety of practices that are directed toward a transcendent ideal of truth. This concern with the transcendent for Nietzsche is set in contrast to a seemingly chaotic, meaningless, and disordered reality. It is also important to recognize that Nietzsche is highly critical of the ascetic ideal in many forms, as we will later see.

This criticism of the ascetic ideal is evidently the focus of the third essay. Nietzsche is adamant that the ascetic ideal is a problematic response to
the need for life affirmation, or the ability to say yes to one’s own life. Nietzsche believes that one should pursue a position of acceptance of their own life so that they would be willing to live their life repeatedly in, what he calls, an eternal recurrence. He believes that the ascetic ideal is a faulty response to our need for a motivation to proceed through life. By this characterization, he also believes the ascetic ideal to be well intentioned insofar as it does intend to be life affirming. Nietzsche, however, is so critical that it seems like he is closing out one of his crowning works without a proper conclusion, without a way forward. It seems like he has written an essay concerned primarily with problematic accounts of truth, without proposing a positive account of truth. Has the philosopher with a hammer left nothing but the rubble critiqued views of truth in his wake? Has he fallen by his own hammer? Or is something left standing among the rubble? I argue that beneath Nietzsche’s continuous criticism of ascetic views of truth is a positive view of his own. In this thesis, I will attempt to piece together what I believe to be the positive approach to truth that underlies his negative and critical approach.

In the first chapter, I will offer an examination of Nietzsche’s detailed criticisms of the many manifestations of the ascetic ideal. From this, I will show first that he is taking on a variety of approaches to truth, from religion to nihilism. By showing that Nietzsche has exhausted every viable option for life affirmation, I intend to show that he is trying to make way for something new. I will also show that Nietzsche is critiquing each of these approaches in a manner that suggests an alternative, thereby setting the environment into which the new system can easily be introduced. I will show that there is an alternative to every option he critiques. In the second chapter, I will show that Nietzsche is presenting tragic art as the proper alternative to the ascetic ideal of truth, based on his extensive treatment of art in the text. In the third chapter, I will offer a defense of humor as a possible additional alternative to the ascetic ideal, based on Nietzsche’s stringent requirements for an antithesis. Although humor is never mentioned directly in the third essay, I believe that it fits Nietzsche’s requirements for an antithesis to the ascetic ideal. This defense will be motived firstly by specific elements of humor found
Humor as Anti-Ascetic in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality

throughout the third essay. The defense will also be based on both the extensive criticisms offered in the third essay, as well as Nietzsche’s reasons for presenting tragic art as a proper alternative to the ascetic ideal.

My intention is to neither defend nor criticize Nietzsche’s views or his work. My intention is to simply present what I think is the proper interpretation of this often misread and misused section of one of Nietzsche’s most influential works.

CHAPTER I: EVIDENCE FOR A POSITIVE VIEW WITHIN

Nietzsche’s Critique of the Ascetic Ideal

By overestimating the importance of truth, we fail to recognize the primary dynamic importance of ideas as vehicles for promoting and stultifying various forms of life.¹

THE ASCETIC IDEAL

To begin to extract what Nietzsche holds as a view of truth, it is important to first explore what it is that he means by the ‘ascetic ideal’ in the third essay. It is clear in the beginning of the essay that Nietzsche’s intention is to discuss the meaning of the ascetic ideal, but the full definition of this unique phrase is never clearly established. The focus of Nietzsche’s essay, although vaguely presented, is to define and criticize the ascetic ideal as it is manifested in various pursuits of truth. These different pursuits include religion, art, philosophy, and modern science. Much of Nietzsche’s criticisms of these pursuits in the third essay can be reduced to a criticism of their adherence to the ascetic ideal.

Before proceeding, an essential distinction should be made between the ascetic ideal and asceticism. Although Nietzsche himself is not explicit in distinguishing the two, it is important that the ascetic ideal be distinguished from asceticism to investigate his criticism of it. David Owens,

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in his book on the Genealogy of Morality, explains this helpfully. He writes that asceticism

Refers to specific practices of self-discipline and self-constraint directed to mastering the expression of instincts and desire ... The latter (the ascetic ideal) denotes the idealization of asceticism ... as an ascetic procedure whereby the end to which this procedure is directed is necessarily not immanent to existence but transcends it.”

Nietzsche’s view of asceticism, as Owen characterizes it, refers to an intentional self-restraint for the purpose of an experience of the transcendent. The ascetic ideal, however, is distinct from asceticism in that, instead of restraining oneself, the pursuit of the ascetic ideal seeks to refrain from falsity and error generally for the sake of the pursuit of a transcendent truth. As Owens said, the ascetic ideal idealizes asceticism. This is because asceticism separates the truth and error of the self. Asceticism rejects the error of one’s own passions or immediate desires for the sake of a greater truth. In a similar way, ascetic pursuits of truth reject a falsity or error for the sake of a higher truth. Thus, Nietzsche believes that the ascetic ideal is most clearly exemplified in asceticism while also being found in art, science, and nihilism. He writes, “We know what are the three great catch-words of the ascetic ideal: poverty, humility, chastity.” By Nietzsche’s characterizations of asceticism, the ascetic ideal, in its most profound form in asceticism, is a form of self-denial in light of pursuing a transcendent or otherworldly truth. His primary concern in the third essay is how asceticism has influenced, through history, our concern for truth. He believes that the theme of avoiding passions has manifested itself in several other fields in the form of an avoidance of error and illusion. This theme, Nietzsche believes, has affected the general pursuit of truth. He wants to explain how the themes of the practice of asceticism have influenced modern day pursuits of truth.

The question remains what exactly the nature of the ascetic ideal is. Nietzsche, throughout the essay, offers many clues of the nature of the ascetic ideal, but never provides a direct definition. The first clue occurs at the outset of the third essay where he boldly claims, “In the very fact that the ascetic ideal has meant so much to man, lies expressed the fundamental feature of man’s will, his horror vacui: he needs a goal — and he will sooner will nothingness than not will at all.”

This claim, which he repeats at the end of the essay, expresses two key features of the ascetic ideal. The first feature is that the ascetic ideal is something that is reached for or pursued as a goal. This goal is not simply an attainable or measurable goal. It is, however, something that expresses itself in a will for truth. This relationship is seen later when Nietzsche writes, “But what forces it into that unqualified will for truth is the faith in the ascetic ideal itself.”

The ascetic ideal is a transcendent goal and the pursuit of it seeks to fulfill a human condition: the need for life affirmation. Nietzsche, though, is ultimately examining this will for truth: Why will truth and not falsity? The second feature is the fact that the ascetic ideal is founded, ultimately, on nothing. This means that the ascetic ideal, for Nietzsche, is ultimately pursuing nothing and will eventually collapse on that understanding. He later affirms this position, “What, then, is the meaning of ascetic ideals? In the case of an artist, we are getting to understand their meaning: Nothing at all … or so much that it is as good as nothing at all.” For him, the ascetic ideal is a false affirmation, a fake fulfillment of the longing for truth. To repeat, Nietzsche writes, “He will sooner will nothingness than not will at all.”

The ascetic ideal, in Nietzsche’s view, pursues the things opposed to life, it pursues nothingness. It should be noted that Nietzsche is not saying that the ascetic ideal has been useless up to this point. Rather, Nietzsche is looking to emphasize the lack that is present in the ascetic ideal. Therefore, the core of the ascetic ideal is hollow and ultimately leads to nihilism.

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4 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 1
6 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 5.
7 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 1.
rediscovery of the pointlessness of a transcendent view of truth is what Nietzsche hopes to occasion in the third essay.

Another clue provided by Nietzsche is that the ascetic ideal, although false and hollow in its real meaning, has fulfilled a very real function for mankind. He writes, “To come back to our first question, ‘What is the meaning of a philosopher paying homage to ascetic ideals?’ We get now, at any rate, a first hint; he wishes to escape from torture.” The torture Nietzsche is describing here is the torture of not willing at all, of having an unstimulated will. By paying homage to the ascetic ideal, one’s will is stimulated in pursuing and willing transcendent truth. By this stimulation, one’s life is given meaning and purpose. For Nietzsche, humanity is involved in a real search for meaning, a search for a life affirming force to avoid the total meltdown caused by an approach that does not will at all. Therefore, the creation of the ascetic ideal initially came about by way of a need to will. There is a self-preserving aspect to the ascetic ideal that allows us to proceed through life as though there is a higher or transcendent purpose for which we are living. Nietzsche writes, “The ascetic ideal springs from the prophylactic and self-preservative instincts which mark a decadent life, which seeks by every means in its power to maintain its position and fight for its existence.” Therefore, the ascetic ideal is not to be totally forgotten, as it has held a specific purpose in the history of mankind. It allowed mankind to progress thus far with meaning and purpose. Mankind, for Nietzsche, needs a new purpose as it evolves away from this truth view.

Nietzsche’s primary goal in this essay is not to simply provide the meaning of the ascetic ideal, as he states at the outset. In proper Nietzschean fashion, the essay includes much more, including a detailed genealogically based criticism of the ascetic ideal, in conjunction with his explanation of the ascetic ideal’s meaning. Although the ascetic ideal has held a life enhancing purpose, Nietzsche provides a detailed criticism of the ascetic ideal, foreseeing its downfall as the accepted life enhancing force.

This negative approach to the ascetic ideal is imperative to the introduction of the new positive view of truth, such as tragic art, that I believe Nietzsche is leaving between the lines of this essay. This introduction of a new truth view could also include humor, which will be defended later. Nietzsche is bulldozing the facade of the Christian transcendent truth system to make room for a newer, immanent approach to truth.

**Reactive Forces**

Before entering Nietzsche’s critical approach to the ascetic ideal, the dynamics of Nietzsche’s own philosophy should first be reconstructed as a foundation. At the heart of Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality is a relationship between the slave and master classes, which he reveals in the first essay of the book. This relationship is an echo of a greater theory of Nietzsche’s: the relationship between active and reactive forces. As Deleuze presents it, “In a body the superior or dominant forces are known as *active* and the inferior or dominated forces are known as *reactive*.”10 Reactive forces, however, are not readily evident in the world. Rather, they express themselves through certain themes such as resentment, bad conscience, or the ascetic ideal. These themes are expressions of the will of reactive forces. Understanding the role that Nietzsche’s theory of reactive forces plays in his criticism of the ascetic ideal is crucial to understanding his stark criticism of ascetic truth. This foundation will also be crucial to understanding tragic art as a proper antithesis to the ascetic ideal as well as the possibility of humor to play that role as well.

The heart of Nietzsche’s criticism of reactive forces rests on the very nature of reactive forces themselves. Reactive forces are not self-supportive, but rather, rely on the presence of an active force towards which the reactive force reacts. As Deleuze states, “The reactive is a primordial quality of force but one which can only be interpreted as such in relation

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to and on the basis of the active.”¹¹ This characteristic of reactive forces is primarily why Nietzsche discounts reactive forces as true forces of life affirmation. Reactive forces must answer to and respond to a higher active force. They are not self-sustaining, but rather, are inevitably self-destructive at their empty core.

Nietzsche bases his critique of the ascetic ideal on this theory of reactive and active expressions of the will to power. And thus, he criticizes each of these fields for each of their own expression of the reactive life, their own expression of life denial. In Deleuze’s presentation of reactive and active forces in Nietzsche’s criticisms, two things are revealed that are paramount to the conclusion of his Genealogy. First, the nature of Nietzsche’s criticisms throughout the book is marshaled into a single theory of active and reactive forces. Second, his extensive treatment and critique of reactive forces reveals a further implication of an advancement of a variety of active forces as an alternative source of life affirmation.

As Nietzsche proceeds through his systematic criticism of the ascetic ideal in asceticism, modern science, and nihilism, the criticism of reactive forces is the continuing theme. This criticism will be shown later as Nietzsche discredits each of these approaches from being a truly life affirming force. It seems that each of these lesser attempts at life affirmation, these forms of life enhancement, each express a reactive force in some way. Asceticism, modern science, and nihilism can all be summed up under the same heading: “Reactive.” This is because each of them reacts to falsity and error in some way. It is within his treatment of the reactive life that Nietzsche implicitly presents the active life in tragic art as an alternative, which will be discussed later. Now that Nietzsche’s larger theory of reactive and active forces has briefly been introduced, his criticism of the ascetic ideal will be made clearer. As will be shown, many of his criticisms of ascetic approaches to truth are motivated from this very theory. Therefore, it is crucial that this theory be addressed before anything else.

¹¹ Deleuze, Nietzsche, 42.
**NIETZSCHE’S CRITICISM OF THE ASCETIC IDEA**

Nietzsche criticizes the ascetic ideal as it reveals itself in several approaches to truth, including religious asceticism, art, modern science, and nihilism. He does this first by offering a genealogical account of the ascetic ideal. All the criticisms offered by Nietzsche regarding each of these fields relate back to an overarching genealogical account of the ascetic ideal that he offers at the core of this essay. Nietzsche begins this account in section eleven, where he introduces a crucial character in his genealogical approach: the ascetic priest. The ascetic priest is the foundation of his genealogical criticism, which leads to his greater criticism of the ascetic ideal in all its forms. The ascetic priest is the foundation because Nietzsche charges the ascetic priest with creating the ascetic ideal. His role in this genealogical criticism will later be discussed.

What, exactly, a genealogical criticism is should be briefly examined. Much of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morality* is focused on this method of critique. As Gilles Deleuze writes, “Genealogy means both the value of origin and the origin of values.” A genealogical approach works off the view that by dissecting the history of something, one can understand that one’s impression of the value of a thing is tied to other factors that they are not aware of. In this case, Nietzsche is exploring the history of the ascetic ideal of truth to come to a greater understanding of the real value of the ascetic ideal. He is first telling the story of how the ascetic ideal came about. The eventual discovery of the value of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche believes, will lead to its ultimate demise as a real source of life affirmation.

Crucial to Nietzsche’s genealogical criticism of the ascetic ideal is his reproach of what he terms ‘ressentiment.’ Nietzsche spends much of the first essay of the *Genealogy of Morality* discussing ressentiment. Because of its importance to the genealogical criticism of the ascetic ideal, his theory of ressentiment should briefly be discussed. Max Scheler offers a clear definition of this Nietzschean term. He writes, “Ressentiment is

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12 Deleuze, Nietzsche, 2.
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a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature.”

Ressentiment is characteristic of Nietzsche’s ‘herd’ class. This herd class, according to Nietzsche, is a class of ressentiment because it has been repressed by a higher, more powerful class, and is unable to revolt. Therefore, the herd class formulates its own morality as a way of gaining power over the aristocracy. This new morality is a reversal of the aristocratic morality as everything the aristocracy views as “bad” is termed “good” and everything labeled as “good” in the eyes of the aristocracy is viewed as “bad” by the herd. This dynamic, most generally, is the foundation of Nietzsche’s criticism of ressentiment. In a life of ressentiment, the blame is turned on the other (the aristocratic class). In the case of the ascetic ideal, the blame for one’s frustration is turned toward one’s own self as false, erring, and mistaken. As Nietzsche writes, “It would be correct to say the priest is the diverter of the course of ressentiment.”

The self becomes a figure of error and falsity in comparison to a higher being. This transition of blame is the focus of Nietzsche’s genealogical criticism in the third essay.

To better understand Nietzsche’s genealogical criticism of the infliction of the ascetic ideal, his approach can be split into the active role of the ascetic priest and the passive reception of the ascetic ideal by the ‘sick.’

A crucial element of this genealogical account is the position of power that the ascetic priest holds over those who follow the ascetic ideal. The ascetic priest is the source and inflictor of the ascetic ideal throughout history. But who is the ascetic priest? Although Nietzsche, again, never offers a clear definition of the identity of the ascetic priest, some sort of characterization can be pulled from his writing. It seems that, most generally, the ascetic priest is the ultimate exemplification of the ascetic ideal. The ascetic priest is the greatest self-denier, the greatest nay-sayer to life. In order to be the source of the ascetic ideal according to Nietzsche,

“He must be sick himself.” The ascetic priest, however, is not simply a sick man among the sick, he is a man in a position of power who wields the ascetic ideal as his weapon. Nietzsche writes, “In that ideal the ascetic priest finds not only his faith, but also his will, his power, his interest.” But how does the ascetic priest attain and keep his power? Nietzsche supplies the twofold position of the ascetic priest as both source of disorder as well as healer. Nietzsche writes, “But in order to be a doctor, he first has to inflict wounds.” The ascetic priest manipulates the herd by convincing the herd of their ailment while also offering the medicine they “need.” This medicine is a religious asceticism. The ascetic priest convinces the herd that the falsity or error of their own bodies is the source of their illness. Therefore, the ascetic approach sprouts from this act of convincing through which the falsity itself of one’s body becomes the thing that is rejected.

