

Consecrated Thought Between the Priest and the Philosopher*

William Desmond

Catholic University of Leuven

Desacralized Thought

The affinity of priest and philosopher is an archaic one. The priest may be the older brother of the two, but both are originally of the same family. A certain tension of the two is also as archaic.¹ The affinity concerns their engagement with what is ultimate and our proper relation to it. The tension is that for the priest this relation is inseparable from fidelity to a tradition which for the philosopher never is quite beyond question. For the priest loyalty to a community has a certain authoritative role in defining human importances, and what counts as ultimately true, trustworthy, and deserving of ethical and spiritual esteem. For the philosopher the call to think through the meaning of our fidelities carries with it the chance of striking out from the already sanctioned ways.

It is not that the philosopher is not embedded in a tradition of thought. It is not that the priest is necessarily an enemy of thought that might induce modifications, even transformations of the hitherto authoritative tradition. Perhaps it is somewhere in the stress between tradition and thought that the difference comes to lie. Priests can become authoritarian in this wise: guardians against thought rather than guardians of a tradition's endowment of truth. Philosophers can become critical in this wise: merely debunking what has gone before, hence more tearing down what has been than adding something new to the

treasury of worthy human possibilities. It is a too-well rehearsed move of the philosophical despisers of religion to remind us that the inquisitorial priest will offer Bruno to the bonfire. It is less well recalled that someone like the genial Hume, in immortal words of philosophical toleration, will consign to the flames all those tomes of theology and metaphysics. The philosophers should beware being too smug. From them too we smell the smoke and hear the crackle of the fire.

The affinity of priest and philosopher holds if there is an ultimate towards which both are oriented. In this affinity the two are intimate others, even if in tension. This tension in affinity is itself double. It can be a source of conflict: either the priest or philosopher might treat its intimate other as a rival, potentially hostile, if not subordinate to its own claim to pre-eminence. It might also be a source of fruitfulness: thought can keep fidelity alert, while fidelity can keep thought poised on a path of discernment.

But what if our orientation to God as ultimate is deemed beyond our concern or beneath it, or denied outright? For instance, one can sometimes find an emphasis on divine transcendence which the philosopher will less seek to understand, as claim that it releases us from reflection on this "beyond." It is too beyond, so beyond that human thought cannot concern itself with it. Let that "beyond" fall to the vocation of priest; by contrast, the philosopher must seek to become the rational master of the immanent whole. The priest may well stand in accord with this proposal, consenting to being consigned the special duty of guarding that "beyond," though not by any means of thought. A kind of dualism between priest and philosopher can here come to be, and perhaps paradoxically due to a certain dualism of immanence and transcendence. One thinks of Descartes, for instance. Then philosophy will tend to define itself through itself alone, not through its relation to another absolute, beyond both itself and religion. At a certain extreme, the result is a secularizing of philosophy. Thought will be desacralized. What the sacred is will have

little or nothing to do with thought. Perhaps fidelity will be allowed in terms of a certain fideism, but the philosophical mindfulness of that fidelity will not be to the fore.

It seems to me that modern philosophy is marked by such a desacralized thought, even as thought tries to maintain itself as a kind of absolute: a power to make intelligible that is defined purely through itself alone: absolutely autonomous, self-determining reason. Clearly in this view, the priest and the philosopher will have little to do with each other. Quite the opposite: the risk of hostility, often claimed to be the preserve of premodern sacralized thinking, will be very much in evidence, but now from the direction of the self-proclaimed superiority of autonomous thought. The priest may now be decried as a lackey of tyrannical tradition and dogma, not a free thinker. The philosopher glories in the pride of thought.

This sense of the relation between the two is a very modern construction and it has entered deeply into the self-image of priest and philosopher, but clearly there are other relations possible. If we live in postmodern times, this construction may also ask to be deconstructed, and something of their antecedent archaic affinity might return in new form. Of course, many of those claiming to be postmodern still work with an image of the philosopher as having shed the alleged authoritarian tutelage of the priest. They are heirs of the Enlightenment as they dismantle the Enlightenment. And yet a more fertile point to any such deconstruction might be the opening up of a new, or renewed porosity between the priest and philosopher as intimate others, not as dualistic opposites. This porosity is not necessarily opened by simply breaking down the identities of the priest and the philosopher. A reformation of such identities might be required, or at least some recuperation of an intimacy between them in their otherness. I would say that it is crucial to maintain properly a sense of the God “beyond” priest and philosopher, if each of these is to be seen as offering different services of a transcendence that surpasses

either alone, and towards which the dialogue of the two tends.

