

Witness to Faith: George Weigel, Blessed John Paul II, and the Theological Life

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ON 19 June 1948, a young Polish priest presented himself before a board of professors at the Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a Sancto Thoma Aquinate in Urbe—a place still commonly known as “the Angelicum.” He was about to defend his doctoral dissertation titled *Doctrina de fide apud S. Ioannem a Cruce*.¹ Doctoral defenses always occasion moments of anxiety. This *praeivium* inspired a special awe. The assembled board included some of the most distinguished theologians in Rome. Future cardinals Paul Philippe, O.P., and Luigi Ciappi, O.P., served as examiners.² They joined the institution’s most famous faculty member, Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.³ The premier French Thomist had directed the work of the

¹ The thesis was published in Italian in 1979: *La fede secondo San Giovanni della Croce* (Rome: Herder, 1979). It later was translated into English by Jordan Aumann, O.P., as *Faith According to Saint John of the Cross* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981).

² In his Preface to *Faith According to Saint John of the Cross* (13), Aumann notes the board’s composition.

³ “I [Wojtyła] wish to address the last word [of this Introduction] to the Very Reverend Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, who consented to direct the writing of this thesis, giving suggestions and guidance out of his own vast experience and learning” (*Faith According*, 29). Although readers may note in the dissertation insights from a variety of theological influences, one Wojtyła commentator has

young Father Karol Józef Wojtyła and was, as one author puts it, “his chief mentor both in Thomism . . . and in Catholic spirituality.”⁴

The legacy of the “*monstre sacré* of Thomism” entails its own complexity and questions.⁵ This evaluation should not surprise us. All are agreed that the early part of the twentieth century witnessed a tumultuous period for Catholic theology.⁶ To maintain objectivity during the heat of a controversy may prove difficult. More time must elapse before one can evaluate the form and matter of the “Garrigouvian” corpus, though some scholars have already begun to assess Garrigou’s significance.⁷ One thing can be said for

remarked that “the influence of Garrigou-Lagrange, however, remained paramount” (Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997], 35). This estimation is echoed by Michael Waldstein in his thorough introduction to the most recent English translation of John Paul II’s writings on the “Theology of the Body”: “Wojtyła resolutely takes the side of his thesis advisor Garrigou-Lagrange in the debate about the Mystical Doctor’s relevance for the life of ordinary Christians. . . . Wojtyła may have come to the same conclusions on his own by his reading of St. John of the Cross, but it is likely that Garrigou-Lagrange helped significantly to shape the core of John Paul II’s vision” (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* [Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006], 87).

⁴ George Hunston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II: Origins of His Thought and Action* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 93. Williams goes on to remark, “Among his professors [at the Angelicum] were Father Michael Browne (1887–1971), the Irish Dominican and promoter of the elevation of St. Catherine of Siena to the rank of *Doctor Ecclesiae*, and three other future cardinals, the Dutch Maximilien de Furstenberg, the French Carmelite [sic] Pierre-Paul Phillippe [sic], and the Italian Mario A. Ciappi. But surely the greatest figure of the Angelicum was the French-born Father Réginald (‘the Rigid’) Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. (1877–1969), the most distinguished authority in Christendom on Thomism in the tradition of the Leonine revival of the Angelic Doctor as the philosophical authority within the Church.” Although Williams’s book is a rigorous and engaging study of the intellectual strands of John Paul II, it erroneously claims that Cardinal Philippe was a Carmelite. The former Secretary of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (1967–73) was a Dominican theologian of the Province of France.

⁵ Richard Peddicord, O.P., *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2005), 2.

⁶ For an interesting summary of some of themes and figures see Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007). Also of help is John Auricchio, S.S.P., *The Future of Theology* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1970).

