

The Road to My Vocation

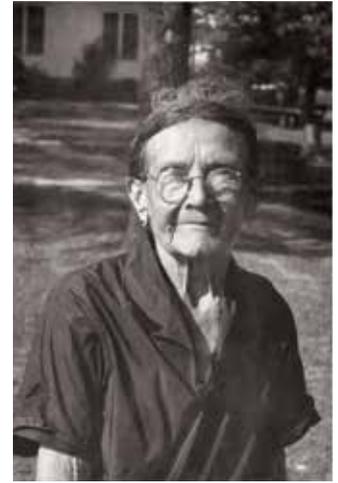
I write this in gratitude to Jesus and Saint Benedict for seventy-one-plus years at St Anselm's, of which I have never regretted a single day. I can imagine many Catholic families in which it happens that a boy of the family feels drawn to enter the priesthood, and it all comes about as a matter of course. But that is not the way it was with me. Let me begin at the beginning.

I was born in 1924 on a farm in Mannheim, Illinois, just outside Chicago. I lived there with my mother (Annette) and father (Harry) and two sisters, Harriet (five years older than I) and Loretta (18 months younger). When I was four and a half years of age, the family moved to a house in Chicago that my mother inherited at her mother's death. This was a bad time to move, just when the Great Depression was beginning. No jobs were available, so my father, who was accomplished in many manual skills (as a carpenter, plumber, electrician, painter) went into business on his own as an interior decorator and so was able to keep food on the table (one of our neighbors swore I had a hollow leg, so they must have helped out at times).

My mother was Catholic, my father's large family was Lutheran—not highly religious but not overly well-disposed toward Catholics. My parents were married outside the Church and my father did not want the children raised Catholic. While we still lived on the farm, my mother and grandmother arranged to have us three children secretly baptized as Catholics. There was tension between our parents in the area of religion, though neither was going to church. We children were quietly inclined toward my mother's side, although for a while I went to Lutheran Sunday School to please my father. My sisters and I went to Avondale public school—a good grammar school, where we were well educated. We then went on to public high schools: Harriet to Carl Schulz, Loretta to Flower Tech, and I to Lane Tech—my parents, seeing no way to send me to college, thought I could learn a trade there.

The big change for me came in the summer between grammar school and high school. I had always been working at various jobs: selling magazines, delivering papers, running door to door with handbills, and delivering for the butcher/grocery store. My parents must have thought I had worn myself down (I do remember them consulting a doctor about my health), because they decided I should spend the summer with my mother's widowed aunt, Nelle Clark, in the small town of Mattoon, about two hundred miles south of Chicago. I must have been very docile at that time because I don't remember any thoughts or feelings about being shipped off from home and family to live alone with an elderly woman I barely knew.

At any rate, it worked out pretty well. Mattoon was a railroad town and Aunt Nelle's small frame house was built right next to a railroad track, with only a small front yard and a low picket fence separating them. I guess I soon got used to passenger and freight trains coming through at all hours, day and night, for I slept on a folding bed in the living room. She and I must have sat and talked in the evenings, but about



Nelle Clark

what, I can't imagine. There were a couple of neighborhood boys I met and palled around with, and I read a lot, being a regular patron of the public library. I also wrote a lot of letters, especially to Loretta, with whom I had always been very close. Aunt Nelle was a devout Catholic, so we went to mass on Sundays. Among her books was a Catholic catechism, and from that I learned the prayers and began to memorize the questions and answers, almost to the very end of it. I became quite devout, spending a lot of time kneeling by my bed at night saying the prayers I had memorized.

At the end of the summer, back in Chicago, I did not lose my piety. Quite the contrary. Loretta and I got into the habit of going to mass on Sunday mornings while our parents were asleep and so knew nothing about it. I started taking instructions on the sly at St Francis Xavier, our local parish, until on one occasion my bicycle was stolen and my mother was afraid my father would find out where I had been going, so I stopped.

At Lane I joined the debating club, often traveling to other schools for debating tournaments, but my parents wanted me to join the ROTC, thinking it would be of help for me in the military service I was sure to enter. I did join and was soon spending time in officers' training,

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attaining the rank of cadet major. Meanwhile, I had enlisted in the Army Air Corps Enlisted Reserve (sworn in on the anniversary of Pearl Harbor), with the understanding that I wouldn't be called up until finishing high school. However, I was in fact called up at the beginning of the final semester of my senior year. So, not having finished high school, I was sent to Sheppard Field, Texas, for basic training. There I began taking instructions in the faith by mail until I was sent forth from Sheppard under the College Training Detachment (CTD) Program. Of the more than 150 institutions involved in CTD, I was sent by chance to Nashville to George Peabody College.

