

2006

# The Call of Two Cities: Citizenship and Christian Identity

Center for Catholic Studies, Seton Hall University

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Summer 2006

# The Call of Two Cities: Citizenship and Christian Identity

Center for Catholic Studies, Seton Hall University

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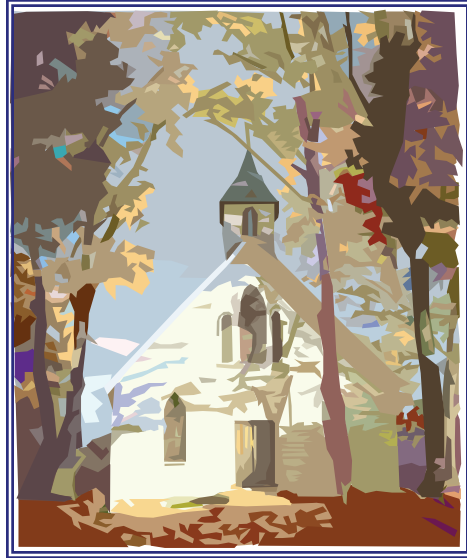
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*“The Call of Two Cities”*



**2006 Summer Seminar  
Center for Catholic Studies  
Seton Hall University**

*Proceedings of the  
Center for Catholic Studies*

**THE CALL OF TWO CITIES:  
CITIZENSHIP AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY**

*2006 Summer Seminar*



*South Orange, New Jersey*

*“The Call of Two Cities:”  
Citizenship and Christian Identity*

This seminar held in May 2006 focused on the relationship of Christian faith to civil society. The facilitator was Professor Jeanne Heffernan from Villanova University. The liveliness of the conversation is evident from the accompanying essays.

Richard M. Liddy,  
Director  
Center for Catholic Studies



## Seton Hall Faculty Summer Seminar

### *"The Call of Two Cities:" Citizenship and Christian Identity*

Monday-Thursday, May 15-18, 2006 (9 AM to Noon)

*Facilitator:* Professor Jeanne Heffernan, Villanova University

From the early Church to the present, Christians have wrestled with the fact of dual citizenship. They are, at once, citizens in temporal cities and members of the pilgrim Church making their way to their true and eternal homeland. Each form of citizenship demands allegiance and entails particular responsibilities.

How do these two citizenships relate? Are they compatible or fundamentally in tension? How do we order our allegiances? Do the things of the sacred city, such as theology, have relevance for secular affairs, such as politics and public law? Christian writers, from St. Paul to Augustine to the participants at the Second Vatican Council, have grappled with these questions. In this seminar, we will enter into this longstanding conversation by reading and discussing classical and contemporary sources on the question.

Professor Jeanne Heffernan is a member of the Department of Humanities at Villanova University and an affiliate professor in the Villanova Law School. She received a Ph.D. in Government from the University of Notre Dame, where she served as the associate director of the Erasmus Institute, a center dedicated to research in the intellectual traditions of the Abrahamic faiths. Prior to her appointment at Villanova, she served on the faculty of Pepperdine University. She has lectured and published articles on Christian political thought, democratic theory, and faith and learning. She is currently editing a book on Catholic and Protestant contributions to the debate on civil society.

The seminar is open to all full-time faculty. Participants will receive a stipend of \$500 for the seminar. Participating faculty will be expected to discuss certain texts and to write a short article about the topic from their own perspective and discipline. These articles will be collected in a volume and printed for wider circulation. Articles will be expected eight weeks from the end of the seminar. Fifteen faculty will be accepted for the seminar, preference being given to those who have not participated in the past. Apply by indicating your interest to Anthony Scigliano, Religious Studies Department, at [sciglian@shu.edu](mailto:sciglian@shu.edu) tel. 973-761-9544. Deadline for indicating interest is March 31, 2006.

This seminar is co-sponsored by the Center for Catholic Studies and the Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership. It is part of a series of such workshops focusing on the notion of "calling" in the various disciplines.

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*Unless otherwise indicated all participants are from Seton Hall University*

## Politics and Religion: You can Take Religion out of Politics, Not Politics out of Catholicism

A. D. Amar, Ph.D.

Most of the political systems in the world, the democratic, such as the United States', and the autocratic, such as the communist China's, to maintain a kind of "monopolistic" power over the masses, enacted exclusion of religion—the other important segment of humanities—from the government. Most of these nations excluded religion from public schools, public places, and whatever other forums were in their control. While many religions accepted this edict of the political powers, some did not. Christianity, in particular, may be because it was born of the political strides of the time of its birth, did not accept the unquestioned authority of the political system over the governance of the lives of its congregations. In fact, Christianity was the first religion that challenged this authority. Other religions preceding it, such as, the Hinduism and Buddhism, did not attempt such a challenge of the political powers. It is for this reason that Christianity continued to be involved in politics and is expected to continue to do that in the future.

The above is especially true of Catholicism. It is because of the special privileges that are enjoyed by Catholicism. These ensue due to its seat in the Vatican that is recognized as an independent state, and, the pope its head. Because of this special status, pope enjoys the status of a head-of-state and gets audience with other heads-of-state wherever he travels. It enjoys a membership in the United Nations Organization. That not only legitimizes politics as an integral part of Catholicism, it further strengthens the principles that integrate politics and religion for the Catholics. In essence, politics can never be separated from Catholicism.

Because of this unique situation enjoyed by Catholicism among the world religions, it bestows on it not only the responsibility to operate politically with the world powers only for the interests of the Catholics but for the interests of all religions in the world. The question is: do the Christians, specifically Catholics, actually do it?

In an attempt to satisfy my curiosity about politics and Christianity, when I learned of the

summer 2006 seminar on **The Call of Two Cities: Citizenship and Christian Identity**, organized by the Center for Catholic Studies at Seton Hall University, conducted by Dr. Jeanne Heffernan of the University of Notre Dame, I volunteered to attend it from May 15-18, 2006. Additionally, because I have attended a number of similar seminars previously organized by the Center and I have found them to be a learning experience for me, I was sure that I will come out with some new information on the subject of politics and Christianity.

In addition to the teachings that came straight from the Bible, we learned about contribution to this topic made by several well-known Christian parsonages, such as St. Aurelius Augustinus (St. Augustine of Hippo), St. Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin, and the contemporary scholars, such as Richard Niebuhr, Jonathan Chaplin, Charles Villa-Vicencio, John Courtney Murray, and Michael Sandel; as well as Pope John Paul II.

With my knowledge from the seminar and my understanding of Catholicism, I find a lot of confusion and contradiction with regard to the role of Christianity in politics; Whereas Catholics are so much involved in politics, Christian teachings condemn politics and politicians.

Believing that Christ was against "culture," early Anabaptist groups in Europe not only refused to participate in politics and government but also believed that because Christian magistracy is according to the spirit rather than the flesh, Christians should not serve as magistrates (Chaplin, 1985). I find a lot of idealism in the Christian teachings of the past.



In another position with regard to politics and Christianity, Chaplin (1985) quotes Jacques Ellul, stating some acceptance. He suggests that Christians live and belong in the world and should not accept that they can decrease their sins by their virtues. A tolerant view of politics and the state, nevertheless, it is not a permission of direct involvement in politics or the state by the Christians.

The "dual citizenship," a third position on this theme, comes from the five Canadian Roman Catholic M.P.s (Members of Parliament). They suggest that Christians, in addition to holding a citizenship of spirituality, also hold a sort of "temporal" citizenship and following that ethic allows Catholics to engage in politics. However, I consider it a convenient "rationalization" of the inconsistent behavior of the self.

There is also a belief that secular dogmas of politics distort Gospel; obviously, you cannot be religious and secular at the same time. This position believes that one may be Catholic in belief, and, separately, engage in politics and the affairs of the state. To me, it seems that the Catholic Church believes in the last position because that is how it can continue to be engaged in politics.

I give credence to most of the positions above, and would tend to believe that there is a direct conflict and contradiction between politics and Christianity, in particular, Catholicism—the more intense part of its. You cannot be a true Catholic and a politician at the same time.

There are many principles on which the above two, Catholicism and political systems of the contemporary world democracies, collide. Catholicism would not allow capital punishment, politics will; Catholicism will not allow freedom of choice or abortion that the government allows; Catholicism will not allow divorce, the politics will: it goes on and on and on.