Of course, if there are different traditions, what it means to be a priest will be different. Something analogous might be said of different practices of philosophy. There is a certain consecration to divinity or ultimacy in diverse traditions, even if the nature of the ultimate or the ultimate divinity is differently understood. This consecration takes the character of a certain intermediation: the priest stands in a middle where there is said to be a communication from the ultimate to the relative, and from the relative to the ultimate. These two directions of communication need not be the same: from divinity to us as graced and inspired; from us to divinity, as reverent and praising. The priest is a consecrated middle: a between porous on both sides, and hence able to turn in two directions, able to turn around, upward and downwards, enunciating the relation of the two, enacting it, incarnating it. A consecrated middle turning to finite life, from a turn to what is above finite life. A consecrated middle enacting the turn of human beings to God, or the turning of God to human beings in creation, in sacred ritual and in a way of life consecrated to ethical service of the other.

Does philosophical thought have anything to do with this? In many practices of religion, the priest was also a figure of wisdom, not unrelated to the sage.² The philosopher is a later-born son in this family, perhaps giving a different priority to critical thought than either, yet nevertheless coming to be in a familial relation to them, a relation to be denied at the cost of reducing philosophy to a technical expertise or a quasi-scientific method, with the loss of the *sapiential dimension* of reflective thought itself. For one might see the philosopher also as a figure of the between: in Platonic terms a creature of eros, daimonic in the sense of a mediator between the mortal and the divine, emergent from the given materialities of existence yet ecstatic and surpassing the limits of finite confinements in the direction of the ultimate. The philosopher as between is both porous to what is beyond the human

self, and in human selving directed to what is beyond, turning the soul in that direction by a discipline of mindfulness that is more than the mere clever virtuosity of the abstract intellect. The whole human being is put to the question, put to the test.

In all this, what authority or authorization is claimed, or can be claimed by the philosopher? A priest has authority by being invested, first relative to the divine as the ultimate endowing source, and second relative to the long accumulated wisdom of a tradition or historical community. This community is itself the more ultimate between, in the space intermediating human beings and God. There is something trans-individual about the priest as a between, just as a participant in that community, and as consecrated with the endowing power of the divine. I do not think the philosophy can or should claim any such authorizing, and yet I think there can be a vocation to philosophy, which again places priest and philosopher in the same between, and as intimate relations of each other.

In modernity, admittedly, there is a general tendency of philosophy to try to generate its own self-authorization by claiming that rational thinking justifies itself. Thinking is to be absolutely self-determining: questioner, responder, and judge of the claims of others and of its own claim. This self-authorization reaches its acme in modern rational enlightenment, such as we find in the philosophy of Hegel, for instance. It also continues in thinkers dedicated to the deconstruction of modern rational enlightenment, such as Nietzsche, though here things begin to become more deeply equivocal. These seemingly opposed instances do not exhaust the possibilities. There is another view of the *heteronomy* of philosophical thought that would bring it closer to the religious porosity of the priest. This other view suggests that thinking is not self-determining but is endowed from an enigmatic source other to thought thinking itself. This possibility was lived more spontaneously by premodern philosophers, I think. Now in post-modernity, signs begin to flicker of something not unlike it, beyond

the deconstruction of absolutely autonomous secular reason. The signs flicker in the porosity of philosophy to its most significant others, especially great art, and being religious. Does this latter possibility point to a new form of consecrated thought? Consecrated thought beyond both the hubris of autonomous reason seeking self-absolutization and the evisceration of reason in a deconstruction which has trouble clearing nihilism, equally anti-philosophical as anti-religious?

