

The Maritain Notebook

NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN MARITAIN ASSOCIATION / VOLUME 22, ISSUE 2 / November 2023

President's Remarks

In an entry to his *Notebook* for 1908, the twenty-five year old Jacques Maritain wrote this: "This same Sunday I resolved to abandon all 'personal inquiry' in philosophy, all desire to know by myself, being sure to know everything essential and everything necessary by the Word of God, and trusting for the rest on the blessed night of faith." Looking back on this a half century later, though, the more mature Maritain explains, "At this time I thought that the essential task of philosophy was to refute error. I have made headway since, I have understood that refutation is only a secondary task, and one most often fruitless and useless (and which has so harmed Thomism). One must not refute, but 'enlighten' and forge ahead."

These insights are particularly pertinent for the topic of our conference in April, democracy. Given its foundation in the popular will, democracy will always appear to be imperiled when one side rises to the top and the other side sees in its own decline the failure of democracy itself. The very structure of democracy makes it a fertile womb for Cassandras who foretell the end of freedom.

This dynamic is evident in philosophy, too. In recent years there have been ample criticism of democracy from both the right and the left. But even when these criticism hit their mark—as many do—this criticism, as Maritain notes, is only a secondary function of the philosopher. Indeed, to criticize without offering a corresponding solution can be seen



as a nihilistic practice, one so pernicious as to drive the young philosopher to fideism.

On the other hand, the primary function of the philosopher—to enlighten, to forge ahead—is a much more difficult task. One is reminded of the dictum from Chesterton, "The Reformer is always right about what's wrong. However, he's often wrong about what is right." All too often, those with the most powerful critiques of democracy offer in its place an unsavory counterfeit of true political communion. Thus, it is easy to criticize the conspicuous problems of democracy, while to grasp the real genius of democracy, and to be able to thereby improve it, is a rare intellectual achievement.

We can be thankful that Maritain outgrew his aversion to philosophy and returned to the fray, for his analysis balances a critique of problematic manifestations of democracy with a forceful articulation of the grounding of authentic democracy.

A preeminent example of this is found in *Scholasticism and Politics*. These essays are derived from lectures given in the autumn of 1938—a point at which democracy was challenged as never before. Even in such dire times, Maritain saw that a constructive philosophy could be the basis for great hope while simultaneously carrying on the secondary critical task: "To my mind, it is through a sound philosophy of the person that the genuine, vital principle of a new Democracy, and at the same time of a new Christian civilization, can be rediscovered; and this involves an extensive work of purification of the ideas that the world has received from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." But he also understood that discovering the philosophical principle was only the start of the battle, for democracy "is a concrete historical ideal which still needs many centuries of human education before it will take on all its dimensions in history."

Eighty-five years have passed since Maritain wrote that. Generations have been blessed with great wisdom about democracy from Maritain and many others. But have we come closer to achieving the historical ideal? I leave that to be discussed when we gather in Rochester.

See below for the CFP.

James Jacobs, President

Other News and “Housekeeping”

Exciting Maritain news from the UK!

Beggars for Heaven: The Inheritance of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain

*The Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge, UK
Wednesday 13 March 2024*

For registration information, see the AMA website

A day conference open to scholars, students, lay and religious; to appraise and promote the spiritual and intellectual legacy of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain. There is considerably less Maritain awareness in the UK than in the US or mainland Europe, so this event is a landmark. Now more than ever, their voices are a clarion call to truth and wisdom, and their profound witness to the mission of the laity stands as an example of saintly lives lived in the pursuit of beauty and goodness. Stay tuned for more details: conference advertising, registration and a call for papers will appear shortly. We're delighted to confirm our keynote speaker—AMA's very own John Trapani!

The conference is largely self-supporting, with costs partially met by registration fees. There are, however, additional costs; and in a spirit of generosity and hospitality so characteristic of Jacques and Raïssa, we would love there to be no cost to graduate students.

Can you donate to the conference? If so, a link to our conference donations page is provided below. A small amount from many folk will go a long way. Thank you, in grateful anticipation (and to those who have already done so). For more information:

<https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/23968>

In the meantime, do get in touch for more information about the conference, or any other Maritain-related matters the other side of the pond.

Dr. Christopher Grey

christopher.grey1@outlook.com



Secretary's Corner

The podcast project is still *in media res*. For the sake of planning and dividing labor, we will discuss this at the next meeting in greater detail. In the meanwhile, if you think that you would like to help me with this, I would appreciate communication to this end!

Please send in details about publications and talks that you have given recently. I would like a fuller list from members before including this in the newsletter.

As always, too: Don't forget to pay your dues (under “membership” at americanmaritainassociation.com). Have a great reminder of your fall term!

Matthew MinerD

webmaster.maritainassociation@gmail.com

Maritain in the 21st Century

Former AMA president Michael Torre shared information he received regarding the “Maritain Siglo XXI” project in Spain. More information can be found at www.maritainsigloxxi.com, as well as on Facebook and X (Twitter).

