

Review Essay*

Revolution or Rejection?

John Cavadini

University of Notre Dame; jcavadin@nd.edu

Mark S. Massa's *The Structure of Theological Revolutions: How the Fight Over Birth Control Transformed American Catholicism* is a study on two levels. On one level, it is a study of the responses of select American moral theologians to Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical on contraception, *Humanae vitae* (hereafter, *HV*). On another level, it is a second-order reflection on these theological responses, using them as data, as it were, for a theory about how theology changes or does not change over time. The book certainly succeeds on the first level. I am not sure, however, that that success translates easily to the second level. To the extent that it is possible, I would like to work with these levels successively, even if, for Massa, the two are accomplished simultaneously, since the narration of the "brilliance" (*passim*) of the individuals treated is tied to the narration of how each of them radically broke with the paradigm of natural law that Massa claims is enshrined in *HV*.

Using Thomas Kuhn's 2012 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, as his main conceptual authority, Massa sets out to study what he calls the "micro-tradition" of post-1968 American natural law discourse to examine the question of "how and why theology changes" (4). Is it a "linear progression," a gradual development, or is it characterized more by "ruptures, rejections, and reinventions" (5)? Massa lays out his objective at the outset: "I will attempt to show that theology does not progress in anything like a linear fashion from generation to generation, any more than Kuhn believed that about the physical sciences" (4). Massa is aware that this is an oversized ambition relative to the data pool under consideration, that

* Mark S. Massa, S.J., *The Structure of Theological Revolutions: How the Fight Over Birth Control Transformed American Catholicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 218 + viii pp., \$31.95 hb., ISBN 9780190851408. Page references appear within parentheses within the text.

the topic of “how and why theology changes” is a “very broad topic,” and the focus on “American Catholic models of natural law” is a “fairly circumscribed topic” (4). But Massa has an interest in studying the “heated Catholic debates over natural law” in and of themselves (what I am calling the first level of the study), and thinks that Kuhn’s ideas might offer a way of understanding them that is “more dispassionate and less heated” (4). I think this justifies, then, an approach which separates out the two levels, at least analytically.

The first chapter is simply entitled “1968.” It attempts to offer a brief synopsis of natural law according to Thomas Aquinas, briefly distinguishing Thomas from the neo-Thomist synthesis that prevailed on the eve of *Humanae vitae* and which, according to Massa, informed its arguments and claims. Neo-thomism it turns out is more a betrayal of Thomas’s system than a development of it: “In place of Aquinas’ quite sophisticated understanding of natural law as an ethical system focused on the goal of human flourishing” (17)—which reason could discern “in the structure of human nature itself” (16)—“the [neo-]scholastics increasingly came to present natural law as something given, set, and external to human nature itself: a law *delivered* to humanity from a God outside of history, rather than discerned in human nature” (17).¹

Particularly problematic from the perspective of those commentators with whom Massa identifies is the view that there is a fixed human nature, a “classicist” view, to use the terminology of Bernard Lonergan, as opposed to a “historicist” view where “human nature and human values were *not* ‘fixed, static and immutable, but shifting, developing, going astray, and capable of redemption’” (25). The “classicist” view shows up in the encyclical’s insistence that there is an “*inseparable connection*, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, *between the two meanings of the [marital] act: the unitive and the procreative meaning*,” and in the insistence that people of our day “are particularly capable of seizing the *deeply reasonable and human character* of this fundamental principle” (21, citing *HV* 12).² Later, we discover that “[t]he most basic presuppositions of the older paradigm,” meaning the neo-Thomist theory of natural law allegedly presupposed by the encyclical, “that one could identify moral meanings in physical acts; that the Church was obliged to teach authoritatively in light of those physical acts; that the ultimate purpose of human coitus was openness to the propagation of the species – all of these were now determined to be ‘erroneous’” (53, citing the judgment of prominent theological critics). To Massa and the theologians he selects for analysis, this is an unacceptably “physicalist” (49) view of human nature.

The language of “paradigm” and the implied language of “paradigm shift” comes from Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Massa is attracted to the idea that science gets to the point where a particular scientific paradigm about “how the universe functions doesn’t actually provide the kind of verifiable predictive

¹ Emphasis in original unless otherwise indicated.