Although we were under military discipline, there was no chaplain at that college, so I went to the local parish (Cathedral of the Incarnation) to take instructions—again. Having been scheduled to be sent to a reassignment center elsewhere in Nashville, I went back to that church to return some books to the priest. However, that priest was not there and I met instead Fr Charles O'Laughlin, a monk of St Anselm's, who "by chance" was on supply there that summer. When he heard my story of having multiple times begun instruction (and having memorized the catechism), he said, "I think you have been instructed enough. Come back on Saturday and I'll hear your confession, and on Sunday I'll give you your First Communion; the bishop will be here and you'll be confirmed." As I was a serviceman liable to be sent overseas at the drop of a hat, these sacraments could be received with such dispatch—and that's just the way it happened.



Joseph at Nashville

Still being in Nashville, I was able to stay in touch with Fr Charles. He was newly ordained himself and had made friends with some local seminarians, so for a while we all went around together. He knew I was interested in becoming a priest and said that by the time I could apply I would be a delayed vocation (at 21!), so there would be advantages in coming to St Anselm's where I could catch up on Latin in the school there. (At that time I didn't really know the difference between a seminary and a monastery!) He urged me to spend my next furlough at St Anselm's. I wasn't about to spend my entire furlough in a monastery, but on one furlough I did go north from Florida (where I was studying radar at the time) to DC, spent two days there, and then headed west to Chicago. Fr Charles took me around Washington; what I remember best from that visit is a trip up the Washington monument and the view from its top of baseball fields laid out on the ground below. I remember

the school, too, which was then simply the north wing of the monastery, with a Dutch door for the secretary's office. I don't remember the services too well.

After Nashville came Preflight Training at Montgomery, Alabama (the thing I remember best was the obstacle course there, called "The Burma Road"). My parents and Loretta visited me there and were quartered on the base. What Loretta best remembers was being awakened by the cadets singing as they marched to mess. She had thought that happened only in Hollywood movies, when in fact we almost always sang when we marched; "Cannibal King" was a favorite, also "Give My Regards to Broadway"—we found we could march to almost any song.



PT-23 at Union City

Then it was off to Primary Flying School at Union City, Tennessee, where the planes were PT-23s, with 220 HP. This was a civilian-run contract school (as were dozens of others), with no chapel or chaplain. We went into town (a short walk) for mass. I sometimes went to the church in the evening. It was there one evening that I remember making a firm decision to become a priest—something I had thought of from time to time since Mattoon. Shortly after that I made my first solo flight (Oct. 28, 1943--big thrill!). Next it was on to Basic Flying School. The planes were now BT-13s, with 450 HP and changeable pitch prop. After we had learned instrument flying, night flying, and formation flying we were sent to Advanced Flying School at Spence Field, Georgia, featuring the single engine AT-6 ("Texan") with 600 HP and retractable landing gear.

At these various bases I maintained my piety. Normally I would be able to attend mass and receive Communion daily, and at each base I became friends with the Catholic chaplain. At one base the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in a closet in the chapel where I would go each evening to pray the Rosary. At another base I arranged to sleep in the chapel as a safeguard for the Blessed Sacrament. I read the Bible a lot and did other spiritual reading; I loved William Walsh's *St Teresa of Avila*.

Eventually the US Army Air Corps came to the conclusion that they had plenty of pilots in the pipeline and began "washing them out" (eliminating them) at a great rate. On my first formation flight, the AT-6 engine seemed to malfunction and I was not able to get up speed and so catch up with my instructor; he didn't believe there had been a malfunction and thought I was afraid to fly close (whereas I had loved formation flying



Joseph displays his wings.



Joseph at Boca Raton

in Basic, especially landing in formation). That began a series of checks which resulted in my being washed out—just a few weeks from graduation. I then began training as Radar Observer Night Fighter (RONF) and as such won my wings and commission as a second lieutenant.

Training to use radar and to acquire the skills needed to direct a pilot to intercept an enemy plane required nine months at Boca Raton, Florida; some weeks of that time were spent across the peninsula at Fort Myers Flexible Gunnery School because the RONF had to be also the gunner and the navigator.

