In Memoriam:
Msgr. Robert J. Batule

Nearly thirty years ago, I was in Washington, D.C., to attend a conference which spanned a few days. Since I would be in our nation’s capital, I decided to make contact with someone I had come to know through my work as a parish priest. This person, a wife and mother, invited me to her home in northern Virginia after the conference’s activities were concluded on the first day. I was happy to accept the invitation and upon my acceptance, I was told that there would be another guest for dinner. The other guest, it turned out, was the estimable Fr. James Schall.

Since it was my first meeting with the long-time Georgetown University professor, I knew I could talk to him about a book of his I had read when I was a seminarian. The book in question was one of Fr. Schall’s earlier ones, *Christianity and Politics* (1981), and I recalled marking up the text pretty well because the author had made so many good points. It was the kind of exercise I settled into easily in reading large chunks of Fr. Schall’s corpus over the next few decades. His writing bore the unmistakable marks of a learned and wise man, and I knew that to become more knowledgeable myself, I had to have him as one of my unofficial tutors.

With that initial meeting, there was a basis for keeping up a correspondence via notes sent through the regular mail. I delighted each time the mail brought one of his hand-written notes. What question would he pose this time, what book would he recommend now, and what event would he comment on this time? There were of course too the photocopies of his columns from *Gilbert*! which were filled with his prescient observations on one subject after another.

What a career it was for Fr. Schall: dozens of books (a few of them published just within the last few years of his life); hundreds and hundreds of articles and columns in outlets almost too numerous to count; all those courses taught in fifty-eight years in the classroom; all those students taught in the United States and Rome. It is amazing but you would think he would never have had the time to read submissions for the *Catholic Social Science Review*. But he did! Most of us, by comparison, are under-achievers. In the case of Fr. Schall, I would have to say he was a Jesuit in full, in full assimilation of Saint Ignatius’s motto: *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Would that we all could do a little more in service of the glory of God. We can—under the inspiration of a loyal son of Saint Ignatius like Fr. Schall.
Although steeped in his faith, Fr. Schall was not too steeped in the older, more traditional mode of communication sometimes mockingly referred to as “snail mail.” He made extensive use of emails—even if it was just to jot a few lines and to ask for prayers. It was the “Schallian” trademark, an unfeigned gesture from an enormously talented man who knew that he was under the judgment of God, and was not too proud to ask help from others who are similarly situated, which means all of us, obviously.

In connection with the judgment to which we are all subject, Fr. Schall was known to write about things like the disorders of the soul. The disorders of the soul are, at root, what ails civilizations. However, this is not what we are told by the ensconced political classes today. They insist that we are in peril, mostly, from what is outside of us—things like global warming, for instance. But is that so? No, not at all. Following Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar*, our faults lie not in the stars but in ourselves. Fr. Schall, however, would push back further historically than Shakespeare’s seventeenth century England, all the way back in fact to Plato.

The truth is we are not under the judgment of history as much as we are under the judgment of the Lord of history. That judgment was rendered by the Lord on a hill outside of Jerusalem in the first century. It came by way of the Cross—a feat Plato was powerless to effect for us in history. The potent grace of the Cross came the first time to Fr. Schall when he was baptized into the Catholic faith in Pocahontas, Iowa, some ninety-one years ago, and was given again and again throughout his lifetime, especially each time he offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as a priest.

That was the last time I was with Fr. Schall—when both of us were concelebrants of a Mass closing out one of the annual conferences of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. With his earthly pilgrimage now come to an end, may the prayers Fr. Schall requested while still with us continue for him unabated. May the same prayers bring us without presumption a heavenly intercession of “Schallian” wisdom in order to contemplate the Wisdom Who is Christ—now and for all eternity.

Requiescat in pace. Tu es sacerdos in aeternam.