Vocation: Thought Between Religion and Philosophy

What can thought be between religion and philosophy? Of course, there is the familiar *fides quarens intellectum*. This has been a desideratum of the intellectually trained priest, as well as the philosopher who wishes to make intelligible sense of the perplexing claims of faith. It may well be true that in recent times the intellectual vocation of the priest has fallen too much into desuetude: overreaction to the too mechanical resort to a too packaged Thomism, coupled with a breathless eagerness to catch up with the age. Of course, anxiety about falling behind the age can occasion the jettisoning of the wisdom of long ages for the fashionable babble of the day—babble mutating from day to day. As there is a long community of faith, there is a long community of thinking about faith and this must be deeply respected. Otherwise we reinvent the wheel, and a wheel does not necessarily move one better just because it is announced as new.

Is there a thinking between religion and philosophy, which is open to both, and yet puts questions to both? Questions not only of the philosopher to the priest, but of the priest to the philosopher? For if religion is closest to the ultimate, as it is, then it seems questionable to simply let the philosopher pose questions on his pet terms, and his alone. Yet the priest has to have a *fides* of mind, a *con-fides* or confidence, not just that religion can withstand intellectual scrutiny

but that it opens enigmas and perplexities that put the philosopher to the utmost test. This asks of the philosopher that she or he be porous to the possibility that there are forms of religion that communicate from a space of significance more ultimate than philosophy itself. A certain openness to the religious qua religious must already be there.³

If the dialogue here is two-way, the priest also must be open to what philosophy communicates. Yet too, in the education of the priest, if the prevalent forms of philosophizing are threadbare, one must beware of Greeks bearing gifts. The practices of philosophy may already have so defined themselves that this fertile space between philosophical thought and religion may lie fallow. Some practices of philosophy may not even allow that there is such a space at all where philosophical thought itself is tested to the utmost. In that respect, the pedagogy of priest has a vested interest in the health of robust philosophical thought open to the space between itself and the religious. Once again, though, if the dominant philosophical culture is defined by indifference to, or hostility towards the religious, it is foolish to look in the direction of philosophers for sapiential solidarity. Philosophy is not a neutral conceptual tool, or intellectual technique. Embedded in its practices are fundamental decisions and orientations towards what is of most import, and ultimate: what it means to be, to be true, to be good, to be a human person, what is or is not sacred, what God is.

Perhaps the notion of vocation reaches out on both sides in the middle space between the priest and the philosopher. Vocation implies something of a special calling. There is a certain singularity to a vocation. This singular person is called to be such and such. If one believes in a God that knows every creature to the hairs on their head, this will not seem impossible, even if astounding relative to the kinds of knowledges we possess. The agapeic love of the divine is to us an idiot wisdom. Our knowledges are usually of a sort yielding a more neutral generality or universality. But

vocation bears on the singular as singular. There might, of course, be a singular community—certainly this is claimed for the Jews as an elect people. The singularity at issue will be hard to grant if we think in neutral generalities. Relative to the singular human being, vocation bears on the intimacy of being, and there seems something idiosyncratic, even idiotic from the point of a more respectable generality or universality.⁴ This is not a point in rejection of more general assessments; yet the singularity of vocation calls for a different kind of finesse and discrimination. If one were only concerned with numbers, one would have lost the thread, and one might as well recruit noughts as anything else to swell the numbers.

There are those in religious institutions who might be skeptical of the notion of singular vocation—organization men, suspicious just of the singular as singular. Yet if there is not some irreducible singularity, what then recommends any specialness to the calling. One might be humble to the point of self-effacement but if this singular tonality of uniqueness is not granted its place, then God becomes a manager of neutral universals, not a lover whose agapeic mindfulness knows even the hairs on the heads of fragile mortals.

Philosophers generally are also suspicious of vocation for not unlike reasons. They love the neutral universal, and identify the singular with the merely contingent and the capricious. They are not wrong in this regard, namely, that a person might exploit claims to singularity, when the real story is the puffing up of one's pretensions to false importance. In religion, as in any other areas, there is no immunity from counterfeit singularities that mimic the real thing. Human beings are driven to singularize themselves, to try to define themselves as themselves. In this instance, the counterfeit singularity is what it is by virtue of a self-insistence that has no opening to what is beyond itself.

The singularity of vocation is quite other. Since there is a call, there is a receiving more primal than any self-

asserting. The receiving so qualifies the self-asserting, that all self-affirmation might undergo a *metanoia* in which our indebtedness to an endowing source beyond ourselves moves us in the direction of gratitude rather than self-glorification. There is reverence for what has been given rather than arrogance for what is claimed as one's own.

