Foreword

There is a certain irony to the modern university. On the one hand, a university has the advantage of bringing scholars together into a community. One scholar need only walk across campus, or simply down the hall, to converse with another. The exchange of ideas is immediate, lively, personal. Many of us have experienced this as students or teachers. Meeting in the lounge, in hallways, over lunch, or for coffee, we speak, often as friends, sharing our thoughts and growing in insight as a consequence. But on the other hand, the fruit of university scholarship is so often impersonal. Hard scientific knowledge, *Wissenschaft*, is privileged, and subjective detachment encouraged in the interest of objectivity and a supposed neutrality. The fruit of intellectual inquiry is often impersonal, as a result, and also insipid. Ironically, the lively exchange of ideas among a community of scholars leads to the production of texts that are detached and impersonal.

The privileging of objective, scientific knowledge is certainly a cause. According to Newman, this privileging has its roots in the modern desire to be emancipated "from the capricious *ipse dixit* of authority,"[1] while at the same time wanting to have an authoritative, objective means for ascertaining the truth. Newman narrates the pursuit of this objective means for finding the truth in a style that tellingly echoes the biblical story of the Tower of Babylon:

> As the index on the dial notes down the sun's course in the heavens, as a key, revolving through the intricate wards of the lock, opens for us a treasure-house, so let us, if we can, provide ourselves with some ready expedient to serve as a true record of the system of objective truth, and an available rule for interpreting its phenomena; or at least let us go as far as we can in providing it.

1. John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 211.

> One such experimental key is the science of geometry, which, in a certain department of nature, substitutes a collection of true principles, fruitful and interminable in consequences, for the guesses, *pro re natâ*, of our intellect, and saves it both the labour and the risk of guessing. Another far more subtle and effective instrument is algebraical science, which acts as a spell in unlocking for us, without merit or effort of our own individually, the *arcana* of the concrete physical universe. A more ambitious, because a more comprehensive contrivance still, for interpreting the concrete world is the method of logical inference. What we desiderate is something which may supersede the need of personal gifts by a far-reaching and infallible rule. Now, without external symbols to mark out and to steady its course, the intellect runs wild; but with the aid of symbols, as in algebra, it advances with precision and effect. Let then our symbols be words: let all thought be arrested and embodied in words.[2]

Notice the ambitious desire to "supersede the need of personal gifts by a far-reaching and infallible rule." In Newman's celebrated comparison of reasoning to rock climbing, he speaks of it as trying to reason "by rule" and he says that, in the last analysis, this is not how we reach the truth.[3] Rather than the detached, impersonal application of rules, the pursuit of truth, especially sublime truths, requires personal engagement and certain personal qualities.

Ultimately Newman finds Aristotle's *phronesis* useful for describing the matter. Aristotle correctly noted that the exercise of right moral judgment cannot be reduced to rules. No system of moral precepts automatically (and impersonally) produces correct moral decisions. The person must discern the right path in ways more fluid and subtle than can be articulated in prescribed rules. Moreover, to do this well one needs a personal attribute called *phronesis* (that is, the virtue of prudence). Newman argues that, likewise, correct reasoning about the truth is more fluid and subtle than can be delineated in the premises and conclusion of a syllogism. The rules of logical inference cannot completely map out for us the way to the truth, but we must rely on personal gifts and qualities—intellectual, moral, or otherwise—to get there.

2. Ibid.

3. John Henry Newman, *Sermon* 13.7 in *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 257.

But Newman's critique of reasoning by *a priori* rules is not unsympathetic of their value. The rules of logical inference, like moral precepts, are useful. This makes the ironic tension of the modern university hard to resolve. There is indeed an indispensable personal and also communal dimension to the pursuit of truth, but the value of objective, methodological thinking cannot be altogether dismissed.

Nathan Lefler's study touches upon this tension. It explores a most personal subject, friendship, and it considers how two personally gifted thinkers in the Catholic tradition, St. Aelred and St. Thomas Aquinas, sought to understand friendship. Friendship is not peripheral to either thinker's system of thought. Aelred finds it to be a perfection, through grace, of inter-human relations and Aquinas defines the highest of all the virtues, charity, as friendship with God. Therefore both speakers, albeit in different respects, place friendship at the heart of the moral project. Human life, and in a sense all of reality, is ordered toward friendship. This is surely a very personalist view of things. Lefler examines how such a view manifests itself in each thinker's writings and also how the thinker's understanding of friendship relates to community, the Trinity, the eschaton, and the reading of the Bible.

Aelred and Aquinas consider friendship in different respects, with Aelred focusing on inter-human relationships and Thomas on the human-divine relationship, but in addition to this, their approaches and styles differ. Do differing approaches and styles matter? Lefler argues yes. He proposes that "a certain recognizable correspondence between the mode in which a subject is presented and the nature of that subject itself has great merit, especially in terms of its capacity for being fruitfully received by a hearer or reader." This is "one of the great strengths of Aelred's account," whereas Aquinas' scholastic approach is not exactly aglow with the warmth that corresponds to friendship. At the same time, Lefler entertains the possibility that "the charm of Aelred's account, for all its power to seduce us, may risk intermittently obscuring our Lordly Friend from our vision, in his less comely guise as a Suffering Servant" (p. 165). Lefler further entertains, by way of Leclercq, that monastic theology, typified by Aelred, and scholastic theology, typified by Aquinas, may complement each other.

Lefler is appreciative of both thinkers, but in the end his sympathies are with the monastic style of St. Aelred. One senses that this is especially in resistance to the dominance that the scholastic style gained at the end of the Middle Ages. But such a resistance to scholastic dominance in theology

may be a favor shown to scholastic theology. To this writer at least, the scholastic mode of inquiry is like that of a commentary which presupposes familiarity with the texts, ideas, and realities upon which it comments. If, then, these texts, ideas, and realities are forgotten, the scholastic style loses its purpose and lends itself to caricature. It was never meant to monopolize the way in which Christian truths were presented. Other texts and media were meant to present these truths and to be the means, even the primary means, for gaining access to them. Accordingly, I have found that the brilliance of St. Thomas' writings shines forth most brightly when they are kept in conversation with other thinkers, especially the Fathers and biblical authors.

While I would not read Aquinas' scholastic approach in substantial continuity with modernity's detached, impersonal mode of pursuing the truth, still Lefler forces us to consider the impersonal style of Aquinas. What are we to make of it? Does it hinder his aims? Is it at odds with the personal, enlivening faith it aims to present? Or if his style is indeed valuable, how is this to be understood? In turn, if we look to the writings of Aelred, we might ask: How is their more charming style not to be mistaken for sentimental theologizing? Or granted that Aelred's thinking does not lack rigor, can that rigor be explicated academically without using a more scholastic or dry and impersonal style? Reading Lefler's study is an invitation to exercise the mind on such questions, in addition to questions concerning friendship itself. But the two sets of questions may be related, especially if friendship is at the heart of the intellectual endeavor. In that case, the greatness of a university may lie not simply in how strictly it adheres to scientific and critical methods, but in the quality of relationships between its scholars, not to mention between the scholars and God.

Austin G. Murphy, OSB