

David L. Schindler

**“We Are Not Our Own”:
Childhood and the Integrity of the Human in a Technological Age**

Abstract

Liberal culture’s anti-child practices are bound up with a logic of childlessness most basically defined in terms of a forgetfulness of being and its Origin and expressed by the marginalization of philosophy, leisure, and liturgy as ways of being and acting. We can adequately address *either* these practices *or* this logic only by addressing *both* of them at the same time. The argument is that we will succeed in carrying out the tasks indicated here only by re-centering the culture in conception, birth, and being born: that is, in these as realized *literally in the procreation of children*, even as this literal procreation of children is *itself understood to bear an entire vision of human being and acting before God*. Absent this re-centering of the culture in conception and birth so understood, our culture is in imminent peril of an ever-increasing loss both literally of the lives of children, especially in their most innocent and defenseless beginnings, *and* of the integrity of the human in its natural givenness.

I

We send apparently conflicting signals about the meaning and dignity of the child in our culture. On the one hand, we provide medical care for children in excess of anything offered in earlier times. We provide a great variety of educational possibilities, as well as opportunities for development of artistic and athletic talents. We provide day-care facilities and professional services for children with special needs. On the other hand, we accept a right, or “entitlement,” to abortion as a way of dealing with pregnancies unwanted for any reason. We permit the use of embryos for research, the freezing of embryos for possible future impregnation, and the “two-minus-one pregnancy.”^[1] We have come to accept the notion of a “good divorce,” as though a “good divorce” and an intact marriage can in principle have more or less the same results for children.

Now, everyone in some basic sense understands that children represent humanity’s most vulnerable beginnings, and as such demand special care and attention. Children’s first physical and nutritional needs demand a nurturing womb. Their growth in intelligence and in the virtues necessary for participation in civil society requires a domestic environment of love and thoughtful education. Most human beings somehow recognize this, and so far intuitively grasp in some basic way that the health and integrity of a culture depend on how the culture orders its energies toward meeting these fundamental needs of children.

How, then, are we to account for the apparently conflicting views and practices with respect to children noted above: is there some way to make consistent sense of the *widespread coexistence* of such views and practices.

In answering this question, we need to look first at the root meaning our society assigns to the child and childhood. Key is the tendency of the dominant culture (to be sure, mostly unconscious), to view children not as children but rather more as adults. Children embody in inchoate form what becomes “perfect” only in the realization of the power of self-determination and self-conscious agency proper to adulthood. In this view it is only in adulthood, in other words, that one can be said truly to *possess one’s own* being, to reason and choose for oneself, and thereby to be properly

entitled to respect and indeed empowered to demand that respect.

Of course, this is not simply a zero-sum matter. Any child who is present and visible appears to the culture by that very fact as an adult in the making, and so far worthy of respect as one who has begun to possess its own being. Nevertheless, we can already see here an ambiguity that bears examination. Modern liberal culture links dignity with the adult power of self-conscious rationality and self-determining agency, all the while it associates the dependence of the child mostly with a weakness expected to be outgrown over the course of time. Such an understanding has roots in two modern philosophers whose thought has greatly influenced America from its origins: René Descartes and John Locke.

Descartes, in constructing a new method for the exercise of reason that would lead us to clarity and certain truth in our judgments, dismissed childhood as a time of immaturity. Childhood for him was characterized by its tendency to accept the truth of things simply as given, and so far passively and uncritically and with an unwitting admixture of error. Locke in his turn defines man in terms of the property of rationality, ascribing rights in the full and proper sense to those who are capable of rational discourse. This includes children, *insofar as they possess this capacity in a rudimentary way*, while (apparently) excluding “changelings,” or those children who, due to some grave defect, will never manifest reason.^[ii] The original state of nature for Locke, then, is a state of perfect freedom wherein all can “dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man.”^[iii] And this state is exemplified above all in Adam, who, on account of his not having a father, “was able, from the first instant of his coming into existence, to provide for his own support and preservation, and to govern his actions.”^[iv]

Now the tendency to prize the independence of an adult over the dependence of a child is of course not entirely misguided. There is an obvious sense in which we ought to value independence over dependence. Clearly we need to outgrow the childlike tendency toward gullibility and to learn to make judgments based on our own exercise of reason and choice. Each of us begins life with a singular human identity that we are meant over time to take conscious possession of and to develop. Taking possession of one’s being through habits of intelligence and virtue, thereby becoming increasingly able to direct one’s own life, for example, in service to God and others, is unequivocally good, even as the absence of interior self-direction, and not being in control of one’s life, is not good.

And so we are left still in a kind of quandary. On the one hand, our culture, not entirely wrongly, values independence over dependence. What I am *in myself*, and thus insofar as I am in full possession of myself, in a significant sense has priority over, and so far warrants more respect than, what I am *simply as a function of something or someone influencing me from outside*. On the other hand, the culture’s *way of conceiving and valuing* independence leads to a peculiar way of justifying all the various practices mentioned at the outset. Thus cultural phenomena like experimental research on embryos at the first moments of their existence, or abortion of unborn Down’s Syndrome babies and other unborn babies whose parents live in broken circumstances, are understood by the culture on its most benign reading as efforts to protect the integrity of what the child, in its state of weakness and immaturity, is not able to choose for itself. That is, these phenomena are interpreted as signs of respect for the human being at its most vulnerable, through securing the infant’s *right to be born in conditions that favor its normal growth into adult personhood* – or, in the case of embryonic stem cell research, by working to realize the conditions that would secure such growth, at least for future infants.

Such phenomena, in a word, are interpreted as efforts to protect the human being who has just

begun, *qua the right to take full possession of itself as an adult*, and thus not to be born in circumstances that would prevent its growth eventually into this self-possession. Note that I am not suggesting that it is this logic that is most often *consciously intended* by the persons responsible for any one of the practices mentioned here, only that it is this objective logic, most benignly interpreted, which serves to “justify” the practices, even when the person responsible offers some other, more overtly selfish, justification, or none at all.

It is in terms of some such logic, then, that the dominant culture typically defends itself against the charge that practices such as abortion and experimental research on embryos reveal a negative disposition toward children, or what some would term an anti-child mentality. On the contrary, it is argued, such practices can rightly be seen at root as expressions of the same care and compassion that have fostered the culture’s advancements in education, scientific-medical technology, and the like, which have been of great assistance to the young. Indeed, it is argued that such practices, together with these advancements, demonstrate rather that the culture is best described, on the whole, as *child-centered*.