² Emphasis added to quotes by Massa unless otherwise indicated.

map we had thought” (41, citing Kuhn). Experiments turn up more and more “anomalies,” and when these become widespread, there is a “period of crisis” as a new paradigm that would explain the anomalies is sought. Massa explains that according to Kuhn, “there is no order implicit in nature apart from the scientific lenses used to study it,” or if there is, it is not accessible to human understanding apart from an “exploratory pattern” used to order the random data nature provides. We get to the point where the older paradigm competes with a newer one to see which best explains the “facts of nature” (42). The resulting paradigm change “is not cumulative and gradual; it is, rather, sudden and revolutionary” (43), a point that is very important to Massa’s “second level” of argumentation.

Massa uses Kuhn’s language to describe the “period of crisis” which ensued as the house of cards that neo-Thomist natural law seemed to be to its critics fell apart. In particular, *HV* did not seem to correspond to the “data,” the “lived experience” (53) of married couples, but rather to a classicist idea of human nature antecedent to historical experience.

The longest part of the book, “Other Voices, Other Paradigms,” carefully takes up, one by one, four prominent theologians who propose a paradigm of natural law to replace that which allegedly informs *HV*. Three dissent from *HV*’s conclusions; one accepts the conclusions but rejects its natural law arguments. We can briefly look at Massa’s treatment of each.

Massa first takes up Charles Curran’s “loyal dissent” (79), which bristled at the “physicalist” and “classicist” version of natural law allegedly reflected in *HV*: “The natural law theory employed in the encyclical . . . identifies the moral and human action with the physical structure of the conjugal act itself” (89, citing Curran), something which “illustrates a classicist approach” in which “human nature and human values were . . . ‘fixed, static, and immutable’” (25, citing Lonergan) instead of having their meaning contextualized historically and subject to ongoing revision. Though Thomas himself tended to “‘identify the human action with the physical and biological structure of the human act’” (98, citing Curran), this judgment was just as historically conditioned as any other, and in fact in our own “modern” context (see 89, but also *passim*) the proper starting point is not a fixed human nature but “an analysis of the actual ‘bedroom experience’ of Christian couples” (105), especially since *any* claim about what nature “means” or “meant” is part of the “classicist” mentality where one presupposed “that one could identify moral meanings in physical acts” (53). This is especially congruent with Kuhn’s contention that “there is no order implicit in nature apart from the scientific lenses used to study it” (42). In fact, back to Curran, Curran argued that “human nature and the meanings of human acts could not be simply *derived* from studying physical processes, whose ostensible meanings were somehow embedded in ‘nature’”; rather “‘modern man interferes with nature, to make nature conform to man’” (102, citing Curran). So, “if moral theologians began with the concrete experience of [married couples like] the Crowleys [on the papal birth control commission] and proceeded

by an inductive method, they would . . . arrive at very different conclusions about the morality of contraception” (104).

Germain Grisez’s “new natural law” theory was designed to buttress the conclusions of *HV* while leaving behind its allegedly inadequate theoretical justification for them. Grisez wanted to retain the idea of natural law as something given in nature, objective and universal, but leave behind the “physicalist” claims that one could read meaning from the “sheer physical facts of copulation” or of any physical acts (107). The problem remained, however, of trying to find a theory of universal objective moral law that corresponded to physical actions, so Grisez eliminated the level of theory and of metaphysical speculation altogether in favor of seven basic goods that, he argued, were “immediately obvious as ‘basic goods,’ desirable as ‘ends-in-themselves,’ and without need of ‘proof’” (113, citing Grisez). The fundamental appeal here is “not to human reason, but rather to human *experience*” (117), in which for all people goods such as “self-integration, authenticity, friendship and justice” (115) are obviously and self-evidently “choiceworthy” (117).

Massa reports that Jean Porter takes a different tack, with one commonality remaining with Grisez, namely, that of rejecting the natural law theory allegedly implicit in *HV*. One criticism of Grisez could be that, in effect, he eliminates the idea of “nature” altogether, if practical rather than speculative reason can simply see without argumentation the choiceworthy nature of certain basic goods, that is, apart from any idea of what “nature” is. This criticism actually implies the position that Jean Porter takes, building on Curran’s ideas, namely, that nature is not a category antecedent to our observation of it, but rather “the idea of nature is shaped by the prior assumptions of the observer,” and so “one does not “observe” nature; *one constructs it.*” Thus even the concept of nature itself is “*at least in part, a social construction,*” and consequently “*Nature is already an interpreted category*” (the quote is from Alister McGrath, quoted by Porter approvingly, and quoted in turn by Massa, 134, who adds the italics in the last line). Porter sees this as an appropriate extension of the idea that for Thomas, nature and reason are not contrasting categories and Thomas “generally emphasized the *continuities* between nature and reason” (132, citing Porter).