To a Catholic right is what is given in the Gospel, whereas to a politician right is what is given in the law. This means we will be able to bring the two in line if the laws are made according to the Gospel. (We, obviously, believe that Gospel cannot be modified to agree with the law, which is man-

made, although, may be more recently.) This brings us to the model of politics and the state, known as theocracy, or religion-based political system, such as the one practiced by the so-called "Islamic Republic" countries. In these countries, government and the politics run according to the *Sharia* law, derived from the Quran. They do not allow for any deviation from these codes. Even those who do not practice Islam are ruled according to this law, no tolerance for the deviant.

On the other hand, Catholicism is based on tolerance, even to those who do not follow the Gospel. That means you can't have strict theocracies and Catholicism...the two do not seem to agree. Democracy, with all its contradictions with Catholicism, is still the most Catholic of all political systems available to mankind in the twenty-first century and the Catholics can make a difference by engaging in politics and affairs of the state.

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**“Confessions” of a Man Who Claimed “I Am The Law!”**  
**A Comparative Look at the Representative Political and Religious Legacies of**  
**Frank Hague and St. Augustine**

Alan Delozier

### **Introduction**

The separation of Church and State is a phenomenon as old as the American Republic itself having been subject to much creative interpretation and countless tests over the past two centuries. Throughout the modern age, these particular forces often intertwined despite the ideal of non-sectarian legislative rule since the achievement of a consensus on most issues especially in a polytheistic society is rarely, if ever achieved to full satisfaction. Moreover, secular realities tend to center upon the quest for personal enrichment and usually outweigh the proverbial greater good when a selection has to be made between these two very unique institutions of influence. In broader terms, ethics and morality do not tend to be associated with money, power and privilege unless these characteristics actually work in conjunction with one another. However, the lure of a lavish lifestyle over noble sacrifice is usually deemed the most popular choice when faced with an either or choice. Therefore, the road to religious salvation is often more difficult to achieve when faced with sacrifice and selflessness in the course of a personal journey toward self-fulfillment in its various forms. This is especially true when it is placed in a political context. A prime example comes in exploring the impact of St. Augustine, a key figure in theological circles overall and career politician Frank Hague, the former ruler of Jersey City, New Jersey.

### **Frank Hague – A Biography in Brief & His Political/Religious Legacy**

Frank Hague (1876-1956) was the former Director of Public Safety for Jersey City, and it was from this platform where his higher end leadership goals were cultivated. Hague was elected Mayor of Jersey City in 1917 and served in this capacity for thirty years. During his three decades as head of this sprawling municipality, Hague established himself not only as the unquestioned leader over tens of thousands within his metropolis, but countless more

in Hudson County and the Democratic Party in New Jersey overall. In many ways, Hague was the ultimate model of “boss politics” (one man rule) in a diverse socio-economic community. Hague was not formally educated for the most part, but made up for this lack of book learning through self-edification as evidenced in the fact that he habitually used his own name ala the third person (i.e. “Hague does,” “Hague is,” etc.) which lent itself to governance issues in which he often proclaimed himself to be the last word on any subject. “I decide. I do. Me.” (Steinberg, 1972)

Tales of Hague and his exploits en route to his emergence as leader of Jersey City are still considered legendary, and are based partly in fact and partially in myth. Unfortunately, key archival resources in the form of letters and journals have yet to be unearthed if not already destroyed, so we rely upon surviving oral history, press coverage and related sources to construct a retrospective look at the reign of Hague. His famed claim that – “I Am The Law!” lives on and with this singular proclamation, a self-motivated Declaration of Independence as it were was put into place and has since marked his legacy ever since. Furthermore, decisions made by Hague in terms of personal liberties often focused upon civil rights for only a select few within his domain and made a mockery of the Bill of Rights in the process. Hague tended to align himself closely with those of his own ilk, namely Irish-American, Democratic and Catholic leaning individuals who bore him a wide power base and devoted coterie of supporters. He naturally opposed most entities deemed “foreign” in outlook, namely Communism, Fascism, Republicanism, Socialism, and other movements that did not meet his favor. (Connors, 1971)

Although he leaned toward those of his own background, Hague did endorse a number of positive measures for the community at large when it came to public works while lining his own pockets and building upon a personal sense of advantage in turn. However, Hague fully controlled his police department and advocated such vices as drinking establishments (during the time of Prohibition), lotteries and gambling establishments as well to help achieve these goals. (Connors, 1971) Conversely, Hague was generous and roundly applauded when it came to implementing social service initiatives especially during the age of the Great Depression when economic and social hardship reached a zenith. He rose to this challenge by providing spiritual solace in the form of free food, clothing, coal and aid in finding jobs for the unemployed. These exercises he affixed around the axiom – “Jersey City is the most moralist city in the country.” (Jersey City Outline, 2006) This was a boast that Hague actively worked upon and wanted to have people believe, but mostly on his terms.

Hague was a typical “politico” when it came to dealing with the religious issue which was often respectful, but a wary and selective relationship resulted when it came to the push for favors from priests and parishioners alike. Even though he was raised within the Catholic Church, Hague rallied against the politicizing of parishes in Hudson County so they would not oppose his reign as secular leader of Jersey City. (Connors, 1971) This would later be seen as a “service for good will approach” whereby Hague believed that money could help with spiritual reward in the following manner...

Jersey City was 75 percent Catholic, and Hague knew it was vital that he have the unwavering support of the church’s hierarchy. He gained this by an umbrella of activities. St. Aedan’s Roman Catholic Church in Jersey City boasted an altar costing \$50,000 paid for by Hague; and the Mount Carmel Guild, the mother charitable organization of the city’s twenty-eight Catholic churches, had an honorary chairman named Frank Hague, who personally raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for it.

Along with Catholic members of the Hague machine, Jewish and Protestant members were also required to sign contribution pledges for Catholic charities, and those who fell behind in their payments received unfriendly letters from the mayor. (Steinberg, 1972)

Despite these moves, Hague was a pragmatist and when it came to the Catholic Church, he was careful not to overstep his bounds in specific dealings with the clergy and hierarchy alike in most cases. Conversely, Hague frowned on priests who became political, a reverse role in the traditional government-religion dynamic. In addition, Hague was not above offering inducements to silence critics whether they were priests, ministers and rabbis who were paid to serve as chaplains in prison, hospitals or within the fire or police departments for example. (Steinberg, 1972) Upon the surface, the legacy of Hague as a politician and how his work was interpreted in part by latter-day historians be it good and bad, or both to varying degrees.

For his efforts in behalf of decency and morality, Frank Hague was honored as a great reformer – a man who brought *real reform*, reform that was visible. This does not mean that the Hague administration was honest; Frank Hague was enough of a realist to know that vice and corruption could not be completely stamped out, because it was part of the times and prevalent all over the land... Graft itself was embedded in the political-machine system, and he expected it would remain in one form or another.

The problem was not corruption but rather how it appeared in the society. Hague would not oppose corruption, especially in the upper levels, as long as it remained invisible to the people of the community. (Rapport, 1961)

This particular analysis shows how Hague tried to take the high road in part, but was not above short cuts to benefit the community second and himself first. Such is one type of politician and his need for

power in its most extreme form from a standpoint of governance style.

### **St. Augustine – A Biography in Brief & His Religious/Political Legacy**

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in the course of his life was a philosopher and professor who emerged as one of the most well-documented and famous figures in Church History. In essence, Augustine was active in his ongoing work to promote: "...truth, certainty, true happiness in philosophy, the Providential order of the world and the problem of evil and...God and the soul." (New Advent, 2006) Augustine returned to the faith after adolescence filled with self-discovery and culminated with his ascendancy as Bishop of Hippo even though he was never formally ordained to the priesthood. As a scribe, Augustine opened a school of rhetoric and composed his now famed "Dialogues" and "Confessions" which expressed an interpretation of how life ought to be lived in a proper manner especially when it came to how earthly goals should fall in line with the example of a higher heavenly power.

Augustine returned to the faith after a youth filled with rebellion and a search for truth. From this point, Augustine matured and ultimately wrote on his thoughts concerning how leaders should lead in a moralistic sense with Christ at the top level and as a role model upon which others might emulate. He wrote that secular powers tend to corrupt and those with experience born of long standing responsibility should be emulated. Furthermore, the ability to be selfless and transmit these lessons in a practical sense helped to promote the value of positive influences in their own right. Essentially, it was a case where rectitude and the concept of a republic had to be in sync for a proper society to function according to Augustine.