Thus the apparent conflict in the practices of contemporary culture announced at the outset is taken to be resolved: because the practices, which appear to be so discrepant, are expressions of what is in fact an implicit unity of vision inspired by a care and compassion become more subtle and expansive through developments in technological science. Now most readers of this journal would (rightly) judge this interpretation of the present cultural situation as it concerns children to be gravely incoherent. But it is crucial as we face the future to understand *why* it is incoherent, and in this context to put forward a more adequate interpretation of the culture.

If the foregoing sketch is accurate, we can see that the key to such understanding, and to such an alternative reading, lies in coming to terms with a twofold fact about our liberal culture: on the one hand, it affirms as a matter of principle the equal “perfection,” and thus dignity and rights, of all human persons, while professing special concern for those who are unable to defend their own rights. On the other hand, the culture spontaneously, even if mostly unconsciously, locates the “perfection” and dignity of persons in, and thus ties rights above all to, the independent, self-possessive and self-determinative, power proper to an adult. The dependent activity characteristic of the child, lacking such power, is viewed at best as a perfection still-in-the-making and so far as a weakness to be outgrown; and the dignity and rights of children can thus in principle be recognized by the culture only ambiguously, not unconditionally. My purpose is to expose the roots of this ambiguity and to show the necessary conditions for its elimination: not by denying that the self-possessive and self-determinative, free and rational, power realized in an adult *is* fundamental for the perfection of the person; but rather by affirming that adult-like self-possession and self-determination *need themselves to retain an innerly childlike character*.

Jesus said that, unless we become like children, we will not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18:3). The plain sense of this saying precludes its being read merely as a matter of “moral” exhortation or “pious” rhetoric. On the contrary, Jesus makes becoming like children a condition for entrance into heaven and hence for the everlasting participation in divine life to which we are all invited. Jesus thus means to say something about the inmost reality of the human being: that the human being is not only to begin as a child, as it were, but also to end as one. Jesus’s demand thus clearly implies a dynamic that moves simultaneously in both directions. As the child becomes an adult, he or she is meant to continue becoming a child. In a word, the child’s legitimate maturation into adulthood is a matter not so much of growing *out of* childhood as simultaneously, and indeed essentially, of growing ever more deeply *into* childhood, such that the face of adulthood itself bears a childlike character.

II

The heart of my proposal is expressed in my title: “We are not our own.” This statement is taken from Canadian philosopher George Grant (1918-1988), one of the great cultural critics of our time. Reflecting back on his conversion to Christianity while in England during the war in 1942, Grant said that this statement captured the recognition basic to that conversion.^[v] He saw in the liberalism of North America a false sense of human autonomy, expressed in what he considered the culture’s technocratic patterns of living and thinking.^[vi] Grant’s conviction, rooted in his sense of creatureliness, is that we do not first *make* the objects that we choose and about which we think; on the contrary, we first *receive* them. We can choose and think about and make only what we are first given; and what we are first given is most basically a gift from another. Our being, thought, and action needs to be formed around this fact. Shortly before his death and after discovering that he was terminally ill, he summed up:

To put the matter in language not easy for moderns, . . . Christianity [is at its] center concerned with grace, if that word is given its literal meaning. Grace simply means that the great things of our existing are given us, not made by us and finally not to be understood as arbitrary accidents. Our making takes place within an ultimate givenness. However difficult it is for all of us to affirm that life is a gift, it is an assertion primal to Christianity. Through the vicissitudes of life – the tragedies, the outrages, the passions, the disciplines and the madneses of everyday existence – to be a Christian is the attempt to learn the substance of that assertion.^[vii]

In a similar vein, Joseph Ratzinger, in one of his early and indeed most important books, says that, according to the ancient, and Christian, view, something is true and good *qua being*, or in its *original givenness* as such (by God).^[viii] He notes that this is different from the modern view that something becomes true and good *quia factum*, or only insofar as it has been made by man or is subject to human intervention. According to Ratzinger, things are thus true and good already in the defenseless innocence of their beginnings. And they are so because, *being created by God*, they are from the first moment of their existence, and in their inmost reality, *gifts*. All the more so, indeed infinitely more so, is this the case when the beings in question are human, formed by a spiritual soul expressed in spiritual capacities of freedom and intelligence.

A twofold implication follows from this common view of Ratzinger and Grant that being is true and good by virtue of its being a *gift* already in its *givenness*: (a) being is “perfect” and thus has worth and dignity already because of what it *is* and not only of what it *does*; and (b), the human act of freedom and intelligence in the face of being takes the form of a “letting be” (*fiat*) that is anteriorly contemplative, not constructive – a matter first of seeing and actively receiving, not making.

The heart of my argument is that it is the child, and childlikeness, that teach us most properly what is meant by the inherent giftedness of being *as given*, and by “letting be” and thus contemplativeness as the primary and always anterior character of human freedom and intelligence. Thus the cultural tendency toward practices like aborting and experimenting on human embryos is tied in its logical roots to the reductive disposition that views being, or *reality*, as true and good only *quia factum* and hence as an object of possible human intervention and construction;^[ix] and this reductive disposition is best understood as a *logic of childlessness*. In a word, the culture’s logical, or better ontological, childlessness disposes the culture to anti-child practices, even as the latter simultaneously reinforce the former.^[x] What ties the two together is the (unconscious) ascribing of the “perfection” and hence worth of being to (falsely-conceived) adult-like constructive power.

Once we see this, we are prepared to see also that there is indeed, after all, a unity of vision within the (otherwise) conflicting tendencies of the culture mentioned at the outset. This unity of vision,

however, cuts in a radically different direction from that assumed by the dominant culture and noted earlier. That is, the practices of abortion and embryo experiment are perniciously anti-child; while the very institutions – educational, medical-technological, and the like – which have greatly benefitted children themselves harbor the ambiguous assumptions regarding the nature of the *given*, and the place of the *contemplative*, that render the culture already of *its inner logic* open to such anti-child practices. These latter practices, in a word, at once express and reinforce the logic of childlessness that remains mostly implicit, and so far hidden, within what are rightly acknowledged as achievements in science, technology, medicine, and education that manifest the culture’s care and compassion for children. It is imperative that we ferret out the roots of this hidden logic. The present article attempts no completeness in this regard, but limits itself to the identification of key principles that provide direction for the ampler study that is needed.

