

***A Response from Paul Radzilowski
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Christopher Shannon has written a fine piece that offers not only a reflection on the state of Catholic historiography today, but also a prescription for its future. I substantially agree with most of what he says, or at least take it as worthy of quite serious consideration. Among the things I am convinced he is correct about are the danger to Catholic historiography of any rigid fact/value dichotomy, his critique of the tendency of contemporary historians to read abstract or hypothetical social or personal agencies as though they were real subjects of history, and his call for a careful and selective appropriation by Catholic historians of the fruits of the monographic tradition of academic history. Surely he is also correct in saying that Catholic historiography need not exclude anything—even social history—if it is relevant at all to the more important realities of human existence, above all the salvation of souls. Perhaps most insightfully of all, he suggests that a revival of authentically Catholic historiography must begin with a distinctively Catholic way of reading histories, in the tradition of the classic fourfold meaning of Scripture, i.e. not just the “literal” meaning of events, but also the typological, broadly speaking. I would like to focus on this last observation and expand upon it for the balance of my response, along the way registering a mild dissent to what I take to be his position on a point or two.

Christopher Shannon refers, cogently enough, to the analogical nature of the Catholic vision. It is returning this vision to historiography that is a large part of his prescription for the Catholic historian today. This is an analogical vision that is—taken in its largest sense—not a collection of various comparisons, but has its metaphysical root in what the Thomists are wont to call a “prime analogate,” i.e. a primary pattern or end that gives form and meaning to the rest of the terms, which strictly speaking, are likenesses to it. Speaking theologically, the prime analogate of human history is God himself, and more precisely his own action and self-revelation in time. So the distinct task of Catholic history would seem to be to search for the likeness of all temporal things in their historicity to the saving acts of God, especially in the person of the incarnate Son, and thus to point out the most important and spiritual aspect of His providence. This is certainly a grand task, and one that seems impossible for the Catholic historian to ignore. And yet it seems some very real difficulties will arise when one tries to apply it. One is quite practical. It is hard to write typologically for a contemporary audience, who, even if Catholic, are often not used to thinking

typologically about history. We historians, furthermore, are scarcely trained formally to do so either. Hence Shannon's basic prescription that we start with a new way of reading seems to me quite sound. That this new way of reading should include a revival of a typological sensibility seems to me obvious.

Yet, I think that it is necessary that we be very clear about just what the end of historical inquiry is, and what makes it different from that of a theologian or philosopher of history. Although not without some pre-Christian roots, the four senses of Scripture were developed mostly to understand the spiritual significance of the Word of God, especially in relating the Old Testament to the revealed fact of the Incarnation of the Son of God. This is to say its purpose was theological. Now, one may postulate simply enough that all history, even "secular" history, stands in analogy to this saving mystery, from which it draws its most fundamental meaning. And this would certainly be true. But who is going to be best able to understand this *theological* meaning of history—a historically attuned theologian or a historian with theological interests? I suspect, in most cases, the former. For surely it requires, above all, a subtlety of specifically theological understanding to bring out a theological meaning? A similar argument could be made with regard to the application of philosophical principles, such as natural law, to history, although perhaps the historian's disadvantage here is less marked, in that like the philosopher the historian's primary intellectual skills are based upon natural reason.

So what can the historian contribute better than any others to a revived Catholic understanding of history? The answer, it seems to me, is the depth and breadth of his engagement with the particular actualities of the past. But it is important to be precise here to avoid falling back into the fact/value dichotomy. What I have in mind is the historian's ability to relate a larger and more completely investigated set of historical particulars *qua* particular (actions, influences, interrelations, contingent cultural contexts, etc.) to general truths about man taught by theology and philosophy. So far as I can see, even if we substitute "man in history" for "man" in the last sentence, the point still holds.

Thus, the historian does not need to equal the theologian or philosopher in the extensiveness, or technical depth of his interpretation of history in terms of general truths; but he naturally will have a great advantage in understanding the subtleties of the particularities that stand in relation to them. It is his right and duty to study these same relations, *i.e.* of the particular to general truth, but unlike the theologian or philosopher of history, he will generally do so from the standpoint of the particulars. This is his most proper occupation, and the one in which no other specialist can match his expertise.

In practice, this can be done in any number of ways, and here I agree with Christopher Shannon that to do so we need not merely copy traditional patterns of Catholic historiography, however useful these will continue to be. But with regard to specifics of relating the particulars of human existence in time to general truths in a historical way, I will content myself with a single example: It is possible for Catholic historians to concentrate on saints and saint-like figures of the times, places and events which they are presenting, so as to show how these concrete types of Christ—the eternal exemplar of all truth—were instantiated in their particular context. For instance, a history of diplomacy or strategic military leadership during the First World War could give special prominence to the Blessed Charles Hapsburg. This would by no means require a triumphalistic exaggeration of his actual role or influence on events, nor would it even require lots of explicit remarking upon his virtues or analyses of his actions drawing specific attention to the eternal standards they might instantiate. It would require, however, setting the right tone and frame of analysis for the reader at the outset, and/or otherwise accentuating their relation to the truth about the good, so that the reader can draw the requisite conclusions himself.

This brings me to my final comment. Christopher Shannon suggests that a revival of Catholic historiography should avoid a multiplication of scholarship by limiting the amount produced on the model of an old professional guild. If he merely means by this that we should avoid the sometimes pointless multiplication of scholarship produced by the modern research university, I am in full agreement. In the short run, to be sure, we must make a virtue of necessity, since the number of historians fully committed to the Catholic vision is evidently relatively small at present. But in the longer run, if there should be the major revival of Catholic historiography he and I hope for, it seems to me hard to say for now whether few histories or many devoted to some given approach or topic will prove useful or necessary. The very nature of historiography, after all, tends to expansiveness in as far as it is intended to make visible to us a vast ocean of the past, all of it, as we know, shaped by God's mysterious providence, whether or not any of us can fully grasp the mercies of its immense working.