There is an appeal to the eye in beautiful things, in gold and silver and all such; the sense of touch has its own powerful pleasures; and the other senses find qualities in things suited to them. Worldly success has its glory, and the power to command and to overcome: and from this

springs the thirst for revenge. But in our quest of all these things, we must not depart from You, Lord, or deviate from Your Law. This life we live here below has its own attractiveness, grounded in the measure of beauty it has and its harmony with the beauty of all lesser things. (*Confessions*, 1951)

To better illustrate this point, Augustine went on to promote the analogy of a pear tree gleaned during his youth. He used to steal fruit from the branch not because it was particularly attractive, but because it was there and it could be done. Augustine wrote that the evil of this action had no rational cause and the only "profit" to be had was a sense of being "wicked" and challenging normal convention. (*Confessions*, 1951) This was deemed as unacceptable behavior when reflected upon in retrospect.

When it came to political works in an idyllic situation, the only proper answer according to Augustine is that God, the lone supreme authority leads an "obedient city" and the citizens are under his control. (Paducci, 1962) It is by harmonic works of love, charity and good will that the mechanics of a Christian-influenced republic are supposed to work, at least in theory. Human beings tend to be fallible, thus, the attraction of power often corrupts when done for self alone and not for the good of the commonweal. Obedience to God is the optimum in terms of political rule as alluded to be Augustine and although hard to achieve, the effort should always be made in earnest.

Peace between man and God is the well-ordered obedience of faith and eternal law. Peace between man and man is well-ordered concord. Domestic peace is the well-ordered concord between those of the family who rule and those who obey. Civil peace is a similar concord among the citizens. The peace of the celestial city is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and of one another in God. The peace of all things is the tranquility of order. (Paducci, 1962)

In regard to present-day politicians, few have probably read Augustine of their own accord and fewer yet have applied his teachings to their own style of governance. Therefore, the temptations that go with rule are not often held up to a standardized morality test, but rather rests upon individual action. He noted that success has its privileges, but should be taken with caution and used judiciously in all ways. Such is the example of a theologian and his need for expressing his view of power in its most helpful form from a religious standpoint.

### Comparisons Between Augustine & Hague

Augustine never met Hague and the latter most likely never read the writings of the former. However, in comparing these two towering figures, it is important to note that even though both achieved lasting fame to varying degrees, Augustine has been oft-quoted and followed on an international basis for several centuries while Hague is a parochial figure who died only half a century ago and is nowadays mainly studied by local or political historians for the most part. The main difference between the two came about in the simple fact that Augustine and his thoughts on a higher authority was a concept that Hague did not quite understand or apply to its full measure.

From the beginning, Augustine learned from the trials of life and later added to the curriculum of most theological courses while Hague was expelled from school in the sixth grade as a troublemaker and became a case study on political corruption. Although intellectual pursuits differed, among the similarities they did share was a Christian-based education although Augustine was more philosophical in approach than Hague. In terms of practical knowledge, both had troubled youths and tried to find themselves and their place in the world.

... ‘does God rule man, the soul the body, the reason the passions and other vicious parts of the soul?’ This example leaves no doubt that, to some, servitude is useful; and, indeed, to serve God is useful to all... Hence, when a man does not serve God, what justice can we ascribe to him, since in this case his soul cannot

exercise a just control over the body, nor his reason over his vices?  
(Paducci, 1962)

In regard to the famed proclamation by Hague that *he* was the law in Jersey City, Augustine would have to differ in who the ultimate boss would be. As Augustine noted in his *Confessions*, graft on the way to glorification was not acceptable under any circumstance. Another form of impropriety endorsed by Hague came about in the form of “voting early and often” on Election Days as was alleged in many Jersey City elections of yore while Augustine in his time went so far as to leave any city where an election was deemed a necessary political exercise. (New Advent, 2006) Augustine never lined his pockets with money especially coin obtained through questionable means. As a political leader, Hague claimed his salary never exceeded \$8,000 per year, but it was estimated that he earned around \$10 million (pre-inflation rates) through various means before the time of his death in 1956. (Wikipedia, 2006)

Your law, O Lord, punishes theft; and this Law is so written in the hearts of men that not even the breaking of it blots it out: for no thief bears calmly being stolen from – not even if he is rich and the other steals through want. Yet I chose to steal, and not because want drove me to it – unless a want of justice and contempt for it and an excess of iniquity... (*Confessions*, 1951)

Insecurity, opportunity, and other factors have worked together to shape the career of Mayor Hague. However, to this day both Hague and Augustine are discussed and remembered for different reasons. Both had various forms of allegiance, Hague more in his lifetime more out of fear and circumstance and Augustine from enlightenment and careful consideration. Augustine remains revered for the most part, but Hague is more of a curiosity. Such are the lessons of politics and religion which remain questioned, debated and evaluated to this day.

## Conclusion

Politics in general and in their ideal form is about public service. Even without an overt religious equation, the basics on establishing an ethical government structure becomes a serious question of how and why for all those who subsequently follow in the footsteps of Augustine and Hague.

The earthly city, which does not live by faith, seeks an earthly peace, and the end it proposes, in the well-ordered concord of civil obedience and rule, in the combination of men's wills to attain the things which are helpful to this life. The heavenly city, or rather the part of it which sojourns on earth and lives by faith makes use of this peace only because it must, until this mortal condition which necessitates it shall pass away. (Paducci, 1962)

It is always easy to evaluate and analyze a public figure from afar while the private citizen could be a totally different figure in some cases when viewed through a separate prism. Reconciling the two is hard, but in the final analysis it comes down to the ultimate election or judgment in relation to how and what an individual accomplished during their lifetime. Such a case study makes for an extreme counterpoint on the comparative works of theology and civics as to how they clash when the objectives of an ambitious public figure and an introspective philosopher vary. It also comes down to their respective lifetime goals and lasting legacies beyond the sepulcher. Such are the characteristics that define separation of church and state and differentiate between power and compassion in the final equation.

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## Called to Practice

Robert Faraci

There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his clothes. She said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured.' Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. (Mark 5: 25-29)

Here we have a synopsis of a story of conversion. The woman experiences serious physical and mental suffering—hence the word “affliction”—and seeks relief from her symptoms. Her long search leads her, in the end, not only to the good of physical and mental health, but even to the far greater good of salvation through faith and the life of grace. Her faith is so profound that she is convinced she will receive health of body and mind merely for the asking, through a brush with Jesus’s garment. Her affliction is her “way of the cross” and is blessed and profoundly fruitful. Her bodily healing is made an outward sign or manifestation of a deeper healing, which is her restoration as a daughter of God. Clearly not all conversions are marked by outward healing, but in this case a sign is given in public that Jesus is the power of life over death.

As a Catholic and an occupational therapist, I find in this story a point of reference for my work. The Church announces to the world that the deepest need of human beings is redemption from the evil of sin and restoration to God as sons and daughters to our loving Father. All who enlist the help of health professionals to restore them to health come, for the most part silently, with this deepest need. My work as an occupational therapist involves me in helping people with disabilities to attain or recover satisfying participation in life through engagement in daily activities that are meaningful to them. It is open to me as a Catholic to aspire to participate through my work in the love of Jesus Christ for the people I work with and to pray that their search for a healthy

active life might lead them to an answer to their deepest need. Even in a modest way and without the slightest hint of proselytizing, it is possible for me to aspire to participate in the healing ministry of Christ and the Church through my professional service to others. Not the least important way to participate is to open myself with God’s help to the constant calls to conversion that I receive through interactions with clients, other professionals, and institutions. It is possible for the practice of a health professional to be raised to the order of grace and become a Christian vocation.

Now that I teach in a professional education program for occupational therapists at a Catholic university, I am inspired to deepen my understanding of what it means to be a Catholic health professional. I look for opportunities and new ways to share faith perspectives on our professions. I hope to join other members of our university community in encouraging students and professionals to discern that some may have a Christian vocation to professional practice.

This year’s summer seminar on citizenship and Christian identity extended my reflections on practice in the health professions and Catholic identity in an important direction. Our readings and discussions focused my attention on the serious challenges that especially lay vocations to health and other professions face in a pluralistic environment of practice. At least since the Second Vatican Council, renewed attention has been given to the role of the laity in the Church. Laypersons are called to transform the temporal order from within and orient it to the service of God and the human person. However, in the words of a prayer I recently heard at Mass, the Church finds in the temporal order many “lights” that are “contrary to the light of Christ.” The current situation of the Church in American society is captured well in a passage from the introduction to the website of American Catholics in the Public Square:

The success and acceptance in American society that

Catholics have come to enjoy is a welcome development. So is the sense of responsibility and shared destiny that they feel with that society. But as with all other religious and ethnic groups who have come to these shores, integration into the American mainstream has costs as well as benefits. Can Catholic doctors, lawyers, politicians, educators, businessmen – to say nothing of schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, relief services – remain both Catholic and American in a United States that, at least at a superficial level, seems to have moved far from the Biblical and natural-law principles that provided a bridge between Catholicity and Americanness?