⁷ For example, Aidan Nichols, O.P., in *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2008), who coined the adjective “Garrigouvian” (93, 105).

certain: the convergence of three figures—St. John of the Cross, Karol Wojtyła, and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange—during an evolving period in Church history merits even today our close attention.⁸ We know, for instance, that the choice of a topic, namely, faith in the writings of the “Doctor Mysticus,” served Garrigou-Lagrange’s research purposes.⁹ The subject of faith and the location of the Thomist academy in Rome evoke certain comparisons. The Mystical Doctor himself grew up in the Thomistic atmosphere of the Spanish Salamanca School.¹⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange emphasized the centrality of faith to Catholic life and doctrine as a needed corrective to positivist views of the Church that had emerged from as early as the sixteenth century.¹¹ In fact, the French Dominican had himself written many pages on St. John of the Cross and he also had been in active support of John’s elevation to the dignity of “Doctor of the Church.”¹² As

⁸ It is interesting to note that Garrigou-Lagrange’s celebrated article “La théologie nouvelle, où va-t-elle?” (*Angelicum* 23 [1946]: 126–45) was published the same year that the young Father Wojtyła arrived at the Angelicum (Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II*, 96). See also Aidan Nichols, O.P., “Thomism and the *nouvelle théologie*,” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 1–19.

⁹ In regard to the topic, “Garrigou-Lagrange evidently influenced his [Wojtyła’s] choice of theme” (Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła*, 45). Williams agrees: “It would appear likely that Garrigou-Lagrange made the suggestion to Father Wojtyła to take up the problem of faith and its metaphysical status in order to supplement the earlier doctoral thesis done under him [Garrigou-Lagrange] in 1935 by Michel Labourdette, O.P.” (*The Mind of John Paul II*, 106).

¹⁰ “Although we have no definite information as to what lectures John followed during his year at the University [of Salamanca] as a *teólogo* . . . it seems certain that the young Carmelites attended the morning lectures given by [the Dominican theologian] Mancio [of Corpus Christi (1497–1576)] . . . for everyone at Salamanca talked of Mancio” (Bruno de Jésus-Marie, O.C.D., *St. John of the Cross* [New York: Sheed & Ward], 37). “Mancio was faithful to the spirit of his Order, as expressed in a General Chapter held at Salamanca in 1551, and a decree issued in 1561, which substituted, for University lectures, the *Summa Theologica* in place of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* . . . Mancio expounded this code of Thomism, article by article, in accordance with Cajetan’s commentaries” (Bruno, 38). For details on the life and thought of the remarkable Mancio of Corpus Christi, see Vincent Beltrán de Heredia, O.P., “El Maestro Mancio de Corpus Christi, O.P.,” *La Ciencia tomista* 51 (1935): 7–103.

¹¹ Cf. *De Virtutibus Theologicis: Commentarius in Summam theologicam S. Thomae Ia IIae q. 62, 65, 68, et IIa IIae q. 1–46* (Turin: Roberto Berruti & Co., 1949); loosely translated (in part) into English by Thomas a Kempis Reilly, O.P., as *The Theological Virtues: Volume One—On Faith* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1965). See also *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1943), 39–92.

¹² Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Christian Perfection and Contemplation According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co.,

we know, the fortuitous convergence of contingent realities cannot be attributed to causes like “luck” or “chance.” In the light of divine Providence, as Aquinas reminds us, no accidents occur.¹³ God indeed orders all things *suaviter et fortiter* (cf. Wis 8:1).

The young Polish priest passed his doctoral examinations with high marks. His written work, the thesis, received from his illustrious examiners eighteen beans out of a possible twenty. His oral defense was particularly exemplary. Father Wojtyła “received the highest grade possible, fifty marks out of fifty.”¹⁴ He returned to Poland and he began his first parish assignment in Niegowić. Father Garrigou-Lagrange continued teaching at the Angelicum for another twelve years, until he was reassigned to the Dominican priory at Santa Sabina in Rome. He remained there—gradually losing his mental faculties—until he died on the feast of the Dominican Rhineland mystic, Blessed Henry Suso, 15 February 1964.¹⁵

Many years later, on 14 September 1998, the same Father Karol Wojtyła, now reigning as Supreme Pontiff, gave the world his encyclical titled *Fides et Ratio*. In the introduction to that encyclical, John Paul II identifies a “reason why I write these reflections” and discloses the continuity between this and his earlier encyclicals. “In my Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, I drew attention to ‘certain fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine which, in the present circumstances, risk being distorted or denied’. In the present Letter [*Fides et Ratio*], I wish to pursue that reflection by concentrating on the theme of *truth* itself and on its *foundation* in relation to *faith*. For it is undeniable that this time of rapid and complex change can leave especially the younger generation, to whom the future belongs and on whom it depends, with a sense that they have no valid points of reference.”¹⁶ The contemporary reader wonders

1937). Jacques Maritain notes Garrigou-Lagrange’s support in his introduction to Fr. Bruno de Jésus-Marie’s *St. John of the Cross*: “Cf. *The Letter of Postulation* addressed, on June 14th, 1926, in the name of the Collegio Angelico, by Fathers Hugon and Garrigou-Lagrange, to the Sovereign Pontiff, with a view to obtaining the title Doctor of the Universal Church for St. John of the Cross, *Analecta O.C.D.* (October–December, 1926)” (Bruno, *St. John of the Cross*, 382, n. 21).