As far as application to marriage goes, Porter indicates that a “thicker” reading of the Scholastics shows that they thought of marriage as essentially ordered toward procreation, but that for them procreation included child rearing, socialization, and education and not “simply human physical generation,” and so the procreative end of marriage had broader resonances than “simply physical coitus between a man and a woman, with the resulting fertilization of eggs” (138). But on Massa’s account of Porter, sex serves broader purposes than procreation even so broadly understood (139), and so a “natural” understanding of the purposes of marriage can include these other goods, “so long as they do not undermine the orientation of the institution [of marriage] towards procreation, comprehensively considered

to include the extended processes of education and socialization.” Same-sex marriage can fulfill some of the other purposes of marriage, if not the procreative purpose, but that is not undermined as long as it is not suggested that “same sex unions should constitute either the only, or the paradigmatic, form of marriage,” something which would be “ruled out by a natural law analysis of marriage” (141, quoting Porter). With regard to contraception, Porter points out that the natural law arguments of the scholastics were arguments informed theologically as to the ends of marriage and “*not* on what physiological processes revealed” (144). The refusal of a Christian married couple to have children is indeed “‘problematic’” given the procreative good of marriage, but not necessarily “‘intrinsically disordered,’” since there might be good reasons, theologically justifiable, for such a choice and for contraception to support it.

Finally, Lisa Sowle Cahill’s position begins from a critique of Porter’s, since Porter’s idea that natural law is socially constructed and therefore by definition not universal, seems to cut off the possibility for a genuinely global ethic where certain activities, such as selling women into sex slavery, would be seen as always and everywhere wrong. Porter’s project “seemed to deny anything like an ‘objective, universal, or common ethic in fact or in principle’” (151, citing Cahill). A feminist ethics might, by contrast, hope for a basis for global critique of practices that “were harmful and oppressive to women, regardless of theological or religious practice” (151). Massa remarks that “Cahill understood the distrust of many feminist scholars that previous models of morality based on *supposedly* universal laws of nature . . . almost inevitably turned out to offer decidedly male, Western, and profoundly oppressive directives that took no account at all of cultural difference, political loyalties, or gender concerns” (154), but also that she was nevertheless “committed to elucidating a ‘revised natural law’ to ground the feminist moral claim that women worldwide . . . were owed certain ‘substantive material goods and protections’” (154).

Accordingly, Cahill, in Massa’s telling, returned to Thomas, convinced that “a critical retrieval” (157) of his thought would provide a way forward, though it turned out to be a very different kind of retrieval than Porter’s was. And so her methodological advance proceeded from what Massa calls “profoundly *Thomistic* principles” (157), namely, that Thomas did not approach natural law beginning with abstract principles or values, but rather generalizing from his own observation of human acting and social institutions. The fundamental starting point was the practical reasoning of prudence, which was always about specific situations and not speculation. Rejecting both the abstract, speculative starting point of foundationalism, and the relativism of non-foundationalism, Cahill adopted a “functionalist” paradigm for natural law that arrives by inductive reasoning, drawn from conversation across religious and cultural lines, at agreement on certain universals, even if recognizing that over time such agreements might shift ground due to social and cultural changes. Massa cites Cahill as indicating that “‘human

nature, its ends, its flourishing, and its moral standards are not “discovered” as already existent and unchanging entities. *They too* are “contingent” and perhaps in some degree mutable,” and yet, “‘moral reason, though historical and tradition-dependent, nonetheless accesses truth’” (166).

These descriptions and analyses of individual theologians and their reactions to the natural law paradigm seemingly implied by *HV* are indeed illuminating, instructive, and to my mind justify the value of the book for anyone wanting to learn more about the history of the development of theological dissent from the judgments and/or arguments of *HV*, at least from the perspective of an author who very obviously rejects the encyclical himself, seemingly whole cloth, as authoritative for Christian life.

As mentioned above, I am not as sure about the “second level” claims that what we are witnessing in this progression of dissent against *HV*, located in what Massa calls a “micro-tradition,” is a “paradigm revolution” in theology akin to the paradigm revolution that occurred in physics moving from Newton to Einstein. Massa is aware that his readers’ judgments on this matter might differ from his own: “Emphasizing that the micro-tradition of natural law was so marked by disjunction and rupture that the phrase ‘paradigm revolution’ seems warranted is, I understand, a question of calibration and perception” (183). I agree with the author’s own judgment here, and appreciate (in effect) his permission to come to a different judgment. I have five “worries” that prompt me to find the claim less credible than he does.

