

The Catholic Imagination

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INTRODUCTION

First of all, what this paper is not: This is not a paper that will analyze the works of Catholic writers. This journal is not the proper venue for that. Too, this is not a study of the doctrinal and propositional Church we call Catholic. Again, this journal is not the venue for that. Instead, I want to present a conceptual framework, an aesthetic theory, if you will, of a particular imagination I'd like to describe as Catholic.

After this little "housecleaning," I'd like to begin by diagnosing the illness of our secular society. (Later, I shall introduce an approach that I discovered—or rather re-discovered—which might allow us to heal the illness.) I use the metaphor of illness because I believe our secular society is sick. We need no special talent to be convinced of this condition. The symptoms of this sickness can be found everywhere. Every time you turn on the radio, or browse the newspapers, or flick on the TV set, you find yourself assaulted by a daily goulash of incestuous rapes, murders, drug-related crimes, fraternity-related violence, bombings, kidnappings, graft and corruption, and so on and so forth, the catalogue of abuses is legion. Every one of us is convinced that the planet is gravely ill and needs healing—on a grand scale. Few of us know exactly where the problem lies.

Some years ago, the novelist Saul Bellow, noting a sense of loss of meaning and purpose in contemporary thinking, remarked in his 1976 Nobel Laureate speech: "We do not think well of ourselves; we do not think amply about what we are" (Smith 96). Are the symptoms mentioned above a bearing out of Mr. Bellow's statement? A year ago, the *Diliman Review* (Vol. 47, No. 1, 1999) came out with a cover of an illustration of a man sitting on a toilet bowl. After I went over

the contents, I was convinced no irony was intended. The writers behind it were simply not capable of irony. Perhaps this is a bearing out of Mr. Bellow's statement.

What caught my attention about the speech, however, was what Mr. Bellow had added: "The intelligent public is waiting to hear from Art what it does not hear from Theology, Philosophy, Social Theory, and what it cannot hear from pure science: a broader, fuller, more coherent, more comprehensive account of what we human beings are, who we are, and what this life is for" (Smith 2). In other words, the intelligent public had given these channels of inquiry a chance and had found them wanting. It had no other choice left but to try the artists. In 1976, Mr. Bellow gave the artists their Great Opportunity.

It is my contention that our artists—our wordsmiths in particular—have disappointed the intelligent public. Instead of creating for us responsible work informed by profound thought and extensive research, instead of concerning themselves with the more serious ethical, social, and spiritual concerns (Turner 14), the majority of our writers are too busy admiring each other, congratulating each other, awarding each other, anthologizing each other, masturbating each other. Few have been brave enough to articulate ways and means that will lead us out of the labyrinth.

Academicians have not fared well either. Academics of our time are still oblivious of the limits of academic jargon. Indeed, academic writing these days has become unreadable even to the educated. The writing is full of conceit (passing for so-called intellectual labor) yet so lacking in substance (Skolimowski xi). We have not been responsible. True, new social and critical theories have proliferated as rapidly as the problems have appeared, yet very few of these have reached out to address basic mainstream problems. This is even worse than what Karl Popper calls the "Myth of the Framework," where we move and act like prisoners trapped in the framework of our own theories so that communication with others of different frameworks become virtually impossible ("Popper, Karl," *Oxford Companion*, 702f). Today, academicians have become addicted to their own frameworks and expect others to become addicted too.

Indeed, we do not think well of ourselves, and because of this the public has had no choice but to turn to a new genre of alternatives

that offer pat solutions—from pop psychology and New Age pap to Amen-Amen Bible bangers—which have only exacerbated the problems. We cannot blame the public. If artists and academicians have not taken their jobs seriously, where else would the public go?

The problems of our secular age call for a deeper solution that cannot be accomplished by pop alternatives on one end or boring academic treatises on the other. The secular vehicle has lost its soul. It wants to be ensouled again. Theology, Philosophy, Social Theory, and Science have failed to deliver. I present this paper with the intent of doing two things: (1) of giving Art another shot at ensouling the secular vehicle, and, before it does that, (2) of ensouling Art with the Catholic imagination. This is the focus of the present work.