¹³ “Nothing hinders certain things [from] happening by luck or by chance, if compared to their proximate causes: but not if compared to Divine Providence, whereby ‘nothing happens at random in the world,’ as Augustine says” (ST I, q. 116, a. 1, ad 2).

¹⁴ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 87.

¹⁵ Cf. M.-B. Lavaud, “Le Père Garrigou-Lagrange: In memoriam,” *Revue thomiste* 64 (1964): 181–99; P. M. Emonet, “Un maître prestigieux,” *Angelicum* 42 (1965): 195–99.

¹⁶ *Fides et Ratio*, §6.

whether the motivation and roots of this unique encyclical can be traced back to the Pope's doctoral studies on the theological virtue of faith.¹⁷

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Sixty-two years after Wojtyła's oral defense and only five years after his death, the long-awaited second volume to George Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II was released.¹⁸ The timing, in God's providence, could not have been better. On 1 May 2011, Pope Benedict XVI beatified his predecessor. One now refers to the charismatic priest from Kraków as "Blessed John Paul II." The Church prays to him. It goes without saying that Weigel's monumental study of the "Millennial Pope" achieved a new standing, a high dignity, and a hagiographic value. What the late Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., said about *Witness to Hope* comes to mind: "If a choice had to be made among the biographies, Weigel would clearly win."¹⁹

From the perspectives of both quantity and quality, Weigel's overall efforts as papal biographer leave one breathless. The first volume, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, sold more than 700,000 copies worldwide in thirteen languages, and a fourteenth (Chinese) is on the way.²⁰ The book's success shows that Cardinal Dulles made the right evaluation. Indeed, another reviewer called *Witness* "the most important biography of the 20th century."²¹ The second volume, *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II—The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy*, hit the top-ten bestsellers list of the Association of Catholic Publishers.²² With the publication of these two volumes, Weigel has put himself in the rare position of being his only real competition. As one reader concludes: "Weigel's biography, in sum, is certainly the most authoritative the world is likely to get of one of the great figures of recent history."²³

What makes George Weigel's account of Blessed John Paul II so significant? The answer is simple. Weigel understands the centrality of faith. In

¹⁷ One commentator suggests that it is possible to read *Fides et Ratio* as "a vindication of Garrigou-Lagrange's lifework" (Pedicord, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism*, 220).

¹⁸ George Weigel, *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II—The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy* (New York: Doubleday, 2010).

¹⁹ Avery Dulles, "Witness to the Witness," *First Things* 97 (November 1999): 49.

²⁰ www.eppc.org/programs/catholicstudies/about/programID.16,pageID.260/default.asp.

²¹ Jonathan V. Last, "Old Man and the See: The Last Years of a Historic Papacy," *The Weekly Standard*, June 27, 2011, www.weeklystandard.com/articles/old-man-and-see_574831.html.

²² www.cbpa.org/images/BestsellersList-0111.pdf (accessed 30 September 2011).

²³ Mary Eberstadt, "The Cold War Pope," *Policy Review*, December 1, 2010, www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/58031.

other words, he tells the story of a man of faith as only a man of faith can tell it. Weigel took inspiration from his subject. As he himself reports: "Referring to other biographical efforts and their emphasis on his role as a statesman, Pope John Paul II once remarked, 'They try to understand me from the outside. But I can only be understood from inside.'" ²⁴ Breaking through the facile consensus that John Paul II was primarily (and perhaps only) an engaging intellectual and a political leader, Weigel insists that he was first and foremost a Christian. George Weigel enjoys the singular privilege of being the first to study, to know, and, then, to write about Blessed John Paul II "from the inside." Weigel's great service remains that he has told the Pope's story through the eyes of faith. When the Church declares one "Blessed," she does more than confer a post-mortem ecclesiastical honor on those who have remained faithful to a party line. Beatification signals a supernatural reality. And, as with all things supernatural, this reality requires faith both to recognize and to appreciate it. Only those who have the eyes to see are able to see. Weigel has shown himself stalwart in his commitment to recounting the life and times of Karol Wojtyła from a beatitudinal aspect. That is, he shows the Pope marching toward God. In a word, George Weigel "got" the late Holy Father.