The second character in the exchange is the sick, the herd. The sick must have a certain sickness to accept the ascetic ideal. As Nietzsche writes, “Everyone who has ever built anywhere a ‘new heaven’ first found the power thereto in his own hell.” For Nietzsche, there needs to be an abundant lack of order for the ascetic ideal to work. The people must first be sick. But sick with what? For Nietzsche, this sickness can take many forms, and it is the role of the ascetic priest to point it out so that the patient might turn against themselves by way of an ascetic lifestyle. Nietzsche writes, “Such a feeling of depression can have the most diverse origins; it may be the result of the crossing of too heterogeneous races … old age and fatigue; it may be a wrong diet; it may be blood-deterioration.” The patient of the ascetic priest is willing to accept the ascetic ideal because of an ongoing lack or dissatisfaction. What is key to this exchange is that the disorders which the ascetic priest is pointing to are disorders of the self and not the other. This is so that the pa-

15 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 15.
16 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 11.
17 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 15.
18 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 10.
19 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 17.
tient might direct the blame for their suffering onto themselves rather than some other person or entity. The ressentiment and the reaction are turned toward the person themself.

As a conclusion of his genealogical criticism of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche criticizes the ascetic ideal for its nihilistic core. Nietzsche believes that at the foundation of the ascetic ideal is a will for nothingness, which will soon be revealed by an inquiry into the value of truth. He writes, “After Christian truthfulness has drawn one conclusion after the other, it finally draws its strongest conclusion, its conclusion against itself; this, however, happens, when it puts the question, ‘what is the meaning of every will for truth?’” This inevitable discovery, Nietzsche believes, will seal the fate of the ascetic ideal of truth as the ascetic ideal is forced to explore its own origin, and therefore, its value. This discovery will negatively affect the ascetic ideal because the alternative to the ascetic ideal is a suicidal nihilism. The ascetic ideal functions solely as a covering or avoidance of that suicidal nihilism. Nihilism, in this light, becomes the presupposition of the ascetic ideal.

In addition to Nietzsche’s genealogical critique of the ascetic ideal, he repeatedly cites an overall contradictory nature of the ascetic ideal. The contradiction of the ascetic ideal is centered on the life-denying characteristic of the ascetic ideal. By ‘life,’ Nietzsche means all our experience, including tragedy, error, and illusion. The ascetic ideal is life denying because it separates one from the entirety of life. Part of life, for Nietzsche, is falsity and error and to react to them by avoiding them would mean avoiding or resisting life. The life-denying characteristic derives from asceticism’s resistance to sensualities. This reaction is manifest in poverty, humility, and chastity. The ascetic ideal’s approach to truth as transcendent or sublime derives from these ascetic practices. Asceticism holds the mundane or sensual as matters of error or becoming in light of a greater or transcendent reality of the divine. Nietzsche sets out to

20  Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 27.
challenge this view by embracing such matters of becoming that have been denied for their relation to the stability of being, and more importantly, for the pursuit of an ascetic ideal of truth. The contradiction, for Nietzsche, lies in the binary separation of being and becoming.

As has been shown, Nietzsche’s criticism of the ascetic ideal contains both a genealogical criticism and a criticism of the ascetic ideal’s reactive avoidance of error and falsity. He offers a narrative of the origination of the ascetic ideal by way of the ascetic priest who both sickens and heals. At the same time, Nietzsche criticizes the ascetic ideal for its denial of life. This denial of life is because of the ascetic ideal’s resistance to error and illusion. Now that Nietzsche’s criticism of the ascetic ideal in general has been shown, his further criticism of additional approaches to truth can be explained. By doing so, evidence for Nietzsche making room for a positive approach to truth will be shown as each of these supposed antitheses to the ascetic ideal will prove to be ascetic themselves.

THE CRITIQUE OF THE ASCETIC IDEAL IN SCIENCE

With the ascetic ideal beginning to topple, Nietzsche critiques the possible antitheses to the ascetic ideal that could serve the function of life affirmation. One of these candidates is modern science, which often sets itself in stark contrast to the ascetic practice of religion. Nietzsche observes much of the rhetoric coming out of scientific groups that claim to be in total opposition to the earlier triumph of religious ascetic practice. Nietzsche, however, is highly skeptical of modern science’s self-proclaimed defeat of religious asceticism. He writes, “Science has today absolutely no belief in itself, let alone in an ideal superior to itself, and wherever science still consists of passion, love, ardor, suffering, it is not the opposition to that ascetic ideal, but rather the incarnation of its latest and noblest form.”22 Rather than taking the seat as an antithesis to the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche is bold in claiming that science is merely taking the

22 Hatab, “How Does the Ascetic Ideal Function,” 23.
torch of the ascetic ideal from the hands of religious asceticism. From Nietzsche’s criticism of improper antitheses to the ascetic ideal, a clearer image can be drawn of what he believes to be the proper and new life affirming approach to truth. And from this image, new possibilities of life affirmation, such as humor, can be defended.

The first reason for Nietzsche’s criticism is that science was born out of religion, and so, it still holds an ascetic approach to truth. In his article on the topic, Paul Valadier writes, “Religion has been a matrix of science in that it rendered possible the scientific regard toward the world, in that it was born of curiosity, of ambition to see beyond immediate appearances, that it was also made of the will to decipher, to interpret the ways of the world.”\(^{23}\) Because of this relationship, science is inseparable from the ascetic ideal because it was from a religious ascetic environment that science drew its motivation for truth. Therefore, science is not a proper antithesis as it still pursues truth like religious practice does.

The second reason for Nietzsche’s criticism of science as a proper antithesis is science’s common ground with the ascetic ideal in a denial of life. Nietzsche writes, “Considered physiologically, moreover, science rests on the same basis as does the ascetic ideal: a certain *impoverishment of life* is the presupposition of the latter as of the former.”\(^{24}\) For Nietzsche, modern science is an extension of the ascetic ideal because it is parasitic on weakening life while still proclaiming to do otherwise. Valadier writes, “The positivists and scientists thus fail to see that they support the secular enterprise of impoverishing life, weakening its defiant vitality, even to the point of declaring themselves against life itself since they effectively emasculate the entirety of its darker and frightening components.”\(^{25}\) Like religion, science seeks a holistic and comprehensive explanation for life, a greater truth. By seeking in such a way, science seemingly attempts to domesticate and draw lines around life and, by

\(^{24}\) Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 25.
doing this, it denies life. Our reality becomes something controllable, and everything becomes attainable. For the sake of truth, “We refuse the world as a groundless abyss, or an intertwining of forces or contradictory realities.”\textsuperscript{26} For this very reason, Nietzsche considers science an extension of the ascetic ideal as it impoverishes life for the sake of a pursuit of some greater overestimation of truth.

The last reason for Nietzsche’s denial of science’s claim as the replacement of religion is that science has a similar effect on man as religion. This similarity is because science, like religion, breaks man down as a means to an end. Nietzsche writes, “Alas, his belief in his dignity, his uniqueness and irreplaceableness in the scheme of existence, is gone — he has become an animal: literal, unqualified, and unmitigated, he who in his earlier belief was almost God.”\textsuperscript{27} Science, for Nietzsche, breaks down man. It pulls man apart to understand him. Science approaches man as a source of study and by this process, science becomes life-denying. Just as Gandalf states in J.R.R. Tolkien’s \textit{The Lord of the Rings}, “He that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom.”\textsuperscript{28}

In this way, science breaks apart man to find out what he is, thereby destroying him as a creature of life. Man, in some respect, loses his dignity as a living being when he is put under a microscope. In a similar way, for Nietzsche, religion breaks man down as a means to attaining salvation. Valadier writes, “Just as religions needed to crush man as a sinner only to be able, afterwards, to exalt him as ‘son of God,’ promised to eternal life.”\textsuperscript{29} In order to attain salvation, one must first endure certain trials. Nietzsche focuses on the similar act of breaking down man for a further end. In the case of religion, that end is salvation, while in the case of science, the end is truth.

From these three reasons for the critique of science, perhaps a clue can

\textsuperscript{26} Valadier, “Science as New Religion,” 246.
\textsuperscript{27} Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 25.
\textsuperscript{29} Valadier, “Science as New Religion,” 250.
be given as to what Nietzsche is proposing as a proper alternative to the ascetic ideal. The reasons why science failed for Nietzsche can help illustrate the proper alternative. It can be said that Nietzsche is proposing, through a negative approach, a view of truth that is distinguished entirely from religious asceticism. It is an approach that functions from an abundance of life rather than an impoverishment, while seeking to embrace life rather than deny it. Science failed for Nietzsche because it intentionally dismantled life while inevitably approaching a nihilistic conclusion. Nietzsche is proposing a view of truth that embraces life in its entirety rather than scrutinizing it from a bystander or reactive perspective. This characteristic will be a further reason why tragic art succeeds in being a proper antithesis to the ascetic ideal. As will be shown later, art does not scrutinize life from a reactive or bystander perspective.

**The Critique of Nihilism**

Now that Nietzsche’s reasons from critiquing science’s exemplification of the ascetic ideal have been shown, his critique of another possible antithesis, nihilism, will also be shown. This discussion will show why nihilism fails to be an antithesis, and later, why tragic art avoids this mistake. The second target of critique in Nietzsche’s third essay is what he calls ‘free spirits.’ Free spirits, for Nietzsche, are the embodiment of nihilism. Nietzsche’s zealous criticism of this form of nihilism helps show that an approach to life markedly detached from meaning is not the way forward. Nietzsche approaches these nihilists with a laundry list of characterizations such as, “These solitaries and deniers of today; these fanatics in one thing, in their claim to intellectual cleanness; these hard, stern, continent, heroic spirits … all these pale atheists, anti-Christians, immoralists, Nihilists; these sceptics, ‘ephectics’ and ‘hectics’ of the intellect.”

Now, it is important to make clear that Nietzsche is speaking about a distinct group of nihilists. As has been said, Nietzsche criticized the ascetic ideal for its nihilistic foundation. It so happens, however, that

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Nietzsche here is speaking of a different kind of nihilism that embodies the ascetic ideal in a different way. As will be shown, it can be said that there are two types of nihilism, one of which Nietzsche is criticizing in this passage. On various occasions Nietzsche has been associated with a different type of nihilism than the two mentioned here, but this will be discussed later.

There are two types of nihilism Nietzsche examines in the third essay. As Deleuze presents them, “The first sense is a negative nihilism; the second sense a reactive nihilism.” The former sense, negative nihilism, is a will to truth manifested in a will to deny. For example, negative nihilism is a denying of the real falsities and errors of life for the sake of the pursuit of truth. Negative nihilism follows the ascetic ideal as it is founded upon a will to annihilate life. This will to annihilate life was presented earlier in Nietzsche’s genealogical criticism of the ascetic ideal. The latter sense, reactive nihilism, is attributed to these free spirits who willingly seek nothingness as a basis for reaction against values. As Deleuze states, “This is no longer the devaluation of life in the name of higher values but rather the devaluation of higher values themselves.” An example of the free spirits Nietzsche is responding to could very well be members of the Russian Nihilist movement of the late 19th century. Members of this movement claimed total freedom from a founded system of values, or rather, truth. Nietzsche, however, is highly critical of this approach, and bases his own criticism on the logical inconsistency of this nihilistic approach.

It seems that, from the outset, these free spirits are the exact embodiment of what Nietzsche would want. They hold the claim to be free from the ascetic ideal as they are free from the objective groundings of science or religion. Nietzsche, however, writes, “Yet, if I may reveal what they themselves cannot see ... this ideal is simply their ideal, they represent it nowadays and perhaps no one else.” Nietzsche gives a

scathing rebuttal to nihilism’s claim of being the antithesis to the ascetic ideal. Rather than being the stark antithesis, this nihilism is labelled by Nietzsche as the ascetic ideal’s “most spiritualized product.”34 But what is it about this form of nihilism that Nietzsche is so opposed to?

Nietzsche offers a few clues about how these free spirits fail in their attempt to become the antithesis to the ascetic ideal. His primary criticism concerns their remaining belief in truth, even after claiming freedom from it. Nietzsche writes, “The absolute fanaticism of their belief in truth is unparalleled.”35 Here, Nietzsche has spotted the logical fallacy of a nihilist approach to truth. While boldly claiming that there is no objective truth or meaning, nihilists are still holding to an objective truth system. For them, it is objectively true that there is no truth, which is self-contradictory. Deleuze highlights the nihilistic contradiction saying, “It (nihilism) replaces the ‘errors’ of other views, and so the liberated sphere is still in the service of truth.”36 By their adherence to a truth system, nihilists are a continuation of the projection of the ascetic ideal of truth. Nihilists, however, project their adherence to the ascetic ideal even louder without even recognizing it. They have a deeper conviction and sense of confidence than any other adherers to the ascetic ideal.

Deleuze summarizes Nietzsche’s critique of nihilism as a critique of a solely reaction-based approach to truth without any expression of the will to power. The approach of the free spirits is entirely reaction based because it requires that a positive theory of truth exist before it. Nihilism is solely based on the critique and denial of another theory, rather than a locally originated expression of the will to power. Nietzsche clearly sees the fault in a negativist approach to truth: it never really addresses a truth of its own. This approach only critiques another system, which is why Nietzsche is so blunt in his attack of these free spirits. Nietzsche, however, can still be said to be a nihilist insofar as he seeks to separate himself from any sort of objective approach to truth, including one

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34 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 24.
35 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 24.
36 Deleuze, Nietzsche, 147.
which objectively rejects other approaches to truth. He can be said to be advocating for a nihilism that is active rather than reactive.

This analysis of Nietzsche’s criticism of free spirits is a further proof of Nietzsche’s greater intention to bring forward a positive theory of truth. Nietzsche does not want to rest on a negative and reactive approach to truth like the free spirits. Nietzsche has another more positive system in mind that rests beneath these criticisms. He has in mind a system that is not overly convinced of itself. Rather, Nietzsche has in mind a system, like tragic art, that actively stimulates the will to power.

**THE NEED FOR LIFE AFFIRMATION**

By denying certain instabilities and fluctuations, Nietzsche believes that the ascetic ideal has denied life, and has thereby contradicted its greater purpose: to affirm life. Nietzsche terms this contradiction ‘life against life.’ Nietzsche uses this language because the approach to affirming life that is found in the ascetic ideal is turned against life itself. The ascetic ideal, although contradictory, uses its denial of life as a purposeful motivation for life. Nietzsche writes, “It is subsequently the wound itself that forces him to live.” It is the wound of an overall fear and evasion of falsity that motivates people to live for a transcendent truth. Subsequently, in the impending collapse of the ascetic ideal, a new life affirming force must take its place. Something else must function to help avoid suicidal nihilism.

What is especially puzzling about Nietzsche’s criticism is his occasional embrace of the ascetic ideal and the ascetic priest as figures of improvement of life. Nietzsche writes, “This ascetic priest, this apparent enemy of life, this denier — he actually belongs to the really great conservative and affirmative forces of life.” As previously mentioned, the ascetic ideal is an avoidance of suicidal nihilism, and so, is affirmative in a certain

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sense. Nietzsche writes, “The ascetic ideal springs from the prophylactic and self-preservative instincts which mark a decadent life.” The ascetic ideal was needed for humanity to continue living, it was not the bane of human existence thus far. But what is Nietzsche proposing here? If the ascetic ideal is supportive of life, why has Nietzsche been so critical of it?

Behind this question lies the need for a distinction between the life-improving forces of the ascetic ideal and those of the antithetical approach of life affirmation which Nietzsche is implying. Lawrence Hatab proposes this distinction as a means of better understanding Nietzsche’s critique of the ascetic ideal as well as Nietzsche’s own form of life affirmation. Hatab calls the life denying ideals ‘life enhancing’ while calling Nietzsche’s system ‘life affirming.’ The proper difference between the two, according to Hatab, is a matter of embracing the other. Hatab writes, “Life affirmation, in Nietzsche’s strict sense, requires an affirmation of otherness, which is consistent with the tensional structure of will to power.” In other words, the theory of life affirmation that Nietzsche is ambiguously proposing is one which embraces all forms of life. In contrast, the ascetic priest is seen as a force of life enhancement because he embraces his own form of life without embracing the other parts of life he labels as false. Concerning the ascetic priest, Nietzsche writes, “He rather affirms thereby his existence and only his existence.” This dynamic is how the ascetic priest is seen as both a yes-sayer and a no-sayer to life.