Genuine religious vocation has something of this special singularity, and indeed a kind of idiocy, though again I would construe this idiocy in terms of the intimacy of being. If the religious calling does not address itself to what is most intimate in our being, it is hard to see how it can make the ultimate claim on us that it does. Augustine speaks of God as more intimate to me than I am to myself. This is divine idiocy that calls even when we are dead and think that every call is the urge of self-insistent ambition.

Some philosophers have mulled on this self-insistence. I think of Plato's understanding of our tendencies to *eros turannos*. They have wanted to devise therapies of mindfulness to moderate the tyranny of self-insistence. That moderation can be effect in the direction of the neutral universal, but if that is all, such a moderation can only amount to a partial therapy, precisely to the degree that it is effected by the denial or abrogation of the singular qua singular intimacy. I think of Spinoza and the Stoics. It is rightly felt that there is something other and beyond self-insistent singularity. But this is not exhausted by the neutral or indifferent universal. There is what I call the *intimate universal*: a community of being that in promise extends to all, but that appeals to what is most intimate in the depths of the singular soul, and within which that intimate appeal finds itself addressed in a unique way. In my view, the genuine religious community is the intimate universal, in the sense intended here. Not a neutral universal, not a collection of merely capricious singularities, but a community which guards and serves the intimacy of the singular in bonds that are themselves constituted by the

most intimate of loves—loves that finally come to rest in the divine as the absolute in agapeic mindfulness.⁵

In this community of the intimate universal there is a sense in which we are all priests as singularly called into the ultimate community. There may be some singulars whose witness of life pays even more special honor to what is asked of us by this community of vocation. The priest dedicated to a life between the human and the divine stands out in witness to this community of the intimate universal. But whether with all, or with the special case, the intimate community is the between of the human and the divine, graced by the communication of the divine and served by the response of the human.

Could one say also that there can be a vocation to be a philosopher in the sense here intended? I think there is something to this. One might choose to be a philosopher but there is an impulse to philosophize that is not first the product of choice. It comes to us out of the obscurity of the soul and the singularity of a life. For enigmatic reasons we do not comprehend, less in the beginning than perhaps later, we are called on a journey which will take us we know not where—a journey into the darkness of our ignorance, and perhaps the learned ignorance that may crown fidelity to the spirit of truthfulness. From where does this call come? No philosopher has an answer. Our answer to the call, in the beginning, is that we do not have an answer, and so we heed the call. Or turn from it.

For the beginning is a happening, not the product of a choice—choice comes later. We are struck into astonishment. An otherness comes over one and the strangeness of being at all communicates itself intimately, calling us to mind it, to become mindful of what it means in the full extent of its intelligibility and mystery. First there is a happening of astonishment and perplexity to which we are patient; then more mindful thought comes in the gap between this patience and a seeking that would both respond and make sense. The seeking seeks an answer by itself answering

a call in which it does not put the question but which puts it into question. A philosopher is first put into question before he puts anything else into question, even himself. Out of this receiving the activities of further thought arise—arise as a vocation committed to follow the call.

I sense that in the longer traditions of the great religions this vocation was well recognized in its fraternal (or sisterly) relation to the vocation of the priest. It formed part of the vocation of some of the great saints. But whether in a sanctified life, or not, there is a vocation to thought which is first a solicitation before it is a commitment. And there is no evident reward offered for the undertaking. The professional enticements of a solid salary and social respectability can hardly be held up as sufficient enticements to follow this vocation to thought. One gets paid to be a professor, no one pays one to be a philosopher. True, when one becomes a respected professor, the confusion with the unpaid philosopher can quickly take over. But the vocation is followed for nothing, done for nothing, nothing beyond fidelity to the call itself, done for free. Those who feel the attraction of philosophy as young students know that there is a risk to be undertaken, and prudent parents fret about the paucity of job prospects to crown such studies. The successful professor can fulfill the role of a spiritual mirage in offering a mask that hides the hazard of thought for free. The respectable professor is the placebo of the philosopher. The philosopher, as following a vocation to thought, may be a healer—or, betraying that vocation, a corrupter.