One regrets that critics of both John Paul II and George Weigel easily disregard the significance of approaching John Paul II under the aspect of supernatural beatitude. However, a Dominican would aver that Weigel's achievement represents a triumph for a biography that now has become hagiography. To see with the eyes of faith remains essential to understanding both the Chair of Peter and Blessed John Paul II. "His faith is not one facet of his personality or one dimension of his intellect. His faith is Karol Wojtyła, at the most profound level of his personhood."²⁵ Because he lived as a true Christian believer, John Paul II exhibited a man transformed by the grace of God. In this way, the late Holy Father provided a tremendous, living example of what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes as the vocation of humanity, namely, "to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father's only Son."²⁶

To recall the foundational centrality of the *imago Dei* in what Aquinas calls the *sacra doctrina* introduces nothing new.²⁷ Indeed, we discover the doctrine of the image present at the very beginning of divine revelation:

²⁴ *Witness to Hope*, 7. This moving quotation is also repeated near the conclusion of its sequel, *The End of the Beginning*, 402.

²⁵ *Witness to Hope*, 10 (emphasis in original).

²⁶ See CCC 1877.

²⁷ See D. Juvenal Merriell, *To the Image of the Trinity: A Study in the Development of Aquinas' Teaching* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1990).

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” (Gn 1:26). Why does the *imago Dei* attain an important place within Catholic teaching? The answer depends on the soul’s intellectual nature and its ability to know and to love God. At its origins, the *imago Dei* analogously reflects within the human person the eternal pattern of knowledge and love that exists in God himself.²⁸ However, this “representative” image—in which the divine self-knowledge is imaged in the soul’s knowing and loving itself through its own essence—does not exhaust the potentialities of the image of God in man.²⁹ The immanent operations of the rational soul extend beyond the human subject. The human being created in the *imago Dei* is called not only to image God by a notional and volitional reflection, but also to image God by knowing and loving the same object as that of the divine knowing and loving itself. In short, man can know and love God himself. In this movement prompted by divine charity, the Thomist school, especially as elaborated by its commentators, locates the most perfect form of the *imago Dei* that one can attain. Thomists refer to this form as the image of conformity.³⁰

Taking into account the various concrete states in which the *imago Dei* can be identified, Thomists entertain a tripartite distinction. First, there is the *natural image*. This consists in man’s natural aptitude for understanding and loving God without sanctifying grace. Since the natural image belongs to the order of creation, all people possess it. Both saints and sinners alike bear the natural image of God. Secondly, there is the *image*

²⁸ ST I, q. 93, a. 5. For further commentary, see William J. Hill, O.P., *Proper Relations to the Indwelling Divine Persons* (Washington, DC: The Thomist Press, n.d.), 1–8. “Temporal things are so dissimilar from God that in knowing and loving them the human soul neither expressly resembles God, nor is it thereby conformed to Him. Yet, in knowing and loving itself the former of these two images is achieved. For here the soul is enabled to know and love itself through its own essence. . . . And in such is there found an analogical similitude of God’s eternal knowledge and love of Himself through Himself” (ibid., 5). “The likeness here obtained is an image only by an analogy of proper proportionality . . . there is a proportion between power, object, and term principled (in both knowledge and love) in the [human] one and the [Divine] Other” (ibid., 6).

²⁹ “More perfect than this image by analogy is that whereby the mind of man not only *represents* the Trinity of Persons, but has a real capacity to *conform* itself to Them” (ibid., 6).

³⁰ “For as the soul knows itself through itself, so is there a sense in which it is enabled to know God through Himself, as He is most intimately present to it as the source of its being. And in such there is shown the soul’s capacity, at least, for becoming a true image of conformity” (ibid., 7). See also ST I, q. 93, a. 8. and Romanus Cessario, O.P., *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 46–48.

of grace or the “supernatural image of God.” This is realized in wayfarers who—albeit imperfectly—know and love God actually or habitually while on earth. The image of grace flourishes only in the justified. In the just, the image no longer exists as an aptitude on the level of nature. There instead arises an actualization of the *imago Dei* by reason of the graced conformity to the divine pattern that develops under the impulsion of the divine premotion. Finally, the *image of glory* appears as the aptitudinal consummation in those persons who know and love God through the beatific vision. This completion belongs only to the saints in heaven.³¹ Pope John Paul II ranks among them, that is, among the blessed.