My last base was Scott Field in Belleville, Illinois, a town where the Oblates of Mary Immaculate had a house. As they had a Flying Priest program, I had a couple of meetings with Fr Paul Schulte, who had written the book *Flying*

Priest Over the Arctic. Because of my love for flying, I was attracted; they encouraged me and allowed me to go to the local airport and check out any of their planes for some solo flying, which I availed myself of on three occasions. That might have been a recruiting gimmick

and I could have ended up at the OMI house a couple of miles up Michigan Avenue rather than at St Anselm's.

From Scott Field I was discharged just before Christmas. There were difficult moments when I told my father I would be going to enter a monastery. During the time I was home I spent a semester studying liberal arts at DePaul, doubling up on Latin (I had had one and a half years of it at Lane). During the time I was in service and until I left for Washington I corresponded with girls and dated, though they knew what my plans were.

When I arrived at St Anselm's, no one was expecting me. I had corresponded with Fr Thomas Moore and had told him I was coming in July, but our correspondence was infrequent and I guess he thought that in the meantime I had changed my mind. Nevertheless they accepted me. There were no novices at that time, not yet even a novitiate. We were still a priory fully dependent on our founding monastery, Fort Augustus Abbey. Fr Alban Boulwood arrived in November (Thanksgiving Day, in fact), having been appointed prior and novice master by the abbot of Fort Augustus. At first I was a postulant and undertook studies at the Catholic University of America until February 10, when I was clothed as a novice with one other of our candidates and three from Portsmouth Priory. I had the blessing of being clothed at first vespers of the feast of St Scholastica and eventually being simply and solemnly professed on her feast day.

Things worked out very well with my father. He was wonderful at the time of my ordination. All of my Lutheran relatives were present for that, and my Lutheran aunts knelt for my blessing (dear Aunt Nelle from Mattoon was also there). In later years my father went with my mother to mass every Sunday, even when they were traveling. When he died many years later and I went to Stewart-Warner, where he had worked for over twenty years, to pick up his personal belongings, a lady I spoke to there said, "You're his son! He was so proud of you; he talked about you all the time!"

I could not have wanted a better mother or father or sisters than mine, and now I have these wonderful brothers.

JOSEPH JENSEN, OSB

An Unexpected Insight

(This is a conference given to our Oblates on Sunday, October 4, 2020.)

This past week, Lorraine Ramsdell and I attended an icon-painting workshop in southwestern Pennsylvania, about a half hour's drive east of St Vincent's Archabbey in Latrobe. We drove up Route 30 through the Allegheny Mountains to reach our destination. It is a beautiful ride. In fact, on the way back we could already see the first intimations of autumn: leaves beginning to turn yellow

and red, some drifting to the ground, blown here and there by the wind.

It was an enjoyable week. It always is. We have been going there for twenty years and the Zimmermans have become family. However, because of where their home and studio are located, my phone and wi-fi failed. We concentrated on our icons and, of course, chatted a lot with our hosts. I recited the office and did my lectio each day from my Kindle, which did not fail me.

The general failure of my electronic equipment, however, came with a bonus and taught me a valuable lesson. Although I interacted with Lorraine and my hosts, being free from the daily bombardment of news and the urge to make phone calls was liberating. I was not totally deprived, because I could depend on the Zimmermans for the one or two calls I had to make. Combined with the general quiet that resulted from working on the icon I was painting, as well as praying for help in finishing it, there was much silence and space for reflection. My thoughts seemed to become calmer. A deep peace and tranquility stole over me.

This experience made me consider how much time I was spending needlessly with my “toys.” Even though it is important to keep abreast of the news, so much that we read is sensational and upsetting and this led me to question myself. How much time do I spend surfing the internet? To what extent does it have an impact on my spiritual life? I do not doubt the usefulness or even the importance of my iPhone, iPad and Kindle, but what came to my mind were the words “moderation,” “quiet,” and “stillness.”

I have been reading for lectio a commentary on Mark’s gospel. In chapter 6, Jesus’ apostles returned from their first mission and gave an account of their ministry. Jesus then said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31). After the burden of their work, the twelve needed to be refreshed in his presence and with one another. Notice that Jesus refers to a “deserted place,” that is, a place devoid of distractions, an uninhabited place. Their bodies and spirits would not be restored unless they were alone with him. In this particular episode, their plans evaporate as the number of people seeking Jesus became so great that they did not even have an opportunity to eat. Nevertheless, the principle that Jesus pointed to was a balance of work, relaxation, and time spent with him.