This discussion of the ascetic priest is an initial indication that Nietzsche is bringing forth a new system of truth through this essay. The great void was, until now, filled with a morality or truth system based in the ascetic approach to truth. Nietzsche writes, “In that ideal suffering found

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an explanation; the tremendous gap seemed filled; the door to all suicidal Nihilism was closed.” 45 This void will now be open again once the ascetic ideal asks that crucial and self-destructive question: “What is the meaning of every will for truth?” 46 The life enhancement of the ascetic ideal will fall by the wayside, and we will be left to choose between suicidal nihilism and another new form of life affirmation which Nietzsche implicitly proposes. For Nietzsche, as we realize the fault of the ascetic ideal, the affirmation of our own existence will be in danger and we will need a new affirmation, an affirmation of life. For this reason, there appears to be an alternative proposed in the text of the third essay: tragic art. The antithesis is proposed as one that avoids the failures of other alleged alternatives. Therefore, tragic art will need to be defended as a proper antithesis. Furthermore, humor will also be defended later as a possible addition to this antithesis insofar as it meets Nietzsche’s requirements.

CONCLUSION

Nietzsche’s text leaves a great deal of indications within his extensive criticism of the possibility of an alternative to each of the systems of truth he criticizes. Every criticism he offers leaves the implication of a differing alternative. Nietzsche’s bold criticism of the reactive leaves the possibility of the active. Just as the ascetic ideal has been characterized as life denying, so the possibility remains for a new pursuit of truth to be life affirming. Just as the forces of ressentiment helped build the ascetic ideal, so the possibility remains for a force of power to build a new approach to truth. Just as the ascetic ideal was built on a nihilistic core, so the possibility remains for a new system of truth to be built on an abundance of life. Nietzsche is not criticizing to propose nothing as an alternative. Nietzsche is taking a suggestive approach by critiquing characteristics of the ascetic ideal in a way that implies directly opposite characteristics. By this approach, he is building the foundation of his

45 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 27.
46 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 27.
own truth system: a truth system that is purely non-unconditional. In other words, Nietzsche is rejecting systems of truth that claim to hold objectively in all subjective circumstances. It should be said that he is not seeking a system that is merely conditional, for this would not encapsulate his refusal of objective systems of truth. Nietzsche is seeking something that is specifically non-unconditional.

Chapter II: Art as An Antithesis

Art, in which lying sanctifies itself and the will to deception has good conscience on its side, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than science is.47

Nietzsche’s Comments on Art

Although much of the third essay is occupied with a direct criticism of the ascetic ideal, there are several mentions regarding a true alternative to the ascetic ideal: a proper antithesis. There remains, for Nietzsche, the possibility of life affirmation even after the death of God and the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche sees the possible versions of suicidal nihilism as unsatisfactory extensions of the ascetic ideal. This dissatisfaction is why he spends a great deal of effort in the third essay discussing tragic art as a proper source of life affirmation. With the presentation of the specific alternative of tragic art, the possibility remains for alternatives to be proposed, such as humor, in addition to the ones directly mentioned. Before exploring such alternatives, Nietzsche’s own narrow view of art must be highlighted so that it can be defended as antithetical to the ascetic ideal. The eventual defense of humor as a possible form of life affirmation will parallel Nietzsche’s own defense of this narrow view of tragic art.

Within the context of the criticisms explored in the previous chapter, Nietzsche spends a considerable portion of the beginning of the third essay discussing and critiquing modern views of art. To begin, it is im-

47 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 25.
portant to make clear that Nietzsche is not interested in just any type of aesthetic art. He sees a major fault in the aesthetics of his current day, which will soon be explored. Nietzsche refers to a need for a return to more tragic forms of art as seen in the pre-Socratic era of Ancient Greece. The ascetic ideal replaced this tragic view of art, and once the ascetic ideal collapses into nihilism, this view will reclaim its role as the popular approach to art.

Nietzsche’s first central view concerning art is that in its proper form, art cannot be reduced to or judged by an exterior motivation of some sort. Nietzsche writes, “To put it at the lowest, they [artists] always need a rampart, a support, an already constituted authority: artists never stand by themselves, standing alone is opposed to their deepest instincts.” Art, in Nietzsche’s view, has lately seemed to rely on and refer to some exterior body such as a religion or a morality. In this post-Socratic age, art has expressed a view, it has suspended a will in some fashion. Nietzsche is calling this entire approach into question. Why does art need an outside support? Nietzsche is calling for a return to an expression of art that is detached from the restraints of an unconditional or ascetic ideal of truth. From this demand for a ‘detached art,’ Nietzsche explores a view of beauty that is totally detached from anything exterior to it. In proper Nietzschean fashion, Nietzsche explores two failures as a means of illustrating the proper approach.

Before addressing these failing approaches to disinterested art, a crucial distinction should be made between the ‘characters’ at play in a piece of art. The first is the piece of art itself which is produced for the sake of an expression of beauty. The second is the artist who creates the art and the third is the spectator who observes the art to appreciate its beauty. Meanwhile, the fourth is the external motivation, such as a religion, which can be used as a platform or support system onto which the art is founded. Under Nietzsche’s critique, this last character should be removed. Because of the absence of this fourth character, the question arises of where the beauty of the art should be placed.

First, Nietzsche expresses his criticism of a disinterested approach to art in his treatment of Kant. Kant also attempts to produce a view of art that is totally separated from exterior interest. For Nietzsche, Kant fails to accomplish this separation because he only defines beauty from the view of the spectator. Kant defines the beautiful as that which “prepares us to love disinterestedly something, even nature itself; the Sublime prepares us to esteem something highly even in opposition to our own [sensible] interest.”  

By only defining beauty from the perspective of the spectator, Kant has “imported the spectator himself into the idea of the ‘beautiful.’” This importation is problematic because by this definition, we never arrive at a proper idea of the beautiful in art. The beautiful becomes something supplied by the one observing it rather than something that has its own integrity as beautiful. Therefore, when exploring this disinterested approach to art, one is easily mistaken in disregarding anything exterior to our personal perception of the beautiful.

In the same way, Nietzsche is also highly critical of a view of art that only appreciates art from the view of the artist. The artist, for him, “is after all merely the presupposition of his work, the womb, the soil, in certain cases the dung and manure, on which and out of which it grows — and consequently, in most cases, something that must be forgotten if the work itself is to be enjoyed.” Nietzsche is responding to representations of beauty that present something resonant only to the artist. This position is the opposite extreme to Kant’s approach, as it places the element of beauty in the hands of the artist rather than the spectator. Therefore, Nietzsche is proposing a view of art that gives the art itself a position of authority over all the other elements. Art, in Nietzsche’s view, holds the active role in the artist’s creation of the art, and the spectator’s interaction with the art.

Nietzsche, once again, uses his critique of the art around him to fur-
Humor as Anti-Ascetic in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality

ther propose his own view of art. As mentioned above, he gives two improper examples of disinterested art. The first is art that relies on the viewpoint of the spectator, and the second is art that relies on the artist. To conclude, Nietzsche’s intent here is to expose every reactive conception of art. It is crucial to Nietzsche’s view of art that art be a “stimulant of the will to power” rather than something that merely suspends the will to power.\textsuperscript{52} An art that acts as a stimulant of the will to power must also magnify the world in its totality, and therefore, magnify it also in its error. As will be shown later, humor seems to do this very thing by suspending a falsity in light of something that would “normally” happen. Art needs to do this act of suspending to be considered a proper antithesis. Therefore, a return to the tragic art of the pre-Socratic Greeks is required for art to truly be isolated from the support of an exterior entity.

\textbf{The Function of the Artist in Art}

With this properly disinterested form of art in mind, it is appropriate to briefly address the position of the artist in relation to the art. As said before, to achieve this disinterested predisposition for art, the artist must be isolated entirely from the appreciation of the art itself. Although the relationship between artist and art has already been addressed, the language used by Nietzsche regarding this relationship leaves a clear indication of his intentions to set tragic art and the ascetic ideal in an antithetical relationship.

As said before, Nietzsche views the artist as the \textit{Vorausbedingung}, the presupposition of the art. The artist, as Nietzsche claims, “Must be forgotten if the work itself is to be enjoyed.”\textsuperscript{53} Nietzsche also refers to a particular \textit{Vorausbedingung} in his later critique of the ascetic ideal. Namely, that the ascetic ideal is founded upon the presupposition of an impoverishment of life. Nietzsche uses this phrase when he writes, “Science rests on the same basis as does the ascetic ideal: a certain \textit{impoverishment}.

\textsuperscript{52} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morality}, 4.
\textsuperscript{53} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morality}, 4.
of life is the presupposition of the latter as of the former.” The problem Nietzsche has with the ascetic ideal, as said before, is that it never really escapes from this impoverishment of life, but rather furthers it. This furthering is a consequence of the fact that, generally speaking, the ascetic ideal denies life through its separation of truth and falsity. Thereby, the ascetic ideal still grapples with and contains its own presupposition, an impoverishment of life. Therefore, it seems that Nietzsche is using a parallel style of language to describe both art and the ascetic ideal. By using such language, Nietzsche seems to be referring to a particular relationship between art and the ascetic ideal. It will be shown that this relationship is antithetical. In the same way, it will be shown that humor could also hold this antithetical role because it does not require its presupposition, its “artist,” to be appreciated.

As said before, the relationship between thing and presupposition occurs in modern art as modern art has a presupposition: the artist. A piece of art, however, can escape from this presupposition by being appreciated apart from its artist as discussed before. This separation of course, is quite difficult to achieve. In fact, Nietzsche accuses his previous idol, composer Richard Wagner, of importing his own will into the work *Parsifal*. Nietzsche offers a comparative analogy to Wagner’s inability to be detached from his own work, saying, “As little as a pregnant woman is spared the horrors and marvels of pregnancy, which, as I have said, must be forgotten if the child is to be enjoyed.” Like the horrors of pregnancy, for Nietzsche, the artist needs to be forgotten if the art is to be enjoyed. Wagner did not spare himself from interpreting his own will to power in the art he created. As difficult as this separation is to achieve, even for a famous composer like Wagner, Nietzsche still seems to believe that a total detachment of art from its origins is possible. Therefore, art is to become opposed to the ascetic ideal’s inability to be detached from its own origin.

Nietzsche, in his comments on art, has offered a preliminary indication

that art can be opposed to the ascetic ideal in art’s ability to be detached from its presupposition: its creator. Art’s ability to become detached from the artist is not an easy task, as seen in Wagner’s Parsifal. This detachment is unlike the ascetic ideal however which necessarily relies upon its creator, an underlying impoverishment of life. By this use of Vorausbedingung during the discussion of art and of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche seems to be presenting an antithetical relationship between art and the ascetic ideal. We are led to believe that there is something about art that allows it to free itself from the nature of the ascetic ideal, even if it is only art of a very particular form which can do this (which I will discuss later). From this initial indication, a further discussion concerning the nature of this antithetical relationship can proceed.

**Art as False**

Amid his discussion of science in the third essay, Nietzsche interjects, saying, “Art, in which lying sanctifies itself and the will to deception has good conscience on its side, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than science is.” Art is Nietzsche’s battleground against the ascetic ideal. An “internal dynamism of the body” is Nietzsche’s point of departure from the ascetic ideal. Art, for Nietzsche, can be an expression of that very dynamism through which life affirmation comes. Deleuze characterizes Nietzsche’s art as “the highest power of falsehood, it magnifies the ‘world as error,’ it sanctifies the lie; the will to deception is turned into a superior ideal.” Nietzsche views art as totally isolated from unconditional truth systems, including those that unconditionally claim truth as relative. Truth, as shown in art, becomes more fluid, more dynamic, falser. Now, it is important to recognize that Nietzsche is not proposing a mere chaotic order by simply embracing

falsity while denying truth. Nietzsche is not countering the ascetic ideal by granting value to what the ascetic ideal opposes: error, falsity or becoming. By this approach, art would simply take the role of “medicine,” which through its embrace of the chaotic, would “help” us endure the world. This role of art as medicine would be a clear manifestation of the reactive life, one that seeks to make the false true. Rather, Nietzsche is approaching art in terms of the will to power, as a manifestation of the active life.

A distinction should be made between two ways in which art could be antithetical to the ascetic ideal in its presentation of the false. Firstly, it could be said that art is antithetical to the ascetic ideal because it is inherently false. In this sense, art is false because it is not what it represents. For example, a painting of a basket of fruit, no matter how lifelike it is, will always be false insofar as it is not the basket of fruit. Art cannot be said to be antithetical to the ascetic ideal in this sense because it teaches us to appreciate falsity alone, in contradistinction to an ascent to truth. It should be said that Nietzsche is not a proponent of art in this way. Rather, Nietzsche attaches a value to art as antithetical in a second way. By this way, art is antithetical insofar as it frames and suspends life honestly. This means that art does not try to avoid or hide the false in light of only presenting truth. The artist does not present only half of life. For example, the violence and drama of the ancient tragedy *The Bacchae* displays the themes of error and falsity. The play itself contains themes of both victory and defeat, peace and war, love and hate. It is in this second way that art can be said to be antithetical to the ascetic ideal. It should be said that this second way requires a very particular type of art, which will be discussed later.

Simply embracing art as a means of attaching a value to falsity is not enough to counter an ascetic will to truth. Nietzsche is not merely bringing value to falsehood because it counteracts truth. Rather, Nietzsche is calling for a will to deception because error and falsity are conditions of

life. To deny and resist falsity unconditionally is to deny and resist life. Therefore, to oppose this view means embracing the conditions of life. A valuing of falsity in art is not antithetical to the ascetic ideal simply because it embraces falsity rather than truth. Rather, the valuing of falsity in art is antithetical to the ascetic ideal because it embraces the condition of life, which is full of error and deception. In this sense, art embraces both truth and falsity. When appreciating art as life-affirming, we are not taking a falsity to be the new truth. Rather, the conditions of our lives, that are full of error, illusion, truth, and clarity are being affirmed in art. Further, Nietzsche is emphasizing falsity and error as stimulants of the will to power.

Now that it has been shown how art is opposed to the ascetic ideal, a proper distinction between complete falsity and deception is needed. Nietzsche says that art is that “in which lying sanctifies itself and the will to deception has good conscience on its side.”\(^\text{60}\) It should be made clear that Nietzsche is talking about the error and deception of life when referring to falsity, and not the false itself. In other words, the false should not be raised as the new ideal. Otherwise, Nietzsche would simply be reestablishing the ascetic ideal, only in an ascent to falsity. Art is valuable because it presents the errors and manipulations of life. Art, therefore, is not a totally false representation. The aim of art is not to necessarily pursue and present total falsity, and thereby deceive us entirely. As Stoll writes, “Saying that cognition rests on or is conditioned by error, illusion, or whatever, is quite a different thing from claiming that all knowledge (so-called) is simply false.”\(^\text{61}\) Here, Nietzsche’s intent becomes quite clear: to show that art emphasizes that fact that life is marked by errors. It is this type of falsity that Nietzsche believes has been disregarded by an ascetic approach to truth.

A will to deception in art holds a life affirming force because it points to life, which itself is deceiving. Art leads us back to the real world, which for Nietzsche is a matter of appearance and deception. Truth takes on a

\(^{60}\) Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morality}, 25.

\(^{61}\) Stoll, “Semblance and Authenticity,” 89.
different form, “Truth is appearance.” The falsity of art guides us away from the belief that our representations of the world are identical with the world as it is. Art, as Stoll writes, “places value on semblance, lie, illusion, and the like, precisely by being up front about and getting us to enjoy its own quality as semblance.” Through art, we can see the world as appearance rather than dogmatic interpretation. Art shows us that although we cannot perfectly know the real, there is a value in presenting our deceptions and false representations alongside the truth in an honest way. And thus, deception, error, falsity, and pain are embraced in art.

Art is a candidate for an active form of life affirmation because it does not avoid falsity by presenting it completely and honestly. Rather, art employs falsity to further understand and allure one to life. It is by raising falsehood to such a position that art can counter the ascetic ideal. The raising of falsehood in art is taken to become a will to deceive on the part of the artist. The artist does not seek to express truth. Rather the artist has a will to deceive insofar as they look to express errors and deceptions. In sum, the will to truth in the ascetic ideal is fundamentally opposed to a will to deception in art.

**Art as Tragic**

When Nietzsche was writing about art as an expression of a will to deception, it is likely that he was not talking about lifelike paintings of fruit baskets. He was seeking to find a form of art that was more stimulating of the will to power, one that expressed the drama of life to affirm one’s life. Nietzsche had a profound interest in the art of tragedy, particularly, in ancient Greek tragedies. As a philologist, Nietzsche sets this appreciation of tragedy in contrast with the life denial of ascetic truth, the origination of which he attributes to Plato. As much of Nietzsche’s discussion of tragedy in the third essay is limited, some of his additional works on the matter will be used to support his claims concerning art.