The full depth and implications of the *imago Dei* do not make themselves readily apparent. To appreciate fully the interlocking integrity and the tendential unity of nature and grace and glory requires theological faith. One may easily infer that the virtues—the acquired and the infused moral virtues, as well as the theological virtues—figure importantly in the Christian life.³² For only in light of these virtues does one recognize the *imago Dei* and only through them does the *imago* achieve its perfection on earth.³³

³¹ “Since man is said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is the most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature. Now the intellectual nature imitates God chiefly in this, that God understands and loves Himself. Wherefore we see that the image of God is in man in three ways. First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly, inasmuch as man actually and habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory. Wherefore on the words, ‘The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us’ (Ps 4:7), the gloss distinguishes a threefold image of ‘creation,’ of ‘re-creation,’ and of ‘likeness.’ The first is found in all men, the second only in the just, the third only in the blessed” (*ST I*, q. 93, a. 4).

³² See Steven A. Long’s “Obediential Potency, Human Knowledge, and the Natural Desire for God,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 37.1 (1997): 45–63. Long observes that St. Thomas “adduces obediential potency in the context of his answer to an objection concerning the very possibility of infused virtue [in *De virtutibus in commune*, a. 10, ad 13]. Just as earth and water have diverse passive potencies in relation to different active agencies, so human nature possesses a passive potency for that which can be achieved in it only through the active agency of God. It is this conception of obediential potency that expounds acts of infused virtue as truly acts of the human agent, without thereby implying that human nature can perform supernaturalized acts apart from divine aid” (45–46).

³³ For the implications of the *imago Dei* in the Christian sacramental life see Romanus Cessario, O.P., “Sonship, Sacrifice, and Satisfaction: The Divine Friendship in Aquinas and the Renewal of Christian Anthropology,” *Letter & Spirit* 3 (2007): 71–93.

George Weigel gets this. He displays a profound grasp of what God accomplishes for us in Christ. The dynamics of grace do not admit of a facile treatment. The papal biographer does not content himself with providing a mere narration of facts and dates. Indeed, in the final section of his two-volume work, he summarizes “the story of Karol Wojtyła’s Christian journey” by reading it through “the prism of the cardinal virtues as well as through the matrix of the theological virtues.”³⁴ Weigel gives the world a brilliant example of what the *Catechism* calls the “theological life”—“the life of faith, hope, and charity.”³⁵ In other words, Weigel demonstrates for us what it means to understand John Paul II from the inside. “Faith, hope, and love combined in Karol Wojtyła to form an exceptionally attractive human character and personality.”³⁶ Isn’t it true? The saints best show us the marvelous splendor of the Christian life. Blessed John Paul II affords no exception. “Grasping as much as we can of the person and accomplishment of Karol Wojtyła means beginning from the premise that the outside of Wojtyła’s life—the public accomplishment—was the by-product of the inside: his interior life, the life of the human spirit (and, he would say, the work of the Holy Spirit within him).”³⁷ In other words, Weigel shows John Paul II as a man transformed through and through by grace.

The theological character of Pope John Paul II’s life and person supplies the unifying thread that runs throughout the hundreds of pages that fall between the front cover of *Witness to Hope* and the back cover of *The End and the Beginning*. The last sentence of the final chapter of *The End and the Beginning* summarizes this motif with striking clarity: “Karol Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II, became the prophet of a new and genuine humanism—and changed the world—because he was a disciple: a radically converted Christian whose unshakable faith in Christ gave birth to a world-changing hope for a new springtime of the human spirit.”³⁸ Disciples of God are those who are conformed to the *disciplina* of the Lord. They are those who are informed by the *sacra doctrina*. Their lives follow the pattern originally found in the image of Christ. As Archbishop J. Augustine Di Noia, O.P., likes to remark: “The human person is created in the image of God in

³⁴ Weigel, *The End and the Beginning*, 417.