In our culture, rest often is equated with entertainment. Again, the principle that St Benedict adheres to is the golden mean: moderation in all things. When I look around, when I read the ads, when I take stock of myself, I realize how much time I spend needlessly on the phone,

surfing the internet, reading “newsy” articles. I know my weakness. If I had TV, I’d be drawn to that too.

As St Benedict knew and taught, the needs of each individual vary. However, I find that the overuse of these electronic devices, good and useful as they are, can easily become addictive and rob me of time that needs to be spent on other things. In turn, this destroys the silence so necessary for growth in the spiritual life and so important in the Rule of St Benedict. Throughout the Rule, St Benedict speaks of silence, but he dedicates chapter 6 especially to this topic. The prologue to the Rule begins with the word “listen,” which we cannot do while talking or if our hearts and minds are divided. St Benedict did not emphasize silence for its own sake, but so that with the ears of our hearts we would learn to listen ever more attentively to God speaking to us: in Scripture, in the depths of our hearts, in the events of our daily lives. And as we grow in attentiveness to his voice, our wills become united with his.

All of us, monastics and oblates, in fact all people have been created for this same end: union with God for all eternity. With this in mind, I need to honestly take stock of myself and ask myself the question: Is the way I spend my time, including the use of my computer, iPad, and iPhone, leading me closer to God, or is it turning me ever so slightly away from the One who loves us passionately and in whom alone is our peace?

Self-examination does not always bring immediate results, nor should our failures in keeping our resolutions. We keep on going, getting up again and again when we fall, as we read in the Rule:

“Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love. Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom” (*RB Prologue*).

BONIFACE VON NELL, OSB



Promoting the Middle

When I was in grade school, one of my regular jobs was cutting the grass at my grandparents’ home. While doing that work one afternoon, I found on their front lawn a piece of paper quoting then-President Eisenhower praising the middle of the road as the only way to get ahead safely and productively. I have never forgotten how at

that time I instinctively agreed with what he had said. Recently looking up the full quotation and not just the single sentence I read that day, I found that it went as follows: “People talk about the middle of the road as though it were unacceptable. Actually, all human problems, excepting morals, come into the gray areas. Things

are not all black and white. There have to be compromises. The middle of the road is all of the usable surface. The extremes, right and left, are in the gutters."

One of the issues our country confronts today is that many disparage Eisenhower's position. In Congress, the animosity in recent years has even led some members to leave. Some years ago it was Senator Olympia Snowe, much more recently it was Senator Rob Portman, who said that he will not seek reelection in large part because of his frustration at the "partisan gridlock," with members of both parties "being pushed further to the right and further to the left, and that means too few people are actively looking to find common ground." Many who responded to his announcement were in full sympathy, leading him to say, "I think people are really yearning for some renewed bipartisanship and cooperation." While some of his critics denigrated his decision by saying he mostly feared losing a primary challenge from the right, even if that was a factor it would simply highlight the increasing partisanship not only of politicians but of the electorate as a whole.

Those of us who are troubled by this phenomenon have been seeking its causes. It is not as though there has not been hostility between different sides in past decades and centuries. One need think only of the animosity between many followers of Alexander Hamilton's Federalists and Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans, or of the fact that in the decade leading up to the Civil War there were physical attacks on persons of the opposing political party on the very floor of the Senate. However, in recent decades the situation both in Congress and in the nation as a whole has definitely become worse than, say, in the middle years of the twentieth century.

The most vivid expression of anger on the national scene was the rioting at the US Capitol on January 6. The harm caused not only to those injured or even killed in the insurrection but also to our nation's reputation throughout the world was massive. President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine answered forthrightly when asked about his reaction: "Shocked. I could not even imagine something like this was possible in the United States of America.... We are used to thinking that the US has ideal democratic institutions where power is passed calmly, without war, without revolutions.... After something like this, I believe it would be very difficult for the world to see the United States as a symbol of democracy."