Consecrated Thought

Should the training of the priest recover some appreciation of the vocation to consecrated thought and foster it? Of course, to the secularized reason of modernity the idea of consecrated thought makes no sense. The idea of a priestly vocation also must make little sense, since the identity of human beings is primarily defined by what

they choose to be rather than what they are called to be. In a fully secularized world, who would be there to call the human being to be? Other human beings? But other human beings seem heteronomous others, hence ambiguous relative to our own claim to the autonomous self-determination of identity. Do we call ourselves? There have been theories which amount to such a self-calling. But how could the human being call to itself? It would have to be split between itself as listening to itself and itself as speaking to itself. People do talk to themselves thus—some sane, some mad. But how does the self-calling human being envisage a more complete or higher version of itself to which it calls itself to be? In some enigmatic sense it would already have to be its own more complete or higher self. But why then call to itself? And how then be a less complete or less high version of itself, if already it is its own higher self? One can insist that the human being is supposedly self-creating, but then we have the tension: it must be itself to create itself, and it must create itself to be itself; but how can it be both? And what if there is something already about it *given to be*, before it creates itself? It does not create this given, this being given to be. It is endowed with it as gift.

Vocation, consecrated life and thought imply another calling that is superior, higher than ourselves. I grant that it is not *entirely* false to say we call ourselves to our own heights, in that we immanently feel the call to be ourselves more truly, to be true to what we are, to perfect the powers of life with which we are endowed. But any such “self-calling” presupposes the prior granting of our own being as endowed. We do not endow ourselves. And there is the reality that the dimensions of vocation bear on something unconditionally supreme in a religious sense, where the experience is of being called beyond oneself, not only to oneself as realized as in a higher, more perfect form, but called to something more transcendent still, even though this is also intimately immanent. For, after all, to hear a call is indeed something very intimate.

Otherwise put, if there is a consecration of life, or thought, we do not consecrate ourselves. We consent to a call, and find ourselves consecrated. Before one lives a consecrated existence, one receives from another source beyond oneself more than one could generate or define through oneself alone. Consecration is an investiture—an endowing that confirms an endowment. And if it is also a commitment, this is to something exceeding oneself. It is an exceeding commitment, in that the living out of the consecration entails a hyperbolic dimension: we could neither grant it, nor guarantee it through ourselves alone. We find ourselves again and again called to lay ourselves open to the strengthening source that empowers one to live up to the ideal. We must be willing, but we cannot just will the attainment of this ideal. There is a willing that is prior to this or that act of will: a state of willingness, readiness, vigilance to what comes, in a world recharged by consecration with enigmatic sacred significance.

A purely secular ethos here makes no sense. While this seems more evident with the priest, I think it has relevance to the philosopher also. If there is a vocational side to philosophy, it makes sense to ask who or what calls the philosopher, and to whom or what is she or he called. If there is a sense of unconditional truth that carries the thinker forward then we are in a space that is hard to render in purely secular terms—terms which reduce everything to immanent conditionality. In such a milieu of immanent conditionals, from where could the unconditional emerge, and make a call on us? And yet it does emerge. It emerges in our ethical being, certainly; and in our searches for the truth. While we do not possess the absolute truth, we are under the charge of the spirit of truth, and called to the utmost fidelity in being truthful. Being truthful is a token of unconditionality in a conditioned finite creature like us: called to an honesty and truthfulness that is not of our own construction but that lays its charge on us.

The priest might ritually be consecrated by incorporation into a religious community. How is the thinker consecrated? Getting a PhD is not the sacred ritual that magically transforms the graduate student into a philosopher—though it might be the union card needed to apply for an academic job with any chance of success. There seems no ritual ordination in the ordination of the thinker to truth. And yet there is an ordination. And what of the community into which consecration gives initiation? The academic community, or college of professors? I think this is not it either, since there is a difference between being a professor and a philosopher, and sometimes academic communities can be less than acute when it comes to philosophical acumen. Many of the great philosophers were not members of an academic community in that sense.

The ordination of the philosopher would be more like a nameless initiation into an incognito community of seekers after the ultimate, though again there can be individuals who experience the call with an intensity and urgency that many humans do not know. There is something intimately universal about philosophy, and yet the difficulty of thinking makes it so that it will be primarily for the few and only indirectly for the many.