³⁵ “*Ordained ministers* are also responsible for the formation in prayer of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Servants of the Good Shepherd, they are ordained to lead the People of God to the living waters of prayer: the Word of God, the liturgy, the theological life (the life of faith, hope, and charity), and the Today of God in concrete situations” (CCC 2607, emphasis in original); see also 2686 and 2803.

³⁶ Weigel, *The End and the Beginning*, 414.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 402.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 517.

order to grow into the image of Christ.”³⁹ From a faithful adherence to this image arise both man’s freedom and his happiness.⁴⁰

When reviewing Weigel on Wojtyła, one may be tempted to frame one’s remarks around the question, *What did George Weigel do for Pope John Paul II?* To pose such a question would not prove helpful. Certainly, Weigel himself would shrink from responding to it. Nevertheless, we can say with confidence that Weigel has labored mightily to tell the truth—a truth whose grandeur is perceptible only to those who have eyes to see. To Dominicans, no accomplishment could appear more admirable. Weigel has revealed the Blessed Pope John Paul II to the world just as the Pope presented himself to the world. John Paul II emerges not as an international statesman or a charismatic leader who happened to say Mass daily. Rather, the life and legacy that the astute reader encounters in Weigel’s pages reveal a Christian disciple, a priest, and a bishop. We discover a man who shaped the last quarter of the twentieth century because of the theological character of his life. To recall what was said above, Weigel’s readers are encouraged to conclude that “the outside of Wojtyła’s life—the public accomplishment—was the by-product of the inside: his interior life.”⁴¹



The temptation exists to remove Pope John Paul II from the living circle of Thomism. The astute student of the Wojtyłan corpus admittedly encounters a unique body of writings; the Pope’s works address many

³⁹ See J. Augustine Di Noia, O.P., “*Imago Dei—Imago Christi*: The Theological Foundations of Christian Humanism,” *Nova et Vetera* 2, no. 2 (2004): 277. Di Noia summarizes St. Thomas’s teaching on the matter: “In the *tertia pars*, Aquinas arrives at the culmination of the theology of the *imago Dei* when he shows how Christ, the perfect image of the Father, is the principle and pattern of the restoration and the perfection of the image of God in us. All the mysteries of Christ’s life, but especially his passion, death, and resurrection, bring about the work of transformation in us by which the image of God, damaged by original sin and by our own personal sins, can be restored and perfected. Configured and transfigured in the *imago Christi* by the power of the Holy Spirit, we return to the Father, and come to enjoy the communion of Trinitarian life that is the essence of beatitude.”

⁴⁰ “In Jesus Christ and in his Spirit, the Christian is a ‘new creation’, a child of God; by his actions he shows his likeness or unlikeness to the image of the Son who is the first-born among many brethren (cf. Rom 8: 29), he lives out his fidelity or infidelity to the gift of the Spirit, and he opens or closes himself to eternal life, to the communion of vision, love and happiness with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (*Veritatis Splendor*, §73).

⁴¹ Weigel, *The End and the Beginning*, 402.

interpenetrating themes with roots in a variety of influences. We, however, should not ignore the Thomistic foundation of the Pope's thought.⁴² Steven A. Long has argued that "the whole 'meta-structure' of Pope John Paul II's teaching has been masterfully and profoundly Thomistic from beginning to end."⁴³ Perhaps one may duly apply what Jacques Maritain observed about St. John of the Cross to Blessed John Paul II: "St. John of the Cross is, in reality, both far more independent of St. Thomas, and far more in harmony with him, than they [who 'exercise their ingenuity in inventing conflicts of thought between those two doctors'] imagine. On the one hand, his intellectual formation, the philosophical and theological structure of his thought, owe so much to the scholastic tradition—and especially to the purely Thomistic tradition in theology—that, to obtain real understanding of the element of speculative knowledge in his writings, one should relate their essential principles to the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, as to their natural system of reference."⁴⁴ We hear another witness to the convergences between Carmel and the Order of St. Dominic.