There is no question that one of the central challenges facing American Catholicism, clergy and laity, liberal and conservative alike, is how to maintain a specific identity in the face of forces, both national and global, both cultural and economic, that seem to be making for a much greater uniformity and far less vigorous and articulated religious participation in public affairs.

By maintaining and enhancing a vigorous intellectual life, a vibrant spiritual and ecclesial life, and steadfast fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church, while yet creating pluralistic environments in their midst, Catholic universities can make ever greater contributions to meeting challenges to the preservation of Catholic identity in American society. The continuing engagement of Catholic universities in professional education is one very important area of opportunity. By opening our minds and hearts to the idea of Christian vocations to professional practice in health care and other fields, Catholic universities can increase their capacity to groom committed Catholic leaders in the professions. At the same time, they can work to sustain rational dialogue on vital issues within the pluralistic communities that they contain. In addition, Catholic universities can foster initiatives to provide stronger spiritual support for lay Catholic professionals. In view of the Church's emphasis on the distinctiveness and vital importance of the vocation of the laity, it is proper to focus attention on cultivating lay spiritual life. For example, with respect to lay vocations to the

health professions, laypersons generally lack anything analogous to the communal charisms and spiritual traditions that have historically grounded and oriented the work of religious orders in health care. It is conceivable that the Third Order of religious congregations such as the Franciscans and Carmelites will offer a spiritual home to many lay professionals. It is also possible that new communal realities associated with the New Evangelization that have emerged in the Church in recent decades, such as the Neocatechumenal Way, will answer the spiritual needs of many lay professionals as well. Catholic universities, under the guidance of the bishops and other ecclesiastical authorities, may be able to do a great deal to cultivate options for the enhancement of spirituality and communion among lay professionals in their midst and provide nourishment that lay professionals need to support them in their vocations.

<sup>1</sup>Edmund Pellegrino and David Thomasma develop this theme at length in two books on virtues-based ethical theory in medical practice. See Pellegrino and Thomasma (1993 and 1996) and related works cited therein. These authors provide an enlightening discussion of the ethical principles and natural virtues that are foundational to practice in the health professions generally and how Christian faith can transform professional practice and the exercise of the natural virtues through the supernatural infusion of the theological virtues.

<sup>2</sup>The website of American Catholics in the Public Square, [www.catholicsinpublicsquare.org](http://www.catholicsinpublicsquare.org), is reported to be at least temporarily inactive since 7/6/06.

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## The Churches' Response to Nationalism The Intricacies of Autocephaly in Orthodoxy

Ines A. Murzaku

In the Anglo-Saxon democracies, in contrast to those in Eastern Europe or Ireland, religion is strong and nationalism is dormant. In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville was struck by America's religiosity and described America as "the place in the world where the Christian religion has retained the greatest true power over souls." Tocqueville contended that "American clergy pronounce themselves in favor of civil liberty, but one does not see them lend their support to any particular political system. They take care to keep themselves out of the country's political affairs." If Byzantine or Orthodox terminology is used to explain Tocqueville's argument, it is that there is no *symphonia* or harmony between church and state in America. Additionally, the notions of nationalism or national identity or ecclesiastical nationalism and religion in America might have very little, and perhaps nothing, in common with each other. In contrast, it is thought that nationalism and religion are intrinsically in opposition.

This way of thinking is alien to Eastern Orthodox Churches as inheritors of the Byzantine theocratic legacy. In fact, the autocephalous orthodox churches in different countries of Eastern Europe faithfully continue the *symphonia* between church and state, or, as Miladin Zivotic, former philosophy professor at Belgrade University, portrayed the Autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church, a sort of "cradle of Serbian nationalism and an enemy of modernity." Furthermore, Zivotic explained that "it was because of the Orthodox Church that this society (i.e., Serbian society) was easily convinced that it had to become obedient followers of the Communist Party." The purpose of this essay is to explain autocephaly and reveal how it is a recent phenomenon in the lives of the Eastern Churches and is a direct ecclesiastical response to East European secular nationalism.

In current Orthodox vocabulary, a church is termed autocephalous if it possesses the right to resolve all internal problems on its own authority, independently of all other churches, and the right to appoint its own bishops, among them the head of the church. Historically, autocephaly has recognized

that the local clergy would be natives and that the liturgical language would be the indigenous. Why was and, in fact, still is autocephaly such a perplexing and puzzling process in Orthodoxy? Why are intrigue and desecration involved in

autocephaly granting? Why did churches have to wait for years in order to get official recognition and acceptance? The Bulgarian Church was recognized as autocephalous only in 1945, 72 years after it had proclaimed itself autocephalous from the Patriarchate of Constantinople; the Romanian Church in 1885, twenty years after; the Church of Greece in 1850, seventeen years after; and the Albanian Orthodox Church needed to wait fifteen years. And then there's the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyivan Patriarchate, which is still not recognized as autocephalous because of fierce opposition from the Patriarchate of Moscow.

Peter L'Huillier former Archbishop of New York and New Jersey of the Orthodox Church in America admits that the issue of autocephaly or the granting of autocephaly has constantly caused ecclesiastical problems, from the fourth century to the present. Furthermore, according to Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann, the very notion of autocephaly, or jurisdiction, as presently understood in Orthodoxy, is missing from the canonical tradition that everyone accepts as normative in the Orthodox Church. Indeed, this is enough reason for the puzzlement and complication that very often and unfortunately have led to desecration and unscrupulousness and to Christians persecuting their brethren Christians.

The notion of autocephaly and its origin and structure in the Byzantine tradition is quite open to interpretation. Who is entitled to grant autocephaly? According to the twelfth-century Byzantine canonist Theodore Balsamon, in his commentary of canon two of the Second Ecumenical Council 381, there are three ways of granting autocephaly: by an imperial decree as in the case of Justiniana Prima; by custom or tradition as in the case of Cyprus; and by the decision of a synod, which has territorial jurisdiction

over an area as in the case of Georgia. The intervention of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople to grant autocephaly is absent from this tradition. The situation changed dramatically after the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453. The Turkish authorities recognized the Ecumenical Patriarch of 1453. The Turkish authorities recognized the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as the head of all the Orthodox faithful in the Ottoman Empire. Under these circumstances, the power of Constantinople overshadowed that of other Eastern Patriarchs and primates of autocephalous churches within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. In ecclesiastical matters, the Ecumenical Patriarch inherited a position similar to that of a Byzantine Emperor, especially with respect to acknowledging or suppressing autocephalous bodies.

The blossoming of autocephalies is a phenomenon that marked the history of the Orthodox Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The awakening of national identities that had been for centuries suppressed as well as the incorporation of ecclesiastical organizations into sovereign states are key factors in the formation of modern autocephalies. Alexander Schmemmann defines this new reality as the national layer of the Orthodox tradition, which is very different from the early tradition and the Byzantine imperial tradition that emerged from what Schmemmann called a progressive anamorphosis of Byzantium. During this period of Byzantine history, the Byzantine sense of universalism began to dissolve itself into narrow nationalism and exclusivism. Furthermore, Orthodox nationalism was greatly influenced by laical nationalism.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries marked the idea of Christian nations with a national vocation. It was only during this period of Orthodox history that the notion of autocephaly appeared as a product not of ecclesiology, but a national phenomenon. Autocephaly, i.e., ecclesiastical independence, becomes thus the very basis of national and political independence, the very status symbol of a Christian nation. According to Pedro Ramet, the equation of religious unity with political unity and national identity became the essential purpose for autocephaly.

In the Orthodox East, the most obvious expression of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution is nationalism, which took forms utterly incompatible with the mental and social structures of

the Byzantine Middle Ages. How did the ecumenical patriarchate react to the revolutionary change that involved the very *raison d'être* of its existence? As a consequence of the dramatic political and social changes, the Patriarchate of Constantinople became more inclined than before to emphasize its primatial authority in the entire Orthodox Church through autocephaly granting, which, as explained, was not part of the Orthodox canonical tradition but a continuation of *symphonia* between church and state and a product of secular nationalism.

In conclusion, nationalism, a nineteenth and twentieth century phenomenon, exploded among the Orthodox faithful of all nationalities. Since the political ambition of all the nationalities consisted in seeking the inception of nation states, the idea of autocephalous national churches became the nation's ecclesiastical correspondent. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople opposed the inclination, but this proved to be ineffective, partially because the patriarchate itself had become the symbol, and at times an instrument, of Greecophilia.

