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In Search of the Whole: Twelve Essays on Faith and Academic Life

John C. Haughey, ed.
Georgetown University Press, 2011
\$29.95, 232 pages

Reviewed by Carl N. Still, St. Thomas More College

The present volume begins with a question generated from John Haughey's previous book, *Where Is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (2009): "What is the whole you are seeking to name, confect, be?" (p. ix). In an attempt to answer that question, *In Search of the Whole* enlists 12 academics and invites them to tell their own stories. Such storytelling is rare among academics, who are accustomed to staying concealed behind the text. Now as editor, Haughey notes, "Each [chapter] is an autobiographical account of an intellectual conversion. For some it is an account of a personal identity; for others it is an account of the whole they are trying to birth for the sake of others, for society at large" (p. x). This statement encapsulates the organizational principle of the book and the essence of each chapter.

The book is divided, then, into two parts—"Whole as Task" and "Whole as Identity"—each containing six chapters. Regardless of the part in which it appears, each essay features an autobiographical sketch of its author's professional attempts to achieve wholeness out of disparate elements. While this makes for absorbing reading, it sometimes results in lesser attention to the volume's other major theme—faith and academic life. One might also wonder about the diversity of the contributors. Ten of the 12 are either theologians or philosophers (seven and three, respectively), and eight name Bernard Lonergan as their principal intellectual inspiration. Were it not for four outliers—a "Hindu-Christian", a Teilhardian, an environmentalist, and a poet—the subtitle would have to be *Twelve Lonerganian Essays on Faith and Academic Life*.

On the positive side, Lonergan's thought unites the volume's disparate voices. Without repeating one another, authors elucidate the ways they have appropriated Lonergan's key concepts (e.g., "conversion," "self-appropriation," "authenticity," "emergence"). Of course, Lonergan is hardly a narrow thinker, and this leads to interesting ramifications. Patrick Heelan discerns "coherence" between Ignatian spirituality and Lonergan's concepts of "interiority and au-

thenticity” (p. 134), while Michael McCarthy finds contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor’s insights into modernity “complementary” (p. 161) to those of Lonergan. Cynthia Crysdale carves her own path as a feminist and student of Lonergan.

Even with 12 distinct trajectories, there are recurrent themes. Haughey characterizes the essays as “forays in the Catholic intellectual tradition” (p. 201). Now, it is impossible to ignore the 2,000-year history of that tradition, but one must also articulate how it continues to be vibrant and illuminating in a world enchanted by novelty. In his meditation on the “wisdom of Catholicism,” Richard Liddy illustrates his debt to a 1955 collection of classics by that title, even though he eventually transcended his youthful enthusiasm for the book. He subsequently comes to the conclusion that “wisdom not only existed in the past, but penetrates the present and the future” (p. 82).

There are moments, however, when the future is rhapsodized uncritically at the expense of the Catholic tradition. Lonergan wrote that modern culture “is not dedicated to perpetuating the wisdom of ancestors, to handing on the traditions it has inherited. The past is just a springboard to the future” (p. 82). It is odd that Liddy appeals to this statement to illustrate how the Catholic intellectual tradition has a “dynamic future.” As early as *Verbum* and again in *Insight*, Lonergan reminded us that we must first grasp what the *vetera* (ancient things) were before we can “augment and perfect the ancient things by the new things,” as Pope Leo XIII put it. William George observes that “[t]his is a huge challenge to Catholic institutions, and a challenge not always met” (p. 65). Indeed, the only sustained attention to the *vetera* appears here in Ilia Delio’s reexamination of Bonaventure’s Christocentrism, which finds a unity between creation and the incarnation as “the inner meaning of creation itself” (p. 115). She then proposes to find in Teilhard de Chardin a “complementary” Christology, where “Christ is the meaning of evolution” (p. 120). If the discovery of evolution requires Catholics to disregard the metaphysics in which Bonaventure’s theology was embedded, have the *nova* augmented, or displaced, the *vetera*?

Another theme both illumined and contested is environmentalism, with its emphasis on our continuity with nature. We are reminded that Pope John Paul II characterized the ecological crisis as a “moral issue” and “the responsibility of everyone” (p. 189). Among the authors here ambivalence about modern science becomes apparent: on one hand, “geologist” Thomas Berry (1914–2009) chided fellow Christians for failing to see the “religious value” of the scientific vision of the universe (p. 195). On the other hand, Christina Vanin captures well

the spiritual cost of modern science, evident when we think of the universe “as a collection of objects rather than a communion of subjects” (p. 191, quoting Berry), a nature “out there” that we merely observe (p. 190). The remedy is not more knowledge but a different *type* of knowledge, a change in consciousness from the kind that “others” whatever is different from ourselves (p. 192). Vanin points us to indigenous peoples for guidance in overcoming our “autism” with respect to nature; she could also have mined the Christian mystical tradition on this topic, though she does acknowledge it. At times, however, Vanin seems to go too far in following Berry, as when blithely equating the “passion of the Earth” with the passion of Jesus (p. 180). The poet Peter Steele seems better inspired when considering the “fact that we are so biform;” that is, we are very much part of the natural order, and yet we also “stand out” from all other creatures as the “wild cards of thought” (p. 172). Consequently, our experience of the world is at once familiar and strange, which Steele likens to how God is all around us but also “the stranger beyond strangeness” (p. 172). If Christians have spent too much time pondering the transcendent side of their “biform” nature, we must now take up the task of contemplating both sides at once. Favoring our immanence at the expense of our transcendence only makes the opposite mistake.

Notwithstanding enthusiasms that occasionally run too high, each of the essays is a carefully crafted gem. All 12 stand on their own, so that one can read the chapters in any order or select only those of thematic interest. Each charts a fascinating journey of an intellectual person of faith striving for a kind of wholeness that modern universities—even Catholic ones—do not provide ready-made. All of these authors, moreover, deserve our admiration for agreeing to become the subject of their own analysis and for assessing, often critically, their own “conversions.” If this seems potentially self-indulgent, I suggest an exercise: Try writing such an essay yourself. Anyone who takes up that challenge will likely find that these twelve essays offer fine models for those attempting that most ambitious, yet necessary, task for the Christian academic—to unite faith and intellect in a single life.

References

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