“All these things—the immense universe of nature and culture, the rhythm of the formation and gravitation of the stars, the vast temporal flow of history—were undoubtedly required for the Incarnation to take place, and for Christ to gather His mystical body around Him. However, against the backdrop of the events that make up the history of the cosmos and of human culture, the Word made flesh and His Church appear, as expressed by Maritain, ‘as a disproportionate, metahistorical goal, freely over-ordained from above, and taking from history, with divine discretion, only what is necessary for them.’ It is, as it were, by chance that the Word was born in Bethlehem. There was no room for Him either in Caesar Augustus’ plans, nor in the inn. Two poor people, a few shepherds, and a host of angels are the first fruits of his kingdom. The Church’s theology must not ‘forget the stable in Bethlehem’; it must shatter all dreams of spiritual imperialism from the outset.”

– Charles Journet, *L'église du verbe incarné*, vol. 2

CALL FOR PAPERS

THE 47th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN MARITAIN ASSOCIATION
Thursday, April 11 to Saturday, April 13, 2024
Hosted by the St. Bernard's School of Theology, Rochester, NY

§ Maritain on Democracy: Promise and Peril; and, Commemorating the 750th Anniversary of St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas §

Program Committee: James M. Jacobs (President), James M. Murdoch (Vice-President and Program Chair), Matthew Miner (Secretary and Web Editor), Francisco Plaza (Treasurer), Travis Dumsday (General Editor)

Jacques Maritain once observed that “the tragedy of modern democracies is that they have not yet succeeded in realizing democracy.” He understood that because democracy “has arisen in human history as a temporal manifestation of the inspiration of the Gospel,” it is the best political vehicle for realizing the common good of persons. Nevertheless, he also knew that in many of its historical manifestations, a “delusive” and “anarchic” democracy acts instead as the greatest impediment to the common good.

The gulf separating the ideal of democracy from its concrete practice in the contemporary world continues to be a problem inviting philosophical reflection. We invite papers considering Maritain’s analysis of democracy (including, too, the work of his students, such as Yves Simon and Mortimer Adler) in both its promise for advancing the human person, and its peril in inculcating a materialistic relativism. We also welcome papers approaching these problems from any philosophical perspective that complements and enriches our understanding of the issues.

We also invite papers on a **secondary theme**. This conference coincides with the 750th anniversary of the deaths of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure in 1274. These “two glorious doctors...illustrious teachers...with surpassing genius,” in the words of Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris*, remain touchstones of the Catholic philosophical and theological tradition. Any paper considering their achievement and continued influence is welcome.

The plenary sessions will reflect the dual theme of the conference. Celebrating the work of St. Bonaventure will be **Junius Johnson** (Executive Director, Junius Johnson Academics) and **Timothy Noone** (Catholic University of America). Addressing the issue of democracy will be **David J. Walsh** (Catholic University of America) and **Russell Hittinger** (Catholic University of America, University of Tulsa, and the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology).

Please send proposals of up to 500 words to Dr. James Murdoch at james.m.murdoch@villanova.edu by January 1, 2024. Final presentations should be 25-30 minutes in length.

The AMA has a longstanding book series arising out of its annual conferences, with volumes published in partnership with Catholic University of America Press. All accepted

submissions will later be eligible for inclusion in the resulting peer-reviewed volume. There is a \$250 prize *and* a guarantee of publication for the best graduate student paper; to be considered for the graduate student prize, please submit your complete paper by January 15, 2024.

The conference registration fee is \$125 (\$50 for students). The optional conference banquet is an additional \$60. Membership in the American Maritain Association is \$75 (\$35 for students). We encourage online payment by March 15, 2024. Registration after that will be \$185.00 (\$75.00 for students).

For more information, visit www.americanmaritainassociation.com.

Several Other Announcements

For Interested Parties

C. S. Lewis Society Bay Area Book and Film Club

Meets bi-weekly Wednesdays, 7 pm Pacific

Wednesdays, November 15 and 29: [Orthodoxy](#), by G. K.

Chesterton; leader/moderator, [José Yulo, Ed.D.](#)

WHEN and WHERE:

7:00 p.m.: 100 Swan Way, Oakland, CA 94621; 510-406-3266 phone

RSVP: 510-635-6892; info@lewissociety.org

Refreshments served

OR JOIN US VIRTUALLY:

Zoom is available as a free download: <https://zoom.us>

The link for the November 15th discussion is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83510268609?pwd=M1FkVngxdkp8rM2RVaWZQcU1PVUNicUT09>

Meeting ID: 835 1026 8609

Passcode: 110207

Summer Residency hosted by the Hildebrand Project

The Residency takes place July 1-9, 2024, at Franciscan University of Steubenville, and is free to attend for all accepted participants.

The Residency is an intensive program for advanced students and scholars working on MA theses, Ph.D. dissertations, habilitations, books, chapters, or scholarly articles principally focused on Hildebrand or substantively engaged with his thought. We are especially interested in supporting research that has never been publicly presented.

The Residency is not limited to those working exclusively on Dietrich von Hildebrand. We welcome applications from students and scholars working on kindred spirits, like Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel, or on any thinker or set of issues, provided that the work in progress includes Hildebrand as a substantive interlocutor or meaningfully engages the personalist tradition.

Residency participants will have the opportunity to work closely with Hildebrand Project Senior Scholars, Dr. John F. Crosby, Dr. Josef Seifert, and Rocco Buttiglione, each of whom was a student of either Dietrich von Hildebrand or Karol Wojtyła.

The application and travel scholarship deadline is January 31, 2024. For more information and how to apply, please visit <https://hildebrandproject.org/event/summer-residency-2024/>.