Nascantur in admiratione, “let things be born in wonder”: this phrase, which served as the motto for a well-known program in Western civilization at Kansas University in the 1970s, [xi] captures well what is implicit in the views of Grant and Ratzinger. “Letting be” (*fiat*), which permits all creatures first to be as they are, implies recognition that creaturely being *in its original givenness* is a matter more like *being born* than *being made* (by humans); [xii] and that being is thus legitimately an *instrument* of human power only as more basically an object of *wonder*. The attempt to show that this is so involves us in a twofold task. We must clarify what a truly child-centered culture consists in, and thus what is meant by an adulthood that bears a childlike character. To do this, however, we need first to develop more fully what is meant by the child/childlikeness itself, such that Jesus makes it a condition of realizing our true end and thereby of entering heaven.

Our basic question, then, in a word: in what sense does *becoming* children, rather than simply *outgrowing* our childhood, as we mature into adulthood, indicate a *perfection*, indeed *the most basic and proper* perfection, of our humanity, and thereby disclose the integrity of the human, even-especially in a technological age?

I will discuss the meaning of childhood as developed especially by Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II). It is scarcely incidental to my choice of these three Catholic theologians that the theme of childhood is integral to their theological vision, which itself is offered also as an interpretation of the Second Vatican Council and, in particular, of the Church’s worldly task as conceived by the Council, for example, in *Gaudium et Spes*. It is clear, then, that the provenance of my argument is Christian. Indeed, Balthasar points out that it is Christianity, uniquely among world religions, that “in its essence is communicated by the eternal child of God” (49). [xiii] It is Christianity’s “trinitarian Childhood” (64) that “keeps alive in its believers the lifelong awareness of their being children...” (49). It is here that we thus find the deepest theological foundations for the “perfection” of the child *as a child* and for living childlikeness on into one’s adulthood. Our imaging of God opens into an imaging of Jesus Christ who is the *eternal* Son, and who, as such, in his Incarnation on earth, reveals eternal childlikeness in God (44).

Indeed, it goes unnoticed far too often in this connection that it is not simply “arbitrary” that God’s incarnation in Jesus took the form of birth, or of being born. That is, Jesus’s being born was not “merely” a kind of biological necessity, given that he was becoming man and this is the way men come into the world. On the contrary, the point is (also) that birth and being born reveal the logic of being-given, of being from another, and Jesus in his Sonship reveals just this logic of coming from another. Jesus’s being born, in other words, so far reveals the logic of God himself, *now in a human creaturely, and thus infinitely different, form*. This logic of God as revealed in Jesus thus reveals in some intrinsic, analogical, way the logic of all creatures created in and through Jesus. [xiv]

My argument, then, presupposes the Christian teaching on creation. It is nevertheless important to see, with our three thinkers, that this teaching itself carries a claim about the nature of things, or what we have termed an ontological claim. The presupposition of Christianity is that its faith is reasonable, and reaches to the inmost reality of things. This implies, in the present case, that its teaching on creation bears an inherent reasonableness that is accessible somehow in principle to all human beings, even if the fullness of that reasonableness is available only with the eyes of faith. My reflection proceeds on the basis of this assumption.

Let us, then, consider each of our authors in turn.

III

Joseph Ratzinger

(1) Ratzinger expresses the Christological core of our topic in a Lenten retreat he gave in the presence of Pope John Paul II and members of the Roman Curia in 1983. “The Son,” he says, “by his essence is the gift and giving back of himself: this is what is meant by ‘being son’” (69).^[xv] The word “Abba – beloved Father,” that Jesus uses is undoubtedly “an attempt to resume in one word the total impression of his life,” “the orientation of his life, the original motive and the aim which shaped it” (72). Jesus did not want to be called king or lord, or “by any name attributing power, but by a word that we could also translate as ‘child’” (72). Ratzinger says that “infancy assumes an almost extraordinary place in Jesus’s preaching” because it “corresponds most profoundly to his most personal mystery, his Sonship” (72). Jesus’s highest dignity as divine lies in “his being turned towards the Other – God the Father” (72).^[xvi]

In sum, the word *Abba* indicates the nature of Jesus’s intimacy with the Father: it reveals the central reality of Jesus to be prayer (122). Jesus as the Son *is* prayerful dialogue with the Father, all the way to his “final cry from the Cross” (71). And, citing the words of the Psalmist in the Letter to the Hebrews (Ch. 10), “I have come to do thy will, O God,” Ratzinger notes that this dialogue between the Father and the Son reveals the new form of sacrifice: that is, not animal sacrifices, but rather an obedience involving the total gift of self (68). Hence Ratzinger says that “the Incarnation of the Son means [also] . . . [that] ‘he became obedient unto death’ (Phil 2:8)” (69), an obedience that is formed through a listening that takes flesh (68-9).

(2) Ratzinger links “being children” with the Beatitude wherein Jesus extols the poor: “Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God” (Lk 6:20) (72). This is not a matter “of romanticizing poverty” or indeed in the first instance of a moral judgment regarding poor or rich individuals. It goes rather to “what is most profound in human nature” (72). It becomes clear from what Jesus says of the poor, in other words, that being a child means that “the child possesses nothing of itself, it receives all it needs for life from others,” and that the child is therefore precisely free, in the sense of not being shackled by possessions and power (73). The child is “rich” insofar he possesses the fullness of his being as human from the first moment of his existence, and simultaneously “poor” because this fullness of being *is given to him* by God in the act of creation. We are “rich” in the poorness of heart whereby we recognize that we and the world are in our deepest depths “in God’s hands and not in ours” (73). We *possess* our being, and hence are “rich,” only by virtue of our being *granted entry into existence* by God, indeed through the mediation of others, and thus through the “poverty” of *being-given* our being. The unity of our richness and poorness, in a word, lies in our reality as *gift*, and thus of what is truly *owned*, but only as always first *given* by another. Indeed, Ratzinger says that anyone among us who is not able to sustain this sense of our richness as given by God loses “that childlikeness without which we cannot enter the Kingdom” (73).

Needless to say, Ratzinger does not imply by all of this that man is not meant to take responsibility for his life and hence to acquire the possessions and the skills of power and mastery necessary for life. His point is simply that none of this excuses one from recognizing these possessions and skills as matters most basically of gifts meant first to be received in gratitude. The possessions we acquire and the skills that we come to “own” via the formation of virtuous habits always remain at a more basic level gifts: they are creative developments of what has always been first given by God, by our forebears, and indeed in a significant sense by all the things, organic and inorganic, that have preceded us and upon which we continue to depend.