Gifted Thinking, Porosity, Praying

There will be those who make haste to post their chilling indictment: Elitism! This is not quite my point. Rather, it is the need to consider seriously if there is such a thing as *gifted thinking*? I mean this in two senses. First, there are some individuals who seem especially gifted with the powers of thinking. These individuals have a spontaneous, native feel for the energy of thought, and when they discover this, they are lived by an energy of minding in which they participate rather than fully possess through themselves alone. In a way they are possessed by thinking. There is an element of the involuntary and received: possessed in a way reminding us of the *theia mania*,

which for Plato is one of the gifts of the philosophers, as well as the poets. This possession, needless to say, has its dangers. It can equivocally skirt the boundaries of mad madness rather than divine madness. We need discernment to see where the divine is in the madness and where the madness is merely mad; and where the possession is merely a defection from mindfulness.

Second, there is also the sense of gifted thinking which applies in a wider way. One might argue that more originally we do not think but find ourselves thinking. We do not first think ourselves into thinking. We *wake up* to ourselves already as thinking, as beings who are endowed with the promise of mindfulness, even though the endowment can then be developed according to its native gifts. But first there is the original givenness of thinking as the promise of a unique power of minding being that marks the human being. This gift-character of thinking is forgotten when our image of thought is of a self-determining reason which would define everything through itself alone. Nevertheless, its power to define itself has first been given as a power or invested as a promise.

At the origin of itself, thought's powers of self-determination are qualified by a sourcing that retreats into recesses, even as we try to subject it to our own autonomous self-determination. Thought's source is heteronomous but in no tyrannical sense. This sourcing gives us the resource to think, in an endowing and releasing sense. After all, it is an amazing thing that the human being wakes up to itself and the rest of being, endowed with the astonishing power to mind all things, itself included. Of course, as we develop this minding power, we forget the amazing grant that minding thus *is granted at all*. It is granted but once granted it is taken for granted and henceforth we quickly forget the gifted character of the thinking. A wakeful philosopher should be especially attentive to the enigma of this gift.

Vocation takes us beyond self-insistent singularity, as I said above, and yet it

pertains to the singular as singular, as well as to ordination to a community that transcends self-insistence. I would say that the gifted thinking of consecrated philosophizing, like the vocation to the priesthood, entails a certain porosity of being in which one is a middle between the human and what transcends the human. There is a *passio essendi* that is more primal than every *conatus essendi*: a patience of being more original than all our endeavors to be. It is with regard to this *passio essendi* that the gift of thinking is also patiently received: given from another source first, before developed this way or that, in its endeavor to think this or that.

Sustaining a response to the call of vocation means keeping this primal porosity unclogged. In philosophy, keeping the porosity unclogged is aided by the disciplines of reflection and inquiry that are attentive to actualities beyond the immanent confines of bewitching abstractions. In living, the porosity is kept unclogged in an orientation to life that is ethically attentive to the sources of worth and value, and that lives them as integrally as possible. In being religious, praying is the happening that most keeps unclogged the primal porosity.

The priority of the *passio essendi* does not mean a flaccid passivity, a kind of lackadaisical lethargy towards things or deeds. It does not entail a languid quietism but an alertness and readiness to what comes to pass, and what we are to bring to pass. This alertness is expressed in contemplative as well as active modes. Yet one might stress that there is a patience of thought that is especially marked by a vocation to something more contemplative in its way of being. This especially is to be recalled in our time, when loud utilitarian pressures harry us and toss us this way and that, depriving us of all more inherent serenity, and rushing us from means to means, with the end of it all lost in a maelstrom of acquisition that, in craving possession of all things, ends in occupancy of nothing.

Gifted, consecrated thought is patient thought. Hence it is contemplative of what exceeds us, what exceeds our use and

usages, what is worthy in its own right, even when it does not accord with how we might more pragmatically evaluate it. We are not the measure of consecrated thought, nor is our measure the measure of what is worthy to be affirmed. The energy of a transcending is in the patience of gifted thought, as the *passio essendi* is caught up in surpassings beyond itself: to truth as for itself, even if as also other to our mastery. We might be the measure of many things but, as called, we are not the measure of ourselves. There is a direction and destiny in the path that is to be obscurely followed; but towards what the path goes, we do not, and cannot know in advance with complete univocal certainty. There is a certain faith in being given over to this path: a fidelity in our passing along it to something exceeding our scientific determination, even ethical determination. One remains faithful to it by remaining faithful to the call as communicated and acknowledged in intimate innerness: passing towards truth by the light of our own fidelity to being truthful.

