

sometimes strikes this note, e.g. in the account of the Battle of the Marne." (284) I have read all of Chesterton but can't place this reference, but the author and recipient of this letter presumably could.

Their knowledge of Chesterton is matched by rapport. After a brief hiatus in the correspondence, Lyttelton writes: "Good! The old rhythm is re-established—systole and diastole don't they call it? I don't know exactly what they/it mean(s), and strongly sympathise with the embryo science-student who wrote that in all human affairs could be observed a regular movement of sisterly and disasterly. How G.K. Chesterton would have loved that and brilliantly demonstrated the profound truth of the remark—just as he did of the apparently faulty definition that an optimist was a man who looked after one's eyes and the pessimist one's feet." (205)

I have looked at the index to the unabridged letters and find only one passage to add to the ones cited from the abridgement—an indication that, in the editor's judgment, the correspondents were at their best when Chesterton came to mind. On 4 April 1957 Lyttelton observes that "the modern note is to be rather sniffy and patronising about G.K.C. Let them! He wrote much that was wise and much that was witty. I wonder if the anthology of him just come out is any good." Two days later Hart-Davis replies: "I agree that Chesterton is greatly undervalued now, though I am told that his first edi-

tions are much sought by collectors. Certainly time will winnow away a good deal of his minor work, but much will surely remain."

Certainly, for these two, twenty years and more after Chesterton's death, a great deal did remain, effortlessly, pleasurably, and to their good.

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*Leisure, the Basis of Culture (including The Philosophical Act); In Tune With the World; Enthusiasm and Divine Madness; Death and Immortality; The Concept of Sin; The Silence of St. Thomas* by Josef Pieper, St. Augustine's Press, P.O. Box 2285, South Bend, Indiana 46680.

One of those stories that is supposed to illustrate the different temperaments of different nations goes something like this. Five men from five different countries were to write something on elephants. The Englishman wrote a short book about hunting elephants in Africa, the Frenchman observed elephants in the zoo in Paris and wrote an essay about their love lives, the Russian sat in his room in Moscow and thought and pondered and wrote a thick book called, *The Elephant: Does It Exit?*, the American wrote a series of newspaper articles called "Bigger and Better Elephants," and the German wrote a two volume work called, *On the Philosophy of the Elephant*. But while many German philosophical

tomes may be long, one German philosopher, Josef Pieper, is well-known for the conciseness of his works, rarely much over a hundred pages, works that Hans Urs von Balthasar nevertheless termed "thick little books." And St. Augustine's Press is to be commended for bringing back into print, in some cases in new translations or translated for the first time, many of Pieper's works. They project to publish about twenty of his books in the next few years, including his autobiography.

Although Pieper wrote many short works, they were not occasional pieces. Rather, he shows himself in nearly everything he wrote preoccupied with a few themes, themes that constantly recur, but because of their profundity, are never exhausted. Pieper returns to these again and again, from different angles, bringing out their different aspects, like someone holding up a diamond to the light and admiring it from different sides.

For example, in what is probably his best known work, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, Pieper is at pains to point out how totalitarian regimes, be they Marxist or National Socialist, desire to mobilize intellectuals, writers, scholars, in service to the regime's goals, and that this involves a necessary corruption of the liberal arts and their subjection to modern ideas of utility and work. Thus a human activity which is ordered toward contemplation becomes simply another form of mundane work. We are perhaps most

familiar with this point of view in Francis Bacon's remark, quoted so often that it has attained the status of a self-evident truth, "Knowledge is power." But Pieper teaches us that knowledge is not power. At least knowledge of the most important things is not power as we usually understand it. Contemplation requires leisure and is not oriented toward the kind of power that Bacon and most of us care about.

One meets with this same question, *mutatis mutandis*, in another of Pieper's books, *In Tune With the World*. In this latter work Pieper has a long discussion, full of interesting historical details, of the state-sponsored holidays of the French Revolution, of the Soviet state and of Nazi Germany, in which again, what was meant to be a free activity of the human person, festivity, was forced to support the official program of the regime, and even became an occasion for more work — this time, though, for "voluntary, unpaid work." As Maxim Gorky, at the time cultural minister in the new Soviet government, wrote in 1920, "It is a wonderful idea to make the spring festival of the workers a holiday of voluntary work." And those who declined to take part in such "festivity" soon began to be called by the ominous title, "labor deserter."

Like true leisure and true intellectual activity, real festivity necessarily includes an openness to the Divine. "There can be no festivity when man, imagining himself self-sufficient, refuses to recognize that

Goodness of things which goes far beyond any conceivable utility. . . .” And in *Enthusiasm and Divine Madness*, a subtle discussion of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Pieper looks at this theme again, as he contrasts the sophists’ exaltation of efficiency—in this case a misuse of rhetoric in service to essentially utilitarian aims—with “*theoria* . . . that mode of approaching the world which aims solely or chiefly at one single thing: to find out the nature of reality. Philosophical *theoria* aims at truth and nothing else. Cicero and Seneca translated the word *theoria* into Latin; and the word they chose to render it was *contemplatio*.”