There were surely many different motivations on the part of those who participated in the rioting, but I find it telling that examination of the public records of those facing charges shows that nearly sixty percent had significant financial difficulties of one sort or another: bankruptcies, notices of eviction or foreclosure, bad debts, or unpaid taxes over the past two decades. Not only were such persons feeling left out of the prosperity that they know some of their fellow citizens continue to enjoy; they have also long felt that many other people,

especially minorities, have been "cutting into the line" ahead of them or enjoying special treatment, as noted by Professor Arlie Hochschild in her fascinating book *Strangers in Their Own Land*. Political scientists Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart pointed to this problem already a decade ago when they wrote: "Exceptionally high levels of economic insecurity are experienced by many sectors of US society.... Many American families, even in the professional middle classes, face serious risks of loss of paid work by the main breadwinner, the dangers of sudden ill-health without adequate private medical insurance, [and] vulnerability to crime."

So, what to do? To their credit, many organizations have been formed in recent years to help promote understanding between different groups in our country. One of these is the Institute for Civility in Government, whose founder and president spoke at a symposium held here at St Anselm's in the early summer of 2019. Another group is Braver Angels, originally called Better Angels after a phrase used by Abraham Lincoln in his first inaugural address. Among other activities, Braver Angels sponsors meetings throughout the country with an equal number of participants from red states and blue states, as well as podcasts in which two persons of different political persuasions converse with one another about issues raised by a facilitator of the Braver Angels staff.

It is encouraging to listen to such podcasts, for they illustrate the way in which two persons can hear one another and respond in respectful ways without in any way disowning what they believe is right. By avoiding what President Eisenhower called the "gutters" of extreme positions, two recent participants in one of these podcasts agreed that the aim is not to "win" by defeating an opponent but to agree to a "tie" in the sense of being willing to compromise, to recognize that one simply cannot have everything one's own way if we are to avoid the kind of behavior manifested to the whole world on January 6.

Facing harsh reality, however, obliges me to recognize that there always will be some persons for whom "political compromise" is a dirty term, persons whose sense that everything they have long held dear is now under dire threat by others. Burke Nixon, who teaches in the Program in Writing and Communication at Rice University, recently reviewed a book titled *Charitable Writing*. In his review, he referred to an "eternal earthly tension between attempting radical Christian love and wanting to protect ourselves from very real dangers," a tension that it often seems impossible to resolve. As he wrote, "Our malicious public debates—and the violence that they can bring—won't end anytime soon." May each of us at least accept the challenge of holding ourselves personally accountable to a higher standard and doing whatever we can to promote harmony, understanding, and mutual respect in our divided land.

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

Understanding Liberalism: How Does It Exist within Our Culture?

We are currently living in the wake of the 2020 US presidential campaign and are trying to find how best to respond and act: how better to understand it and make wise decisions about what we should do and how we should think. Ideally, with Socrates, we would want our doing to follow from our grasping and knowing. Best begin then with the challenge of understanding. The enormous forces dividing persons and groups from each other imply that something is gravely amiss within the life of our country's political culture, although the American situation is not entirely unique. All Western nations exist as liberal democracies or at least are said so to exist. A liberal political mentality reflects or points to a liberal economic mentality.

The uniqueness of the American experience, however, stems from its revolt against old-world notions of just rule and government. The American revolution served to inspire would-be revolutionaries in other parts of the world, most especially the makers of the French Revolution. So pivotal became the American contribution and so pressing is our current need to come to a better understanding of it that we are being driven to stand back and, with Socrates, face simple but difficult questions: What is justice? What is the good? What is the purpose and function of a political order? So, too, what is the purpose and function of an economic order? If, in the United States, a liberal democracy exists, then what is this purported liberalism? What are its roots? Can we move toward a better understanding of ourselves within our current human context? How can things improve in one way or another?

As an initial point of departure, let us note that liberalism does not exist as a theory that has been thought out and then put into some form of technical expression. In contrast, Marxism exists more or less as a unified theory and, if we are to understand it, we can turn to a number of authoritative texts from the likes of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Liberalism, however, exists as a more ambiguous, slippery kind of thing, and no one set of texts will necessarily satisfy our wants and needs. To initiate some kind of inquiry, we begin with a point of departure that we can perhaps identify with, namely, our own historicity, including our inherited prejudices and biases. We recall advice that comes to us from two ancient sources: the philosopher Alcamaeon of Croton taught that "we move from traces and signs that we see and move toward a world that we can never see," and St Augustine wrote that by "pillaging the Egyptians" we look at the material and the cultural resources which exist in our world and try to discern therein what is good and not so good, allowing us then to bring what is good into our own lives.

