



**Symposium:
Reflections on the Political Thought
of Fr. James V. Schall:
Reason, Revelation, and Politics
Introduction**

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This symposium is the result of a panel sponsored by the Society of Catholic Social Scientists at the 2015 American Political Science Association Conference in honor of Fr. James V. Schall, emeritus professor of government at Georgetown University.

Fr. Schall is one of the most prolific scholars and influential teachers, having taught at the Pontifical Gregorian University, the University of San Francisco, and, from 1977 to 2012, at Georgetown University. He is a master at the Socratic method—a teaching method that was expected and appreciated by his students, including those 100 plus who enrolled in his “Introduction to Political Theory” course. He taught courses on particular political thinkers or themes such as Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, natural law, and his most recent course on Roman Catholic political thought, which resulted from a lifetime of research and thought. Fr. Schall influenced thousands of students throughout the years, including me, as I had the privilege of taking his course on Plato’s political philosophy as a graduate student. A testament to this influence is the standing-room-only crowd at 500-plus-seat Gaston Hall for his final farewell speech at Georgetown.¹

Fr. Schall influenced not only students but also countless unknown others through his writing. He has written over fifty books; over a thousand shorter and longer essays and commentaries; hundreds of book chapters, journal articles, and book reviews; and hundreds of monthly columns. (To my knowledge, no one has compiled a complete bibliography of his works—a project-in-waiting for someone.) His writings cover every topic imaginable and are accompanied by creative titles such as “The Praise of ‘Sons of Bitches’: On the Worship of God by Fallen Man,” “Truth and the Open Society,” and one of my favorites, “The Metaphysics of Walking.” He addresses every topic imaginable in some insightful manner, with many topics touching on the themes of reason, revelation, and politics, constantly demonstrating how they are hierarchically related, according to the nature of things. He is a man of wisdom—a wisdom attainable from

reasonable reflection on the most profound questions that everyone should address, but also attainable from the Wisdom revealed to our reason by God Himself.

To celebrate Fr. Schall and his thought are three distinguished professors and friends: Peter Augustine Lawler, Dana Professor in Government at Berry College; Marc Guerra, associate professor and chair of Theology at Assumption College; and Hadley P. Arkes, Edward N. Ney Professor in American Institutions (Emeritus) at Amherst College. They each touch on a number of themes, such as Schall's Thomism, Augustinianism, and attention to Aristotle and Plato, as well as his promotion of knowledge of "what is"—the nature of reality and its inherent telos, including the nature of the human person upon which all politics rests. The contributors address Schall's treatment of the above themes as they fall within the overarching themes of the relationship between reason and revelation and the relationship between the ancient and modern political philosophers. These two themes are addressed within the context of Fr. Schall's engagement with the political thought of Leo Strauss and "Straussians." All three contributors agree that Schall demonstrates well that Christian revelation is in harmony with philosophy and reason, and even provides the best answers to questions that philosophy asks but cannot adequately answer. In other words, Schall demonstrates that knowledge of the whole of reality can only be found by accepting the two sources of truth, reason and revelation, and that the harmony of these sources is found most fully and reasonably expressed in Catholicism.

Following upon these contributions is a response by Fr. Schall himself, which I find no need to remark upon here. I leave it to the reader to ponder his thoughts in light of the contributions.

Notes

1. Fr. James V. Schall, "The Final Gladness," Georgetown University, December 14, 2012: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xN1rFyYbKak>.