Donald A. Gallagher

Appendix

Message to the American Maritain Association and the Canadian Jacques Maritain Association

This message to my fellow members of the American Maritain Association and my colleagues in the Canadian Jacques Maritain Association comes to you from Rome, where I am a press representative at the Episcopal Synod. With regret, I note that this is the first meeting of the AMA I have missed since its founding in 1977. I wish to say a few words on the question: what path should we as Associations, or as “little flocks,” pursue in the years to come?

The pathways are various. One path is an obvious dead-end: that of following Maritain literally and almost slavishly, a path leading to idolization. Our decade of work shows that this poses no danger to us, but it must be borne in mind as a temptation. At the other extreme is the path of merely honoring the name of Maritain, but treating current trends of thought with little or no reference to his principles and methodology. Again, there is no real danger to us in this, but it is a more insidious path.

A praiseworthy pathway is one of being a relatively small professional society dedicated to the study and propagation of Maritain’s thought. In effect, this is what we have been and are, but we should aim at something more. It may well be what we do best, but we should constantly re-examine this objective and judge whether it suffices.

Sometimes I reflect that, in this age of intellectual crisis, we are called upon to be prophets as well as strict philosophers. Maritain was a prophet as well as a philosopher; rather, his Christian philosophy embraces a prophetic dimension. There is an affinity between Maritain the youthful in Antimoderne and Maritain the elder in Le Paysan de la Garonne. We all know that he recognized the historic gains in our present age, but did not hesitate to expose and criticize its failings. Are we not called upon to be prophets and not merely academics?

In this brief message, I would not dream of presenting my idea of what
the right pathway for us to tread is. I wish to hint at something, following
the lead of Maritain. He speaks of the need of Ontosophy, embracing the
ethical and metaphysical orders. (His word, "ontosophy," if I may borrow
an expression from Charles S. Peirce, is one safe enough from kidnappers.
It signifies Maritain's determination to break out of old formats and to ex-
press something new.)

Jacques Maritain teaches us to ascend to and embark upon the High
Road, as well as to pursue the little way.

The High Road, as I use the expression, signifies the immense task of
reconstructing the social order and building a New Christendom (Integral
Humanism) and of the renewal and development of Christian Philosophy.
Sometimes, Maritain speaks as though almost nothing has been done
regarding these objectives, the accomplishment of which he recognizes is
bound to take generations. However, he does not disdain the little way or
ways, the path of doing our best in our own local setting. Indeed, he
praises the little way; it is what his own Little Brothers of Jesus do. Is it not
what his own "little groups" or "little flocks" do?

Who is to say that the little way most if not all of us follow does not, in
some obscure way, lead to what I called the High Road? These paths are
not exclusive of one another. Our question remains: what should our task
or our path be as a group or as a society? What can and should we do that
would effect more than our own individual efforts?

As I said above, I would not presume to answer such a question in a
short allocution. Let me adopt a lesson or formula I learned long ago in
high-school mathematics. Even the little group bears within itself enor-
mous potentialities for dialogue or encounter. If every person in a group of
100 members met one-on-one or formed a pair with every other member,
there would be 4,950 pairings and thus potential authentic dialogal one-
on-one encounters. Out of this stunning potential, something actual,
something actually splendid, should be enacted. I put the matter this way
because we are so often discouraged in the face of gigantic difficulties in-
volved, in the task of renewal on a global basis—for example, in coping
with entrenched errors and in laboring at reconstruction or at what I call
instauration. It is encouraging to reflect that even the "little flock" (again,
as Maritain is fond of calling it) is capable of achieving something of last-
ing importance. No doubt, we intend more than we are able to accomplish,
but we also accomplish more at times than we intend.

Best wishes to my friends in the CJMA and the AMA!

Rome, Italy: October 31, 1987
Contributors

Mortimer J. Adler is Chairman of the Board of Editors of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Director of the Institute for Philosophical Research, and author of over forty books: from *Dialectic* through *The Idea of Freedom* to *Intellect: Mind over Matter and The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth* (tentative title), both forthcoming from Macmillan.