It is not that this contemplative side is lacking its own practical side. But this practical side is not utilitarian, is not defined by serviceable disposability.⁶ It is more integrally ethical. That is, we are called to the doing of the truth: the deed itself can incarnate, be the enactment of, the call of being true.⁷ There are many dimensions to our being ethical; but the most important here is that the patience of being true calls us beyond our self-insistence into a service of the good. This is a service of the good of the other, but this is not exclusive of service of one's own good. There is a service of the good of self that also is beyond self-insistence. At the heights this service is an agapeic service.⁸ The service of consecrated thought it also an agapeic service: lived out of gift, and in patience towards what is beyond oneself, but out of a surplus of mindfulness that first again is given to one before one can give oneself over to minding what is beyond oneself. Minding that arises from being gifted comes to be a mindfulness free to give itself over to what is beyond itself—and without imposing conditions on

the other in advance. To be a consecrated thinker is hence impossible without the proper way of life: not only mindful of the good of life, but living mindfully a good life.

The pragmatism of modernity notwithstanding, there is a measure beyond the human, and contemplation is needed to be open to it. Beyond the instrumentalizings of modernity, there are practices of life in which we try to enact with integrity the good. The consecrated passion of the first opening is matched by the committed endeavor of the second enactment. Then the *passio essendi* and the *conatus essendi* come to be in accord, under the call of a more original patience to the good, and a more unconditional doing that would live agapeically, in light of the good beyond human measure.

This is why one might say that such consecrated thinking awakens to itself in the same family circle wherein *praying* is at home. The intimacy of prayer is also a porosity to the divine. We do not pray through ourselves; we await a gift of communication from the divine, within which we find ourselves and to which we wake up in prayer. The initiation, initiative comes from the other side, even if we must respond in order for the communication—already full in its surplus fullness—to be further fulfilled by being heard.

There are modes of thinking that are more like prayer than anything else. One wakes up to something astonishing. One is struck into thought. One finds oneself already in thinking, entertaining thoughts that come to one from who knows where. In the past the meditative practices of the philosophers have evoked certain likenesses with religious meditation. These likenesses are the more lost, the more reason wants to secularize itself, and the more the loss of the sapiential dimension is carried through. With the sapiential dimension, thought needs to relish the savor of truth. Sapiential savoring is not unlike a taste of the divine—a finesse for the divine.

One might also say that the notion of agapeic service is cognate to this sense of the porosity of prayer. Agapeic service lays

itself open generously to what is other. There need be nothing servile about this service. This is a service which has the bearings of nobility. The priestly height is down in the valleys of life, there where all self-affirming sovereignty becomes again like a child, and the servant of servants hiddenly passes by in a secret nobility. This service is not a matter of possessing power but of being empowered and being able to empower—but not with one's own power but with the energy of the divine in which it is one's privilege to participate. Being at all is this participation, even when it is not known as such, and even when we remain unheeding of its soliciting call.

Notes

* This article was originally published in *Louvain Studies* 30 (2005), 92-106.

1. See my *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany, NY: State University

of New York Press, 1990), chapter 1, especially pp. 39-43.

2. See *Philosophy and Its Others*, pp. 55-61.

3. On some of these issues more fully, see my *Is There a Sabbath for Thought? Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

4. On the idiotic and agapeic mind, see my *Perplexity and Ultimacy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), chapters 3 and 4; on idiot wisdom, see *Philosophy and its Others*, 309-311.

5. On the intimate universal, see my "Het Intieme Universeel: Tussen Religie en Filosofie," in *Godsdienst/Filosofisch bekeken*, ed. P. Cortois, W. Desmond, I. Verhack (Kapellen: Pelckmans, 2003), pp. 71-87; also *Is There a Sabbath for Thought?*, introduction.

6. On this see *Ethics and the Between* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), chapter 14.

7. See *Being and the Between* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), chapter 12, "Being True."

8. See *Ethics and the Between*, chapter 16.