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## Flight of the Kestrel: The Two Cities of St. Augustine in the Verse of Gerard Manley Hopkins "The Windhover"

Tim Wenzell

In the realm of literary interpretation, quite often an author's source material is overlooked as a means of better understanding the process by which that author has undertaken the act of creation. This is particularly the case when that source material, from a literary perspective, falls outside of the subject of literature and thus becomes virtually ignored by literary criticism. As a consequence, understanding the work itself, or understanding the underlying reasons for the creation of the work itself, become diminished.

This is particularly the case when poets choose, as subject matter, specific elements of the natural world, where careful observation of the various components of nature have led to a specific choice for a poem. For Gerard Manley Hopkins, this comes through his idea of "inscape," a word he conjures up in his journals to define the symbiotic relationship of characteristics that give each living thing its uniqueness. This distinction can only be articulated through direct observation of the natural world.

Hence, Hopkins composed his poem "The Windhover" by directly observing the unique qualities of the flight of the Common Kestrel, and it is important here to draw from ornithology to better understand Hopkins's subject matter for this poem. The Common Kestrel is common throughout Europe and can often be seen flying over open spaces. The bird is a member of the falcon family, but its flying style is highly unusual, even for a falcon. Like most birds of prey, its preferred method of finding food is still-hunting. However, the bird has the unusual ability, during its search for prey, to be able to hover. The Common Kestrel hovers by facing into the wind, so that while it is moving through the air, it is also staying stationary with respect to the ground. This is quite an unusual sight to behold, and in fact ornithologists call this "wind-hovering". The wind hitting the kestrel gives the bird sufficient lift to remain stationary with respect to the ground. The tail, like the rear wings of an airplane, is spread, supplementing the air-catching effect of the wings, the

alulas (feathers at the front bend of the wing) are raised and wingtip feathers separate to reduce turbulence which would cause stalling at such effectively low speeds. The Common Kestrel is also able to arc its head downwards, enabling it to spot a meal from a much more upright position when hovering. They have evolved such that they can keep their head still while flapping their wings. This act of hovering consumes a lot of energy, but ornithologists have shown that they catch around 10-15 times as much food as when searching in flight or still-hunting. Under strong wind conditions, Kestrels can also stay poised in the air, with their wings wide open and still, referred to as "kiting" [1].

To replicate this movement with words, Hopkins uses the poem's structure to emphasize the flight of the Common Kestrel. His use of sprung rhythm and alliteration, in fact, creates a sense of movement in the poem that mirrors the hovering and falling of the bird: I CAUGHT this morning morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding

Of the rolling level underneath  
him steady air, and striding  
High there, how he rung upon  
the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy!...

Here, Hopkins reinforces the unification of wind and bird, emulating in verse the manner in which the wind hits the kestrel (morning morning's minion) and the bird's subsequent ability in this state to remain stationary with respect to the ground ("daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn"). Here, the "m" alliteration works to create movement--that is, sprung rhythm--pushing like a string of dominoes, which is then interrupted--stopped in mid-air, if you will--by the repetition of "d." The bird's ability to stop like this becomes both an ornithological and po-

etic site to behold: the Kestrel's movement with the wind becomes the graceful movement of an ice skater whose "... heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend."

But then there is a clear interruption to the flow and rhythm of the poem as the movement in the poem drops, as the "Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here Buckle!" Indeed, this act of buckling becomes a necessary and natural action for the Common Kestrel once it spots its meal on the ground below: the wings fold in (that is, they "buckle"), it leaves its poetic dance in the wind, and it drops straight down to attack its prey: "No wonder of it: sheer plód makes plough down sillion/ Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,/ Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion." The change in rhythm is clear in the closing lines of the poem. Here, the beauty of the bird's flight transmutes into the beauty of its fall, its necessary action for survival. Its "plodding," like the common work of the plough in a field as a means of tilling land and sustaining food for survival, becomes, for Hopkins, the beauty of a living thing undertaking an act of pure necessity, thereby giving the entire act of hovering and falling meaning. Thus, the bird's inscape is achieved through this dual and unique set of movements.

Much criticism and debate has centered on the epigram in "The Windhover," the curious line, "To Christ Our Lord." Indeed, based on the very presence of this epigram, the poem has been widely interpreted as allegory: the bird itself is Christ. The bird's actions would certainly support this view: its poetic and spiritual "kiting" (to reference the ornithological term for its ability to hover) can certainly represent Christ as Son of God, while the shift into the kestrel's buckling and dropping to necessitate its biological survival would represent Christ as man.

Another point of interest is that the flight of the Common Kestrel is both horizontal (its kiting on the wind and its parallel movement to the ground) and vertical (its straight drop to attack its prey), forming, in essence, the sign of the cross in the sky. Even the pre-Christian symbolism of the cross comes into play here, where the vertical section of the cross represents earth and mortality, while the horizontal section of cross represents sky and immortality.

Rather than a representation of Christ, the poem can also be viewed as a *dedication* to Him. This is implicit in Hopkins' use of the preposition "To" at the beginning of the epigram. In this sense, the bird as allegory is no longer Jesus Christ, but man. And this allegory is best understood by examining the dual movement of the bird within the context of Augustinian theology, most notably in reference to the two cities in *The City of God*. St. Augustine states: "The specific gravity of a body is, as it were, its love, whether it tends upward by its lightness or downward by its weight. For a body is borne by gravity as a spirit by love, whichever way it is moved" [2]. Here, the duality of the birds' actions become clear as a representation of man himself, in that gravity (the body) and love (the soul) become an integral part of one and the same creature.

It is important to note that St. Augustine here is referencing an observation of the natural world, that is, the world of non-man from which man has been cast out with the onset of original sin. Thus, Augustine notes, man would indeed share in this natural order "if we were sheep of some kind." But to look to the natural world, and to the unique qualities of the kestrel, becomes a clear way to understand the dual nature of man. Hopkins' kestrel maintains control through its kiting. It maintains its presence in the sky, that is, the spiritual or its soul, as a means of countering its predetermined capacity to buckle and drop. "And it is when the soul serves God," Augustine writes, "that it exercises a right control over the body; and in the soul itself" [3].

For St. Augustine, the city of God and the city of Man must invariably share the same space, and the inherent conflicts in this space must be recognized and resolved: "The peace of the body then consists in the duly proportional arrangement of its parts. The peace of the irrational soul is the harmonious repose of the appetites, and that of the rational soul is the harmony of knowledge and action. The peace of the body and soul is the well-ordered and harmonious life and health of the living creature" [4]. To achieve this peace and harmony, all parts must be in harmony, a balance of God and man, immortal and mortal, soul and flesh. For Hopkins, the beauty and valor of the Common Kestrel come through observation of the peaceful and natural movements of his subject, and emulating these observations

through sprung rhythm and alliteration. “The peace of all things is the tranquility of order,” St. Augustine states, and it is in this state that the kestrels’ necessary actions for survival become clear as representation of man: “The whole use, then, of things temporal has a reference to this result of earthly peace in the earthly community while in the city of God, it is connected with eternal peace” [ibid]. This balance of things temporal and eternal becomes implicit in reading “The Wind-hover,’ where Gerard Manley Hopkins, by looking to the sky at the flight of the Common Kestrel, can tap into his Christian ideals and reflect these ideals through both rhythm and allegory to convey the spiritual and natural elements in all living things.

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Maura Grace Harrington

During the penultimate week of Lent of this year, I entered my classroom about one-half hour early to find one of my students engrossed in a book. I saw that the spine of the chunky paperback was creased, and the dog-eared pages were a signal that the book was used heavily. The student looked up and was eager to discuss with me the book that he was reading, *The Da Vinci Code*. While this thriller novel by Dan Brown was initially published in 2003, I had only recently begun hearing much of anything about it. I had learned just enough about the book at this point to be chagrined upon finding it prominently displayed in our campus bookstore that very week. I asked the student to tell me what the book is about. He proceeded to give me the rudiments: Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, they had a child, and the child and mother moved to France after Jesus' death; a conspiracy by the Church is revealed by the work of "symbolist" Robert Langdon; secret societies have known about this Church cover-up for centuries; in order to maintain its power, the Church both reveals what it does reveal and keeps under wraps secret information about the life of Jesus. I must have had a look of incredulity on my face, as the student promptly added: "The whole book is based on facts!" I asked the student how he knew this, and he told me that the author makes known in the book that all of his assertions are based on true information. After I raised an eyebrow, the student laughed a little, and then said, "I guess you're right. Maybe it's not all based on facts, but the author says it is."