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As will be shown, the two primary sides of tragedy for Nietzsche are the Apollonian and the Dionysian, in reference to the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus respectively. These two principles are set in opposition for Nietzsche, but are both nevertheless crucial in Nietzsche’s view of tragic art.

Nietzsche claims, “Plato versus Homer: that is complete, genuine antagonism – on the one hand, the sincerest ‘advocate of the beyond,’ the great slanderer of life, on the other hand, its involuntary idolater, the *golden* nature.”\(^{64}\) Tragic art is set in complete contrast from the ascetic approach to truth found in Plato. It is a fuller stimulant of the will to deceive as it presents an illusion of life in its entirety, as discussed before. This will to deceive contrasts Socrates who sought to only present truth and avoid falsity. Socrates was not concerned with providing an illusion of life to stimulate a will to illude or deceive. Rather, Socrates presented the truth, thereby stimulating a will to truth. This characterization aligns with Nietzsche’s general view of Socrates as the enemy of Dionysian tragedy. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes, “Insofar as the fight was directed against the Dionysian of the older art, we recognize in Socrates the enemy of Dionysus.”\(^{65}\) It is clear from Nietzsche’s earlier work, that he was predisposed to set the ascetic ideal and tragic art in opposition.

Nietzsche held a deep appreciation for Greek tragedy, namely, that of the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus. Although he spends little time discussing Greek tragedy in the third essay, much of his appreciation for Apollonian and Dionysian tragedies influences his claims in the text. At the outset of the essay, Nietzsche offers a brief indication for his appreciation for the early Greek tragedians. He offers a brief interpretation of tragedy while critiquing composer Richard Wagner. Nietzsche wrote that, unlike Wagner’s *Parsifal*, real tragedy was one, “with an excess of the most extreme and flippant parody of the tragic itself, of the ghastly

\(^{64}\) Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 25.

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earthly seriousness and earthly woe of old—a parody of that most crude phase in the unnaturalness of the ascetic ideal, that had length been overcome.” Since Nietzsche seems to specifically set tragic art in contrast to the ascetic ideal, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss Nietzsche’s thoughts on tragedies such as those concerning Dionysus.

Although Dionysus is the Greek god of wine, he is also known for his relationship to religious ecstasy and madness. Nietzsche’s fascination with Dionysus often stems from the duality of truth and falsity that stems from its relationship with Apollonian tragedy. In his book on Dionysus, Walter Otto writes, “The final secrets of existence and non-existence transfix mankind with monstrous eyes … This spirit of duality which distinguishes Dionysus … is the source of the fascination and the confusion which everything that is Dionysiac evokes, for it is the spirit of a wild being.” Nietzsche credits Dionysian tragedy with an embrace of duality as a stimulant of life. Nietzsche is so appreciative because the duality presented in Greek tragedy resembles the duality of real life. A duality between being and becoming, truth and falsity, life and death, joy and pain. It is this duality that brings forth life affirmation. Through illusion and deception, art presents both sides of life, making it the most life affirming.

As mentioned before, the duality Nietzsche refers to stems from the relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian sides of tragedy. According to Nietzsche, the Dionysian is most properly complemented by the Apollonian, the spirit of the Greek god Apollo. As the god of reason and logic, Apollo was known to be distinct from Dionysus, the god of madness and ecstasy. This is important to mention because it shows that Nietzsche is not proposing a form of tragedy that is merely chaotic. The chaos must be set in distinction from order. In the Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche writes, “I have kept my gaze fixed on those two artistic deities of the Greeks, Apollo and Dionysus, in whom I discern the living and

66 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 3.
visible representatives of two art-worlds which differ in their deepest essence and highest goals.” Nietzsche sees these two opposing sides of tragic art as complementary to one another. This opposition stems from the very nature of the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

The Apollonian was considered to be logical and structured in its presentation of poetry and beauty. The Apollonian provided a structure from which topics such as death could be more easily discussed. In this sense, the order of the Apollonian offered a degree of affirmation. The Dionysian, on the other hand, was based on a throwing off of such order in favor of a more instinctually based tragedy. The Dionysian side was marked by a certain irrationality. This distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian points to the fact that the Dionysian requires the Apollonian. The Apollonian provides a structure out of which the chaos and disorder of the Dionysian arises. In this sense, both side of the tragedy are necessary. Therefore, for Nietzsche, tragic art should be one that includes the rational and the irrational sides of life. Nietzsche is not merely arguing against rationality as the rational side is quite necessary. Rather, he finds both truth and falsity to be life affirming.

**THE DUALITY OF ART**

This same duality can be found in the opening sections of the third essay where Nietzsche critiques the antithetical relationship between chastity and sensuality. He claims that “there is no necessary antithesis between chastity and sensuality.” Although this quote pertains to a direct criticism of asceticism in the life and work of artists such as Richard Wagner, Nietzsche is hinting at a larger antithesis that needs to be tackled for life to be properly affirmed, that is, the antithesis between truth and falsity in the reactive approach of the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche believes that this duality should not be set in conflict, as in the ascetic ideal, but should be set in tragedy, as it is in tragic art.

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68 Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 16.
Nietzsche believes that the relationship between sensuality and chastity is not one to be examined for an embrace of chastity and a disregard for sensuality. Rather, this relationship is to be embraced in its entirety as a source of life. He writes, “This should, at any rate, be the case with all beings who are sound in mind and body, who are far from reckoning their delicate balance between ‘animal’ and ‘angel’ … the most subtle and brilliant spirits … have seen in this a further charm of life.” The relationship of chastity and sensuality is not one to be regarded as antithetical, especially in the case of art. This antithesis is why Nietzsche is so deeply critical of the works of Wagner; for, “They worship that painful and superfluous contrast.” The worship of the antithesis is undoubtedly driven by a reactive force. For when one embraces chastity in contrast to sensuality, a painful tension is brought to bear. Rather, for Nietzsche, both chastity and sensuality should be embraced as parts of life, and more deeply, truth and falsity.

The artist, for Nietzsche, approaches the duality in art through a different lens than the theoretical man. The theoretical man looks to divide what he observes into truth and falsity to better embrace truth. The artist does something very different. Nietzsche, in his Birth of Tragedy, makes the uniqueness of the artful approach quite clear. He writes, “Whenever truth is unveiled, the ecstatic eyes of the artist remain fixed on what still remains veiled … similarly, the theoretical man enjoys and satisfies himself with the discarded veil, and his desire finds its highest goal in a process of unveiling.” For Nietzsche, the artist appreciates the mystery-filled and illusory principles of life. The artist does not try to hide or avoid the falsity of life, they present both truth and falsity honestly. The artist does not follow a black and white approach to reality. Furthermore, the artist embraces life as a constant and dynamic interplay of truths and falsities, of being and becoming, of life and death. The artist appreciates the art as an appearance that gives insight into the

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70 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 2.  
71 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 2.  
72 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 15.
world. Art is to be appreciated as a great appearance or deception and not as something representing or containing a transcendent truth. Art teaches the artist to approach the world as appearance, full of deception and error. By this very embrace of the mystery and illusion of art, the artist attains a zeal for life, a Joie de vivre, exuberant enjoyment of life.

CONCLUSION

Having shown Nietzsche’s presentation of art in the third essay, it has become clear that Nietzsche is setting art in an antithetical position to the ascetic ideal. Firstly, from Nietzsche’s use of language it is clear that tragic art is separable from its artist, who is the precondition of the art. Secondly, art has been found to be false in that it is able to “trick” us into appreciating a falsity. Thirdly, Nietzsche sets tragic art in opposition to the ascetic ideal through his treatment of Greek tragedy. Lastly, Nietzsche presents a duality between truth and falsity in art which connects the third essay to his treatment of art in the Birth of Tragedy. With these observations in mind, Nietzsche believes that tragic art is firmly opposed to an ascetic approach to truth. Furthermore, it is possible that Nietzsche had other approaches in mind that were also firmly opposed to the ascetic ideal. As will be defended, humor seems like a good possibility for one of these additional antithetical life-affirming approaches.

CHAPTER III: HUMOR AS ANTI-ASCETIC

HUMOR AS FALSE

In this chapter, humor will be defended as a possible candidate for life affirmation alongside art. Humor has undoubtably been something that has been debated by philosophers since Plato. It does not seem, however, that humor was a primary focus of Nietzsche’s, especially in the third essay. Although Nietzsche never explicitly names humor as a proper antithesis to the ascetic ideal, it should be said that here humor is being defended as something that could be antithetical to the ascetic ideal. It seems that the circumstances surrounding humor and laughter, such as
differences in power, are present within Nietzsche’s text. Therefore, it should be said that humor could very well play a role in this finding of a life affirming force. This defense will be motivated firstly by the presence of the circumstances behind three theories of humor in Nietzsche’s third essay. To do this, each of the three most common theories of humor will be connected with the text to show that the themes that underlie humor are present in Nietzsche’s text. Then, a narrow view of humor will be chosen as most possibly applicable to the project of finding a life affirming force. This focus on a single theory of humor will allow for a more precise and specific discussion concerning how humor could be life-affirming while not all the theories of humor are applicable for life affirmation. The reason for their mention is simply to show that the circumstances surrounding humor are present in the text even though Nietzsche does not explicitly address humor itself.

In the history of philosophy, there have been three major competing theories of humor. Each of them draws from a type of force behind the humor, such as psychological, epistemological, sociological, or even political. The first competing theory of humor is the Superiority Theory, the creation of which is often attributed to Plato, Aristotle and even Hobbes. This theory views something as funny when it places us in a position of power over another person. As David Monro says, “According to any superiority theory of humor, the laughter always looks down on whatever he laughs at, and so judges it inferior by some standard.” By this approach to humor, something incites laughter because another figure is belittled or lowered. For example, a bully may laugh when a victim is humiliated in public. The Superiority Theory is based primarily on the mechanisms of human interaction. When the Superiority Theory is in practice, it incites laughter because it negates the position of another. In practice, a bully often belittles another out of a feeling of being threatened by their surroundings. And so, to negate those surroundings and to falsify the truth of his reality, the bully frames his reality as false.

The bully frames his reality to treat those around him as if they were not a threat. The bully may belittle a victim to achieve a sense of power or pride. The laughter that is accomplished however, is caused by the bully’s ability to witness his reality set in falsity. Simply put, the Superiority Theory highlights humor’s ability to belittle one’s surroundings as a form of negation.

Within Nietzsche’s third essay, the circumstances surrounding the Superiority Theory of humor appear quite vividly. In the middle of the essay, Nietzsche discusses the struggle for power between the slave and master classes. As it is said, the higher master class must not lower itself to the level of the slave class in a “pathos of distance.” Therefore, the higher class needs to, in a sense, belittle the lower class to maintain power. Nietzsche writes, “The higher must not degrade itself to be the tool of the lower, the pathos of distance must to all eternity keep their missions also separate.”

Therefore, the master class is held in a circumstance of superiority over the lower class. It could be presumed that this circumstance could very well insight laughter within those of the master class. To maintain their superiority, the master class must in some way degrade of belittle the slave class.

The second competing theory of humor is the Relief Theory. This theory characterizes humor as a release of energy that has been pent up in the body. The creation of the Relief Theory is often attributed to psychologists such as Sigmund Freud who include laughter among the many muscular motions that can come from an emotional reaction. For example, an angry person will often clench their fists as a release of energy. In a similar manner, laughter is simply a release of energy from the body. By this view of humor, a joke stores up a certain amount of pressure or anticipation in the mind, which is released by a final line in the end of the joke which incites a muscular reaction from the release of psychological energy. For example, someone could tell a story that

might sound outrageous, but is eventually brought together with a clever line in the end. In the Relief Theory, one is brought to create a certain perception of a story or reality even though they might not understand it. One is led to believe something that is eventually crushed or contradicted. By this understanding, the Relief Theory highlights humor’s ability to falsify a reality or perception the one builds. One becomes invested in a story that is eventually turned upside down by a punch line.

Within the third essay, Nietzsche focuses on one specific instance of psychological relief that is predominant in his discussion of the ascetic ideal. That relief is the one provided by the ascetic priest as a relief from one’s ‘disorder.’ As said before, Nietzsche believed that the ascetic priest was both the healer and the inflictor of illness. Those who took the “medicine” of asceticism were relieved of their ailment. Concerning this medicine, Nietzsche writes,

> With such subtlety, refinement, Oriental refinement, has it divined what emotional stimulants can conquer, at any rate for a time, the deep depression, the leaden fatigue, the black melancholy of physiological cripples—for, speaking generally, all religions are mainly concerned with fighting a certain fatigue and heaviness that has infected everything.\(^76\)

Those who receive this relief are given a new perspective beyond the one they had before. Although Nietzsche is critical of the relief given, the theme within it remains. Those who receive the medicine are given a psychological release of sorts, which could very well create a response of laughter. This release of energy can be compared with the punch line in a joke when one’s anticipations or expectations are turned upside down. In the same way, those who suffer a particular ailment have their perspective turned upside down when the ascetic priest directs their blame toward sin and error.

The third theory of humor is the Incongruity Theory of humor. This theory views humor in terms of its deception of our prior expectations. Humor, in this light, incites laughter because it differs from what is ex-
expected. For example, we might laugh at someone walking a crocodile on a leash because it defers drastically from our expectations of crocodiles and animals walked on a leash. The origination of the Incongruity Theory is often attributed to Kant and Schopenhauer, both of whom strongly influenced Nietzsche’s thought. More specifically, Schopenhauer presents his take on the Incongruity Theory in terms of the relation of perception and concept.

Schopenhauer uses the Incongruity Theory of humor to prove his greater take on the division of sensual and abstract knowledge. For Schopenhauer, humor is a clear example of a separation of the conceptual expectations made about reality and the sensual observations made of it. Schopenhauer writes, “The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity.”\(^{77}\) In this view, humor is valuable because it shows the difference between reason and reality. Nietzsche refers to a similar situation in which one’s conception is found to be incongruous to objects. He writes, “To renounce the belief in one’s own ego, to deny to oneself one’s own ‘reality’ — what a triumph!”\(^{78}\) Here, Nietzsche is crediting the ascetic ideal for its ability to throw off and question one’s own beliefs and assumptions. There is something stimulating about this act of renouncing one’s presumptions and finding that we have, in a sense, been fooled. It can be assumed that this experience could possibly cause a reaction of laughter. This act of throwing off is quite similar to the instance when someone sees a crocodile on a leash. The expectation and the actual perception are quite different from one another. Therefore, one is brought to a realization of this incongruity which could create a reaction of laughter.

Now that it has been shown that there is a textual basis for the circumstances surrounding humor and laughter, a more specific view of hu-


\(^{78}\) Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 11.
mor should be focused on. Nietzsche seemed to nominate tragic art as a life-affirming force, as discussed before. This is because tragic art allowed one to gain an appreciation for both truth and falsity in a non-ascetic way. It seems then, that the Incongruity Theory is most appropriate because it is concerned with the falsifying of one’s beliefs of truth. It can be said that the Incongruity Theory allows one to appreciate both truth and falsity in similar way to tragic art, which will be discussed later. It should also be noted that the Incongruity Theory is identified with the thinkers with whom Nietzsche was familiar such as Kant and Schopenhauer.

In his article about Nietzschean humor, Hatab draws out a more specific sense of humor that can be said to be a part of the Incongruity Approach. This specific sense even more clearly resembles humor as a post-ascetic life affirmation. Hatab writes, “The ability to laugh at oneself shows a freedom from fixation and affirms a willingness to sacrifice formality; it overcomes what Nietzsche called the spirit of gravity and is able to enjoy a surrender of structure.”79 The ability to laugh at oneself is most like Nietzschean life affirmation in art because it is a falsification of one’s own personal perspective. In the case of the other three theories of humor, what is falsified is each person’s view of something exterior to them. In the case of laughter at oneself however, one’s own views of one’s own personal self and life are falsified. Thereby, one’s personal self and life become falsified and negated, through which a positive reaction is created. The ability to laugh at oneself then, is the most direct method of life affirmation through humor because it eliminates the unconditional approach found in the ascetic ideal. By eliminating an unconditional approach, one is better able to appreciate life in its entirety, as said before. Hatab writes, “Consider someone who can laugh at his own terrible downfall.”80 In this case, one’s life is affirmed regardless of how it resembles a structure of truth or falsity. When someone can laugh at their own downfall, it proves that they are able to enjoy their life in its

79  Hatab, “Laughter in Nietzsche’s Thought,” 73.
80  Hatab, “Laughter in Nietzsche’s Thought,” 73.
Humor as Anti-Ascetic in Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality

entirety. By this approach, they are beyond truth and falsity.

