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In practice, [Saint Alphonsus Maria di] Liguori [1696-1787] also insists that we have the moral obligation to try to overcome doubt and ignorance. Charity demands that we search for the truth, and God's justice guarantees that we are able to do that by the light of natural reason.
— Michael Printy in The Catholic Historical Review¹

The great moral theologian, Saint Alphonsus, obligates the Faithful away from a “pay, pray, and obey” mentality toward an obligation of forming their own consciences. In other words, the Faithful are obligated to the intellectual life. As Psalm 63:3 puts it, *Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory.*

Psalm 63, as well as the readings from 1 Thessalonians and Matthew, are all available as a final capstone thought at funerals.² Chapters 6 through 9 in the Book of Wisdom are important for tracing the development of wisdom speculation and Wisdom-Christology.³ The life of the Church and the lives of her members wrap into an intellectual experience.

Wisdom 6:13 proclaims that wisdom *hastens to make herself known in anticipation of their* [those who seek her] *desire*. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Saint Paul observes *we shall always be with the Lord*. That is Wisdom, making herself known to the individual consciences of the Faithful. Saint Alphonsus teaches that once wisdom is found by way of individual conscience formation, wisdom is to be followed.

Wisdom 6:13 is also relevant to 1 Thessalonians 4:15 that the Lectionary translates *who are left until the coming of the Lord*. *Anticipation* and *coming* are the same Greek word. *Anticipation* is an occasional translation of the Greek in the Greek Septuagint, where it regularly means *to come*. Paul is equating the anticipation of Wisdom with the arrival of Jesus.⁴

¹ Michael Printy, “The Intellectual Origins of Popular Catholicism: Catholic Moral Theology in the Age of Enlightenment,” The Catholic Historical Review, Vol. XCI, No. 3 (July 2005) 452.

² N.a., International Commission on English in the Liturgy: A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and published by Authority of Pope Paul IV: Order of Christian Funerals: Including Appendix 2: Cremation: Approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1998) 220, 225, 232, 252, 309.

³ Richard A. Horsley, *Wisdom of Word and Words of Wisdom in Corinth, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (April 1977) 225.

What would Jesus do, thereby, becomes a reasonable query.

Saint Alphonsus defines conscience as “that faculty of reason which we apply to specific cases.”⁵ Individual conscience is the final criterion for judging. This means that the love of learning, fostered in the Book of Wisdom and hidden in the translation of Wisdom 6:15, is mandatory for the Faithful.

1 Thessalonians involves the intellectual life trying to understand the nature of time, an intellectual venture in itself. After finishing the explanation, 1 Thessalonians 4:17 concludes, *we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord.*⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:17 treats the process set under way with the death and resurrection of Jesus as present and experienced,⁷ the exact meaning of which is difficult to understand by Americans in the United States.

At a more basic level, eleven markers of textual difficulty appear in the best composite Greek text available. These markers call for the intellectual life in order to accept the Word of God. The notion and nature of time as found in Holy Scripture also demands intellectual life.

Philosophically, time is a measure of motion. In the ancient Middle East, when Jesus and the Thessalonians lived, this time was either imaginary or experienced.⁸ Imaginary time was either past or future, beyond what any living witness experienced. Imaginary time also included what did not actually exist.⁹ This division between imaginary and

⁴ Jeffrey S. Lamp, “Is Paul Anti-Jewish? *Testament of Levi* 6 in the Interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16,” *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 2003) 413.

⁵ Michael Printy, “The Intellectual Origins of Popular Catholicism: Catholic Moral Theology in the Age of Enlightenment,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. XCI, No. 3 (July 2005) 451.

⁶ Jeremy Corley, *The Pauline Authorship of 1 Corinthians 13*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 269-270.

⁷ Bruce J. Malina, *Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?* *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 15.

⁸ Bruce J. Malina, *Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?* *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 29 footnote 55.

⁹ Bruce J. Malina, *Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?* *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 14.

experienced time details what is difficult for those in the United States to comprehend.¹⁰ Negative or circumstantial evidence brings out the difficulty.

The New Testament mentions *this age* and *the age to come*, but nothing of ages or generations to come. Only in 525, did Dionysius Exiguus propose counting time from the birth of Jesus, i.e. the year of the Lord, or Anno Domini, or AD. The use of BC for Before Christ may only have begun with Bishop Jacques Bénigne Bousset (1627-1704), who first used it in 1781.¹¹ Bousset and Dionysius Exiguus are translating time as Jesus understood it into time as North Americans understand it. “Reverse engineering” is required to find the original meaning.

For the ancients, time was either experienced now or imaginary. There was no tension in ancient times between the “already but not yet” that grinds upon moderns.¹² In this way, when someone in the United States prays to live only in the present, without learning from experience, that prayer is a type of self-centered naval gazing.

For those in the United States, time is forward-looking, future oriented. For that reason, the Faithful in the United States have no problem believing in and waiting for the Second Coming of Christ. People in the United States look toward the future in everything they do. People in the United States do not expect to experience future time, now.