During his 17 November 1979 visit to the Angelicum, Pope John Paul II walked to "Aula 11" where he had defended his doctoral thesis, and there he shared "some of the nostalgia which this special hall, the *aula minor*, woke in him: 'every Saturday—like today—we came to hear the lectures of Père Garrigou-Lagrange: a great theologian, a man expert in the spiritual sciences, who at over seventy years of age kept alive a surprising vivacity! A man . . . who showed by his living that he was

⁴² In his comments about the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Cardinal Dulles summarizes: "While encouraging recourse to the wisdom of Aquinas, John Paul II allows for a plurality of systems. Acceptable systems of philosophy, he believes, must share the metaphysical realism of St. Thomas, including his position on the natural knowability of the existence of God (§53). The Angelic Doctor is an authentic model for all who seek the truth and who wish to profit from revelation without demeaning the just autonomy of reason (§78)" (Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., "Can Philosophy Be Christian? The New State of the Question," in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003], 14). For further information on the Thomist foundations of Pope John Paul II, see Jarosław Kupczak, O.P., *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2000).

⁴³ Steven A. Long, "The Thomistic Meta-Structure of Pope John Paul II's Doctrinal Initiatives" in *Reason and the Rule of Faith*, ed. Christopher J. Thompson and Steven A. Long (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 29.

⁴⁴ Bruno, *St. John of the Cross*, xviii.

always teaching.”⁴⁵ This teaching exercised a strong influence on the young Polish priest. And this influence, no doubt, bore fruit in more ways than one during the long pontificate (1978–2005) that divine Providence accorded Pope John Paul II. Weigel offers a hint of an explanation as to why this might have been the case. He remarks that Garrigou was unique in that “unlike others in the professoriat, he was accessible to students, who were eager to get into his Saturday afternoon seminars on spirituality. Some of the young priest-students took him for their confessor, perhaps the highest compliment that one priest can pay another.”⁴⁶ The Pope did not forget the personal example of his old teacher.

Like all great and holy men, Pope John Paul II eludes facile description. How does one capture a phenomenologist who never rejected his Thomist bearings? Some may find the description paradoxical. Sage commentators like Rocco Buttiglione, however, find no moment for pause.⁴⁷ As a disciple of Christ entrusted with the keys of Peter, John Paul II recognized with perspicacious clarity the importance St. Thomas holds when it comes to safeguarding and communicating the *depositum fidei*. Little wonder. St. Thomas Aquinas, too, was a man whose life and teaching can best be described as theological. During the aforementioned visit to the Angelicum, John Paul II remarked that St. Thomas was “a master profoundly human because he was profoundly Christian, and precisely because profoundly Christian, therefore profoundly human.”⁴⁸ With Weigel’s adroit guidance, John Paul II emerges as someone equally human and Christian. He remains, as Cardinal Dulles predicted he would, “the principal witness to that witness.”⁴⁹

Mary Ann Glendon summarizes it well: “To interpret John Paul II ‘from the inside,’ however, requires a biographer with a rare combination of qualities. Such a person must be well grounded not only in Catholic

⁴⁵ *John Paul II at the Angelicum* (Rome: Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1980), 38–39.

⁴⁶ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 85.

⁴⁷ “It would perhaps be wrong to think in terms of an opposition between the doctrines of Garrigou-Lagrange and those of Wojtyła. Rather, we can see that the latter as a matter of principle tended to develop the subjective side of the problem, while seeing it not as autonomous but as tightly bound to the objective side” (Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła*, 47). Moreover, the more phenomenological approaches for which Wojtyła was always famous were decidedly Thomistic in grounding: “Wojtyła’s point of reference in his engagement with [Max] Scheler would always be St. Thomas Aquinas, yet Thomas understood through St. John of the Cross” (ibid., 48).

⁴⁸ *John Paul II at the Angelicum*, 46.

⁴⁹ Dulles, “Witness to the Witness,” 57.

thought, but in modern secular philosophies; politically sophisticated; independent of mind, yet able to 'think with the Church.' Happily, George Weigel . . . possesses all those qualifications plus a gift for explaining without simplifying that any theologian would envy."⁵⁰ We gladly join Ambassador Glendon's opinion. George Weigel deserves our deepest gratitude. He showed the world that only a man of faith can tell the story of a man of faith—"from the inside."⁵¹ **N-V**

⁵⁰ Mary Ann Glendon, "Review of New Papal Biography—Pope John Paul II: *Witness to Hope*," *L'Osservatore Romano* (Weekly Edition in English), 29 September 1999, 9.

⁵¹ The authors gratefully acknowledge the editorial assistance of Kevin Joyce, seminarian for the Archdiocese of Boston.