Concerning this laughter at oneself, there appears to be an overarching theme of negating or falsifying. Humor incites laughter through a presentation of some falsity or negation. In the Incongruity Theory, something unexpected occurs or a concept is negated by a perception. Humor, by its nature, is a negating and falsifying force that lives off sudden surprises or changes, the unexpected, the erroneous. Likewise, humor in this sense reflects and embraces life as it frames life as a falsity. It tricks us into appreciating a false view of our own reality. As Hatab writes in his examination of humor, “The truth revealed in a laugh is the shattering of a fixed truth.”

HUMOR AS SIMILAR TO TRAGIC ART

To properly connect the Incongruity Theory with what Nietzsche says about art in the text of the third essay, this approach to humor must be connected with tragic art. In fact, it should be said that humor complements art in many ways. By this claim, humor is something that could affirm life alongside art. It is possible for humor to be an alternative to art. To defend this, it will be shown how both humor and tragic art are strongly connected in Dionysian art, that Nietzsche often focuses on. Under the Dionysiac theme, humor can be said to represent the more frolicsome and joyous side of Dionysian worship. While tragic art embraces and displays the errors and falsities of life, humor takes them in jest. In sum, humor incites a positive approach to falsity.

As Nietzsche writes in the middle of his discussion on art,

> Art, in which lying sanctifies itself and the will to deception has good conscience on its side, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than science is … that is complete, genuine antagonism — on the one hand … the great slanderer of life, on the other hand.

As said before, Nietzsche clearly characterizes art as a proper opposi-

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81  Hatab, “Laughter in Nietzsche’s Thought,” 73.
tion to the ascetic ideal and he understands art in this way because of art’s ‘genuine antagonism.’ This understanding is clearly a reference to the will to oppose that is found in art. It is that very will through which art opposes an unconditional approach to reality, and through the opposition to this approach, art engages with the will to power. Nietzsche, at the beginning of the third essay, does offer a brief indication that humor, in the Incongruity Theory, could complement tragic art’s engagement with the will to power. He writes that “That, as I have said, would have been quite worthy of a great tragedian; who like every artist first attains the supreme pinnacle of his greatness when he can look down into himself and his art, when he can laugh at himself.”

It seems as though the stimulation of the will to power in tragic art, for Nietzsche, can also be accompanied by laughter. This genuine antagonism, of which Nietzsche attributes to art, can also clearly be said of humor. That is because in humor, lying and deception are framed in a positive light. Humor in the Incongruity Theory exemplifies that genuine antagonism because it opposes all firm positions and approaches to reality. This opposition, however, is done with a positive goal: to incite laughter. There is however, a much deeper connection between humor and art than just a will to deception. Humor and art are connected with one another on a more fundamental level than their approaches to reality.

At face value, it may seem that art and humor are opposed to one another. Granted, it seems that tragic art deals with more negative aspects of life, while humor deals with a positive outlook on life. Humor and tragic art, however, are a further reflection of the life affirming tension between a seemingly chaotic order and positive embrace of that chaotic order. While art may be life affirming in its honest display of falsity and error, humor is a response to that very display. Humor complements tragedy by displaying a negation or a falsity in a positive light. This complementary relationship is more clearly seen in the relationship between mythos and komos.

The complementary relationship of humor and tragic art reflects the

83 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality, 3.
twofold nature of the Greek god Dionysus. This seemingly paradoxical relationship between art and humor is based in the two types of Dionysian worship. These two seemingly paradoxical forms of worship complemented the dualistic nature of the god Dionysus who was considered both mortal and divine. The first ritual, *mythos*, consisted in a more violent and somber act of dismembering and consuming animals. Through *mythos*, “A god suffering dismemberment, death and rebirth was cultivated in rituals so that sheer negativity could be transformed into a cultural meaning.”  

This side of Dionysaic ritual is reflective most of the tragic art argued for in the third essay. In this ritual, the somber presentation of the painful death of a god is presented to its followers as a means of bringing meaning to that group of people. In a similar way, tragic art presents the painful and chaotic life of a character, to embrace and affirm the erroneous and chaotic state of life. Like the killing of a god, tragic art presents the killing of normalcy and convention through the display of dynamism and chaos.

Through a positive approach to the negation of convention and normality, *komos* is related to humorous life affirmation. It is from this ritual, *komos*, that comedy receives its etymological origin. This ritual consisted in a joyous “band of drunken men who engaged in dancing, laughter, witty and mocking language, and who generally threw off all social conventions and inhibitions.”  

It expresses a dramatic throwing away of convention and consistency. Like humor, *komos* resists or throws out some sort of normality or structure in a jolly or happy manner. In the case of the Incongruity Theory, one’s own expectations about reality are, in a sense, thrown away as a means of embracing error.

By this connection to the paradoxical relationship of *komos* and *mythos*, humor can be found to have a close relationship with tragic art. Firstly, humor and tragic art negate what is real in some fashion. The effect of this negation is an affirmation of life. Secondly, humor and tragic art both derive from the twofold rituals attributed to Dionysus. In this light,

84 Hatab, “Laughter in Nietzsche’s Thought,” 69.
85 Hatab, “Laughter in Nietzsche’s Thought,” 70.
we understand humor in its proper sense as presentation of something false which incites a positive reaction. The normalcy and unconditional is presented with a false light, which incites laughter. Through the lens of humor, we can appreciate a false perception of the world.

**Humor as Anti-Ascetic**

Finally, the Incongruity Theory of humor must be proven to be able to survive Nietzsche’s strenuous criticisms in the third essay to be viewed as an antithesis to the ascetic ideal. Nietzsche’s initial criticism of ascetic practice in religion was based on the life-denial that the ascetic ideal seemed to follow. The basis of the later criticism of science was that science followed in this life-denying tradition for the sake of truth. Lastly, Nietzsche offers a direct criticism of nihilistic positions based on their great emphasis on an unconditional claim. Humor must not be found guilty of these criticisms if it is to be nominated as a truly life affirming force.

Humor is quite unlike each of the three carriers of the ascetic ideal: asceticism, modern science, and nihilism. Nietzsche bases his criticism of ascetic practice upon his theory of ressentiment as presented in the first essay of the *Genealogy of Morality*. By this theory, the weak and poor create a reflexive morality in reaction to the strong and rich, a morality that exalts poverty and weakness as virtues. Regarding the creators of this morality, Nietzsche writes, “Their intellect did effect all this, simply because it was the dominant instinct.”

86 Nietzsche recognized that the reflexive morality was born out of a will to power, out of a will to dominate the higher classes, which in turn became a life enhancing force. And so, it can be said that humor, through the Incongruity Theory, avoids this approach altogether because humor is not born out of a reactive force. Humor does not react to a truth system or morality by objectively reversing that very morality to make falsity to be truth and truth to be falsity. Rather, humor negates a personally held belief, which

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incites a positive reaction.

In the third essay, Nietzsche wrote of science as the phony antithesis to the ascetic ideal, “Science is not, by a long way, independent enough to fulfill this function, in every department science needs an ideal value, a power which creates values, and in whose service it can believe in itself.”

Unlike science as it is critiqued here by Nietzsche, humor does not follow an ideal of truth. Likewise, humor is self-sustaining. By this claim, humor is not driven by an exterior ideal of truth that it must follow. Rather, humor can believe in itself, and simply be appreciated by itself because humor is simply a negation of a previously existing truth or position. Humor does not seek to reinforce or follow a truth system, but to negate and triumph over those which already exist. By this act, humor stimulates the will to power, and functions as a life-affirming force.

Humor can also be found to be unlike the approach to life affirmation of the free spirits who were so actively criticized by Nietzsche in the third essay. In his examination of Nietzsche’s critique of the ascetic ideal, Hatab highlights a culminating theme of confidence among these free spirits. Nietzsche seemed to have the most difficulty with a spirit of confidence among those who upheld the ascetic ideal, especially those who confidently declared their independence from the ascetic ideal. This great confidence came from the fact that the free spirits most clearly defended a single unconditional truth that they believed to be the only truth. The only problem for them was that they were the last foothold of ascetic truth. Nietzsche writes, “The absolute fanaticism of their belief in truth is unparalleled.”

Humor opposes a relative nihilism because it does not rely on the presence of a binary separation of truth and falsity for it to function as a life affirming force. Humor has the unique ability to be a positive life affirming force while still avoiding the strict defense of a truth system. Unlike the free spirits, humor does not lay claim to an

88 Lawrence Hatab, “How Does the Ascetic Ideal Function in Nietzsche’s Genealogy?”, 112.
esoteric view of truth. Its mission is simply to present a falsity in order to incite a positive reaction. Through humor, falsity and becoming are enjoyed rather than avoided because humor does not stake itself in a reverence for the unconditional. Humor also does not reject the unconditional through a self-contradictory and unconditional statement.

**HUMOR AS A PROPER ANTITHESIS**

Now that humor has been found to be (potentially) clean of the ascetic ideal and similar to art as Nietzsche describes in the third essay, humor can now be presented as a functioning antithesis to the ascetic ideal. As mentioned before, like art, humor negates or falsifies our commonly held beliefs about reality. We can, then, predict how humor will function in a non-ascetic world. As Nietzsche said of the ascetic ideal at the end of the third essay, “In that ideal suffering found an explanation; the tremendous gap seemed filled; the door to all suicidal Nihilism was closed.”\(^9\) If humor is to be a true antithesis to the ascetic ideal, it must serve the role that the ascetic ideal once served, that is, the role of steering humanity away from suicidal nihilism. Humor, however, must accomplish this task in an entirely new way, a way completely different from the ascetic ideal.

As Deleuze characterizes this seat of opposition to the ascetic ideal, he writes,

> But we do not replace the ascetic ideal, we let nothing of the place itself remain, we want to destroy the place, we want another ideal in another place, another way of knowing, another concept of truth, that is to say a truth which is not presupposed in a will to truth but which presupposes a completely different will.\(^{91}\)

Deleuze here shows the gravity and drama of the opposition to the ascetic ideal. For a force to function against the ascetic ideal, it must not present an ideal, but rather, a new drive for life, one without a proper or unconditional goal, but one that excites one’s pursuit and enjoyment.

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90 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 27.
of life. Humor fits this bill because it is so far from the ascetic ideal that it seems almost laughable for it to take the place of something that has profoundly impacted almost every pursuit for life. Humor, by its unlikeliness to be the candidate, is that completely different will.

Nietzsche, in his conclusion, also gives a bit of a foresight of this post-ascetic world. He writes, “Morality from henceforth — there is no doubt about it — goes to pieces: this is that great hundred-act play that is reserved for the next two centuries of Europe, the most terrible, the most mysterious, and perhaps also the most hopeful of all plays.” Nietzsche here is describing a life driven only by a non-ascetic affirmation. Life becomes terrible, mysterious, and hopeful because it is driven by the small motifs of life that are found in art and humor. These motifs function as a burst of life affirmation that helps one avoid the breakdown of suicidal nihilism. They can be found to be more dramatic and pointed in humor as opposed to art. Both however, seem to function as “lily pads” that allow one to jump from one to the other to avoid sinking into a breakdown of suicidal nihilism. Nietzsche’s third essay pinpoints the people of the post-ascetic age living off these bursts. Nietzsche predicts that these coming centuries will be driven by these motifs.

**Conclusion to the Chapter**

By Nietzsche’s characterization of the ascetic ideal, along with the naming of humor as antithetical to the ascetic ideal, the post-ascetic age can be found to be one without an end, a final goal. After the death of God, man loses his final end. Thus, man looks to more localized sources of life affirmation. Rather than life being directed by a greater, more transcendent truth, it is guided by smaller and more instantly gratifying “truths” such as humor and art. These motifs, however, are ultimately fleeting and require a constant and steady supply to provide continued support. Every piece of tragic art gets older, and every joke or funny situation becomes redundant. They lose their enjoyable character quickly. And so,

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92 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, 27.
the antithetical relationship between ascetic and non-ascetic highlights the ongoing and deeper struggle between the fleeting and the founded. This tension is one that is accentuated most clearly in the religious tension between sin and grace, between an embrace of the divine and an embrace of life.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with the intent of showing that humor is a possible antithesis to an ascetic approach to truth as Nietzsche characterizes it. The first chapter examined the method by which Nietzsche criticizes the ascetic ideal while also showing how Nietzsche sets up the introduction of a proper antithesis. This was done by first characterizing the ascetic ideal and show how it is a manifestation of the reactive life. Then, Nietzsche’s systematic criticism of supposed antithetical approaches was illustrated as a guide to “how not to be the antithesis to the ascetic ideal.” This was done to introduce the proper antithesis more properly: tragic art. The goal of the second chapter was to show how tragic art was indeed the proper antithesis for Nietzsche. The second chapter accomplished this pursuit by first illuminating Nietzsche’s comments on art throughout the third essay. Then, the common theme of falsity in art was examined as means to show how art avoids the numerous criticisms of Nietzsche towards other antithetical approaches. Finally, the second chapter narrowed the scope of types of art to tragedies insofar as the most clearly embrace and stimulate the will to power. Lastly, the third chapter sought to show how humor could possibly complement tragic art as an antithesis to the ascetic ideal of truth. This was done by firstly showing how there is a textual basis for humor in the third essay. Then there was narrowing to a specific view of humor that was shown to both avoid the criticisms of Nietzsche and contain numerous similarities to tragic art.

It should finally be said that the pursuit of proving such a possibility has several further implications concerning a life that is isolated from the pursuit of an unconditional truth. As said in the conclusion of the
third chapter, the search for alternative life affirming forces after the loss of an unconditional pursuit of truth touches on a larger tension. A belief system concerning any ascent to truth is set between two extremes: an overarching dogmatism and utter chaos. It seems that the tensions displayed in the third essay are resonant of the human struggle to find a balance between the two extremes. One could argue that Nietzsche’s stern criticisms in the third essay were a rejection of a truth system set too closely to overarching, dogmatic belief in a transcendent reality. The implications of such a rejection, however, can evidently often find themselves too close to utter chaotic order. Thus, this discussion of Nietzsche’s third essay can be seen as glimpse into the struggle to avoid a chaotic belief system when one has detached themselves from unconditional truths.

Nietzsche seems to be attempting to right an untethered ship. He is attempting to find a way forward, without the foundation of unconditional truths, that doesn’t fall into chaotic nihilism. An examination of such a project is quite important in the twenty-first century. When one separates themselves from an objective pursuit of truth, for various reasons, the meaning and telos of one’s life becomes foggy. Therefore, finding meaning within the immanent becomes a focal point of one’s life. There begins a great search for an affirmation of one’s own life to avoid the pain of utter nihilism. When someone is caught between the pursuit of objective truth and the self-destruction of nihilism, the need for a middle way becomes quite evident. This seems to be what Nietzsche shows to be possible in the third essay, life is not merely a choice between objectivity and chaos.

Nietzsche is calling for pieces of tragic art to become a set of life affirming motifs that could allow someone to receive life affirmation. This pursuit is significant because it shows that one can find life-affirmation between objective truth and chaos. Nietzsche has shown the validity of the intermediary stage between the two. Therefore, there is a desire proper to human nature that is beyond the dichotomy of objective truth and chaos. There is a human desire within Greek tragedy, Christianity,
and humor. There is ultimately a desire to will. Every human wants to avoid the torture of being stagnant in their will. For there is a great pain involved in not willing. It can be said that willing is indication of life. Therefore, to not will is to not properly live. Nietzsche has uncovered this perennial desire in his third essay.

For the desire to will manifests itself in Greek tragedy, in which one is better able to will the goods and errors of their own life. This desire is also in the ascetic ideal, in which one can will for and desire a further objective truth. Lastly, this desire is manifested in humor, when one can further will their own reality when it is contrasted by a joke or comedy. Overall, every human person desires to will for something rather than not. As said before however, tragic art may not be the only way forward. There may be several life-affirming forces in addition to it. For as Nietzsche has shown, the death of God does not necessitate the birth of destructive nihilism.
The integral formation of priests is difficult today. It has always been hard and will never be easy. Priestly formation, at its essence, is the process of breaking the pot and reshaping it, according to the template given to us by the Church. And these “pots” that present themselves for ordination today were hardened so much earlier than was the case in previous generations; in an age of confused masculinity, with no father figures for many of them, with notions of sexuality warped by pornography, of privilege, of never being told no, and of having either helicoptering or absent mothers, formators in seminaries in such a context have their work cut out for them. And seminary formators themselves must realize that they are not immune themselves to these negative influences from secular culture. They must deal with all that is going on in their own lives, dissipating the cognitive distortions, the unnatural desires that can so affect their lives.

*The Program of Priestly Formation, Fifth Edition (2006)*

An adage in seminary formation is “the seminarian you are, the priest you will be.” In a recent document on seminary formation, *The Program of Priestly Formation*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
stated:

The goal is the development not just of a well-rounded person, a prayerful person, or an experienced pastoral practitioner but rather one who understands his spiritual development within the context of his call to service in the Church, his human development within the greater context of his call to advance the mission of the Church, his intellectual development as the appropriation of the Church’s teaching and tradition, and his pastoral formation as participation in the active ministry of the Church.¹

In this article, I would like to suggest that an approach to seminary formation based in part on the theology of the 20th century Canadian Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan can be seen in complete accord with recent Vatican and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops documents. In my attempt to examine this notion, I will explain the Church Universal’s understanding of priestly formation, as well as the specific understanding in the Church’s American dioceses, especially in terms of the intellectual formation of a candidate for priesthood, as well as the work of Bernard Lonergan, SJ, and his concepts of the conversions, intellectual, moral, and spiritual, in the lives of the seminarian. Especially considering the recently issued document by the Vatican’s Congregation for the Clergy, The Gift of the Priestly Vocation (2016), I contend that Lonergan’s thought can shed much needed light on the task of the formation of candidates for the ministerial priesthood.

**Official Teaching on Seminary Formation**

*The Program of Priestly Formation* states: “The basic principle of intellectual formation for priesthood candidates is noted in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Pope Saint John Paul II’s 1992 Apostolic Exhortation on the formation of priests) no. 51: ‘For the salvation of their brothers and sisters, they should seek an ever deeper knowledge of the divine mysteries.’”² The document stresses that disciples are learners. Like *Pastores Dabo Vobis*,

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² *The Program for Priestly Formation for USCCB, 71.*
The Program of Priestly Formation describes four “pillars of formation,” each of which involves a lengthy learning process. These pillars are human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral.

Regarding intellectual formation, The Program of Priestly Formation (PPF) suggests that the first aim is to acquire a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fullness and completion of God’s revelation and the one true Teacher. It notes that this saving knowledge is acquired not only once, but it is continuously appropriated and deepened, so that it becomes more and more a part of us. The Program of Priestly Formation suggests that seminary intellectual formation assumes and prolongs the catechesis and mystagogia that is to be part of every Christian’s journey of faith. At the same time, it points out that this knowledge is not simply for personal possession but is designed to be shared in the community of faith. It demonstrates that a seminarian’s study has a missionary purpose because seminarians study “for the salvation of their brothers and sisters.” This notion of the ecclesial dimension of theological studies was also stressed by Cardinal Gerhard Müller, Prefect-Emeritus of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, in a talk to seminarians:

If the ultimate concern of theology is bringing people into the living dynamic of Revelation and the response of faith, then this concern must burn all the more in the hearts of priests who have been ordained for the Church and are sacramentally configured to Christ the bridegroom who laid down his life for his bride the Church.³

Cardinal Müller suggested that studying should be an act of pastoral charity for the people whom a priest will serve. He explained that it requires taking on the heart of Christ who was moved with pity for the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. The former Prefect stated: “As disciples of the Good Shepherd, who came to serve and to lay down his life for the sheep, priests must never lose sight of the pastoral goal of theological reflection, and that goal is no less than the sal-

vation of souls.”⁴ Cardinal Müller states that if this truth is not firmly established in the minds of future Catholic clergy, they can be tossed in the wind when problems arise, following whatever trend so pleases either them or their audience. Here, I am struck by similarities with the thought of the U.S. Roman Catholic theologian, Jesuit Father John Courtney Murray, who stated: “theology presents itself as an essentially ecclesiastical science,” and “Theology must exist in the Church; it must also exist for the Church, to serve her needs—fundamentally her need to teach the word of God.”⁵

It is also helpful to recall that Father John Courtney Murray stresses that the finality of communicating the truths of the faith in theology is so that this can have a “social import” as theology, often through the work of lay people, and comes to have an impact on the temporal order. We can recall Murray’s statement:

The social import of theology is the motivational effect which Catholic doctrine has on Catholics in their participation in social concern. And the truths of Catholic doctrine are the most effective keys for unlocking the driving force of charity.⁶

**THE RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS INSTITUTIONIS SACERDOTALIS**

On December 8, 2016, the Vatican’s Congregation for Clergy released “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation,” a new version of the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis. This new Ratio, which each episcopal conference around the world must now study, adapt, and employ, builds, by its own admission, on the magisterium of the last two pontiffs, especially Pope Saint John Paul II’s Post-Synodal Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis and Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Letter “Motu Proprio” Ministrorum Institutio. However, more than any other single influence, this new Ra-

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⁴ Muller, “The Wisdom of the Priest.”
tio reflects Pope Francis, the current pontiff, most especially in ideas expressed consistently in his addresses to religious, priests and seminarians and in his Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. The document also follows closely Pope Francis’ own lived experience of priesthood by articulating Francis’s oft-mentioned concerns about the necessity of the priest to avoid “temptations tied to money, to the authoritarian exercise of power, to rigid legalism and to vainglory,” according to the Congregation for Clergy’s Prefect, Cardinal Beniamino Stella.

What is also fascinating in the *Ratio* is the understanding of the formation of the priest. The documents divide the formation of the seminarian into four unique stages: first, a propaedic stage, where the seminarian would have a year in which he would spend in prayer, in learning about Scripture, the Catechism, the Liturgy, and Spirituality. This would take place before the seminarian would begin philosophical studies. This is much needed today, as applicants for the seminary are coming in from diverse backgrounds. One cannot assume any longer the existence in most U.S. schools the presence of a liberal arts curriculum based on the classics of Western civilization. Many seminarians today come from academic backgrounds where history, languages, philosophy, and, perhaps most tellingly, even catechetical knowledge of the Catholic faith is present. The *Ratio* then describes a discipleship stage, lasting two years, in which a seminarian would study philosophy. It is in this discipleship phase in which the seminarian would examine all issues in his human formation which need to be addressed to be a holistic individual. Next, there would be a configuration stage, lasting four years, in which a seminarian would study theology. Finally, there would be a final year, a pastoral stage, in which a seminarian, as a deacon, would be able, by serving in a parish fulltime, to do a vocational synthesis.

It must be noted that each episcopal conference needs to design its own implementation of the *Ratio*. There will be differences in application and approach in each nation. For instance, the United States is blessed to

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have several college-level seminary programs and these stages that are described in the *Ratio* might need to consider the lived reality of these college age seminarians.

**BERNARD LONERGAN AND CONVERSION**

Bernard Lonergan, in his works, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* and *Method in Theology* speaks about conversions: intellectual, moral, and spiritual. Regarding the work of the first three levels of consciousness, Lonergan, in *Method in Theology*, does not alter the basic account he offered in *Insight*. As in *Insight*, he stresses that intellectual conversion helps the individual to withdraw from bias and to become authentic. In *Method in Theology*, he deepens some of his thoughts.

**INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION**

Lonergan defines intellectual conversion as “a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowing.” At the essence, it involves a shift in the way that one perceives reality. Fully aware that “knowing is not looking,” Lonergan believes that one comes to objectivity not by this naïve realism, but that reality is “given in experience, organized in understanding, posited in judging and belief.” It is the shift to a world mediated by meaning, going beyond sense perception to the external and internal individual and communal experience, which is verified by the community.

Lonergan describes this attitude of “knowing as looking” as a myth with many consequences. Among them would be the philosophical positions of naïve realism, empiricism, and idealism. He writes:

> The naïve realist knows the world mediated by meaning but thinks he knows it by looking. The empiricist restricts objective knowledge to sense experience;

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for him, understanding and conceiving, judging and believing are merely subjective activities. The idealist insists that human knowing always includes understanding as well as sense; but he retains the empiricist’s notion of reality, and so he thinks of the world mediated by meaning as not real but ideal. Only the critical realist can acknowledge the facts of human knowing and pronounce the world mediated by meaning to be the real world; and he can do so inasmuch as he shows that the process of experiencing, understanding, and judging is a process of self-transcendence.10

Although each of these philosophical positions differ concerning various points and all come from different horizons, they all share the one thought: namely that knowledge derives from looking. Breaking oneself away from this awareness requires a true self-authenticity, a knowledge of oneself, and a knowledge of one’s cognitive structure. Lonergan describes it as such: “It is to acquire the mastery in one’s own house that is to be had only when knows precisely what one is doing when one is knowing. It is a conversion, a new beginning, a fresh start.”11

This intellectual conversion is essential for the seminarian who wishes to avoid a fundamentalism, a literalism, when it comes to his use of what Lonergan describes as the first three functional specialties (research, interpretation, and history) and his implementation of the second phase functional specialties (foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications). With the awareness that comes from intellectual conversion, the theologian can avoid the pitfalls that lie before him should he or she try to prescind from the basic criteria of evidence and of critical understanding.12 Vernon Gregson describes this habit of the mind by stating:

Lonergan’s criterion of intellectual conversion is not meant to be some “new” criterion. Rather it is meant to be a reflective grasp of the natural and active criteria of our own minds. These criteria manifest themselves spontaneously as questions: “What is the evidence for what you say?” “Why do you understand it that way and no other?” “On what do you base your assurance that

10 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 238–239.
your understanding is true?” “What is the quality of your evidence?” “Are you sure you have all the relevant data, or are you leaving something out?” “If so, what?” “Why must the evidence be understood in the way you are proposing, and not in some other way?” “Are you sure the evidence supports your hypothesis?”

Lonergan states: “Intellectual conversion is to truth attained by cognitional self-transcendence.” This cognitional self-transcendence is essential if one wishes to truly engage in dialectic.

**Moral Conversion**

As one progresses in life, one becomes more aware of the need to make decisions and choices, “from satisfaction to values.” Using freedom to exercise one’s self-authenticity, he or she opts “for the truly good, even for value against satisfaction when value and satisfaction conflict.”

Moral conversion, at its essence, involves the rejection of the purely selfish, pain-avoidance and pleasure-enhancing self-service to a maturity of self.

Lonergan wisely notes that moral conversion falls short of moral perfection. He states: “Deciding is one thing, doing is another.” True self-authenticity must consider the reality of general and individual bias, as well as the situation in which the individual finds himself or herself. Lonergan urges the moral converted to continue to develop one’s knowledge of “human reality and potentiality,” as well as to grasp the elements of progress and decline.

**History, Progress, and Decline**

This call to intellectual honesty is a hallmark of Lonergan’s later *Method in Theology*. Lonergan posits two vectors in history: progress and

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13 Gregson, 95–96.
decline. As Raymond Lafontaine notes, Lonergan is “working out the theological implications of his cognitive theory...that ‘insight into insight,’ leading to the gradual emergence of ‘higher viewpoints,’ is the motor driving the cumulative process of ‘human progress.’ ‘Insight into oversight,’ in contrast, is the key to understanding the cumulative progress of decline.”

18 Lonergan writes:

Insight into insight brings to light the cumulative process of progress. For concrete situations give rise into insights which issue into policies and courses of action. Action transforms the existing situation to give rise to further insight, better policies, more effective courses of actions. It follows that if insight occurs, it keeps recurring; and at each recurrence, knowledge develops, action increases its scope, and situations improve.  

19 Decline, on the other hand, is the result of the “finalistic tension of psyche and spirit in consciousness.”

20 Lonergan writes in explanation:

Just as insight can be desired, so too it can be unwanted. Besides the love of light, there can be a love of darkness. If prepossessions and prejudices notoriously vitiate theoretical investigations, much more easily can elementary passions bias understanding in practical and personal matters.

21 This bias works on three levels. In the individual, it is called “dramatic bias.” Dramatic bias functions on an unconscious level and can lead an individual to incorrectly interpret situations and suffer a form of cognitive distortion. The second form of bias is called “individual bias” and involves a conscious decision “to resist the transcendent pull of con-


19 Lonergan, Insight, 8.


21 Lonergan, Insight, 214.
science and to favour egoistic interests.” Lonergan states that this bias, which inevitably leads to decline, is not only in the individual, but also is present in social structures. With bluntness, he describes this form of bias in the following manner: “Unfortunately, as insight and oversight commonly are mated, so also are progress and decline. We reinforce our love of truth with a practicality that is equivalent to an obscurantism. We correct old evils with a passion that mars the new good. We are not pure. We compromise.”

**DIALECTIC AND COSMOPOLIS**

Lonergan states that it is necessary, if one wishes to be an authentic person, to promote progress and to reverse decline, to employ a method of dialectic. Dialectic method holds that “position,” which comes about from authentic reasoning and deciding, needs to developed and, “counterposition,” which arises from the effects of bias, needs to be re-

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22 Whelan, 90. Lonergan describes egoism in the following fashion: “Egoism is neither mere spontaneity nor pure intelligence but an interference of spontaneity with the development of intelligence. With remarkable acumen one solves one’s own problems. With startling modesty one does not venture to raise the relevant further questions. Can one’s solution be generalized? Is it compatible with the social order that exists? Is it compatible with any social order that proximately or even remotely is possible?” (Insight, 245).

23 Lonergan, Insight, 91. Lonergan goes on to describe two different sorts of bias which are present in the social realm: the first, “group bias,” is expressed in the gathering of “functional groups,” and these groups can lead to a class society, structured not only on social function, but also on social success. The second, “general bias,” is a refusal of common-sense people to admit differing viewpoints. This is much more serious, according to Lonergan, and “What is worse, the deteriorating situation seems to provide the uncritical, biased mind with factual evidence in which the bias is claimed to be verified. So in ever increasing measure, intelligence comes to be regarded as irrelevant to practical living.” (Insight, 8)

24 By genetic method, Lonergan means “the development, or genesis, of new schemes of recurrences either within living things or in the emergence of new living things, one from the other” (Whelan, 79). See Insight, 289ff concerning the human being and genetic method.
versed. By definition, position is “any philosophical pronouncement on any epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, or theological issue...” that is “coherent with the basic positions on the real, on knowing, and on objectivity.” Culture needs to cultivate “cosmopolis,” namely a “dialectic attitude of the will” Lonergan writes:

What is both necessary and disastrous is the exaltation of the practical, the supremacy of the state, the cult of the class. What is necessary is a cosmopolis that is neither class nor state that stands above all their claims, that cuts them down to size, that is founded on the native detachment and disinterestedness of every intelligence, that commands man’s first allegiance, that implements itself primarily through that allegiance, that is too universal to be bribed, too impalpable to be forced, too effective to be ignored.

The only way to live in a world that opposes the very notion of cosmopolis is to develop himself or herself as a truly authentic human being. Lonergan writes:

The solution has to be a still higher integration of human living, For the problem is radical and permanent; it is independent of the underlying physical, chemical, organic, and psychic manifolds; it is not met by revolutionary change, nor by human discovery, nor by the enforced implementation of discovery; it is as large as human living and human history. Further, the solution has to take people just as they are.

It is precisely this call to authenticity that is necessary for the seminarian to embrace in his or her own personal journey that lies at the root of a true method in theology. Lonergan writes:

The crucial issue is an experimental issue, and the experiment will be per-

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25 Lonergan states that a basic position is present “if the real is the concrete universe of being and not a subdivision of the ‘already out there now” and “if objectivity is conceived as a consequence of intelligent inquiry and critical reflection, and not as a property of vital anticipation, extroversion, and satisfaction.” On the other hand, a basic counterposition arises “if it contradicts one of more of the basic positions...” (Insight, 413ff)

26 Lonergan, Insight, 413.

27 Lonergan, Insight, 721.

28 Lonergan, Insight, 263.

29 Lonergan, Insight, 655–656.
formed not publicly, but privately. It will consist in one’s own rational self-consciousness clearly and distinctly taking possession of itself as ration self-consciousness. Up to that decisive achievement, all leads. From it, all follows. No one else, no matter what his knowledge or his eloquence, no matter what his logical rigout or his persuasiveness, can do it for you…

Personal commitment is essential for the seminarian to the process of priestly formation if it is to be authentic. Lonergan, writes:

Despite the doubts and denials of positivists and behaviorists, no one, unless some of his organs are deficient, is going to say that never in his life did he have the experience of seeing or of hearing, of touching or smelling or tasting, of imagining, or perceiving, of feeling or moving; or that if he appeared to have such experience, still it was more appearance, since all his life long he has gone about like a somnambulist without any awareness of his own activities. Again, how rare is the man that will preface his lectures by repeating his conviction that never did he have even a fleeting experience of intellectual curiosity, of inquiry, of striving and coming to understand, of expressing what he has grasped by understanding. Rare too is the man that begins his contributions to periodical literature by reminding his potential readers that never in his life did he experience anything that might be called critical reflection, that he never paused about the truth or falsity of any statement, that if ever he seems to exercise his rationality by passing judgment strictly in accord with the available evidence, then that must be counted mere appearance for he is totally unaware of any such event or even any such tendency. Few finally are those that place at the beginning of their books the warning that they have no notion of what might be meant by responsibility, that never in their lives did they have the experience of acting responsibly, and that least of all in composing the books they are offering the public.