In the first place, admittedly theology is a “science,” in fact “the queen of the sciences” (46), but is it really a “science” in the same sense, or even in an analogous sense, as is natural science? Massa seems to collapse the two senses of “science” too readily. He admits that “it strains the obvious to observe that theology and—say—physics are both ‘sciences’ in very different ways” (46), but even his description of the difference seems to collapse them nevertheless. For a book focused on Thomas, for whom the distinguishing mark of *sacra doctrina*, as distinct both from philosophy and from the liberal arts, was its grounding in revelation, and not, in the first instance, reason, there is no mention of revelation in Massa’s description of the science of theology. Theology, it turns out, is not a quantitative science, but is a science just as much based in observation and experience as natural science. Philosophy might be speculative, but not theology, which has an “explicitly experiential basis” in the *lex orandi lex credendi* (“the law of prayer is the law of belief”), which requires “a reasoned explanation of why Christians believe the doctrines that define their religion – based in a rigorous analysis of the concrete, actual experience of Christian believers,” a “careful and rigorous examination of experience.” Theology claims to be a science because, like the natural sciences, it is “a reasoned attempt to explain the lived experience of believers” (47), as though “experience” were the only source of revelation and in fact, seemingly, an ongoing source of revelation. The Word of God, transmitted in Scripture and Tradition, as *Dei Verbum* 8–9 explains, is never mentioned. The

Word of God is, of course, completely irrelevant to the natural sciences, but it is intrinsically relevant to theological method on any conceivable Thomistic account or on any account derived from the documents of Vatican II (which are also barely mentioned). When *Lumen Gentium* is drawn into Massa's discussion, it is to point out that the models of the Church it proposes, "Body of Christ, communion, servant of the world," and ultimately "People of God," are "humanly constructed models," ignoring the Scriptural provenance of these images (though Massa says "People of God" is "more biblical"). But as Scriptural they are not in any simple sense simply "humanly constructed," or "arbitrary" and "provisional" (92–93).

Nor does it seem compatible with the theology of God's Logos or Reason to say, as Kuhn says, with Massa following approvingly, that there is no intrinsic order in nature. On Massa's reading, according to Kuhn "there is no order implicit in nature apart from the scientific lenses used to study it," and these lenses are "paradigms" of the coherence of experimental results and as such are "provisional and arbitrary" (43). Is it equally true of theology that the kinds of judgments of intelligibility that it makes are always, and in the same way, "provisional and arbitrary"? Massa goes on to point out that when a reigning paradigm is increasingly inadequate to explain new data that constitute "anomalies" from the perspective of the old paradigm, then a new one must take its place if science itself is to continue in a coherent manner. Such changes are not "cumulative and gradual" but "sudden and revolutionary" (43). There is a period of crisis as a new paradigm is sought, and, when it is found, there is always a rear-guard action on the part of some scientists attempting to call their colleagues back to the "older 'orthodoxy'" (45). One advantage Massa sees for adopting Kuhn's theory of paradigm shift is that, since it is "brilliant and ideologically neutral," it "might help historians of religious ideas to narrate debates every bit as heated . . . in an even-handed way: scholars can avoid the invidious labels of 'orthodox' and 'progressive'" (47). Note the slippage in shifting to "historians of religious ideas" which is not the same thing as theology, but also note the slippage between the way that "orthodox" is used of previously accepted scientific theories and the way it is used in theology, as though there were no normative judgment intrinsically involved in assessing a theological position, and as though the only criterion for making that judgment were rigorous analysis of experience analogous to the natural sciences.