(3) Further, according to Ratzinger, while being children means saying “Father,” it also means saying “Mother” (73). This is what reveals the *human* childhood of Jesus. “*Eucharistia* means rendering thanks” (73), and Jesus’s thanks includes saying “thanks to the humble maiden from whom he received [his] flesh and [his] blood when the Holy Spirit overshadowed her.” Jesus learned from his mother to say “yes,” the “yes” “which goes on always without wearying” and is summed up in the words of the *Fiat*, which are the first words of the new covenant: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word’ (74).

It is clear from all of this why, for Ratzinger, being a child is thus not merely a transitory biological reality expected eventually to be cancelled out (71). On the contrary, “in infancy, what is proper to a human being is realized in such a way that one who has missed childhood has missed him or herself” (71). What Jesus says about children is therefore not simply “a romantic idealization of little ones” or merely “a moral judgment,” but something more profound (71): we image God by sharing in the reality of Sonship, and thus to the extent that “we become ‘children.’” In a word, we become God-like when we enter into the dialogue of Jesus with his Father, and when this dialogue “takes flesh in the composition of our daily life” (69).

(4) Ratzinger adds two further qualifiers that are important for our concerns. First, he points out that the desire to become like God is not as such misguided. On the contrary, human beings by nature “want to become God and – given a proper interpretation of the term – *should* become so” (72, emphasis added). His point is that, in seeking to become like God, we should understand this not as an imitation of God as unoriginate *origin* and hence as Father, [\[xvii\]](#) but of God the Son, or better, as an imitation of the Father always in and through the Son. We become truly like God, in a word, by becoming children in the divine child incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Thus the essence of the sin of Adam, according to Ratzinger, lay in the fact that Adam tried to become like God *precipitously*, by short-circuiting the childhood characteristic of the truth of his being as a creature, by “casting off childhood entirely as a mode of being (*modo di essere*)” (72). The lack of childhood before God, then, indicates, not man’s original perfection, *à la* Locke, but man’s original sin. It is sin in this sense, therefore, that gives us the original definition of *false* human autonomy (*auto-nomos*: law unto oneself), an autonomy that consists in a logically self-centered activity that prematurely instrumentalizes [\[xviii\]](#) all relations, the relation to God above all, and also to others and to all cosmic entities. In a word, Adam in this way embodies not the original image of God in man but its opposite, the original *absence* of God.

Second, Ratzinger concludes his meditation on the child with a striking reference to Plato. Citing the work of Greek author Stylianos Harkianakis, Ratzinger notes that Plato saw no reproach in the fact that a non-Greek criticized the Greeks on the grounds that they were *aei paides*, eternal children. On the contrary, Plato thought this a tribute to the Greek character: “The Greeks want to be a people of philosophers and not technocrats, that is, eternal children, apt to wonder in amazement at the higher states of existence” (73). Ratzinger’s reference here is important for two reasons: first, it makes clear that recognition of the inherent goodness of childlikeness, of being *aei*

paides – always children – is not simply a function of Christian faith. On the contrary, such recognition is tied to the desire to live in a genuinely reasonable way, which is to say, as “philosophers and not technocrats.” And thus the second point: childlikeness for Ratzinger, following Plato, has to do with a reasonableness understood in the most proper sense to be *philosophical* as distinct from technocratic in nature.

Of course it is crucial to be clear about what is meant by philosophy, which refers here not to the sort of activity normally found, for example, in philosophy departments of contemporary universities, but to the philosophical activity exercised by Plato, following Socrates: an activity which seeks the truth and goodness of things first *as given* in themselves and in light of their transcendent origin and thus not as potential instruments of power and public effectiveness; and which, further, informs an entire way of life and indeed bears a willingness to undergo martyrdom to uphold the integrity of this search.

We may helpfully recall here Benedict’s lecture some years ago at the University of Regensburg, where he urged the professoriat of the Western university to recuperate reason (*logos*) in its openness to love and to God. The pertinence of this appeal to reason becomes evident when we understand with him that reason – *logos* – has its roots in the *Logos* revealed in Jesus Christ, the divine child. There is for Ratzinger/Benedict, in other words, an intrinsic link between philosophy as an activity which of its essence manifests the spirit of the child (*aei pais*), on the one hand, and the reasonableness proper to man as such, as created in and through the *Logos* of the divine child, on the other. The natural and so far spontaneous openness of reason to God, in a word, is at root indissolubly philosophical *and* childlike, such that philosophy and childlikeness, each in its distinctness, reveals the inner meaning of the other; and to separate the two is thus to lose the integrity of both.

Hans Urs von Balthasar

Balthasar says that keeping the awareness of being children alive “in all areas of our existence,” as we must, becomes “more difficult the more technical man seeks to shape and govern everything on his own.”^[xix] Our culture, he says, is “decidedly making great strides along th[e] road of the ‘makeability of man,’” and indeed

Nothing, compared to this, has ever more emptied the wondrous mystery of childhood of its value. But the ideal of man’s self-fabrication is infallibly also his self-destruction. . . . And for this reason we may say that it is in our time that the contrasting Christian *leitmotiv* of birth from God – the childhood in God of even adult, active and inventive man – attains to its full and even increased validity (43-4).

To be sure, for Balthasar, God, in creating man, grants him a creaturely participation in God’s own freedom. Human activity and inventiveness, and thus making, are images of God. The crux of the matter for Balthasar, however, as we have seen already with respect to Ratzinger, is that this activity and inventiveness image God *only in and through God the Son* (Col. 1: 15-18; GS, 22). Focusing on Jesus, Balthasar describes the contrast between an adult-like making infused with childlikeness and a making that is not and so far becomes technocratic. What, then, he asks (44), are the “the essential traits of [one] who lives [one’s] childhood in God as an adult”?

(1) First, there is Jesus’s *wonder and amazement* “in looking up to the Father” (44) “‘The Father is greater than I,’” (Jn 14:28), Jesus says. Even as Jesus shares divinity equally with the Father from all eternity, he shares it as *Son* of the Father, who alone remains *unoriginate origin* and *source*. Jesus thus “knows himself to be sheer Gift that is given to itself,” one who remains united with but

distinct from the Giver (44). The Father hands over everything to the Son, hence including the Father's freedom. But this freedom takes form in the Son as *self-surrender* and as *contemplation of the Father*, which thereby define the inmost reality of that freedom. In knowing himself as Gift from the Father, the Son knows his *divine power* first in the form of *amazement, wonderment, and gratitude* (45).

This sense of "the Father being greater than I," says Balthasar, which is infinitely different for human beings created in the Son, "lies hidden [also] in all human experiences" (46). God remains the ever-greater one in what he "has handed over to his creatures on their own" (46). Thus creatures exercise their own freedom, but in so doing they are first receivers, or better, *receptively original*, and as such they can never wrest the unoriginate origin of the power of freedom into their own grasp.