Be attentive! Be Intelligent! Be Reasonable! Be Responsible! Be in Love! These are the precepts that underline Method in Theology and the creation of the functional specialties.

Triumph Over Selfishness

In many ways, one might view moral conversion as a triumph over selfishness in oneself and in society. It is a call to move from a limited hori-
zon to a deeper one. Lonergan comments, “Moral conversion is to values apprehended, affirmed, and realized by real self-transcendence.” T. S. Eliot, in his play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, writes, “The last act is the greatest treason. To do the right thing for the wrong reason.” The seminarian who is truly morally converted can be responsible, to know what, and perhaps more importantly, why he does what he does. True moral conversion requires one to be open to criticism for self-growth, all in the service of coming to know the truth of the statements one makes and the grounds one uses for analysis. Moral conversion must be lived, and moral conversion of its very essence is orientated toward action.

**RELIgIOUS CONVERSION**

Lonergan describes religious conversion simply as “Religious conversion is being grasped by ultimate concern.” Religious conversion, then, means moving from a focus on one’s own personal concerns to matters of ultimate meaning and value. It is a horizon shift from the things and values of this passing world to the things and values that endure. “Religious conversion is to a total being-in-love as the efficacious ground of all self-transcendence, whether in the pursuit of truth, or in the realization of human values, or in the orientation man adopts to the universe, its grounds, and its goal.”

This religious conversion is described as “other-worldly falling in love,” “total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations.” It is viewed by Lonergan not as a single act, but instead as a “dynamic state” and is demonstrated as “an under-tow of existential consciousness, as a fated acceptance of a vocation to holiness, as perhaps an increasing simplicity and passivity in prayer.”

Religious conversion differs from faith. Lonergan delineates the distinc-

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tion in three ways: in the first stage, there is an individual’s experience of supernatural, unconditional love; in the second stage, there is the decision of whether to return this love; and third and finally, there is the affirmative decision to respond to this otherworldly love and this to become a “being-in-love.” Lonergan speaks of this in rather personalistic terms:

Faith is the knowledge born of religious love…Of it Paschal spoke when he remarked that the heart has reasons which reason does not know…this apprehension…may be objectified as a clouded revelation of absolute intelligence and intelligibility, absolute truth and reality, absolute goodness and holiness. With that objectification there recurs the question of God in a new form. From now it is primarily a question of decision. Will I love him in return, or will I refuse?37

This sense of “being-in-love” is a powerful experience of the transcendent. Tad Dunne explains this notion in the following manner:

If we decide to believe, then we can see that our lover is unlike any earthly lover. I might love you with all my heart, but you did not give me my love. This lover comes to us by giving us our power to love, and nobody on earth ever did that. With transcendent love, we can imagine ourselves caught in a great circle of love, beginning with the One who loves us, pouring this thirst and desire into our souls, and pouring from our souls towards absolutely all goodness, truth, beauty, and order—which is what this One is. Our love is Alpha and Omega, both the source and object of our loving.38

Dunne makes a distinction between implicit and explicit religious conversion, in light of the definition of religious conversion as “the subordination of all conscious activity to transcendent love.” He states that one who does not analyze the source and origin of this transcendent love would be in a state of implicit religious conversion. The one who has an explicit religious conversion can recognize in personalistic terms, “a Thou, a Someone, a named and loved term of an orientation.” He states: “And for those knowingly in love, it makes an enormous difference in

37 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 116.
38 Tad G. Dunne, Lonergan and Spirituality: Towards a Spiritual Integration, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), 111.
how they ponder life’s mysteries; it gives them a Thou to talk with.”39 Lonergan describes how, for the converted, the triad of “see, judge, act” reveals “eros of the human spirit, its capacity and its desire for self-transcendence.”40 Religious conversion permits the existential subject to become a “subject-in-love, a subject held, grasped, possessed, owned through a total and so an other-worldly love.”41 From this perspective, everything changes for the subject. He or she now has a new basis to “see, judge, act,” and a new impetus to promote progress and reverse decline. Religious conversion transcends the established ends of intellectual conversion (truth) and moral conversion (value). Lonergan explains religious loving as “without conditions, qualifications, reservations...with all one’s heart and all one’s soul and all one’s strength.”42

Lonergan also explains the opposite of religious conversion: sinfulness. Making a distinction between sinfulness and moral evil, he describes it as “the privation of total loving...a radical dimension of lovelessness.”43 This can, according to Lonergan, be disguised as a failure to go deeper, one allowing himself or herself to live superficially and to escape into creature comforts. This superficial level of living cannot be sustained. It will ultimately lead to “the absence of fulfillment reveals itself in unrest, the absence of joy in the pursuit of fun, the absence of peace in disgust—a depressive disgust with oneself or a manic, hostile, even violent disgust with mankind.”44

THE CONVERSIONS AND SUBLATION

Lonergan notes that, because all three conversions involve a self-tran-
scendence, one can posit a theory of sublation.\textsuperscript{45} Value, according to Lonergan, “is a transcendental notion. It is what is intended in questions for deliberation.”\textsuperscript{46} Lonergan describes a scale of values to which one responds in feelings. He writes:

Not only do feelings respond to values. They do so on accord with some scale of preference. So we may distinguish vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious values in an ascending order. Vital values, such as health and strength, grace and vigor, normally are preferred to avoiding the work, privations, pains involved in acquiring, maintaining and restoring them. Social values, such as the good order which conditions the vital values of individual members of the community…Cultural values do not exist without the underpinning of vital and social values, but none the less they rank higher. Not on bread alone doth man live. Over and above mere living and operating, men have to find a meaning and value in their living and operating. It is the function of culture to discover, express, validate, criticize, correct, develop, improve such meaning and value. Personal value is the person in his self-transcendence, as loving and being loved, as originator of values in himself and in his milieu, as an inspiration and invitation to others to do likewise. Religious values, finally, are the

\textsuperscript{45} Lonergan, \textit{Method in Theology}, 241. Here, Lonergan indicates that his notion of sublation is more akin to that of Karl Rahner in \textit{Hearers of the Word} (1994, trans. Joseph Donceel), rather that of G. W. Hegel. Lonergan states that sublation means “what sublates goes beyond what is sublated, introduces something new and distinct, put everything on a new basis, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context.” (241)

\textsuperscript{46} Lonergan, \textit{Method in Theology}, 36. Lonergan distinguishes between intentional feelings, which focus on an object as simple as “hunger, thirst, sexual discomfort,” and as complex as feelings which motive someone to do the good and non-intentional feelings that include “fatigue, irritability, bad humor (and) anxiety,” all with no immediate cause.
heart of the meaning and value of man’s living and man’s world.\(^\text{47}\)

Each level of conversion sublates the other. For instance, moral conversion sublates intellectual conversion and religious conversion sublates moral conversion; however, one should not think of a linear sequence—intellectual conversion, then moral conversion, and then finally religious. Lonergan points out the true nature of conversion by stating:

> On the contrary, from a causal viewpoint, one would say that first there is God’s gift of love. Next, the eye of this love reveals values in their splendor, while the strength of this love brings about their realization, and that is moral conversion. Finally, among the values discerned by the eye of love is the value of believing the truths taught by the religious tradition, and in such tradition and belief are the seeds of intellectual conversion. For the word, spoken and heard, proceeds from and penetrates to all four levels of intentional consciousness. Its content is not just a content of experience but a content of experience and understanding and judging and deciding. The analogy of sight yields the cognitional myth. But fidelity to the word engages the whole man. (Emphasis mine)\(^\text{48}\)

The opposite of conversion is breakdown. Due to lack of true self-transcendence, due to a superficiality and lack of self-authenticity, the progress made by individuals and cultures can quickly decline. Lonergan states: “Cognitional self-transcendence is neither an easy notion to grasp nor a readily accessible datum of consciousness to be verified.”\(^\text{49}\) However, even though it is difficult, it is necessary if one wishes to grow. Intellectual, moral, and religious conversions are the cornerstones of the fourth functional specialty, dialectic.

\(^{47}\) Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31-32. Here it should be noted that Lonergan also formulated the scale of value in another manner: “Vital values of health and strength; with the social values enshrined in family and custom, society and education, the state and the law, the economy and technology, the church or sect; with the cultural values of religion and art, language and literature, science, philosophy, history, theology; with the achieved personal value of one dedicated to realizing values in himself and promoting their realization in others.” (Lonergan, “The Response of the Jesuit as Priest and Apostle in the Modern World,” in *Collection*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 4, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 168-169.


Lonergan describes the two levels of dialectic: the upper level, consisting of operators and a lower level, involving the things that are operated on. He describes on the upper level (operator) as having two main precepts. The first of these precepts is to develop a position, which Lonergan defines as “statements compatible with intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.” The second of these precepts is to reverse counter-positions, described by Lonergan as “statements incompatible with intellectual, or moral, or religious conversion.”

To grasp the concept of dialectic, one needs to understand that the first three functional specialties are deficient in two ways: first, history is concerned with telling what exactly happened. Operating on the third level of intentional consciousness, it does not concern itself with values, which would be an operation of the fourth level of consciousness. Second, interpretation is based not on an evaluative hermeneutics, which also operates on the fourth level of consciousness.

Dialectic’s tasks, then, are to add an evaluative aspect to the first three functional specialties. The theologian engaging in dialectic is to be the one aware of “gross differences” that may exist in history or texts. He or she is to become more aware that the individual authors may not have arrived at a level of conversion and are operating at different levels of differentiation of consciousness. Dialectic is difficult work for the theologian. It involves a radical call to self-authenticity that can only come

51 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 249. Lonergan notes that, prior to being “operated on,” the material in questions as to assembled, completed, reduced, classified, selected. He defines each of these terms: “Assembly includes the researches performed, the interpretations proposed, the histories written, and the events, statements, movements to which they refer. Completion adds evaluative interpretation and evaluative history.... Comparison examines the completed assembly to seek out affinities and oppositions. Reduction finds the same affinity and the same opposition manifested in a number of different manners; from the many manifestations it moves to the underlying root. Classification determines which of these sources of affinity or opposition result from dialectically opposed horizons and which have other grounds. Selection... picks out the affinities and oppositions grounded on dialectically opposed horizons and dismisses other affinities and oppositions.” (249-250)
from an ongoing effort. It involves a realism about oneself, about others, and about the world. Lonergan writes:

Human authenticity is not some quality, some serene freedom from all oversight, all misunderstanding, all mistakes, all sins. Rather it consists in a withdrawal from unauthenticity, and the withdrawal is never a permanent achievement. It is ever precarious, ever to be achieved afresh, ever in a greater part a matter of uncovering still more oversights, acknowledging still further failures to understand, correcting still more mistakes, repenting more and more deeply hidden sins. Human development, in brief, is largely through the resolution of conflicts and, within the realm of intentional consciousness, the basic conflicts are defined by the opposition of positions and counter-positions.52

Lonergan reminds us that among the four realms of meaning (common sense, theory, interiority, and transcendence), the one he has described the least as a differentiated realm is transcendence. He described the gift of God’s love as “spontaneously reveals itself in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control.”53 The seminarian, to do his task, must deal with the dialectic that has plagued modern humanity—common sense and transcendence. Lonergan writes:

Quite distinct from these objectifications of the gift of God’s love in the realms of common sense and of theory and from the realm of interiority, is the emergence of the gift as itself as differentiated realm. It is this emergence that is cultivated by a life of prayer and self-denial and, when it occurs, it has the twofold effect, first, of withdrawing the subject from the realm of common sense theory, and other interiority into a “cloud of unknowing” and then of intensifying, purifying, clarifying, the objectifications referring to the transcendent whether in the realm of common sense, or of theory, or of other interiority.54

**THE CONVERSIONS AND THE RATIO**

Could not the stages as described in the Ratio (propaedeutic, discipleship, configuration, and pastoral) be seen as in accord with the conversions as articulated by Lonergan? Thus, the propaedeutic stage could be

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53 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 266
54 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 266
seen as having a focus on religious conversion; the discipleship stage, those years in which philosophy is studied, would include an invitation to intellectual conversion, but is perhaps just as importantly devoted to encouraging the growth in that moral conversion that flows from religious conversion. The document is notable for the attention it gives, at all stages, to the importance for the seminarian of integrating his sexual identity with the call to celibacy. This challenge can be related to the way psychic conversion needs to be combined with intellectual conversion. Sexuality is intimately related to the life of the psyche. Without an attentiveness to bodily needs and to affectivity, intellectual formation risks being abstract and lacking in empathy for others. Finally, during the years of the study of theology— what the Ratio calls the configuration stage— one hopes that all four of the conversions are beginning to become integrated into the man who will soon be a priest.

The Ratio is a policy document for seminaries and so it addresses a wide range of issues. Some of these are notable for addressing issues that have arisen recently in seminary formation around the world. These include the formation of vocations coming from other countries, the promotion of priestly vocations among young students, as well as older vocations. It clarifies the role of the local Church, the family, the local bishop and presbyterate in the promotion of priestly vocations. It likewise clearly delineates the role of the various necessary seminary personnel: rector, spiritual director, etc., as well as emphasizing what should be in a seminary curriculum.

THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD AND THE THOUGHT OF POPE FRANCIS

On questions of intellectual formation, the impact of Evangelii Gaudium on the Ratio is evident. It stresses how theology as the knowledge of God must always be related to life as lived by the People of God. It speaks of how theological understanding must be open-ended, open to new discovery, and attentive to the reality that many Catholics are only able to live an imperfect expression of the Catholic ideals to which they
aspire. It is perhaps best to pause here to come to a greater understanding of the vision of Pope Francis. John Courtney Murray describes Pope Saint John XXIII in the following manner:

He (John XXIII) raised some questions himself—notably, the great, sprawling, ecumenical question— to which he returned no definitive answers. He encouraged the raising of other questions, both old and new, both theological and pastoral— and even political. The symbol of him might well be the question mark—surely a unique symbol for a pope.55

Murray’s description of John XIII could easily be applied to our current pontiff, who could just as easily be characterized with that same question mark. For many, the approach of Pope Francis represents a seismic shift. Cardinal Walter Kasper characterizes this shift as above all concerning a question of method. He suggests that the notion of theology during the time of the two predecessors of Francis was primarily deductive.56 By contrast, he suggests that the approach of the current pope is primarily inductive. In adopting this inductive approach, Pope Francis’ theology can be seen as in continuation with Murray. In fact, Pope Francis, like Murray, is a remarkable example of a contextual theologian.

A “Theology of the People”

An important interpreter of the thought of the theology of Pope Francis is Juan Carlos Scannone. This Argentine Jesuit is a former seminary lecturer of Jorge Bergoglio and states that, to understand Francis, one must come to an understanding of the “theology of the people” so prevalent in Argentina after Vatican II.57 Various commentators note that although the Bishops of Argentina did not per se contribute a great deal to the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council, they quickly implemented

56 Walter Kasper, Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love (Mahwah, New Jersey: 2015), 7, 12.
the Council’s pastoral and ecumenical teachings. In this matter, they were assisted by an interdisciplinary group of Catholic intellectuals who articulated this “theology of the people.” In essence, this group of advisors helped the bishops become more contextual in their theology. Scannone states that for this group the key was not only finding a role for the laity in the Church, but “also the inclusion of the church within the historical course of peoples.”

Scannone notes that what separated the Argentinian school from the rest of Latin American “liberation theology” was the fact that the Argentinians focused on method, not on specific “socio-economic” issues. He explains that the focus was “socio-cultural,” rather than “socio-economic” as was the case elsewhere. He traces the theology of the people to the thought of Lucio Gera. The theology of the people derives its roots from *Lumen Gentium*’s concept of the Church as the “People of God,” as well as from a non-political “Peronism.”

The desire of the theology of the people as articulated by Gera, is to create an alternate situation for the people, one which, following the example of Christ, would posit a preferential option for the poor, recognizing the life-situation of most of the Argentinian people. The focus is placed on culture, not on economic class. By focusing on the creation of normative values in culture, the focus switches to the values needed in the evangelization of the culture. Popular piety would play an important role in the creation of the ecclesial and social identity of the people.