Seven authors who have pondered these questions in recent decades will be our guides in this process of

discernment. We begin with Christopher Dawson's *Progress and Religion: An Historical Inquiry* (1929) since it gives us an initial sense of things as understood by him and others prior to the advent of the Second World War. Dawson notes that one notion or manifestation of progress exists in the religious roots of ancient Israel, which were then carried over into the beliefs and practices of Christianity. However, the origins of a secular or materialistic notion of progress within the stuff of human history point to a different view, one that is the basis of modern liberalism—liberalism understood as the progressive secularization of western European culture. Its ground is belief in the workings of a mysterious, mechanical, automatic law of progress that is somehow always operative in our lives. From this perspective, our human good is promoted with every kind of advance occurring within the order of business, technology, and economics. Quantifiable material well-being grounds every other kind of human well-being: achieve the first and everything else will follow.

More recently, Adrian Pabst's *Demons of Liberal Democracy* (2019) identifies difficulties which we are experiencing: inner contradictions which need to be understood and evaluated if better judgments are to be made about the scope and the viability of liberalism as both a philosophical outlook and as a practice of human freedom in the choices that we must corporately and individually make. In greater specificity, Ryszard Legutko's *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies* (2018) adverts to an unexpected, strange kind of authoritarianism within liberal democracies as we find them within our world today. He asks whether a pre-condition of Marxist analysis is a kind of liberalism grounded in a utilitarian understanding of human life.

Moving to a further stage of analysis which could add to our understanding, Sir Larry Alan Siedentop's *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (2017) looks at premodern points of origin in terms of the influence of one key variable. While many interpretations of liberalism point to sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation roots, Siedentop examines Christian origins that come from the apostolic preaching of St Paul and the proclaiming of a saving message that was intended for all persons, irrespective of any social and cultural differences. As God's children, all persons exist as brothers and sisters, one to another. By postulating a fundamental form of equality that exists among all humans who stand before God, the person emerges as a primary unit, first within the order of religion and later within the order of society and civic life. Each person, as human, possesses a commonly shared nature, which in turn explains why each person must possess an identical set of fundamental rights that all must respect if everyone is to live a truly human life,

each in their own way. A further development comes to us from twelfth-century canonists in their study of ecclesiastical law: beyond what is commanded or forbidden us *by nature*, a subjective element is also to be found. Quite rightly and properly, as human subjects we can *choose* to do what we would like to do after determining what we can or should do in a given situation. A degree of personal freedom exists within us in a way which helps us move toward an understanding of our natural rights: the law of nature reveals the rights of nature in a way that indicates how we can best learn about the identity of our own human rights. One leads to the other.

Michael Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (2009) points to two related changes which existed as a species of revolution. First, he shows how in the thirteenth-century certain philosophical developments within a theological context created a new, larger context in which the traditional primacy of our human acts of *reasoning* was replaced by an alleged primacy of our human acts of *willing*: willing trumps understanding. If Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* began to articulate a distinct philosophy of the human will, later but still within the same century Duns Scotus began speaking about an actual primacy of our acts of human willing, over against an alleged primacy that had traditionally belonged to our acts of understanding and judgment. The resultant growing emphasis on the power and scope of our acts of willing led to a different theology of God, a different understanding of our salvation as this comes to us from God, and a different understanding about what it means to be and exist as a human person. If, for instance, God's divine freedom is not conditioned by how God exists as an unrestricted act of understanding, then our created human freedom correspondingly emerges with an absoluteness of its own. We understand ourselves in a different way if our freedom emerges as a new first principle, for it reorders our subsequent human actions in a way which can be divorced from the demands or requirements that belong to our acts of human cognition. Do we grow in knowledge and understanding by merely willing our acts of cognition?

In the same context, a second, related change was perhaps still more fundamental: an understanding of human cognition which favors our acts of sensing over our acts of understanding, or which interprets our acts of understanding in terms which more properly belong to our acts of sensing. How do we move toward a knowledge of real things? Is "the real" something which exists primarily as an individual item or is it some other kind of unity? A nominalist understanding of human cognition differs from realist understandings that reject the simplicity of nominalist assumptions.