(2) According to Balthasar, there follows from this wonderment an "elemental thanksgiving" (46). "'*Eucharistia*,' thanksgiving, is the quintessence of Jesus' stance toward the Father" (46), and this is echoed in human childhood. The child in his deepest reality is given, and is thus dependent, and we therefore teach him to say "please" and "thank you" not only for specific things, but because we are "trying to bring into his more conscious sphere what is already present from the beginning" (49). "To be a child," says Balthasar,

means to owe one's existence to another, and even in adult life we never quite reach the point where we no longer have to give thanks for being the person we are. This means that we never quite outgrow the obligation to give thanks for ourselves or to continue to ask for our being (49).

The fundamental spirit of childhood expressed here, says Balthasar, is the key to what Jesus proposes on the Sermon on the Mount (50-51).

(3) There is a sense of *mystery* implied in the Christian's reception of the sacraments authorized by Christ, in the proclamation of the Word and in the teaching office (51-3). In the face of the Word and power of the Father contained in the sacrament, we all remain "children who cannot understand everything to the root" (53). Seen in light of the preceding points, this also implies an ontological claim: in their inmost reality as gifts, creatures can never, in any act of intelligence of whatever sort, quite catch up with the giver-origin who is present within them *as their infinitely transcendent source*. It follows that mystery is internal to every act of knowing, in both the "form" and the "content" of that act – and mystery is thus not merely a matter of what is yet unknown, as our dominant culture typically assumes. [xx]

(4) The nature of our reality as creaturely gifts implies a childlike, hence *playful and liturgical, sense of time and space*. The child takes each day and hour as it comes. He lives time as something that is given to it now, "in all its fullness" (54), and hence each of its moments – and each space – "in itself" is of intrinsic worth to him. It is this sense of time and space that alone enables the child's characteristic activity to be *play* (54-5). Indeed, it is the same childlike sense of the fullness of time, of the inner openness of time to eternity, that indicates the natural ordination of human being and acting toward prayer and liturgy.

The child and childlikeness thus bear a distinctive logic of time and space. Time and space are no longer something simply to be passed through, merely instruments to be utilized in view of the succeeding time and the next space, ultimately in anticipation of an eternity that comes only *after* time. [xxi] The child teaches us, on the contrary, that we are not properly *in* time and space, where we are meant to be as human creatures, except insofar as we are in a significant sense *present* and so far *at rest in* each moment and each space *as a gift* from God. Creaturely time and space as

revealed to us by the child are, as Josef Pieper's famous book *Leisure the Basis of Culture* reminds us, ordered in their roots toward leisure and play and worship.

In sum, says Balthasar, if we abstract from the love revealed in Jesus, the divine child, a love that is also revealed in an analogical (infinitely different: *maior dissimilitudo*) way in the creaturely child, and if as a consequence we lose our sense of wonder at being permitted to be, worldly reality and culture

will necessarily fall under the sign of the constant dominion of "knowledge," and... science, technology, and cybernetics will overpower and suffocate the forces of love within the world. The result will be a world without women, without children, without reverence for the form of love in poverty and humility, a world in which everything is viewed solely in terms of power or profit-margin, in which everything that is disinterested and gratuitous and useless is despised, persecuted, and wiped out, and even art is forced to wear the mask and the features of technique. [xxii]

Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II

Karol Wojtyla says in his play, "The Radiation of Fatherhood," [xxiii] that we must be "liberated from freedom through love" (355), learning to "to give birth even more than to create" (341). Man realizes his fatherhood by means of its "radiation," and for Wojtyla this is accomplished only in becoming a child: recuperating one's childhood and passing through motherhood (362). "The more I am a father, the more I become a child" (368), he says. Human freedom is disclosed in its deepest reality through "the love that reveals the Father in the Son" (368).

What is it that conceiving and giving birth add to creating (as it is customarily understood)? The answer is a filial-social relation to another. That is, conceiving (from *cum-capio*, to take or hold together, take in or receive, and form inwardly) and giving birth indicate a "creating," or making, characterized specifically by *participation in what is first given, by God and through another person*. Conceiving and giving birth, in other words, suggest a "making" the inner logic of which expresses and emerges from filial community with God and social(-spousal) community with another. It is through conceiving and giving birth in this sense that a man is understood by Wojtyla to create or become powerful in the mode of a father, and thus to radiate his fatherhood and so far his proper fatherly adult-likeness.

We speak of the outcome of the "making" that is a conceiving, then, not as an artifact or product but as a birth. Being conceived is a matter not of being made (in the ordinary sense), but of being born, first in a womb and then over time into one's own independent existence outside the womb. But again the crucial point is that all of this is not merely a biological fact but already signifies the way of being proper to the human being as a creature, and shapes from within the person's distinct reality as an agent exercising power. That is, the human person remains for the duration of his existence *one who is conceived and born, and whose own exercise of power thus recapitulates in a distinct (and so far new) way his reality as conceived and born*. In each act of making or thinking about something, I remain one whose power is exercised only in and through my (dependent) filial relation to the Creator and social relation with others, a social relation that indeed includes also the entities making up the natural environment.

The upshot is that I *never* first make or think anything simply in the manner of adult power as understood by the dominant culture: in the manner of an agent abstracted, or in principle abstractible, from the relations to God and others that are intrinsic to my being. As noted earlier, this does not in any way undermine the "perfection" of fatherly, adult-like power, or attenuate the

necessity and worth of the adult-like making and control, and hence technological activity, that is involved in the building of human culture. The point is that even this adult-like making and control, rightly understood, must be understood as springing from, and taking their first form in, a “conception” ordered toward “giving birth.” Our first disposition toward the world must therefore, always and everywhere, be *nascantur in admiratione*:[\[xxiv\]](#) let things be born, let everything we make or think or do be born in wonder.

IV

But let us now bring together the various elements of our depiction of the nature and unique dignity of the child and childlikeness. I have used the phrase, *nascantur in admiratione*, “let things be born in wonder,” as an apt summary of what is implied in our recognition of the fact that, as creatures, we are children and thus “not our own.” Our three authors have exhibited for us the depth and breadth of what this implies.