My second worry is that, in a question where "calibration and perception" are important, Massa constructs the perception of a "paradigm shift" partly by narrowing down the field being calibrated, namely, to five or six authors, from McCormick to Cahill, who have the same critical view of the natural law theology allegedly informing *HV* and who, for the most part, are in conversation with each other. But this leaves out a significant swathe of material relevant to the interpretation of *HV* and its background and of the kind of neo-Thomism which surfaces in *HV*. This is the phenomenological tradition emanating from Husserl and especially Merleau-Ponty. For this tradition, it is not so self-evidently "risible"

that “one could reach an understanding of the moral meaning of human acts by studying their physical embodiment” (29), since body as body is both expression and intention for such thinkers. Massa endorses Grisez’s distancing himself from the “‘phenomenological argument’” (118) of *HV* but otherwise never examines the phenomenological tradition in Catholic thought, which moves from Merleau-Ponty to figures like Bergson and Peguy, and from Husserl to Edith Stein, into a kind of personalist Thomism that included, at various levels, the Maritains, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Mounier, Gertrud von le Fort, and through some of these figures, Karol Wojtyla and, arguably, *HV* itself, since Wojtyla was on the Executive Committee of Paul VI’s commission (60). Bernard Lonergan’s account of the complementarity of woman and man in his 1943 essay “Finality, Love, Marriage” is an important element in the “non-classicist” account of embodied meaning which is nevertheless not simply “physicalist.”

Further, the way in which Pope John Paul II himself carries this tradition forward in his interpretation of *HV* in his manifold catechetical lectures on Genesis 1–3, in his encyclical *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and in many other instances, are arbitrarily left out of the “who’s who” (52) of those reacting to *HV* over time, as though these had no claim to the status of “data” in judging what kind of “revolution” we are dealing with in the theologians Massa selects for detailed study. Nor is the account of natural law offered in *Veritatis Splendor* given anything but passing notice, nor is the appearance of a more so-called “classicist” account of natural law in the *Compendium of Catholic Social Teaching* mentioned, even though it is used to undergird the idea of inalienable human rights. See, for example, sections 140–42, especially the way in which the natural law, “given by God to creation,” and consisting in “participation in [God’s] eternal law,” “expresses the dignity of the person.” It is on human dignity, in turn, that the natural rights of human beings are grounded (sections 152–55). In this way of thinking, there is an intrinsic connection between the natural law, understood as pre-cultural and universally binding (even if necessarily culturally inflected, see section 141), and protection of the vulnerable, the non-autonomous, the poor, and those who have no voice. Massa’s “revolution” seems to leave this connection behind, as though such an idea of human rights and human dignity were itself “classicist” and “physicalist.” Perhaps a consideration of Vincent Lloyd’s *Black Natural Law* (2016) or Paulinus Odozor’s *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African* (2016) may have tempered the negative judgment of the so-called “classicist” paradigm which becomes part and parcel of Massa’s claim to document a “theological revolution.”

My third worry is with the issue of “disjunction” and “rupture” itself. In the first place, I think that Massa has gone out of his way, and done a good job, of showing how all four of those theologians who get a chapter of their own (Curran, Grisez, Porter, and Cahill) make it one of their principal concerns to show the *continuity* between their thinking and that of Thomas. They all argue that their version of natural law is more truly Thomistic than that of the neo-Thomism

they believe they are replacing. Massa himself seems to endorse these projects of “recovery” enthusiastically. Is this, then, a “theological revolution” or a debate among scholars who claim the Thomistic mantle, a debate as to what exactly is the proper interpretation of Thomas on natural law? Is it a “theological revolution,” or an attempt to find and invoke a deeper continuity of thinking than the one claimed by “neo-Thomism”? It seems very important to all of these thinkers that they be truly Thomist. “Grisez,” for example, “had argued that the neo-scholastics had, in the first place, misread Aquinas—a misreading that had led inexorably to the metaphysical muddle that was ‘Catholic natural law discourse’ of the time” (111). Porter’s “recovery” project “was a critical engagement with historical natural law texts like that of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*” (138). But the very point for Porter is to argue that there is a continuity *despite* the discontinuities in specifics and applications. And Massa notes that for Cahill, the “‘pragmatist turn’ that feminist ethics utilized for grounding its own concerns” had a substantial Thomistic basis; “Cahill was, therefore, a Thomistic thinker – but in a very different sense than the neo-scholastics who also claimed Aquinas as their patron saint” (158–59). There is a strong sense in all of these thinkers that being “Thomistic” *means something* and that it is important to clarify what it means and to demonstrate continuity. Is this a paradigm shift? Or an attempt to retrieve an older paradigm?