People in northern Europe regard time differently, namely as looking backward.¹³ For example, I told a native Greek friend of mine that people in the United States wonder why some will not forget the Civil War, since that war ended over a hundred years ago. My Greek friend observed that a hundred years is nothing. Europeans regularly remember and focus on things that happened five hundred years ago and more. For Saint Paul and the Thessalonians, the problem was no more than fifty years.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul is thinking through the promise that Jesus would come again in experienced time and the fact that some of the Faithful were experiencing death

¹⁰ Bruce J. Malina, *Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean? the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 8.

¹¹ Bruce J. Malina, *Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean? the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 2, footnote 5.

¹² Bruce J. Malina, *Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean? the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 9, 29.

¹³ Bruce J. Malina, *Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean? the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 25.

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before that arrival. 1 Thessalonians invites the Faithful to figure out the presence of Jesus within a context of time. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul is bringing together three accepted time-related strands of faith: (1) that the Faithful will die and rise again with Jesus; (2) that those who have already died will precede those still alive at the Second Coming; and (3) that the dead in Christ will die first.¹⁴ These Personal Notes have nothing to elaborate, as they move on to feminism.

The intellectual life in the contemporary world requires some consideration of feminism. Matthew 25:1-12 is one of ten New Testament accounts in which women are central. Eight are in Luke: 7:11-17, 36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 11:27-28; 13:10-17; 20-21; 23:27-31. Also, see Luke 4:25-26. Luke 30-21 corresponds to Matthew 13:33 and probably the Q document that scholars think Mark also relied upon.¹⁵ Through Matthew and Luke, all of Christianity is trying to deal with its own sexism. That requires continuing careful thought.

In the readings for this Sunday, the Gospel of Matthew, about the wise and foolish virgins, is about the requirement of the intellectual life for prudence. Matthew 25:7, about trimming lamps uses a Greek word whose derivation is *worldly*.¹⁶ The Gospel readings, thereby, endorse worldly prudence, such as that found in formal education. In contrast to Luke, Matthew places this parable as the last instruction near the end of the ministry in Jerusalem.¹⁷ It seems as if in his own conscience formation, Jesus is giving up on Jerusalem.

Luke 9:51-19:27, in contrast, presents this material well before Jesus begins his ministry in Jerusalem. Luke is relatively unconcerned about avoiding what is about to happen in the divine plan. In Luke, Jesus is warning the Pharisees. In Matthew 25:13, Jesus is preaching to his disciples in such a way that the Gospel is enticing the Pharisees to think about what is happening, *Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour*.¹⁸

¹⁴ John Kloppenborg, *An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula 1 Cor 15:3b-5 In Light of Some Recent Literature*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (July 1978) 360.

¹⁵ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 190, including footnote 335.

¹⁶ Stanley B. Marrow, *Κοσμος in John*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 95.

¹⁷ Francis D. Weinert, *Luke, the Temple and Jesus' Saying about Jerusalem's Abandoned House (Luke 13:34-35)*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 1982) 71.

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In Matthew 25:1, Jesus appears as a bridegroom, rather than the judge in Mark 2:19-20.¹⁹ A bridegroom is friendly and happy by nature. He is also thinking about understanding the new life upon which he is embarking. A bridegroom is in the process of expanding the family. Matthew is trying to include his Pharisees.

A judge, on the other hand is not particularly either happy or friendly. His thoughts are not about entering a new life. Nor is a judge expanding the family. Rather a judge cuts offenders away from family. Matthew and Luke exemplify different results in their intellectual lives. The Faithful should expect similarly different results.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, Paul, like Matthew, is trying to include Israel. Paul thinks that if Israel turns around to accept Christianity, the end will be at hand. The purpose of God showing his love for humanity is to love his Chosen People.²⁰ The Faithful require thought to understand and accept the love of God.

As Wisdom 6:12 and 15 put it, "Resplendent and unfading is wisdom...For taking thought of wisdom is the perfection of prudence." Matthew illustrates taking thought of wisdom. In relating the parable of the virgins, Matthew describes the life of Jesus from his perspective. Perhaps Matthew was an old Jewish rabbi, dedicated to studying the Word of God in Sacred Scripture, trying to bring his Pharisee brothers into Christianity. In this, Matthew is like those in the Black Apostolate, trying to reach out to racists, for the Gospel of Matthew teaches that the Church is composed of many different kinds of people (Matthew 13:47-50; 25:1-13, 14-30).²¹

Matthew wants the Pharisees to think for themselves and not simply follow a herd mentality continually condemning themselves as they condemn Jesus. The Pharisees to whom Matthew reaches out condemn themselves by refusing to think through what they are doing according to the principles laid down eighteen hundred years later by Saint Alphonsus.

¹⁸ Francis D. Weinert, *Luke, the Temple and Jesus' Saying about Jerusalem's Abandoned House (Luke 13:34-35)*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 1982) 71.

¹⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, "Interpreting the Parables of Jesus: Where Are We and Where Do We Go from Here?" *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No 1 (January 1991) 55, 77.

²⁰ Murray Baker, "Paul and the Salvation of Israel: Paul's Ministry, the Motif of Jealousy, and Israel's Yes," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 2005) 479.

²¹ Daniel C. Olson, "Matthew 22:1-14 as Midrash," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No 3 (July 2005) 444.

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For more on sources see the Appendix file. Personal Notes are on the web site at www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes.