

**J. Budziszewski, *The Line Through the Heart: Natural Law as Fact, Theory, and Sign of Contradiction*. 368 pages. Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009. \$18, paper.**

We might act as if the natural law does not exist, even perhaps habituating ourselves to ignore it, but it is present in each of us and inclines us in specific ways. Such is J. Budziszewski's contention in his earlier books on the natural law such as *What We Can't Not Know* (2003, revised and expanded in 2011), and again in his new book, *The Line Through the Heart*, where he elaborates variations on this theme. Budziszewski entered the Catholic Church in 2004, though he earlier had established a reputation among evangelical Protestants as a natural law thinker. *The Line Through the Heart* is a collection of previously published essays; the book's subtitle was the focus of a 2007 symposium in this journal. The book is divided into two parts: natural law in ethics and natural law in politics.

In Chapter 1, Budziszewski considers the natural law under three aspects: "as fact, as theory, and as sign of contradiction." In doing so, he defends the natural law against modernism under the guises of skepticism, secularism, and minimalism and draws on four witnesses to the natural law: conscience, evidence of design in nature, the particulars of human design, and the consequences of violating the natural law.

In Chapter 2, Budziszewski argues against "The Second Tablet Project," which is the attempt of some natural lawyers to have natural law without recourse to God. He does so in two ways. First, he argues that recognition of the appearance of design in nature is not sufficient, for many, to ground normative claims. For that, they need at least a natural knowledge of God's creatorship. Second, he maintains that natural knowledge of the natural law only leads to dismay and defeat because the law can only show us our duty and thus provides no relief for the guilt of shirking it. Without knowledge of the possibility of being forgiven, most people are unwilling to acknowledge their guilt. Christianity shows the way to forgiveness. Ethics, and the natural law, Budziszewski concludes, need God.

This theme is continued in "Nature Illuminated," where Budziszewski gives seven ways in which revealed truth aids in the knowledge of the natural law. Revelation presupposes the natural law, underwrites reflection on it, and illuminates it. The illumination is five-fold: its precepts recall and bolster our awareness of the natural law; it affirms our natural knowledge by providing an explanation for its existence, i.e., God made it that way; it provides a narrative explanation

for our difficulty in following it; it situates the law in the economy of salvation; and it tells us more about our nature by showing us how it can be perfected by grace. Finally, as evidence of what happens to the law without the help of revelation, Budziszewski points to the failed Enlightenment project of having law without natures or a Creator.

The following two chapters have a change in character: in “The Natural, the Connatural, and the Unnatural,” Budziszewski takes up St. Thomas’s account of connaturality in order to explain how it is that what is unnatural can become second nature and thus, how awareness of the natural law can be obscured in us. In Chapter 5, he argues against reductionist naturalism and utilitarianism and for a non-reductive view of natures. Here, and throughout the work, Budziszewski shows a keen understanding of human psychology, recognizing that discussions regarding morality usually run more on emotion and desire than on reason.

The second half of the book takes up two themes in relation to natural law: the human person and politics. As Budziszewski notes in an appendix, the natural law tradition needs to be harmonized with personalist considerations. To that end, he offers personalist natural law arguments against abortion and for capital punishment. The latter argument may come as a surprise to readers as it is founded on a robust view of justice and a strong view of the dignity of each human person. In the final three chapters, he argues that the American constitution presupposes the natural law and should be judged in light of it, and that liberalism is a not a neutral ideology.

This book was written by a Christian for Christians. Since the work is “in-house” so to speak, and as two of its chapters are devoted to arguing for this approach to natural law, it is perhaps not surprising to find the author making constant recourse to Sacred Scripture. It is a little disappointing, however, for this reason: while natural law may be gaining popularity in some circles, it is hardly in vogue at Budziszewski’s academic home, the University of Texas. Unlike some of us, then, he is a veteran of the stridently secular, liberal academic scene (as is clearly evidenced by his last chapter on liberalism). One would like to know how he presents the natural law to his colleagues and students. Doubtless, he would like to see them converted, but in his classroom, one supposes that he teaches natural law as a preamble to the faith and not as moral theology. Perhaps he could write another work detailing how he engages those who have not embraced revealed truth.

Budziszewski shows considerable insight into post-modern man, and it is perhaps for this reason that he does not make recourse to the ancient, pre-Christian tradition of natural law. Perhaps he finds his

contemporaries too jaded or cynical to accept Stoic or Aristotelian arguments. Of course, the ancient notions of the natural law were flawed (as he notes on p. 35) and not as complete as Christian ethics, but they had more going for them than he acknowledges. Consider two examples. “Pagan thinkers,” Budziszewski remarks, “were nearly blind to the sacrificial quality of love” (44). However, Aristotle is hardly a minor pre-Christian figure, and he said that true friends willingly give up anything, including their lives, for one another (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX, 8). It is true that Aristotle did not extend this sacrifice to everyone or anyone, as Christ did. But it is also true that Christ calls us his friends, and so the Aristotelian principle that friends will die for one another is in harmony with the supernatural truth of the gospel. Budziszewski also implies there is almost no precedent for mercy outside of the Christian tradition (114), and yet St. Thomas Aquinas finds that Seneca’s account of clemency and Aristotle’s account of pity are very similar to Christian mercy (*ST* II-II 157, 2-3, II-II 30, 1).

Pope Benedict XVI has expressed an urgent call “to reflect upon the theme of the natural law and to rediscover its truth.” While more might be done to acknowledge the natural law arguments used by pre-Christian thinkers, Budziszewski’s project of bringing personalist concerns into the natural law is a worthy contribution to the conversation called for by the Pope.

Fiona Barker  
*New Orleans, LA*