As are many people who read *The Da Vinci Code* or watch the newly-released movie, my student was interested in the phenomenon because he was searching for a deeper relationship with Christ. While some people read Dan Brown's latest novel in order to find fodder against the Catholic Church, many people enter into this pursuit with the intention of coming to a deeper understanding of Christ and of their religious tradition. It is supremely unfortunate that young people and people of all ages who are seeking the Truth turn for information and guidance to a work of fiction whose agenda is to validate all individuals' ideas and experiences, regard-

less how ill-informed they may be. Instead of being led down the path of revelation and tradition, those who read *The Da Vinci Code* or watch the film version are encouraged to question everything they have ever believed or been taught. Because it emphasizes the experience of the individual, *The Da Vinci Code* purports to promote toleration; however, such a subjective view, in which it is impossible to determine what is true, or even if there is a truth at all, can lead only to confusion. This novel, in one fell swoop, removes "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" from its concept of Christianity. Although Brown markets his book as a novel, his inclusion of some historical facts and his distortion of others confuses the issues, leaving his audience wondering what is actually true, and feeling so helpless in the face of all of this information that many readers and viewers end up with a relativistic view of the entire Christian experience. Although as works of fiction the novel and film may seem innocuous, they wield a certain power over those who are seeking the truth.

One reason Brown's creations can be so confusing to Christians is related to the nature of Christianity itself. This May's thought-provoking seminar on citizenship and Christian identity coincided with the release of the film *The Da Vinci Code*. The seminar ended on Thursday, May 18<sup>th</sup> and the film had its American release on Friday, May 19<sup>th</sup>. Because of the serendipitous timing of the seminar, my discussions with friends and family about the movie release were informed by my recent reading and discussion with the seminar participants on the place of the Christian in civil society. Is it possible for a Christian to have within himself two people: a Christian and a "secular person," as Martin Luther suggests (601)? I reached my conclusions about the *Da Vinci* phenomenon based on my realization that I cannot separate myself into two discrete beings, or, as Luther suggests, into "two different persons in one [woman]" (596); instead, I am one person, a Christian in the world, who looks at the world, and who deals with those in it, as an integrated human being. Twentieth-century theologian H. Richard Niebuhr defines a Christian "as one who counts himself as belonging to that community of men for

whom Jesus Christ—his life, words, deeds, and destiny—is of supreme importance as the key to the understanding of themselves and their world, the main source of the knowledge of God and man, good and evil, the constant companion of the conscience, and the expected deliverer from evil” (11). For such a person, it would be impossible to imagine our world with elements of our history as divorced from Christ and his action here. Were I to read Dan Brown’s novel or to watch the film version of the novel, I would do so as a person who could identify with parts of either, but who would immediately take issue with others. Brown’s use of the names of real people and institutions, including certain truths about them, and his standing these truths on their head by building up a case with dubious “facts” would be an offense to me as a Christian. This would be a far cry from reading *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, which allows me to step into a fantasy world in which fictional characters are able to work wonders. For Christians, the fictional world of *The Da Vinci Code* is too close for comfort, since its whole world is based on the real world and the premises of the novel are purportedly historical facts. However, some Christians and countless non-Christians feel attracted by this novel because of its focusing on mystery, adventure, conspiracy, and a hidden love story. Dan Brown has truly initiated a phenomenon that transcends bookstore success; his novel is an instigator of lifestyle changes. *The Da Vinci Code* has spawned books, diet fads, DVDs, CDs, puzzles, games, and an action figure for children, as *Newsday* staff writer Daniel Bubbeo notes. It is likely that the genre accounts for the novel’s wide appeal. In his Introduction to *The Da Vinci Hoax* by Carl E. Olson and Sandra Miesel, James Hitchcock asserts that “it is a very serious book... since it is nothing less than an attack that would be little noticed if it were presented in the form of a historical or theological treatise” (13). However, because it is marketed as a popular thriller, the book is garnering a wide audience, most of whom do not have the background and wherewithal to refute the claims in the novel that are repulsive to Christianity. In his Foreword to the same book, Francis Cardinal George picks up on the dangers posed by this novel and others that include attacks on Christianity, expressing concern that “those who have lost or do not know the faith are likely to believe anything. It matters what we read, what films and television

shows we watch. If we feed our minds on error, we risk losing touch with the truth about who we are and how we ought to live” (11). Christians should respect themselves enough to avoid inundating themselves with falsehood.

*The Da Vinci Code*’s popularity among those who are in the process of forming and solidifying their faith is a testament to the zealotry with which our contemporaries are seeking to understand their faith. According to “What They’re Reading on College Campuses” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Da Vinci Code* was third on the list of the most popular books among university students both in March of 2005 and in the immediately previous survey. This data “was compiled from information supplied by stores serving” thirty-one universities served by Follett book stores. High school students are joining their older counterparts as voracious readers of Brown’s latest opus. *The Voice of Youth Advocates*, a journal that promotes teenagers’ unfettered access to books, reviews the book as “an absolutely addictive thriller that blends fact and fiction with wonderfully creative results....[the novel] might push some teens into researching these topics just to see what, if any, possible real historical basis there might be to Brown’s story.” The organization recommends the book for 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders. And the teens are biting; *Education Week* reports that *The Da Vinci Code* was among the top nine books that teenagers “had read for pleasure in the past six months” (“Teenagers’ Favorite Books”). While it can be hoped that the reading of a work of fiction would encourage curious individuals to perform further research on the topic, this might not happen if the fiction is taken as fact. Patrick Anderson, book reviewer for *The Washington Post*, seems to have fallen prey to just such a fallacy. Anderson reports that

The novel alternates between conventional chase scenes and the scholarly digressions that provide its special charm....Are you aware that the Catholic Church has for centuries repressed both women and the feminine side of early Christianity? During the Inquisition, for example, “Those deemed ‘witches’ by the Church included all female scholars, priestesses, gypsies, mystics, nature lovers, herb gatherers, and any women ‘suspiciously attuned to the natural world.’... During three hundred years of witch hunts, the Church burned at the stake an astound-



ing five million women .”

While these assertions of Brown clearly lack evidence , Anderson accepts them as fact, and uses the revelation of such astonishing “truths” as an inducement for his audience to read the book. Anderson exhorts his audience to “Read the book and be enlightened,” encouraging readers to accept the veracity of Brown’s fictional characters’ ideas. Anderson gives Brown’s book an almost religious authority, claiming that it includes “revelations about Jesus...[that] have been whispered about for centuries, but have never overcome the opposition of organized Christianity.” Further, Anderson challenges his readers: “How much of this [*The Da Vinci Code*] is fact and how much is fiction? Read the book and make up your own mind.” Anderson treats the novel as a self-contained unit, which includes sufficient information to allow its audience to come to a reasonable conclusion on its assertions, possibly discounting all of Christian tradition.

It would seem that the confusion over the levels of fact and fiction in this novel, even by serious journalists, is misplaced, since the book is marketed as a novel; such puzzlement, however, has its source in the novel’s author himself. In *The Da Vinci Code* question-and-answer section of his personal website, Brown responds to the concerns that many Christians and those who respect Christians’ religious freedom have raised over his novel. Instead of quelling concerns, however, the answers that he provides to these questions seem both wishy-washy and inflammatory. Brown reveals that his “hope in writing this novel was that the story would serve as a catalyst and a springboard for people to discuss the important topics of faith, religion, and history,” and he proposes that “each individual reader must explore the...characters’ viewpoints and come to his or her own interpretations.” He readily admits that “it is...[his] belief that some of the theories discussed by the characters have merit.” Solely reading the novel, in which the characters’ “theories” are reality in this too-close-for-comfort “fictional” world, does not really qualify the readers to make an accurate assessment of the ideas put forth in the novel. Brown also defends his use of “facts” in the novel, noting that the “FACT” page at the beginning of the book “states that the documents, rituals, organization [sic], artwork, and architecture in the novel all exist. The ‘FACT’ page makes *no* statement whatsoever about any of the an-

cient theories discussed by fictional characters. Interpreting those ideas is left to the reader.” Aside from the fact that many of the “facts” in the book are mistakes and the factual phenomena that Brown discusses are often misrepresented, it is clear that Brown’s use of these “facts” blurs beyond recognition the boundaries between reality and ill-conceived fantasy. This blurring is perhaps accelerated by Brown’s own “interpretation” that the theories that his characters expound in fact represent the truth.