This dialectical shift from an institutional image of the Church to that of a “grass-roots” image of the “People of God” is apparent in John Courtney Murray’s thinking as well. Murray, during the Council, had gone through several different images for the Church, from the “family of

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60 Scannone, “Papa Francesco”: 572-573.
God” to the “People of God,” eventually arriving at a favored image of the Church: “Christian community.” Murray believed that it is precisely this image that permits true dialogue across the many moral, religious, and cognitional differences in Church and culture. Murray perceived the fundamental problem in the Church to be one of community. In the living out of his papacy, Francis has emphasized community as the primary image. The Church as community has concrete implications:

How important it is that the voice of every member of society be heard, and that a spirit of open communication, dialogue and cooperation be fostered. It is likewise important that special concern be shown for the poor, the vulnerable and those who have no voice, not only by meeting their immediate needs but also by assisting them in their human and cultural advancement.

Like Murray before him, Pope Francis is calling for the development of a true ethics of discourse, for the good of the Church and the world. Various commentators note that before being elected pope, Francis played an important role in persuading the bishops of Latin America to adopt the approach of a Theology of the People. He was the chairperson of the drafting committee of the meeting of Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM) when they held their fifth General Assembly, in Aparecida, Brazil in 2007. In its final document at Aparecida, CELAM examines in past and prepares for its future, stating:

This has taught us to look at reality more humbly, knowing that it is greater and more complex than the simplistic ways in which we used to look at it in the not very distant past which often introduced conflicts into society, leaving

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62 Hooper, 184.
many wounds that have still not been able to heal.\textsuperscript{65}

One commentator notes:

Commentators agree that Aparecida has a distinctively Argentinian theological tone, placing less emphasis on difference of economic class and employing a vocabulary of “inculturation,” discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the popular piety of the poor, the experience of indigenous peoples, of women, and of urban dwellers. Also noteworthy is the fact that some non-Argentinian liberation theologians praised the Aparecida document and acknowledged that their own thinking had undergone a maturing process over the decades.\textsuperscript{66}

When one compares documents, one finds that the links are clear from the final document of Aparecida, to \textit{Evangelii Gaudium}, and the \textit{Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis} of 2016.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

At the end of the second synod of the family, Pope Francis offered an exhortation that received a standing ovation from the bishops. His advice was offered most immediately to bishops but can be taken as sage advice to seminarians:

Since (the Synod) is a journey of human beings, with the consolations there were also moments of desolation, of tensions and temptations, of which a few possibilities could be mentioned:

1. One, a temptation to hostile inflexibility, that is, wanting to close oneself within the written word, (the letter) and not allowing oneself to be surprised by God, by the God of surprises, (the spirit); within the law, within the certitude of what we know and not of what we still need to learn and to achieve. From the time of Christ, it is the temptation of the zealous, of the scrupulous, of the solicitous and of the so-called – today – “traditionalists” and also of the intellectuals.

2. The temptation to a destructive tendency to a superficial goodness that in

\textsuperscript{65} Aparecida Final Document, paragraph 36, as cited in Whelan, “Pope Francis,” 5.

the name of a deceptive mercy binds the wounds without first curing them and treating them; that treats the symptoms and not the causes and the roots. It is the temptation of the “do-gooders,” of the fearful, and also of the so-called “progressives and liberals.”

3. The temptation to transform stones into bread to break the long, heavy, and painful fast (cf. Lk 4:1-4); and also to transform the bread into a stone and cast it against the sinners, the weak, and the sick (cf. Jn 8:7), that is, to transform it into unbearable burdens (Lk 11:46).

4. The temptation to come down off the Cross, to please the people, and not stay there, to fulfil the will of the Father; to bow down to a worldly spirit instead of purifying it and bending it to the Spirit of God.

5. The temptation to neglect the “depositum fidei” [the deposit of faith], not thinking of themselves as guardians but as owners or masters [of it]; or, on the other hand, the temptation to neglect reality, making use of meticulous language and a language of smoothing to say so many things and to say nothing!

Clearly, the Church after Vatican II still struggles to recognize that the implementation of the Council calls us to the conversions outlined by Lonergan: religious, moral, and intellectual. I have noted that the absence of these conversions tends to lead to a polarization of theology and pastoral praxis between a scattered left and a solid right. The proper implementation of the Ratio by each episcopal conference can prove a powerful tool in the formation of good, happy, healthy, holy Catholic priests.

The 20th Century was one of great global change. The Church was no mere spectator to this change. Instead, the changes within the world and the changes within the Church often mirrored each other. Writing amidst these changes, Hans Urs von Balthasar briefly reflects on the history of the relationship between the world and the Church and proceeds to posit a pathway forward because of the newly defined parameters of the roles held by the Church and the world. Indeed, this work may even seem to be a borderline forgettable one since its approach to theology is so prevalent in contemporary theology that the work itself can easily be forgotten. However, this prevalence should not necessitate the rejection or forgetting of the themes contained within *Razing the Bastions*. Further, von Balthasar organizes his text into four distinct sections to connect the immutable identity and the changing circumstances of the Church: Departure, Descent, Endurance, and Contact. Ultimately, von Balthasar’s work remains for the contemporary reader a dated text because much of its claims have been received into theology in an authentic fashion, though the themes which von Balthasar treats are not simply important, but they have been matriculated into the life of the Church.

The context for von Balthasar’s work is succinctly given by the then-Father Christoph Schönborn, O.P., himself writing in 1988, well after the publication of the original text. Schönborn quite astutely makes the obvious connection between the content of *Razing the Bastions* and the Second Vatican Council. In effect, Schönborn’s Foreword serves two major
purposes: it highlights the role of *Razing the Bastions* in the seeming tension in thought between pre-Conciliar and post-Conciliar von Balthasar, and it attempts to present the text as valuable on its own merit, through Schönborn’s presentation of his understanding of the scope of the text. To the former point, Schönborn cites both an interview with the now-Cardinal Angelo Scola, the former editor of the Italian edition of *Communio*, from 1985 as well as several texts from von Balthasar’s own reflections towards the latter portion of his career. Though these chronologically later texts seem to contradict *Razing the Bastions*, Schönborn reconciles these texts by illustrating that viewing *Razing the Bastions* simply as an *aggiornamento* text does a disservice to von Balthasar’s theology. Schönborn’s dissolvement of the perceived tension allows for the manifestation of the second goal of the Foreword. According to Schönborn, “*Razing the Bastions* pleads for a Church that interprets the ‘signs of the age’, grasps them, and answers them, allowing herself to be awakened by the (Holy) Spirit and by the age ‘from the bed of historical sleep for the deed of today’.”¹ This, for Schönborn, is an explicit statement of the scope and purpose of this text. However, Schönborn harmonizes this thesis with the perceived change in von Balthasar’s approach by honing on the “discernment of what is Christian.” Schönborn’s defense of von Balthasar argues that the Church of *Razing the Bastions* must never forget her distinct identity and that von Balthasar himself never argued for such an intentional rejection of identity. Further, “[the Church] is credible when her openness to the world does not become assimilation to the world—which would have nothing else to say to the world than what the world itself already knows better.”² For Schönborn, the key to properly understanding von Balthasar’s text is not to separate *aggiornamento* from identity but rather to understand that through identity *aggiornamento* becomes credible and effective.

“Departure” examines the current state in which von Balthasar observes the Church. Firstly, he characterizes the sentiments of the laity,

especially the young people, in writing, “...the laity will always be inclined to equate or confuse the theological principle of tradition with a more general Catholic preference for handing on what already exists.”\(^3\)

The reader is assured throughout this section that von Balthasar himself is certainly not against Tradition.\(^4\) However, the reader finds himself in a position where he must ask himself if von Balthasar’s claim about the view of the laity is an accurate portrayal. Indeed, since this entire section centers around the role of the laity in the life of the Church, the questions and ideas which von Balthasar raises are not dated, since a summary of recent Church news will indicate that the role of the laity continues to be called into question even today. Further, in this section, von Balthasar presents an ecclesiology which utilizes the figures of Mary, St. Peter, and St. John to describe the Church.\(^5\) At times, it does seem that the language which von Balthasar uses remains highly unsympathetic to the Petrine Church, though perhaps this slight antagonism through the vocabulary which he uses was presented in an effort to highlight the necessity of the laity and the Church of Mary and the Church of St. John. Given the context in which von Balthasar is writing, such focus is understandable. However, if one seeks simply to describe an ecclesiology and not to make a specific argument for or against one of the three “Churches,” Bishop Robert Barron’s brief characterization might be more helpful.\(^6\) As well, Dulles also seems to synthesize different ecclesiological understandings in a less polemical manner than von Balthasar does.\(^7\) Regardless of the controversy, no one can argue that von Balthasar presents his view clearly and unambiguously throughout this section, which can be summarized by the following: “The future of the Church (and today she has the greatest opportunities) depends on whether laymen can be found who live out of the unbroken power of

\(^3\) von Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 19.

\(^4\) In fact, he affirms this many times, e.g., *Razing the Bastions*, 22, 32.


von Balthasar begins “Descent” by illustrating the interplay between the Church and traditions throughout history. This first part of this chapter concerns soteriology and ecclesiology, and in these theological fields von Balthasar is decidedly orthodox. Especially in his exegesis of extra ecclesiam nulla salus, von Balthasar does not stray from the tradition of the Church, indicated by his use of St. Augustine as his guide throughout this exegesis. However, in his historical characterization of the role of the Church, it seems that von Balthasar is assuming intentions which may not be historically accurate. For example, the reader must discern whether the Church “pushing boundaries forward” or “carry[ing] on as long as possible the medieval order” was an explicit attempt to achieve those goals or was simply the result of the way the Church existed during that time. It seems highly dubious that the historical Church even had the capacity to consider herself acting thusly within its own context, thereby eliminating the possibility for the foresight of malintent. Though von Balthasar’s historical logic for explaining the current state of the Church seems questionable, his diagnosis of the Church’s present circumstances and his recommendations for moving forwards do not seem to be questionable; both are firmly rooted in Scripture. In doing so, von Balthasar notes that many people during his time were drawn towards an implicit notion of social justice. The promulgation of the social encyclicals give credence to this claim. To respond to this need, von Balthasar recommends St. Paul’s “logic of the Cross” together with Christ’s own words in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. von Balthasar’s solution seems to permeate the theology of contemporary times: “They would stand in need of a theology that describes Christian existence from the perspective of service.” One must ask if service really has taken a foothold in the academic realm of theology, and not

8 von Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 43.
9 von Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 48.
10 von Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 51.
11 von Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 69.
12 von Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 69.
merely in piety or religion. A text complimentary to these themes would be *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, which connects the active life of the laity to the identity of the Apostles. Yet, given von Balthasar’s constant insistence on the identity of the Christian, the reader can also ponder whether von Balthasar’s recommendations were heeded, ecclesial documents notwithstanding, at the expense of the Church’s identity, at least in part.

Though up to this point in the text von Balthasar has painted a bleak historical depiction of the Church, in “Endurance” von Balthasar presents a positive path forward in the aftermath of the bastions having been razed using transcendence. Indeed, perhaps the best strategic hermeneutic which von Balthasar employs throughout the text is an underlying presupposition of transcendence. This strategy comes to the fore in this section as von Balthasar describes Christian experience. It is not merely that the Christian experience socially betters a group of people but “his experience of Christian life will be a piece of Christianity indispensable to the total experience of the Church.” Indeed, “Where there is a Christian, there is the Church; he bears the light with him, and therefore (as long as he bears it truly) he never comes into an area outside the Church.” von Balthasar thus reemphasizes the missionary nature of the Church, which stems from the individual’s Christian experience which is by nature transcendent and ecclesiological. Towards the end of the chapter, von Balthasar also details a helpful, if not possibly controversial, programmatic schema concerning the roles of the hierarchy and the laity. He considers that the laity should “practice tolerance,” while the hierarchy should “[hold] fast to the forms and formulas of revelation and tradition.” While his description of the hierarchy seems uncontroversial, I think one could question whether the goal of the laity is the practice of tolerance. Further, is it really the role of the laity to

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“convince the hierarchy to apply a new tolerance?” The history of lay movements and restorations in the Church certainly lend credibility to this question.

Finally, von Balthasar explores this “Contact” between the laity and the world. Again, whether the “splendid isolation” from which the Church was forced reflects the historical reality could be debated. It seems here von Balthasar would do well to distinguish between “authority” and “isolation,” for the latter term seems foreign to the Church, even despite the past flaws of Her members. Finally, von Balthasar draws an analogy between the Church on the cusp of where von Balthasar find her and the Great Wall of China. According to von Balthasar, “The Chinese Wall is being demolished today,” and “the contact with the space that then comes into being is something greater.” If von Balthasar intends to exhort the lay faithful to a missionary dynamism, then this statement remains valid. If, however, von Balthasar intends to imply that prior to the period around 1952 the Church remained behind her towering walls, it seems that his historical analysis should be called into question. The sheer history of evangelization, though far from perfect since the Church’s members are far from perfect, would seem to contradict von Balthasar’s claim. Further, if von Balthasar intends to imply that the Church’s missionaries have lived the Gospel message admirably but that her theologians live in “splendid isolation,” then, again, his claim seems dubious. The introduction of Greek philosophy into theology by the Church Fathers, the introduction of Aristotelianism and Muslim thought by Aquinas, and the application of the Church’s tradition to contemporary social issues by Pope Leo XIII all refute such an implication. If, however, one is to read von Balthasar through charitable lenses, one could assert that von Balthasar simply wishes to claim that the laity now have avenues through which they can more tangibly and actively participate in the evangelical mission of the Church.

17 von Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 91.
18 von Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 93.
19 von Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 103.
Overall, von Balthasar’s text remains foundational for theology today since many of the issues which he addresses are still unsolved. The reader can and should question the claims and assertions made by von Balthasar to determine their value, but the very fact that the reader can perform such critical thinking on the text indicates that the text remains highly relevant. The text only remains “dated” insofar as many of the exhortations of the text are now common practice in theology and the life of the Church. This reality in no way lessens the importance of the text as a theological work, but instead highlights the fact that the reader may not read the text with the same exhortative force with which von Balthasar originally wrote it. Perhaps, the most controversial issues involve the continual effort by von Balthasar to ascribe certain intentions to the Church of the past, which not only seem to be contradicted by the very missionary history of the Church but also by the capacity of the Church for self-reflection in those times. Setting aside the historical dimension, von Balthasar goes to great pains to emphasize the orthodoxy of his presuppositions, and this strategy allows the speculative claims he makes concerning ecclesiology and the role of the laity to have some merit: they cannot be ignored. As with all texts of an author’s thought, Razing the Bastions cannot be read as a work isolated from von Balthasar’s other texts. Indeed, this text does seem to be indispensable for any serious student of contemporary theology.
“What am I doing here?” or “What are you doing here?” That question, depending on the intonation, can cover various attitudes and emotions. They surround the notion of belonging, or not belonging. As Solomon muses in the first reading from the Book of Kings, it is about the wonder and awe at the dignity which God has bestowed on him and on the people of Israel.

A realization of unworthiness which is overshadowed by awe! And we should have such awe. That God allows us to cooperate in the cycle of grace. From what he bestows upon us, we make a return, which he himself then blesses and multiplies. In this place, we bring voices and words, bread and wine, which we ourselves do not create, and He returns to us His very presence, His Word, Jesus Christ, Christ’s very Body and Blood from Calvary in the Eucharist, the feeding of His true Body the Church!

A realization of unworthiness which is overshadowed by awe! And we should always have such awe.

In the Gospel Jesus calls, and scandalously invites himself, to the house of the tax collector Zacchaeus. We know that many looked at both Jesus and Zacchaeus gathered at table and said, “What are they doing here?” They should not be together. This man is a sinner, this man claims to be the Son of God. Zacchaeus was quick with a realization of unworthiness. But that unworthiness by God’s grace, by Christ’s invitation, or in this case his insistence, led Zacchaeus to conversion. It happens back there
in the back. When we walk into the confessional, the priest does not ask us, “What are you doing here?” He himself a sinner is at the same time an ambassador and channel of God’s mercy. In Zacchaeus’ home, and in this home, we witness to an unworthiness which is overshadowed by mercy and conversion!

In St. Paul we hear of the dignity that we who are clearly not worthy to be called such, are made sharers in everything that God is doing and what he wants to build up. “You are no longer strangers or sojourners, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. You are built on the Apostles with Christ as your head, and you all fit together so that there is a place, this place, where the Spirit may truly and deeply dwell.” What a dignity, not initiated on our own, but certainly with our cooperation in the cycle of grace, God builds us up. “What are you doing here?” I am being built up into Christ’s body and I am doing it with you! A realization of unworthiness which is channeled by destiny!

“What am I doing here” or “What are you doing here?” We should be overshadowed by awe, overshadowed by mercy and conversion, be willing to be built up as Christ’s body. All of that happens each time we gather. May it be so for length of days.
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