
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 kidnapers. It signifies Maritain's determination to break out of old formats and to express 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 enormous 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 involved, 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 lasting 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

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