While he purports to be blazing a trail on which people can seek the truth, Brown actually muddies the water considerably. In the question-and-answer section of his website, Brown reveals his utter distrust of objective reality. Brown expresses the postmodern concern with the multiplicity of histories that can actually be true, and then proposes that “we should...ask ourselves a deeper question: How historically accurate is history itself?” Such a question and the mistrust that comes with it signal an extreme unlikelihood of a belief that there is an ultimate Truth to be found. While he ostensibly disdains the idea of historical fact, Brown simultaneously asserts that that which he presents in his novel is accurate. When Brown is asked if he is concerned about the consequences of his controversial novel, he responds “The ideas in this novel have been around for centuries; they are not my own. Admittedly, this may be the first time these ideas have been written about within the context of a popular thriller, but the information is anything but new.” In his response, Brown backs off from his position that the material in the novel consists simply of “ideas” to be “interpreted” and suggests that they have factual veracity.

Although Brown reveals in his interview that he welcomes debate about the issues that he raises in his book, he also betrays the fact that he considers such debates ultimately fruitless. When asked his opinion about “clerical scholars attempting to ‘disprove’” his book, Brown responds:

The dialogue is wonderful. These authors and I obviously disagree, but the debate that is being generated is a positive powerful force . The more vigorously we debate these topics, the better our understanding of our own spirituality. Controversy and dialogue are healthy for religion as a whole. Religion has only one true enemy—apathy—and passionate debate is a superb antidote.

Although Brown claims a concern with “religion as a whole,” he must also realize that the reason that Church scholars and other fair-minded individuals are arguing against him is that the characters in his book, in their own factual-fictional way, malign the Catholic Church’s practices and teachings. The response to his book is not truly a debate over issues but a presentation of the facts to repel an attack. Brown believes that ultimately, each person will come to his own conclusions about religion, and that all of these conclusions are equally valid; debating religious issues is distracting to the ultimate quest of faith: “By attempting to rigidly classify ethereal concepts like faith, we end up debating semantics to the point where we entirely miss the obvious—that is, that we are all trying to decipher life’s big mysteries, and we’re each following our own paths of enlightenment.” One is left to wonder why Brown finds it necessary to open up so many proverbial cans of worms if he believes that the discussion of religious issues is actually of no use. Still, Brown holds that “Suddenly, enormous numbers of people are passionately debating important philosophical topics, and regardless of the personal conclusions that each of us draws, the debate can only help to strengthen our understanding of our own faith.” Such an assertion, however, does not ring true if people are entering into these debates improperly informed. Brown would seem to want his readers to enter these debates armed with that which he presents in his novel, but if the readers do not have the tools to determine what in his book is actually true and what is mere speculation, it is impossible for debates over these issues to be constructive.

Dan Brown’s personal website features a “Reader’s Guide” to *The Da Vinci Code*, including a series of book group discussion questions. Traditionally, thriller novels are written to entertain, but the “Reader’s Guide” questions make it clear that Brown’s book is intended to transform its audience’s perceptions and thought patterns. For example, the second question in the “Reader’s Guide” is: “As a symbologist, Robert Langdon has a wealth of academic knowledge that helps him view the world in a unique way. Now that you’ve read *The Da Vinci Code* [sic], are there any aspects of life/history/faith that you see in a different light?” In addition to revealing that the book can act as an agent of change for people’s thought patterns, this question’s premise implies that reading the book imparts to the

reader “a wealth of academic knowledge,” and that this pseudo-sacred text renders its readers noticeably wiser than they were prior to the encounter. Brown also invites his audience to ponder this question: “Historian Leigh Teabing claims that the founding fathers of Christianity hijacked the good name of Jesus for political reasons. Do you agree? Does the historical evidence support Teabing’s claims?” The question itself gives credence to the fictional Teabing, architect of the conspiracy theory, emphasizing that the (fictional) character is an historian, which a reader would already know. Additionally, it is to be surmised that the historical evidence to which Brown refers is in his novel, and this is puzzling, since Brown wants his readers to question the historical accuracy of history. Brown also asks his readers: “Has this book changed your ideas about faith, religion, or history in any way?” Brown would not ask this question unless the expected answer were in the affirmative. Why is it that Brown must feel as though he has influenced his readers’ thought about faith, religion, and history through his fictional work? It is quite evident that Brown intends this fictional work to be more than just a thriller.

How can Christians respond to this type of work, that purports to be fiction but that actually strikes at the core of Christian belief and Catholic tradition? As Father John Wauck points out, Brown’s allegation that Jesus was actually simply a good man is not a new charge, as most of the world’s inhabitants believe just this. Wauck believes, however, that Brown victimizes “the Roman Catholic Church [which]...appear[s] to be an evil, misogynistic, power-hungry blight on world history.” Thus far, Christians have had three main categories of responses to the *Da Vinci* phenomenon. Many Christians have read the book and watched the movie in order to demonstrate their “open-mindedness.” Christians in this category have left the novel or the film with a “realization” that Jesus’ marital status is not a significant factor in their faith. They might respond, “If I found out today that Jesus really were married, my faith would not be shaken. I know what I believe.” It is just a hop, a skip, and a jump from this position to protagonist Robert Langdon’s position, as reported by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: “Why does it have to be human or divine? Maybe human is divine? Langdon ruminates about Jesus, declaring that ‘what matters is what you believe.’” Aside from the theologi-

cal implications of the proposition that Jesus was married and has living descendants, those who do not believe such a thing but are rendered willing to believe such a thing by the novel or movie are led to question the authority of the Church, based on the premises that Brown sets forth. Often not fully educated in the Church's early history, these individuals also are likely to buy into Brown's claims that the Christian canon was compiled under the direction of Constantine, who, in the interest of his own political gain, handily eliminated dozens of true gospels. While Christians who participate in the *Da Vinci* phenomenon for the sake of being "cultured" might not immediately shun their faith, their limited understanding of the truth behind Brown's fabrications leaves the door open for them to change their ideas about Christianity. As Wauck notes, the confusion between fiction and fact in this novel is dangerous enough; additionally, and perhaps more basically, "fiction itself is a powerful form of communication. When you watch a movie or read a book, your imagination is guided and shaped. Feelings are stirred, questions are raised. Impressions—perhaps false, perhaps true—are formed. Mental associations are created." Such is certainly the case with a book or movie that flies in the face of many basic truths that Christians have been taught. The power of suggestion is very strong, especially when there is a dearth of information readily available to the audience to combat the dominant impression given. Those who, for a cultural experience, read the book or see the film often believe that they can divorce their experience of *Da Vinci* without detriment to their faith because they are reading or watching not as Christians but as consumers to be entertained; however, the relativistic stance that some of them express after viewing the film shows that in fact, they have been witnesses to Brown's phenomenon with their Christianity vitiated, and that it has the potential to be harmed further.

A second type of response is to encourage protest of the phenomenon or to protest it, often without experiencing *Da Vinci*. Those who choose this route realize the dangers that the power of suggestion poses and argue that the novel and the film impinge on the religious freedom of Christians; that is, they believe that Christianity, and the Catholic Church in particular, is slandered by the characters in Brown's novel, and that such accusations prevent Catholics from being respected and treated fairly.

These individuals realize that Christians cannot read or watch *Da Vinci* only as citizens of a secular society, but instead their encounter with it must be and would certainly be colored by their Christianity. Responses of the "stay away" type have been seen from the upper echelons of the Vatican, to national Catholic organizations, to smaller grassroots groups. No options are off the table to combat the promotion of the ideas that Brown's characters express. Catholic News Service reports that "Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, head of the Vatican's sainthood congregation, said it was disturbing that 'no respect is being shown for the hundreds of millions of people who believe in Christ, the church [sic] and the Gospels. This is the result of an ignorant form of arrogance,' he said." Similar sentiments were echoed by other top Vatican officials, including "Archbishop Angelo Amato, the secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [who] called for a boycott" of the film shortly before its release ("Vatican Prelate Ponders Legal Action"). Amato explained that the film should be boycotted because he expected that since its source is "stridently anti-Christian," the film would follow suit (Fisher). Papal preacher Father Raniero Cantalamessa, in a homily on Good Friday, urged that "church leaders should not allow 'millions of people to be crassly manipulated by the media without raising a cry of protest'" (Thavis). Cardinal Francis Arinze, leader of the Vatican's liturgy congregation, suggested in no uncertain terms that Catholics should pursue means of reparation for the harm done by the book and the film, and pointed out that some people are poised to take legal action to ensure that Catholics protect "one of the fundamental human rights: that we should be respected, our religious beliefs respected, and our founder Jesus Christ respected" (Catholic News Service). Since before the release of the film, laypeople have also been working to combat its ill effects. William A. Donohue, the President of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, published an open letter to film director Ron Howard in the March 6, 2006 edition of the *New York Times*, addressing him, "As the director, you have a moral obligation not to mislead the public the way the book's author, Dan Brown, has." Donohue goes on to request that Howard place "a disclaimer at the beginning of the film noting that this is a fictional account." Howard failed to comply with this request, and Christians of

various sects have risen to protest this failure. Movieguide.org, a group that focuses on monitoring media respect for Christian principles, has posted an online petition whereby signatories can express their displeasure with the film to Sony Pictures and Imagine Entertainment, Ron Howard, and Tom Hanks for their part in the release of a film “which is fraught with misconceptions and blatantly false claims about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the history of Christianity, and the Catholic Church.” The June 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Catholic Advocate* featured an advertisement by the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property for a “Rally of Reparation” to be held outside the Sony Building in New York City on June 24. This rally will consist of “rosary, litanies, and Catholic hymns,” and prospective participants are exhorted: “Show your love for Our Lord and your rejection of the blasphemous film *The Da Vinci Code*” (7). Clearly, those who advocate a wholesale avoidance of the book and the film are responding to their sense that Christians cannot experience *Da Vinci* as secular persons, and are concerned that Christians will have difficulty escaping the *Da Vinci* phenomenon unscathed.