We might note too, that the Baconian ideal of knowledge as in service to power, power that can be touched, quantified, used, is not limited to the world of Nazis or Communists. From the frequency with which Bacon’s aphorism is quoted in the United States one ought to be able to see that capitalism, in its usually more gentle but equally ruthless way, has corrupted leisure, the intellectual life and festivity to suit its own ends, as much as any totalitarian regime ever did. America generally goes more slowly but is usually more thorough and successful in her remaking of the world. Some words of John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus* about the alternatives to Communism that the West proposed after World War II are apposite here.

“Another kind of response, practical in nature, is represented by the affluent society or the consumer

society. It seeks to defeat Marxism on the level of pure materialism by showing how a free-market society can achieve a greater satisfaction of material human needs than Communism, while equally excluding spiritual values. In reality, while on the one hand it is true that this social model shows the failure of Marxism to contribute to a humane and better society, on the other hand, insofar as it denies an autonomous existence and value to morality, law, culture and religion, it agrees with Marxism, in the sense that it totally reduces man to the sphere of economics and the satisfaction of material needs.” (no. 19)

It is possible to more or less successfully subordinate all activities within a society to efficiency and (in this case) moneymaking without the use of terror or a secret police. And in such cases, it is even more necessary to hold fast to what Pieper teaches about these matters, things that in fact he is passing down to us from his own teachers, St. Thomas, Plato, Goethe, and many others.

Another theme that Pieper takes up in more than one of his works is that of man’s status as a creature. In fact, in *The Silence of St. Thomas*, Pieper quotes Chesterton’s remark in his own book on St. Thomas to the effect that Thomas ought to be called “Thomas of the Creator.” For as all three writers point out, it is God who has created us and his creation, for all that it is wounded by sin, is still good. “In his *Commentary on St. John’s Epistle*, St. Thomas remarks

that we can find in Sacred Scripture three different meanings for the term ‘the world’: first, ‘the world’ as the creation of God, and second, as the creation perfected in Christ; last, as the material perversion of the order of creation. To ‘the world’ in this last-named sense, and to this world only, may one apply the saying of St. John: ‘The world is seated in wickedness’ (I John 5:19). It is precisely the claim of St. Thomas that the first meaning of ‘world’ (as creation) may not be identified nor interchanged with the third—(‘world’ as material perversion of the order of creation); the world as creation is not seated in wickedness.” This from *The Silence of St. Thomas*.

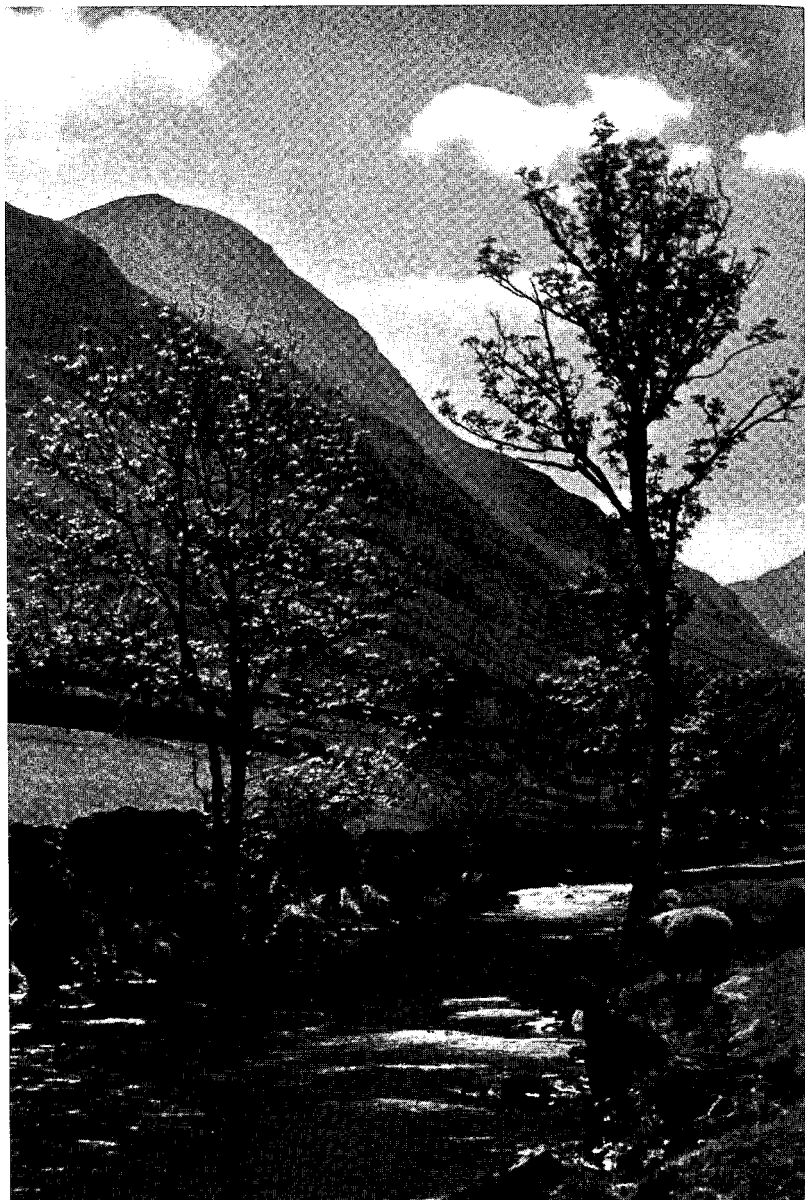
Pieper is at pains more than once to vindicate man’s status as a creature of both body and soul, again, because this comes from God’s creative act. God did not make us pure spirits, angels, and we do wrong to try to behave as such. In fact, in *Death and Immortality*, Pieper notes that St. Thomas refutes the argument that says “After death, in the state of bliss, the soul will finally be liberated from the body, and thereby will be similar to God, the Pure Spirit.” What does Thomas say to this? “The soul united with the body is more like God than the soul separated from the body”—and why?—“because it possesses its nature more perfectly.”