What we learn from them is that obedience and gratitude and thanksgiving and humility are not “merely” moral or “pious” acts but define and express in a distinctly free and intelligent way the core of our being as creatures. We learn that the body is not merely a matter of the “accidental and formal relations of [biological] birth.”[\[xxv\]](#) We learn that “dependence” is not merely a lack of “perfection” but what gives proper form to the “perfect” independence of human adulthood itself. We learn that the root meaning of “rich” and “poor” has to do more with the state of the filial-social relations that originally co-constitute us as creatures than with having or not having possessions – although these two meanings are of course not mutually exclusive. We learn that mystery refers to the ungraspable that *lies beyond* only as the ungraspable that is also-already *present within* both our act of knowing and what we know. We learn that contemplativeness is not the preserve of the bourgeois or the privilege of idle moments, but the only form of consciousness in and through which we can reach the heart of things as they truly are, in themselves.

All of this, then, is implied in “letting things be born in wonder.” This “letting be” thus indicates what is in the end the only “method” (*methodos*, way) whereby objects can be thought, actions performed, and artifacts made with integrity, which is to say, in a form that is genuinely true, good, beautiful, and apt for worship.

But again let me stress: this “method” indicates not merely a kind of knowledge or a morality or “piety” but a *way of being*: a distinct way of occupying all of our time and space. An adult power that forgets childhood, thus growing out of and not into childhood, tends precipitously and of its inner logic to dominate and instrumentalize time and space. Such a power no longer permits *entry into* or *resting within* this moment or this place; rather, it promotes quick movement along the surfaces (*super-facies*: superficial), dispersing always elsewhere. Such an adult power is of its essence inattentive and distracted, because instrumentalization of reality invites, indeed already *is* extroversion, a turning precipitously outward, away from any given entity in itself and toward that for which such an entity is (potentially) useful.[\[xxvi\]](#) Such adult power, in a word, is of its essence technocratic.

An adult power that carries the memory of childhood, on the contrary, senses the in-breaking of eternity into time and space, and hence a certain fullness of truth and beauty at each moment and in each place, thus inviting a presence that abides, an *interior presence*. Such a childlike adult power, in a word, *undergoes* and *indwells* time, and thus “*takes time*,” after the manner in which the activity of an organism – of what is conceived and born – in contrast to that of a machine, characteristically takes time.

But we can now synthesize the foregoing still further in light of our authors. The human activities that best express this sense of the inherent truth and goodness of being, and of a time that bears eternity, are *philosophy, leisure or play, and prayer or liturgy*. What these activities share, each in its own way, is a childlike memory of being and its Origin, hence a disposition of openness to being *as it is in itself* and *as given*, ultimately *by God*.[\[xxvii\]](#) This openness implies a constant (re-)orienting of one's self toward other beings in themselves, and ultimately toward God, and so far a gift of self at the heart of which lies humble and obedient gratitude. And, as we see in Socrates, the Greek who is the pagan *aei pais* par excellence, and in an infinitely different way in Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father, this humble and obedient gift of self, lived fully and to the end, involves the risk of suffering unto the very sacrifice of one's life.

In sum, then, philosophy, leisure, and liturgy, each in its own way and together in their unity, summarize the root meaning of the filial – the child and the childlike – as unfolded in all its various aspects by our authors. The burden of this point is missed, however, if we take it to undermine adult-like “perfection” and hence the importance of the culture's adult activities of making and sustaining, developing and improving science, medicine, and education, as well as the devices of technology. Philosophy, leisure, and liturgy, rightly understood, neither merely *add to* nor simply *displace* such activities: they are not meant to have a place only in the private interstices of the culture. The point, rather, is that these adult cultural activities are themselves meant, as a condition of their own “perfection” and thus human-creaturely integrity, to take on a childlike character, and this means being informed in some principled, interior way *in and by the spirit of philosophy, leisure, and liturgy*.[\[xxviii\]](#)

Apropos of our problematic as framed earlier, we can thus say in summary: our liberal culture's anti-child practices are bound up with a logic of childlessness that is most basically defined in terms of a forgetfulness of being and its Origin, and expressed by the marginalization of philosophy, leisure, and liturgy as ways of being and acting. We can adequately address *either* these practices *or* this logic, therefore, only by addressing *both* of them at the same time.

My argument has been that we will succeed in carrying out the tasks indicated here only by re-centering the culture in conception, birth, and being born: that is, in these as realized *literally in the procreation of children*, even as this literal procreation of children is *itself understood to bear an entire vision of human being and acting before God*. Absent this re-centering of the culture in conception and birth so understood, our culture is in imminent peril of an ever-increasing loss, both literally of the lives of children especially in their most innocent and defenseless beginnings *and* of the integrity of the human in its natural givenness.

V

The movie *Of Gods and Men*, recently released in America, tells of the Trappist monks of Tibhirine in Algeria, who suffered a brutal death at the hands of terrorists. One of these monks had written in his diary shortly before his death: “to resist evil... the only force to rely on, which is inexhaustible, is that of the infant. Only the spirit of the infant, of the new beginning, can renew the world.”[\[xxix\]](#) In light of the discussion of Ratzinger, we may recall here the “yes” carried implicitly within the child. This “yes” bears a gratitude that springs eternally and hence ever creatively into hope: into expectation of the ever-newly-given beginning.[\[xxx\]](#) Childlikeness, then, carries its own “method” for renewing the world.

As members of a liberal society, we think about renewing the world most immediately in terms of initiating new policies, programs, and organizations, or of issuing documents and creating new

websites. Such policies to be sure have an indispensable place in cultural renewal. My argument is simply that childlikeness, as both the beginning and the end of our creaturely *way of being (modo di essere)*, ought to shape these policies from within, via the traits described above and given integration in the form and spirit of philosophy, contemplativeness, and liturgy. [xxxix]

It is crucial always to remind ourselves in this connection, however, that childlikeness, as a way of being and hence as integrator of policies and the like, bears a distinctive sense of what it means to be effective and realistic in efforts to renew the world, and indeed of the grounds for never-failing hope in these efforts. That this “method” has the capacity to shape history is evident in the lives of the Tibhirine monks themselves. It is evident also in the lives of Socrates and, in an infinitely greater way, of Jesus. In this light, however, we must remember that such a “method” realizes its peculiar effectiveness and realism, and indeed enduring hope, only through the childlike, and so far ultimately-inherently defenseless, witness of one’s whole being, which includes willingness to undergo passion (*patior*, to suffer, permit; hence *patiens*, patient) and death. And to see as well that the need for precisely this kind of effective, realistic, and hopeful witness has not become impertinent in a democratic age – as indeed the experience of Socrates should already suffice to make clear. [xxxix]

David L. Schindler

November 14, 2011

David L. Schindler is Provost and Edouard Cardinal Gagnon Professor of Fundamental Theology at the John Paul II Institute for Studies in Marriage and Family at the Catholic University of America, and Editor of the international review *Communio*.