On another but somewhat contrary track, Andrew Jones's *Before Church and State: A Study of Social Order in the Sacramental Kingdom of St. Louis IX* (2017) gives a clearer understanding of liberalism to the degree that it attempts to speak about a pre-liberal context that characterizes human believing, feeling, thinking, and

understanding. What kind of human world exists as a pre-modern or pre-liberal type of world? If, in our contemporary understanding of the relation which exists between society and state, it is commonly believed that human *conflict* is a fundamental problem in the way human beings live and exist, and if it is believed that only the state has the right to use force in order to solve human problems (in order to suppress the violence of other parties and groups), a different perspective emerges if we recall how, before Luther and Hobbes, a different way of thinking had existed, one which supposed that *peace* exists as a more fundamental point of departure. Conflicts will inevitably arise later, but in trying to deal with them we will function best if we try to return things to a prior condition of peace and concord and try to determine the customs and traditions which had regulated how persons and groups had amicably lived and co-existed with each other. In this perspective, Church and State work together to determine the relevant customs and traditions that allow all members of society to treat one another with respect and honor. On the basis of a common shared horizon, friendship holds persons together and is an essential requirement if difficult human problems are to be successfully understood, addressed, and resolved.

In conclusion, how can liberalism be understood within a larger, transcendental perspective? In its distinctiveness, liberalism is best understood if other points of view can be identified, known, and appreciated, each in its own way. To illustrate this possibility, consider two early works by Bernard Lonergan. In his "Essay in Fundamental Sociology — Philosophy of History" and in "*Pantōn Anakephalaiōsis: A Theory of Human Solidarity*," he notes that our human story is filled with many contradictions and conflicts. Some things get better while others get worse. Our history is filled with many ambiguous changes. Hence, how to differentiate; how to discern? If the birth of philosophy is taken as a kind of benchmark, we can distinguish between a "dialectics of fact" and a "dialectics of thought." Three phases or variables exist within each. In a dialectics of fact, one variable is that developments within the order of human technology have led to changes within the order of economics and politics: a human society grows in the degree of its organization. A second variable is that any good which is achieved is undermined by the way evil exists as a mysterious, vitiating force, a kind of undertow which corrupts the life of a given society. The good and the evil grow together (the wheat and the weeds), but in a manner which can be challenged by a third variable: by religious claims which refer to events that are perceived to have come into our world as intrusions that are said to be divinely revealed.

In a dialectics of thought, however, a law of progress exists if, as a first variable, we move into critical forms of understanding and cognition that arose with the emergence of philosophy and science (the two initially existing together). We become less tempted to think in terms of

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Editorial Board: Abbot James Wiseman, OSB; Matthew Nylund, OSB; Alessandra Styles.*

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*4501 South Dakota Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20017-2795*

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short-term solutions for our human problems. However, as a second variable, the progress which comes about through the emergence of philosophy and science is interrupted and complicated if our understanding is separated from the good of belief which exists within the order of transcendence and religion: through such separation, our understanding is turned into something which exists on its own, independently and apart from anything else. The kind of liberalism that we commonly experience today tends to exist within a perspective that values such autonomy and independence. Our understanding seems to exist as a self-sufficient kind of thing: we can solve our own problems! A third and concluding variable, however, is the possibility of religious faith as providing an effective, subjective response. The good of our reasoning and understanding is thereby restored and is raised to new heights through an openness which can begin to turn our apparently insoluble human problems into means and instruments which convert an existing evil into a good. This comes about through a mysterious form of agency which exists as a kind of external cause which is supernatural, although we can participate in it if we are open to

it, receptive and cooperative. A form of higher unity can begin to join us as human beings into a new form of solidarity that we could not bring about by ourselves.

As much, then, as we urgently need to move toward an understanding of liberalism that can answer some of our questions, we find an even larger number of questions that are more difficult to answer. These challenge us to find some new, possible point of departure. As the foundations of liberalism become better known by us, they appear to be less sure and certain, emerging with a questionableness that recalls the quandaries and challenges which once confronted Socrates. We become faced with the challenge and opportunity of living in a way that preserves our rights and prerogatives without having them be determined solely by our acts of willing and desiring. Do we really have an endless number of rights? Does not any genuine right exist for reasons that transcend ourselves? Our society does indeed have an urgent need to understand liberalism, but in discovering its occasional lack of coherence we will experience the need to turn ourselves toward other realities and grow in our knowledge and understanding of them as well.

DUNSTAN ROBIDOUX, OSB