George Anastaplo, subject of the celebrated Supreme Court decision *In re Anastaplo* (1950–1961), is Professor of Law at Loyola University of Chicago and longtime member of the Liberal Arts Adult Education Program at the University of Chicago. His most recent book is *The Constitution of 1787*.

Otto Bird is founder and former Director of the Liberal Studies Program at the University of Notre Dame, former Editor of *Great Ideas Today*, and author of *The Idea of Justice*.

Joseph J. Califano is Professor of Philosophy at Saint John’s University (Jamaica, NY), and has published articles in the *Thomist*, Asian and European scientific journals, and for the Department of Energy.

Raymond Dennehy is Professor of Philosophy at the University of San Francisco and the present President of the American Maritain Association. Author of *Reason and Dignity*, he has written widely on ethics and metaphysics, and has frequently participated in televised debates on abortion and related matters.

Desmond J. Fitzgerald is Professor of Philosophy at the University of San Francisco and a former Research Fellow for *The Idea of Freedom*. He assisted in editing Yves R. Simon’s *Freedom of Choice*.

Donald A. Gallagher is President of the De Rance Foundation, President Emeritus of the American Maritain Association, and co-author, with his wife Idella, of the definitive Maritain bibliography, *The Achievement of Jacques and Raissa Maritain*.

Catherine Green is author of “The Nature of Moral Action: An Examination of Yves R. Simon’s Metaphysics of Morals” (M.A. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1987) and is presently completing her doctoral work on Simon’s ontology of knowledge.
John A. Gueguen is Professor of Political Science at Illinois State University. He has published various articles dealing with the applications of political science to contemporary issues, and is editor of the recently released *The Good Man and Society; Active Contemplation: Essays in Honor of Gerhart Niemeyer*.

John Hellman, Professor of History at McGill University, has authored books on Simone Weil and Emmanuel Mounier and the introduction to the revised edition of Yves. R. Simon’s *The Road to Vichy*.

John P. Hittinger, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the College of Saint Francis (Joliet, IL), has published articles in *This World and Social Justice Review*, and is presently working on a book on twentieth century Catholic philosophers.

David T. Koyzis is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Redeemer College (Ancaster, Ontario), and author of “Towards a Christian Democratic Pluralism. A Comparative Study of Neo-Thomist and Neo-Calvinist Political Theories” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1986).

Marianne Mahoney, Adjunct Associate Professor of Political Science at Elmhurst College and Lecturer in Philosophy at Loyola University of Chicago, is currently doing research for a book on contemporary democratic theory based on the Thomistic notion of prudence.

Matthew J. Mancini, Associate Professor of History and Philosophy at Mercer University, has published articles and reviews in *The Journal of Negro History, The Journal of Southern History*, and *Notes et Documents*, and is the co-editor of *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*.

Ralph McInerny is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, Director of the Jacques Maritain Center there, and Editor of *The New Scholasticism*. One of his most recent books is *Art and Prudence: Studies in the Thought of Jacques Maritain*.

Robert J. Mulvaney is Professor of Philosophy at the University of South Carolina and editor of Yves R. Simon’s *Practical Knowledge*, forth-coming from Fordham University Press.

Ralph Nelson, Professor of Political Science at the University of Windsor, is presently co-translating Jacques Maritain’s *Neuf leçons sur les notions premières de la philosophie morale*.

Michael Novak is George F. Jewett Scholar in Religion, Philosophy, and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute (Washington, DC),
and was Professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame in the fall of 1987 and of 1988. Among his most recent books is *Free Persons and the Common Good*.

**Robert Royal** is Director of Catholic Studies at the Ethics and Public Policy Center (Washington, DC). His articles and reviews have appeared in various publications, among them *The National Review* and *The American Spectator*.

**Michael D. Torre**, a former instructor in the Great Books program of Saint Mary’s College (Moraga, CA) and a contributor to the American Maritain Association’s previous volume on Maritain, is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of San Francisco.

**S. Iniobong Udoidem** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and author of *Authority and the Common Good in Social and Political Philosophy*.

**John Van Doren** is Executive Editor of *The Great Ideas Today* and Fellow of the Institute for Philosophical Research.
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Mortimer J. Adler


Jacques Maritain


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