Why Catholic? The question is pertinent, especially if asked in the light of the observation of two writers: George Steiner and Walker Percy. Steiner observes that postmodern culture is post-theological. According to Steiner, postmodern culture has become immune to the Catholic vocabulary because the words have exhausted themselves (Cunningham, *The Catholic Heritage*, 143).

Walker Percy amplifies the observation: “The Christian novelist nowadays,” he writes, “is like a man who has found a treasure hidden in the attic of an old house, but he is writing for people who have moved out to the suburbs and who are bloody sick of the old house and everything in it” (Cunningham, *The Catholic Heritage*, 143).

Both Steiner and Percy observe correctly, but they observe incompletely. Let me explain:

I think these objections have arisen because both writers and the general public have tended to equate Catholicism with doctrines and laws, these two things being natural built-ins of any given institution. What is appealing about Catholicism, however, is not found in its propositional component. Catholics remain Catholics or return to Catholicism because of its predoctrinal emphasis on the sacramental, the baroque, and the comic-narrative imagination. I cannot conceive of Catholic artists, for example, like Gerard Manly Hopkins, James Joyce, Flannery O’Connor, Graham Greene, Gregorio Brillantes, Renato E. Madrid, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola,

Roberto Benigni (“Life is Beautiful”) and many others who write of Catholic themes if Catholicism were only doctrines and laws. Their relationship to Catholicism may be inert in some, overt in others, but the imprint is there. Catholic symbolism permeates their works. When poets John Berryman, Allen Tate, and Robert Lowell converted to Catholicism, they did not do so because its doctrines and laws attracted them. They embraced Catholicism because in their search for new metaphors, they found abundance. Yes, it is the imaginative component they found attractive; no, it is not the propositional that inspired them.

So when I speak of Catholicism—and religion—I refer not to the institutional religion but rather to the primordial/original meaning of religion which is a set of symbols which attempt to provide us a “meaning system” (Greeley, *Myths*, 15) to enable us to survive in the world. For unlike animals that survive because they are provided with innate instincts, we human beings have rather few instincts. We survive not because we have an elaborate system of instincts but because we are able to evolve culture, i.e., a series of meaning systems that enable us to interpret and organize our lives. Religion is the most fundamental of our meaning systems. The postmodernization and secularization of our societies, far from eliminating religion, has made it even more necessary, precisely because the “meaning questions” (Greeley, *Myths*, 16) have now become more explicit and conscious.

Unfortunately, religion as we know it has become so involved with peripheral issues, not to mention its having been encrusted by dogmatocracy (Eric Voegelin), evangelicalism, pietism, triumphalism, fanaticism (indeed, properly considered, none of these fall under the definition of religion at all).

Doctrinal propositions, ethical norms, socio-political issues, therefore, however important, do not constitute the heart of Catholicism. They are the smaller components of a wider and richer heritage. The Catholic imagination does not repudiate them. It merely does not see them as the ultimate source of one’s commitment. Because many Catholics today do not have a clear idea of this imagination, they replace it with social service and political action. While these are essential in our lives, they are essential as results, not as substitutes, for the true imagination which is the heritage of every religion.

Our task is to rediscover and retrieve that lost heritage with all its imaginative powers for the purpose of ensouling the vehicle of Art before the latter ensouls the secular vehicle. The success or failure of this search may well determine the future of our project. I hasten to add that this ontological component may well apply to any religion in the world.

I also predict that the Catholic Imagination will not gravitate towards the traditional clergy of the institutional Church. It will gravitate instead towards the Catholic artists—practicing Catholics or not—for three reasons: (1) because Catholicism is sacramental at the core; (2) because Catholicism is baroque; and (3) because Catholicism is a religion with a comic-narrative tradition.

THE SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION

One of the main foci characteristic of Catholicism that distinguishes the Catholic tradition from other religions is its emphasis on the sacramental. Catholicism believes that visible realities mediate invisible realities. The pomp, the ritual, the ceremonies of the Catholic tradition (as contrasted with the bare simplicity of the Protestant and other religions) reflect the belief that the invisible ineffable Reality is mediated through sensible realities. From the simplest gesture like making the sign of the cross to the more intricate architecture of a medieval cathedral, one sees the Catholic patent, i.e., the sensible and the tactile mediating the transcendental.

This is most attractive to any artist, for all artistic acts are attempts to descend the abstraction ladder. The principle of sacramentality enables the artist to be true to his craft, and in being so, adds dimension to his work, because he sacramentalizes the concrete and the specific so that no longer are they mere objects, events, or persons, but sacraments.

To the Catholic artist's mind, the artistic act by its very nature is sacramental. It is an attempt to reveal, to disclose, through the medium of the artist, the hidden God. Thus, the better the art, the more sacramental it becomes, and the more revelatory of God. Poor artistic activity or toilet art is an insult to God (Greeley, *How to Save*, 198).

Because of this principle, no artist need sell his talent short. Because of this, the sacramentality of a work can be judged by its craftsmanship, and not because the work is a tool for backing up a religious symbolism. Without a doubt, a well-written work would reveal the symbolism, but the principle of sacramentality says it is the craftsmanship that matters, not the religious implication. When Picasso did the Grunewald crucifixion, it was craftsmanship he was interested in, not the passion of Christ.

Thus, the sacramentality of a work of art is structured into the work itself and not imposed from without because preachers are able to use it as illustration. What counts is the experience the work produces and not the homiletic lesson that may be derived from it. I repeat, the beauty of the sacramental imagination is its causing a work of art, including the so-called Catholic work of art, to be judged by no other criterion than by its craftsmanship. This attitude is lacking among the Church elite who fail to understand this important (sacramental) component of the Catholic religion.

Indeed, by understanding this, many of the boundaries that separated the four channels of inquiry—religion, philosophy, art, and science—might eventually be eroded. For example, by focusing on Art, but using the sacramental component, the importance of the natural sciences is not undervalued. On the contrary, it is seen as complementary, for without the exactness resulting from the discipline of science, it is difficult to arrive at a multi-dimensional view.

For example, let me seek science's aid in amplifying the sacramental imagination by thinking of the principle of electromagnetic waves. We can see the band but not the ultraviolet waves. Yet we know they are there. Or better, the nearest analogy I can cite is the experiment on the implicate order (David Bohm), with apologies to the physicists who obviously know more about this than I do.

The implicate order is basically a view proposed by David Bohm, Basil Hiley, and David Peat which allows for interconnectedness at a deep level. The physical universe, according to this theory, is the explicate order made explicit from the deep level which "implies" it. The beauty of this theory lies in its being classical and non-classical at the same

time. It is classical because at a deep level the theory is deterministic. But because the theory also allows instantaneous action-at-a-distance, it is as non-classical as quantum theory.

Bohm's model to test the properties of the implicate order is known as the Glycerin Dye experiment. Despite its simplicity, I was struck by its implications, perhaps because the experiment was done at a time I was seeking some mental connections. (Bohm's model, by the way, has been widely ignored by the mainstream scientific community for reasons I do not know. At the same time, I have not come across any single experimental evidence to refute it.)

With the right instruments you can try the experiment yourself. All you will need is a glycerin solution encased between two glass cylinders, one inside the other, and a drop of dye solution which you let fall into the glycerin. As soon as this is done, you rotate the cylinder slowly clockwise. The first thing you will observe is the dye drop threading out into the liquid. Turn the outer cylinder some more and the dye disappears. Using a simple scientific term, we can now say that the distribution of the dye is random, which means that the initially ordered state had passed into entropy.

This, however, is only the beginning of the experiment. Bohm asked: What would happen if the cylinder were rotated counterclockwise exactly the same number of turns it was rotated clockwise? If you did this, you would discover that the drop would reconstitute itself. In other words, the seemingly random state had not been one of disorder at all but of an implicit order, *only hidden from view*. According to Bohm, this is the state of the universe. When it evolves into form, it becomes explicate; when it involves from form, it becomes implicate. Bohm goes further to say that the implicate order itself is implied in an underlying order of pure potential which in turn springs from an infinite pool of infinite potential, and so on and so forth.

The experiment led me to two inevitable conclusions: (1) that the universe might be—postmodernists may hold their breaths—*ordered* after all; and (2) that one of the best ways to express this order is through the vehicle of Art ensouled by the sacramental imagination.

THE BAROQUE IMAGINATION

Mention baroque art and the following adjectives come to mind: bold, theatrical, elaborate, ornate, dramatic, grand, magnificent, exuberant, robust, intense. Indeed, baroque art is all these and more because it was historically a celebratory reaction against the stiffness of the Reformation.

Baroque art, however, is never sentimental. I will return to this later.

The Catholic imagination was baroque until Vatican II. Vatican II made a mistake when it went out of its way a bit too far to please the Protestants. In so doing, it compromised Catholicism's uniqueness. The consequences, I believe, have been disastrous.

I have known parish priests dismantle side altars, vestment mahogany cabinets, massive doors—everything they could put up for auction. I have witnessed the disappearance of gold crowns, sanctuary lamps, ivory statuettes, medieval church pews, *rayos*, and velvet gowns—only to find out that they have been sold as heirlooms to prominent families.

I have seen old buttresses built to last hundreds of years torn down and replaced with cement posts. I have seen old sacristies renovated and transformed into multi-purpose halls. I have seen old manuscripts burned because they took up space. I have seen chandeliers removed from ceilings and replaced with fluorescent lamps. I have seen ivory statuettes replaced with paint-coated statues made of plastic, paper mache, and plaster of paris. We could go on and on.

Our present clergy have replaced the baroque with the generic. With parish priests behaving as if everything were their property, I wonder if there will be anything left to Catholicism to distinguish it from other Christian churches: no incense, no votive candles, no stained glass windows, no solemn music, no mystery, no awe.

And no respect for privacy. Post-conciliar Catholics would not leave you alone. You have to clap your hands, reach out, greet each other, feel sociable. Attending church services these days is no different

from attending a meeting of the Kiwanis club—or a political rally. The Catholic baroque imagination could be the tool that could chisel out the grossness of the age. We need our literary counterparts of Caravaggio who can weave grand religious themes from the everyday world of peasants, ugly old men, baskets full of fruits, and calesas without appearing obviously “religious.” Or literary Bernini’s who will write of fiestas and evening processions with passion without having to chant “Amen” after every sentence.

And yet, as I mentioned earlier, the Catholic baroque imagination is not sentimental. This is not easy to accept especially in the face of so many euphoric Bible-bangers and charismatic preachers. Religious euphoria is misleading. Genuine religious experience takes place not in the sentimental level. The baroque imagination has nothing to do with sentimentality. The experience is more akin to Plainchant—or the music of Johann Sebastian Bach—which is overtly dry (to the sentimental listener) but inertly rich.

In music, Bach is the perfect example of the baroque imagination. If you are not accustomed to his music, you may find it too cerebral. This is because almost all the music we are used to listening to—including a lot of classical music—is built like an arch with pillars of chords supporting a single melody. The baroque music of Bach is “contrapuntal,” i.e., melody is piled on melody, with all the melodies sounded simultaneously, interpenetrating one another. Bach’s genius was proven some years ago in an experiment done when a pianola roll of Bach music was reversed so that the high notes became bass and vice versa. The music sounded even more melodious.

Bach does not appeal to the sentimental person. The sentimental person expects to be lifted, to be moved to tears of happiness or sorrow, and is disappointed if his/her emotions are not aroused this way. These violent emotions are unnecessary because they hinder the imagination (Needleman 131ff.).

Allow me to amplify:

Let us imagine a tank filled with clear water. Then let us imagine a lighted electric bulb at the bottom of the tank. If the water is very still you can see the lighted bulb clearly. Suppose we churn the water a bit. This time the light is no longer seen clearly as earlier

observed. This time the light is slightly distorted. Suppose we churn the water some more. We will observe that the more we churn the water, the more distorted the light becomes. If we churn the water at great speed, we will eventually see, in place of the lighted bulb, patterns of lights streaking across and within, dissolving, reappearing, until eventually we no longer see any light at all but only waves and waves in great agitation. Now suppose we stop churning the water. Gradually, as the turbulent water subsides, we see, in a reverse order, at first, patterns of light, next a distorted light bulb, then the clear-lighted bulb. Finally, if the water is kept very still, as in the first stage, we will see the light bulb so clearly we may not even be aware of the water itself.

This is what happens to ourselves when we let our emotions (symbolized by the water) distort our Imagination (symbolized by the lighted bulb). For sentimentality deforms our view of things. The baroque imagination is never sentimental, even if it appears to be so to the uninitiated. It is the quietest thing in the world. We do not reach it by raising our hands and shouting “Amen.”

Unfortunately, it is the sentimentalism which many Catholics are trying very hard to reproduce these days—a bogus spirituality in the cheap desire to break away from the routine. Thus we have charismatic pastors even within the Catholic Church trying to outdo their Evangelical counterparts who work people up by heating up the emotions. Unfortunately the unthinking majority who mistake true spirituality for sentimentalism eats this up.

Again, try it yourself: play any Bach recording, a choral composition, for example, three times. The first time, listen to the soprano only; the second time, try to separate the bass from the strands of melody; the third time, listen to the middle voices only. You might find the music you listen to paling in comparison. In fact, you can listen to Bach a hundred times and each time uncover richness previously unearthed. We need our literary counterparts of Bach.

THE COMIC-NARRATIVE IMAGINATION

Catholicism is a religion with a narrative tradition. Catholics listened to the stories first before they encountered the institution.

They thought of religion as a collection of stories and a community in which the stories were told. This was what it ought to have been. The Founder Himself was essentially a storyteller.

The equation of religion with doctrines and laws is largely the consequence of two things: (1) the invention of the printing press and (2) the theological arguments of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Doctrines codified the stories which were dutifully memorized to make sure they were true to the tradition. Through the ages those who memorized them clung to them tenaciously even though they did not see any relationship between their lives and the memorized truths anymore.

The early, pre-doctrinal Christians enjoyed hearing stories because they themselves loved to tell them, for in both the telling and the listening to stories, they brought some order out of the seeming chaos of their existence. Today, despite TV, I think many Catholic children still refuse to go to bed unless you read them an old fashioned bedtime story which begins with the old fashioned “Once upon a time” and ends with “And they lived happily ever after.” I suspect this obligatory ending is a primal cry for meaning to the experiences the child had gone through during the day and a cry for reassurance that all is well in the universe before the oblivion of sleep sets in.

I hold that this primal cry for meaning survives in the Catholic adult—and the child in this Catholic adult—who longs for stories which, however temporarily, imposes order on the phenomena of existence and points towards a trajectory of comedy.

The Catholic story line, therefore, is comic. When a Catholic tells a story, his story will almost necessarily be comedy, i.e., its trajectory toward an ending will be in the direction of a happy ending.

Critics of the comic narrative are wont to think of those who end their stories happily as either feeble-minded or sentimental, unaware of the tragedies of life. Isn't this Catholic story line bordering on wishful thinking? Does it refuse to face the reality of evil in the world? Admittedly, the idea of a comic story line might seem arbitrary and simplistic in the face of the hard countenance of reality. Even a cursory reading of the dailies is enough to convince us that real life is more tragic than comic, that real life does not have happy endings.

Tragic endings in real life are probably what drove Frank Kermode to remark that happy-ending stories are intellectually and epistemologically dishonest. Bruno Bettelheim, for his part, also remarked that stories with happy endings concede to the weak-willed who engage in wishful thinking because they like to find meaning where there is no meaning, purpose where there is no purpose.

The issue about purposeful thinking, however, is not whether it is wishful thinking but whether it resonates with something valid. It is not good argument against a comic narrative to say that it is wishful thinking as a result of its attempt to impose structure when that structure is non-existent in actuality, because the argument begs the question—the question whether indeed there is order—for the evidence is as yet inconclusive in either direction. The issue about contemporary rejection of purpose is not whether it is tough-minded but whether it is accurate. Optimism requires as much toughness as pessimism; comedy requires as much maturity as tragedy; tragedy that is too easy may be as wishful thinking as comedy that is too easy; demolition that comes too easy may be as useless as construction that comes too easy.

If in the awareness of the randomness of things you deny the storyteller the opportunity of a comic ending because life after all has no purpose, you still face the necessity of accounting for the problem of hope. If you recognize evil and say that life is purposeless, then you still have to explain the existence of goodness. In other words, in terms of the argument, you are in no better position than the person who decides that a comic narrative is more revelatory than a tragic narrative is.

A secular man may dismiss this argument as absurd or self-deceptive. My point here is that it is Catholic. In fact, no religion in the world in the last 2500 years has emerged with a story line so blatantly and overtly hopeful as the Catholic story line. In the Catholic narrative, the Cross is not the last word. Whatever story about suffering and death might be told, it must always end with life being stronger than death, love stronger than hate, light stronger than darkness, good stronger than evil, Easter stronger than Good Friday. In the Catholic narrative, there are reconciliations, renewals, second chances.

The Catholic Imagination is extremely attractive because it is a religion of wayward sons returning home, of life triumphing over

death. What makes a story successful is the element of surprise, and in the Catholic narrative, the greatest surprise is that sins are forgiven.

The real enemy of the Catholic narrative is not the unimaginative who cannot perceive of—or even denies—the possibility of a happy ending. The real enemy are the “religionists,” the Amen-Amen groups, the New Agers, the CBCP, the fanatics, the so-called pro-lifers, the sentimentalists who have oversimplified the human drama, and as a result, have turned off many a serious seeker.

The comic narrative requires as much maturity as pessimism, and pessimism that comes too easy may be as wishful thinking as hope that comes too easy. The duty of the Catholic artist is to take hope seriously.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Catholic solution is by no means the only solution in town. I have chosen it because it is the religion I am most comfortable with. Artists may want to rediscover the predoctrinal/imaginative components of their belief (or non-belief) systems in the manner I have suggested. I abstain in this paper from commenting on other religions. A Catholic writer has more than enough to do to cope with the problems of his own religion without offering unsolicited and uninformed advice to others.

Catholicism has always been supportive of artists. It is difficult to think of Catholicism without thinking of the arts that go with it. A visit to the Vatican is enough to impress upon any visitor the whole weight of the Church’s artistic tradition (Cunningham, *The Catholic Heritage*, 128).

If the secular world is to be healed, we must re-examine and re-emphasize the historic link between Catholicism and the arts. Art is not a luxury but a necessity. Only then can we demand the highest standards of craftsmanship, not because the hierarchy or the clergy approves it but because more enlightened laity will demand nothing else.

To ensoul art, however, we must first embark on a search and rescue operation for the original and unadulterated Catholicism that existed before it was encrusted with dogmas and pharisaicalism.

I question the role of poetry as therapeutic private expression on one end or as a tool of proletarian politics on the other. The Catholic imagination must return to the more public and mainstream themes that deal with the human condition, even if this means a return to poetic metre and form.

I question the role of contemporary fiction written as a form of exhibitionism, i.e., to impress, nothing more. What the public wants to read are genuine stories by talented storytellers who can make them identify again characters, plot, theme, setting.

I question the role of contemporary protest drama on one end and avant- “artistic” bilges on the other. The audience deserves more than these. No wonder we have to “require” our students to watch our plays. Stage plays, like all art, should never force themselves on anybody. Art does not control. All you do is to stop reading or watching or listening, and it leaves you alone. There is complete absence of coercion in Art—which is where it gets its power.

We want works that are informed by profound thought, extensive research, and serious ethical, social, and spiritual concerns.

Let us turn on our cable TV sets and watch a recap of the news of the previous century. Images flit before us: A Catholic bishop helping a convicted rapist-murderer escape the death penalty; a politician-cartographer charged for faking land titles; human rights lawyers holding a press conference for their Kuratong Baleleng clients while outside the building three innocent civilians are gunned down by fleeing bank robbers; a family man is shot in the face by an irate motorist over a parking space altercation. Let’s flick the channel and turn to the foreign news: A pro-lifer armed with a rifle bursts into two abortion clinics in Brooklyn, Massachusetts, and opens fire, killing two persons and wounding five others. The scene rewinds to the near past: I recognize Dr. Haing Ngor, the Cambodian refugee and one-time movie actor and survivor of the Khmer Rouge killing fields. He is shot dead outside his home in Los Angeles’ Chinatown. Then we see an American soldier’s dead body dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Now there’s this black and white documentary on the Vietnam War. We see civilians scrambling from the rooftops of the US Embassy building in Saigon into waiting helicopters. We see a snub-nosed .38 caliber revolver aimed at Bay Lop’s temple and the

deathly grimace on the latter's face a split second before his executioner pulls the trigger. We channel surf and see dead children inside twisted wreckages of buildings blown up by terrorists on a suicide mission. We see victims of red tide poisoning, dengue fever, the AIDS virus, the Ebola virus, children dying of hunger, a five-year-old girl raped and strangled by a neighbor, an OFW coming home in a box, a neophyte beheaded in a fraternity initiation rite . . .

Can our poets, storytellers, dramatists heal the planet? Would they be willing to broaden their spheres of awareness and ensoul the vehicle in the manner we have proposed above? I offer the Catholic imagination as the ghost in the machine.

I would like to end by narrating an event that inspired a fresco by the artist Raphael entitled *Repulse of Attila*. Attila the Hun threatened the city of Rome, and the people turned to the Church for protection.

The year is 452 A.D. The Huns have razed Aquileia, and Western Europe has crumbled. Meanwhile, the vandals have taken North Africa, and the Suevi have captured Iberia. Britain has fallen too under the barbarian invaders and the Gaels sign a separate peace with the Goth and the Burundians. All these prepare the ground for the Huns to invade Northern Italy. Their intention is to lay it in ruins. And now we see the Huns thundering directly towards Rome, the heart of western civilization. The people of Rome, abandoned by their own rulers, turn to Leo 1 for help. The pope immediately orders his cardinals and archbishops to assemble together and lead the people in procession to Mincio in the vicinity of Mantua, there to meet the barbarian invaders. The Huns witness a long procession coming out of the city to meet them. Attila is awed by the strange pomp of incense and stately robes and the singing of sacred hymns led by an aging pope holding aloft the processional crucifix. As soon as he is face to face with the invader, Leo 1, bishop of Rome and Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church, points the crucifix at Attila, the Scourge of God, and orders him to depart from Rome. Attila, confused, turns back and retreats to the Danube, never to bother Rome again.

This magnificence is woefully missing in the quotidian Church. Meanwhile, I hear rumors of a reinvigorated, unadulterated Catholicism already resurfacing; but it appears to be resurfacing not

in the direction of the institutional Church but towards the storytellers, the poets, and the dramatists. The artists, not the clergy this time, are where the Catholic imagination seems to be gravitating to. Will the artists accept the challenge? Would they be willing to be the Leo's of our time, protectors of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and lead us out of a world plunged into a new Dark Age few of us are even aware of despite the barbarisms we encounter every day? I present the Catholic imagination in the hope that we too may have our renaissance.

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(Most—if not all—studies submitted for publication in journals and reviews often drag with them a freight of cross references, content footnotes, reference footnotes, and annotated bibliographies to show to the reader the amount of research done and the meticulousness of documentation checked out. Since this paper is an abridgement of a work-in-progress I am doing on a larger canvass, I must confess that I too have not been free of this tendency. For this paper, however, I have decided to curb the spur, so to speak, and provide the reader with as distilled a bibliography as possible—a maximum of ten seminal works—for just one reason: In an on-line age such as ours, the absence of direct references to authorities in the text can no longer indicate a lack of indebtedness. The purpose is to preclude the tendency to overwhelm the reader with a long list of sources one can easily locate by accessing on any on-line bibliographic database. It is my intent, therefore, to give the reader a minimum of overt scholarly apparatus by including only those authors I brazenly, liberally, and sedulously borrowed from and whose works, if the reader may have come to read them, my thoughts have heavily vectored on.)

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