NOTES

[i] Ruth Padawar, “The Two-for-One Pregnancy,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2011.

[ii] Cf. Anthony Krupp, *Reason’s Children: Childhood in Early Modern Philosophy* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2009), 102-103; but see also Locke’s qualifiers, discussed by Krupp on p. 100.

[iii] *Second Treatise on Government*, Ch II, 4. Cf also Kant: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance.... ‘Have the courage to use your own understanding,’ is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment. Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why such a large part of mankind gladly remain minors all their lives, long after nature has freed them from external guidance” (Immanuel Kant, *Education* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971], 6).

[iv] Locke, *Second Treatise*, Ch. VI, 56. From Adam, Locke goes on, “the world is peopled with his descendants who are all born infants, weak and helpless....”

[v] *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversation*, ed. by Larry Schmidt (Toronto: Anansi, 1978), 63.

[vi] Grant took the Roe vs. Wade decision to be symbolic of Anglo-American liberalism’s voluntaristic freedom and technologicistic intelligence: cf. his *English-Speaking Justice* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 69ff.

[vii] “Two Theological Languages,” Addendum [1988], in *Collected Works of George Grant*, Vol. 2

(1951-1959), edited by Arthur Davis (University of Toronto Press, 2002), 60.

[viii] Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), see especially 30-37.

[ix] On the link between reproductive technologies and the like that are common in the West and the West's larger theological and anthropological assumptions, see Ratzinger's 1989 presentation to the Presidents of the European Doctrinal Commission: "Difficulties Confronting the Faith in Europe Today," *Communio*, Vol. 38 (Winter, 2011) (to appear).

[x] I leave aside here the trend toward literal childlessness expressed in the increasingly low birth rates of Western societies. The studies of Nicholas Eberstadt are indispensable for understanding these demographics in their cultural implications.

[xi] The program was founded by John Senior and two other professors at the university. For comments pertinent to the founding and history of the program, see *inter alia* Russell Hittinger, "Solesmes Monks Coming to Tulsa," *Crisis* 17 (November, 1999), 32-6.

[xii] Note in this connection that the term "nature," from the Latin *natura*, stems from *nascor*, to be born. My suggestion to be sure implies no denial of the fact that creation *ex nihilo* involves something infinitely different from birth (or indeed making) in the normal creaturely sense. It suffices for the point I am making here, however, simply to recognize that creation *ex nihilo* is more properly understood as an act of love that is fruitful than as a mechanical act that is "productive" and "forceful." For more discussion pertinent to this point, see my treatment of Karol Wojtyła below.

[xiii] *Unless You Become Like This Child* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 49.

[xiv] Sonship in human beings is of course infinitely different from the divine Sonship of Jesus. Jesus is the gift of being-given and giving back in dialogue with the Father, but in the utterly unique sense (cf. analogy and the *maior dissimilitudo* of the Fourth Lateran Council) that the Son has already from all eternity been begotten (*unigenitum non factum*) by the Father and received from the Father and given back to the Father. The Father and the Son, in other words, have shared fully the unity of divinity from all eternity, as *Father* and *Son* (in the Holy Spirit). The Son is therefore always already complete in his divinity, and hence "adult-like," as it were. He nevertheless reveals the infinite "adult-like" divinity of God to have personal reality also as Son: not simply as the Father but also as the one who is from-the-Father. The consequence is extraordinary, in ways already suggested: in the Christian revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the power of divinity itself is disclosed in and as the "littleness" and defenseless innocence characteristic of a child. In Jesus, the *logos* of adult-like divine love is seen to involve at its core the gratitude, humility, and obedience that we rightly link with the state of being a child. The divine Word incarnate in Jesus, in other words, discloses something new about, and so far unsettles, what human beings on their own might expect regarding the nature of divinity.

What we need to understand in all of this, then, is that affirmation of childlike "littleness" in God implies no denial whatsoever of the fact that Jesus bears the self-possessing and self-determining power proper to an adult, or again the adult power of mastery over things. After all, Jesus is in absolute possession of his divinity, and as such is absolute master over all things. The point rather is that Jesus reveals the power of absolute possession and mastery in its Christian sense to be the power of love, a love that includes the exchanging of gifts, and thus (also) receiving and listening and obeying, and indeed "letting be" and so far "patience." In sum, we see in Jesus, as the revelation of eternal childhood in God, that these traits, which we associate with childlike "littleness," are in fact integral to the perfection, and so far the adult-likeness, of incarnate divinity itself.

[xv] Joseph Ratzinger, *Journey Towards Easter* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 69.

[xvi] It is for this reason, says Ratzinger, that the biblical scholar Joachim Jeremias said that "to be

children is to learn to say Father”: *ibid.*, 71-2.

[xvii] In the way Locke does, for example.

[xviii] Needless to say, there is a sense in which relations are legitimately instrumental in nature: that is just the point of qualifying the term here by “prematurely.”

[xix] *Unless You Become Like This Child* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 43.

[xx] Cf. in this connection Benedict XVI’s discussion of the monastic “search for God and... readiness to listen to him” as a necessary condition for any human culture: “The Origins of Western Theology and the Roots of European Culture,” *Communio*, Vol. 38 (Summer, 2011), 298-307 (presented as a lecture at the Collège des Bernardins, Paris, September 12, 2008). Cf. also David L. Schindler, “America’s Technological Ontology and the Gift of the Given: Benedict XVI on the Cultural significance of the *Quaerere Deum*,” also in *Communio*, Vol. 38, 237-78.

[xxi] Cf. in this connection the Calvinist-Puritan “rationalization” of time and space that was influential in the shaping of American life: Schindler, *op.cit.*, 248-55.

[xxii] *Love Alone Is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 142.

[xxiii] Karol Wojtyła, *The Collected Plays and Writings on Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 323-68. Though written much earlier (by 1964), this play was published in the Polish journal, *Znak*, in 1979, shortly after Wojtyła was elected pope.

[xxiv] Again, regarding the Latin verb, *nascor*, to be born: this verb is in the “middle voice,” and hence shares something of both active and passive. Thus we may say that nature is something first *given to itself* even as it at once *participates in its own givenness*. This, the root of what it means to be born, receives its basic ontological meaning in the Thomistic distinction between *esse* (the act of being) and *essentia* (what being is). This distinction, rightly understood, appropriates even as it transforms Aristotle’s definition of nature as an entity that bears within itself the principle both of movement and of being at rest. But this is a matter for elaboration elsewhere.

