

Fr. Perozich comments —

When priests get together there is voiced an occasional criticism of certain clerics when they join the group, “Here comes the smartest man in the room.”

That fellow cleric is slow to hear, quick to speak, easy to dismiss others, has a solution for every situation, is self-imposing, and generally arrogant.

Usually such a cleric speaks of all the things of the world with great confidence and surety, and of God rarely except to appeal to divine authority for the cleric’s opinions.

The cleric needs a healing as Monsignor Pope states, [We must be cured of our infatuation for a world wholly explainable ...

Oddly, some of us Catholics still can be mesmerized by such a man. Others see right through him. We ourselves need to learn, yet always realize that we do not know everything, that we are still learning in humility.

Catholics have an intellect, a heart, and a will, all of which should be integrated to inform one another in order to direct the person to God.

God moves us in each of these. Monsignor Charles Pope cautions against relying solely on the intellect, rather calling us to deep prayer, to enter the darkness of not understanding through union with Jesus.

Pope cites great intellectuals such as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, Fr. Henri de Lubac,

Pope reminds us to be intellectual and humble together.

- Only the humility and silence of the mystical tradition can unlock its greatest potential: moving toward God in deeper wisdom and understanding.*

The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him (Habakkuk 2:20)

Need For The Mystical

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MSGR. CHARLES POPE



Our intellect is our greatest strength and one of our greatest blessings, yet almost nothing gets us into as much trouble. Our strength is also our struggle. **We think we know a few things, and indeed we do—a *very* few things.**

The greatest intellects, if they have wisdom and humility, know this. St. Thomas Aquinas famously said,

In finem nostrae cognitionis Deum tamquam ignotum cognoscimus. (At the end of our knowledge we know God as unknown.) (In Boetium de Trinitate, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1um)

Henri De Lubac, a great intellect of the twentieth century, lamented,

There is probably no thinking person today who does not feel the shallowness and impoverishment of a certain kind of intellectualism and the barrenness of a certain abuse of the historic discipline ... The dust and

*must of rational or positive criticism. ... We have believed in the light, [but] we are rather bad at finding it, perhaps because we have, in the end, sought it only in knowledge and **interest** (The Drama of Atheist Humanism, p. 85).*

I suppose by “interest” he means **self-interest**. That is, we have sought the light of truth not for its own sake, but for what it can do for us. De Lubac longed and hope for a

... return to the golden age of medieval thought, that of St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure ... **restoring the climate of mystery that was eminently the climate of patristic thought** ... relearning, if not the use, at least the understanding of symbols ... going back to the deep springs ... (Ibid).

And he advises,

[We must be] cured of our infatuation for a world wholly explainable ... (Ibid, p. 86)

And he warns,

As soon as man ceases to be in contact with great mystical religious forces, he inevitably comes under the yoke of a harsher force, which leads him to perdition. (Ibid, p. 90)

Indeed, welcome to the world of post-Christian secularism and atheism; usher in the tyranny of relativism, unmoored and drifting rapidly toward the abyss. Detached from God and the humility of mystery, we fall inexorably to our ruin, all the while arrogantly calling it progress.

As a final witness to the need for mystical silence before God, enter St. Bonaventure, whose feast we celebrated on July 15th. Although he was a dogmatic theologian of the highest rank and would later be declared a doctor of the Church, **St. Bonaventure held that our intellectual power, though always present, is inferior to that of the affections of our heart.**

We see these insights on beautiful display in the following excerpt from his writings, featured in the Office of Readings for

his feast day. As you read this, remember that St. Bonaventure was no anti-intellectual, just one who wisely and humbly recognized the limits of human thought.

Christ is both the way and the door A man ... should gaze at him hanging on the cross, full of wonder and joy, marked by gratitude, and open to praise and jubilation.

Then such a man will make with Christ a “pasch,” that is, “a passing-over.” Through the branches of the cross he will pass over the Red Sea, leaving Egypt and entering the desert. There he will taste the hidden manna ...

For this Passover to be perfect, we must suspend all the operations of the mind and we must transform the peak of our affections, directing them to God alone. This is a sacred mystical experience. It cannot be comprehended by anyone unless he surrenders himself to it. ...

Seek the answer in God’s grace, not in doctrine; in the longing of the will, not in the understanding; in the sighs of prayer, not in research; seek the bridegroom not the teacher; God and not man; in darkness not daylight; and look not to the light but rather to the raging fire that carries the soul to God with intense fervor and glowing love. The fire is God. ...

Let us ... enter into the darkness, silencing our anxieties, our passions and all the fantasies of our imagination ... saying: My flesh and my heart fail me, but God is the strength of my heart and my heritage forever. Blessed be the Lord forever, and let all the people say: Amen. Amen!

From The Journey of the Mind to God, by Saint Bonaventure, bishop (Cap. 7.1.2.6.6 Opera omnia 5, 312-313)

Once again, remember that St. Bonaventure was one of the great intellectuals of the Church and a great believer in doctrine. In this passage, his point is that doctrine without grace is just religious studies. Only by grace

and humble silence can we pierce the clouds and see toward the purer light that is God.

Yet even our correction, that the intellect must be humble and balanced by mystical reverence, itself must come with a “warning label.”

Refuting the cynical agnosticism and atheism of the day, De Lubac says,

Contempt for truth can never be ours. ... Our God is a hidden God indeed, but in himself he is light. “God is light, and in him there is no darkness” (1 John 1). So we refuse to make an idol of darkness (Op cit, p. 86).

We are not to be anti-intellectual. God reveals truths about Himself through creation and Scripture that can be known and must be insisted upon. But our acceptance of the darkness and the dark knowing of the mystical tradition is not an end in itself. For indeed the darkness will give way to the beatific vision, in which the glory of God will eternally unfold for us.

By the grace of faith, we know God, though for now, it is in a mirror darkly (*cf* 1 Corinthians 13:12); we should admit this fact humbly. One day the darkness will fade and we will behold the Lord face to face. Now we know in part; then more fully, even as we have been fully known (Ibid).

Yes, our intellect is both our greatest gift and our biggest stumbling block. Only the humility and silence of the mystical tradition can unlock its greatest potential: moving toward God in deeper wisdom and understanding.

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