A third type of response to *The Da Vinci Code* is the use of it as a tool to get at questions of spirituality. In an interview posted on his personal website, Dan Brown reports that “Father John Sewell of St. John’s Episcopal Church in Memphis stated...: ‘This [novel] is an opportunity. We are called to creatively engage the culture and this is what I want to do. I think Dan Brown has done me a favor. He’s letting me talk about things that matter.’” In a similar response to the *Da Vinci* phenomenon, St. Cassian Roman Catholic Church in Montclair, New Jersey recently publicized in its weekly bulletin the June meeting of its Spiritual Book Club as a discussion of *The Da Vinci Code* in this way: “*The Da Vinci Code* is a novel, a work of fiction. It is an historical novel that develops its plot using historical events. To make the story even more interesting, the author creates historical events. *Fiction is fiction and not intended to be the truth.* Faith has nothing to fear from culture. But everyone has something to fear if faith and culture never dialogue.” While there can be value in reading something with which one disagrees, in order to further solidify and understand one’s own “view , encouraging the reading of what Cardinal Amato called a “stridently anti-Christian” book seems to have ques-

tionable value, akin to self-flagellation. While it is admirable that some church leaders want to make religion palpable to congregants, showing how it relates to everyday life, there should be other accessible avenues by which to pursue spiritual development. We should address and give credence and support to cultural phenomena that support and validate or at least do not undermine Christian principles, but intentionally exposing ourselves to and financially supporting anti-Christian “cultural” phenomena is harmful. We do not have to buy into and deeply involve ourselves in falsehood in order to reject it. Also, deeming *The Da Vinci Code* a cultural phenomenon worthy of consideration is troubling. *The Da Vinci Code* shows distrust of Christianity and of history, both of which are central to Western culture . Not only are the book and the film anti-Christian but they are also anti-cultural.

*The Da Vinci Code* is an attempt to replace the mystical Body of Christ with a series of human bodies that include the genetic material of Jesus. This is belittling to Christ and it ignores his two natures in one person. It also does not show an appreciation for full humanity. The root of the problem with Dan Brown’s novel and the film version of this novel is that they undermine Church authority and depreciate Christ because of an essentially simplistic and pessimistic view of humanity. A world in which spirituality is used as a means of control and in which people can acceptably worship beings that are ultimately only of this world is a sad, degraded world. In denying the transcendence of God, Dan Brown also denies that humans are more than the sum of their physical parts. In his attempts to uncover the hidden and the sacred, Brown maligns and desecrates the dignity with which God has endowed humanity. The *Da Vinci* phenomenon privileges the present, while discounting the past. It is impossible to have a truly human culture that discounts past experience and denies the communal nature of human religion. Such a worldview artificially divorces the individual from heritage, communication, and collaboration with others. If everyone’s viewpoint, no matter how badly informed, is equally valid, instead of a catholic experience, humanity would know only fragmentation and confusion.

Despite the fact that Dan Brown believes his novel to have an enlivening effect on religion by promoting debate, it can be seen that, in fact, the phenomenon that he has initiated is deleterious to

religion and to the concept of humanity held by the audience. All hope is not lost, however; as Gerard Manley Hopkins declared:

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward,  
springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah!

bright wings. (ll. 10-14)

Although *The Da Vinci Code* is operating outside and against the grain of Christianity and although reading or watching it can unleash harmful consequences, its popularity indicates that people are ready and willing to learn the Truth; it is up to the Church to provide access to the Truth. Whether the answer lies in homiletic series, more rigorous religious education classes for children, adult religious education programs, public service announcements, or artistic works that reveal some of the Truth and Goodness of that which truly exists, a captive audience is assured. People long for a confirmation of the unity of their spiritual and day-to-day existence. As St. Augustine noted, even enemies of the Church “undoubtedly benefit by their wickedness the genuine, Catholic members of Christ, since God makes good use even of the wicked, and ‘makes all things co-operate for good for those who love him’” (833). If the Church takes advantage of the opportunity to reach out to those who, in the words of Niebuhr, consider “Jesus Christ—his life, words, deeds, and destiny—...[to be] of supreme importance as the key to the understanding of themselves and their world” (11), then the Church will have succeeded in using a negative stimulus in order to spark a positive response.

<sup>1</sup>Bubbeo also notes that “it’s unknown whether Brown earns any profits from products using ‘The Da Vinci Code’ name (he refused to comment for this story).” Speculating that Brown’s answer would be in the affirmative is unfair to him, but would add further impetus to papal preacher Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa’s declaration that “‘Christ is still being sold, no longer to the heads of the Sanhedrin for thirty pieces of silver, but to publishers and booksellers for millions of dollars’” (qtd. in Thavis).

<sup>2</sup> Although it is served by Follett Higher Education Group, the sales of books at our campus bookstore were not used in the compilation of these results. However, Catholic universities whose results were included among the data were the University of Notre Dame and Georgetown University.

<sup>3</sup> Books and websites in which authors explain the fallacies in *The Da Vinci Code* abound. One valuable book that provides such a service is Olson and Miesel’s *The Da Vinci Hoax*. This book is written in a clear and understandable style and includes hundreds of references.

<sup>4</sup> Although it is not unusual for a person to claim that Jesus is not the Son of God, it strikes me as unusual that a contemporary self-professed Christian would take this position.

<sup>5</sup> The 1999 *Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists* eloquently describes the collaboration that should exist between artists and the Church, and the manifold ways in which artists can serve as instruments of God’s revelation: “The creation awaits the revelation of the children of God also through art and in art. This is your task. Humanity in every age, and even today, looks to works of art to shed light upon its path and its destiny.”

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## BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

A. D. AMAR, Ph.D. is professor of management in the Stillman School of Business. Amar has a B.S. and M.S. degree in engineering, and an M.B.A. and a Ph.D. in business. He has published more than 75 works in various journals and periodicals, and has worked and consulted in general management, productivity enhancement, and operations and strategy areas for a number of organizations.

In addition to lecturing at many technical conferences around the world, Amar has trained and instructed managers in the U.S., Russia, Poland, the United Kingdom and India.

ALAN DELOZIER currently serves as Director of Archives & Special Collections and is an Associate Professor/Faculty Librarian at Seton Hall University. A graduate of St. Bonaventure University, he later earned advanced degrees from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and Villanova University. His research interests include twentieth century American and Irish religious, educational and social history.

ROBERT FARACI, Ph.D., OTR/L is an associate professor in the Occupational Therapy Program in the School of Graduate Medical Education. He has a Ph.D. in linguistics and taught in that field for several years before becoming an occupational therapist. He practiced occupational therapy in New Jersey for almost 18 years before coming to Seton Hall in August of 2004.

MAURA GRACE HARRINGTON received her M.Phil. from Drew University in 2009, her M.A. from Seton Hall University in 2003, and her B.A. from Caldwell College in 2001. Harrington currently works as an English instructor at Seton Hall University and has published on Irish, American, and English literature.

INES A. MURZAKU, Ph.D., has a S.E.O.D from the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Summa cum laude in Scientiis Ecclesiasticis Orientalibus Doctorate; a M.A. from the University of Calabria, "110/110" in Lingue e Letterature Straniere Moderne; and a S.E.O.L. from the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Summa cum laude in Scientiis Ecclesiasticis Orientalibus Licentiate. Dr. Murzaku specializes in Ecclesiastical History, especially Byzantine and Catholic Church History.

TIM WENZELL teaches writing at Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ. He has published a novel, Absent Children, along with a number of short stories, poems, and essays in various literary magazines.