[xxv] That is, as distinct from the “sympathetic and voluntaristic relations” that are first chosen: Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 29.

[xxvi] Not surprisingly, the argument is now being made that “attention blindness” is a mark of progress. Thus: “Multitasking is the ideal mode of the twenty-first century, not just because of our information overload but because our digital age was structured without anything like a central node broadcasting one stream of information that we pay attention to at a given moment. On the Internet, everything links to everything and all of it is available all the time, at any time” (Cathy Davidson, *Now You See It: How the Brain Science of Attention Will Transform the Way We Live, Work, and Learn* [New York: Viking, 2011], 6). Key for Davidson, then, is the fact that the Internet and the World Wide Web have no center or authority or hierarchy, and thus permit maximum freedom (see p. 7).

[xxvii] It seems to me that conception, birth, and the child indicate the heart of the Christian ontological response to what Heidegger criticizes about modernity, or indeed Western patterns of thought and culture more generally. But that is also an argument for another occasion.

[xxviii] Note that, in referring to liturgy here, I am suggesting that the liturgical act is proper to members of society and not to the organs of the state as such, in accordance with a rightful understanding of the distinction between society and state. But I also take the fostering of conditions that favor the orientation toward liturgy in the lives of citizens to be a proper task of the state – in a way quite different from the customary liberal understanding in such matters. On this, see my “America’s Technological Ontology,” 271-5; and also my chapter, “Civil Community Inside the Liberal State: Truth, Freedom, and Human Dignity,” in my *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 65-132, especially 111-32.

[xxix] *The Monks of Tibhirine*, by John W. Kiser (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 163.

[xxx] Cf. in this connection Charles Peguy, *On the Portal of the Mystery of Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

[xxxi] It is beyond our scope here to discuss the details of any particular policy. For a helpful discussion pertinent to the matter of genuine policy reform, see G. K. Chesterton's *What's Wrong with the World* (in G. K. Chesterton, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987], pp. 33-224, especially here pp. 215-224), which deals *inter alia* with the question of property ownership in England. Chesterton says that there are two ways in which this ownership can be realized, "a cold administration by quite detached officials, which is called Collectivism, or a personal distribution, so as to produce what is called Peasant Proprietorship." He thinks "the latter solution the finer and more fully human, because it makes each man... a sort of small god. A man on his own turf tastes eternity or, in other words, will give ten minutes more work that is required." Nonetheless, Chesterton notes that his book is criticized for not proving or explaining adequately the case for the policy reform he advocates, and for thus ending "the book just where it ought to [have begun]." Chesterton objects that the criticism misses the point, because his book was designed rather "to prove the case against modern sages who turn reform to a routine," thus misconceiving the nature of true reform. "The whole of [his] book," he says, "has been an... elaborate urging of one purely ethical fact," which clarifies this nature, that is, in a way that alone enables a rightful understanding and practice of what Chesterton intends in calling for the policy of a personal distribution of property.

Chesterton discusses the ethical fact in terms of a parable. Modern law has permitted "certain doctors and other persons to dictate to their shabbier fellow-citizens," sending out to the latter "an order that all [poor] girls should have their hair cut short." The reason? "That the poor are pressed down . . . into [the] suffocating underworlds of squalor, that poor people must not be allowed to have hair, because in their case it must mean lice in the hair."

Chesterton's book is criticized, then, on the grounds that it does not prove or explain adequately the case for the social-economic policy he proposes in response to such a problem. But this, says Chesterton, is to beg the burden of his argument, which is that the right way to approach these matters is to begin rather at the other end: not with the question of policy reform, but "with a little girl's hair." "That I know," he says,

is a good thing at any rate. What ever else is evil, the pride of a good mother in the beauty of her daughter is good. It is one of those adamantine tendernesses which are the touchstones of every age and race. If other things are against it, other things must go down. If landlords and laws and sciences are against it, landlords and laws and sciences must go down (217-18).

Chesterton then elaborates: If the child should have long hair, then she should have clean hair; if clean hair, then a clean home; if a clean home, then a free and leisured mother; if a free and leisured mother, then not an usurious landlord; if not an usurious landlord, then a personal distribution of property; if a personal distribution of property, then a revolution: "she is the human and sacred image; all around her the social fabric shall sway and split and fall; the pillars of society shall be shaken, and the roofs of ages come rushing down; and not one hair of her head shall be harmed" (218). (Chesterton then adds a qualifying note later: "In speaking of a sweeping redistribution [i.e., a distributed personal ownership, against Socialist ownership], I speak of decision in the aim, not necessarily of abruptness in the means.... If we hesitate, we shall soon have to hurry. But if we start doing it quickly, we have still time to do it slowly": 224.)

For Chesterton, then, centering one's attention first on the "little urchin with gold-red hair" entails not at all avoidance of claims regarding social policy. Nor does it suffice by itself to explain the details of or adequately defend any one policy. What it does indicate is that starting point alone

which can lead to the right sort and spirit of the policy called for. The presupposition governing Chesterton's argument, in other words, is twofold: on the one hand, any policy not rooted in a depth of appreciation of the dignity of the little girl and her gold-red locks will tend, in some significant sense and as a matter of its inner dynamic, to be dehumanizing in form and spirit. On the other hand, to the extent that this depth of appreciation is present, such appreciation will unfold organically into a concern for social transformation, in the right form and spirit, on all the levels of community – familial through local to society as a whole – that are necessary to secure the dignity of the girl and her gold-red locks. In a word: if insufficient depth of care and appreciation for the little girl, then no adequate form or spirit of policy reform; if sufficient depth of care and appreciation, then so far an inner dynamic for the right form and spirit of reform on all levels of society necessary to secure her dignity. Either way, the necessary starting point for policy reform of the proper kind and spirit, and what alone can sustain such reform, is an abiding depth of love for the little girl and her gold-red locks.

[xxxii] Indeed, a largely unconscious and unspoken assumption of our own democratic age, held even by Christians, is that, if Jesus had had the benefits of our “benign” liberal institutions – political, economic, and academic – there would likely have been no need for him to follow the path of suffering and ignominious death. This assumption, however, itself reflects the pervasively-reductively adult-like thinking that has rendered these liberal institutions invisible as a bearer of a logic of childlessness that is readily, as a matter of its own inner dynamic, open to the homicide of the innocent and the defenseless – precisely because and insofar as they are unable to be instrumentalized in precipitously adult-like, technocratic fashion.