In *The Concept of Sin* Pieper takes up this theme once again with regard to the question of Christian ethics. He observes that with some

theologians, such as the Protestant Jurgen Moltmann, there is a notion of man as severed from his own created nature. “According to [this] interpretation, human existence now comes across to theology above all as man’s liberation from his own nature, effected by the grace of Christ!” But if man is “liberated from his own nature,” then the law of God and man’s sin are ultimately reduced simply to positive law, the will of God, which perhaps becomes the whim of God. In fact, however, “‘guilt before God’ simultaneously concretizes itself as a violation against what world and man are ‘because of creation’—which is why it is completely legitimate to say that every sin is ‘against nature.’”

As a philosopher, Pieper naturally has much to say about philosophy in his writings. But for one who could be considered a scholastic, his remarks on the subject might seem entirely too romantic: the philosopher is like the lover, philosophy has a special affinity with dying—in *Death and Immortality* he quotes Epictetus, “Let others study cases at law, let others practice recitations and syllogisms. You learn to die.” But he bases such statements, not in the musings of the German romantic philosophers, but above all in St. Thomas himself, whom he is always trying to rescue from an overdry and rationalistic interpretation.

All traditions have a tendency to dry up, and the great classical-medieval tradition is no different in that respect. One might say that all



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of Pieper's "thick little books" are efforts to keep that tradition alive, to show it in its many-sided richness, as well as to deal fairly with modern thought and, wherever possible, point out the congruence of modernity with tradition, a congruence often hidden under widely different terminologies and concerns.

In one sense Pieper is a popularizer. That is, he takes the thought of St. Thomas, of Plato, in fact, of practically the entire tradition and explains it, makes it accessible to the man of today. But while a popularizer he is never a simplifier, for he always insists on the full rigor and complexity of tradition, on its nuances, its paradoxes, its unexpected reconciliations. He wants to make sure that his readers do not merely pass over the classical or medieval texts without stopping, without being troubled, without having their secure attitudes challenged, in short, without opening themselves, even if just a little, to the Ground of being, to the Divine.

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*Political Apocalypse: A Study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor*, by Ellis Sandoz. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2001. \$24.95.

In its general outline, the author's thesis is altogether reasonable: the story of the Grand Inquisitor in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* adumbrates "messianic socialism" and "atheistic humanism" upon which "totalitarian-

ism" is bound to follow. The substitution of pleasant and peaceful living for freedom of spiritual choice ends in totalitarianism; the Grand Inquisitor rejects the option of free submission to God choosing instead his own grief, resentment, and a sense of bitter righteousness. Dostoevsky's narrative is compelling, and it leaves a lasting impression. This is what novels do: they suggest motivations and solutions, but in such a way as to invite interpretations that are never complete and always in need of another commentary or clarification. This is also why writers usually are reluctant to answer questions about the meaning of their works. When Leo Tolstoy was asked about the meaning of *Anna Karenina*, he answered curtly that the meaning is contained in the totality of words in the text, no more and no less.

But Sandoz goes further, and suggests that the Grand Inquisitor episode conveys a mystical insight into the nature of the political order and of human sinfulness, and that this insight is somehow connected with Dostoevsky's profession of a Russian model of Christianity. And here the problem begins. Literary texts cannot be approached as if they were voices from heaven conveying Christian eschatology. Sandoz treats *The Brothers Karamazov* as if it had been written by someone so pure of heart and so enlightened by the Holy Spirit that the reader can approach it with total trust, the way Holy Scriptures or at least the writings of the Church Fathers have been ap-