This brings up the more general point implied in these questions: that is, the author nowhere gives us a calculus for determining how one would gage “continuity” and “discontinuity” and their relative relationship such that one could decide if we are truly witnessing so much “rupture” that we have to declare a paradigm shift. There is even the suggestion, in the conclusion, that in the development of doctrine in the Catholic tradition, there is “at least as much rupture and discontinuity as continuity” (179), with the implication that there could be *more* rupture and discontinuity than continuity. But in that case, if there is more discontinuity than continuity, how can there be an identifiable tradition that is in any meaningful sense “apostolic,” to use a word generally accepted as a marker of authenticity of teaching. *Dei Verbum* seems very clearly to embrace a paradigm of continuity even in the midst of growth:

And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (see 2 Thess. 2:15), and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all (see Jude 1:3) (4). . . . This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. (5) For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down.³

³ Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1965) 8.

Could there be a recognizably “apostolic” theological tradition if there were *more* discontinuity than continuity, as Massa implies could happen? How would one recognize the apostolic continuity? There are no criteria on offer.

Newman’s *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) is a work that Massa mentions, mainly, it seems, to suggest its limitations as a paradigm for theological change relative to that implied in Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (180). Nevertheless, Newman famously offered his reader seven criteria, or “notes,” by which a true development of doctrine, as opposed to a distortion, might be recognized.⁴ Massa neither mentions these “notes,” so painstakingly laid out by Newman, nor offers any of his own. Therefore, it is difficult for a reader to judge whether or not we are dealing with a revolution that is still in significant, recognizable continuity with the tradition, or a wholesale rejection of it, a “corruption,” to use Newman’s term, or something in between.

Massa invokes John Meier’s argument that “in the beginning was the grab bag” (179) as a way of illustrating that the development of a theological tradition does not proceed along “rectilinear” lines of orderly progression or evolutionary development. Point taken, but this does not avoid the question of essential continuity in the tradition. In fact, the example Massa gives, namely, that Meier shows that the biblical tradition does not exhibit an “evolution” from the supposedly low christology of Mark to the high christology of John, shows Meier’s investment in a deep coherence of biblical teaching and, at least by implication, between the christological developments of the fifth century and the “high christology” of even the earliest synoptic Gospel.

A fourth worry is that the invocation of the natural scientific paradigm leads Massa to place a high premium on experience, “the actual lived experience of believers,” understood as “data,” and in particular the “data produced by the physical and social sciences” (66, original emphasis). That raises the question, too, of whose experience? The only actual *data* referenced is that generated by Pat and Patty Crowley, “a married couple from Chicago who at the time were the lay leaders of an international Catholic group called the Christian Family Movement (CFM)” (59). As members of the Papal Birth Control Commission, they “conducted three surveys in the United States and in Europe among CFM members” regarding the “bedroom experience” of Catholic married couples, specifically, their experience with “the rhythm method” of regulating births (59–60). These surveys had an outsized influence on the decision of the Majority Report of the papal commission, according to Massa (60). But are surveys of a presumably like-minded group of self-selected movement members really “rigorous” social science with a truly random sampling? How representative were these married couples of the rest of the Catholic world, such as the whole continent of Africa, where very different family structures can be found?

⁴ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (6th ed.; Notre Dame Series in the Great Books 4; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989) 169–206.

But even presupposing a random, world-wide, cross-cultural, truly “rigorous” sociological study, the issue of human experience as possibly tainted by self-interest, self-righteousness, or to put a word on it, sin, is never mentioned. This is another theological category that is omitted from Massa’s account of “theology” as a “science,” though he quotes with approval a passage from the Majority Report that disowns motives for contraception “*spoiled by egoism and hedonism*” (63). The views of another, earlier Christian theologian, to which Thomas subscribed in large measure, namely Augustine, which are not considered by Massa or by the literature he cites, seem relevant in considering what a “theological revolution” might look like, especially if an analysis of “experience” is invoked. To consider how concupiscence affects the experience of even the most self-professedly “devout” Christian would seem to present a major difference between the kind of science that theology is, and the kind of science that physics is, and would seem, at least, therefore, to merit a mention.

A final worry: in a passage omitted by Massa in his treatment of *HV* itself, the encyclical proposes as a kind of bottom-line analysis of what is at stake in observing the natural law regarding marriage: “to experience the gift of married love while respecting the laws of conception is to acknowledge that one is not the master of the sources of life but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator.”⁵ This seems like a claim worth mentioning and considering in its own right, especially because it seems to be contested, in one way or another, by all of the theologians who regard natural law as something fully humanly “constructed,” as essentially “provisional” and “changeable.” A passage from Curran, quoted approvingly by Massa, would seem to stake out a position directly opposite to *HV*: “Modern man does not find his happiness in conforming to nature. The whole ethos and genius of modern society is different. *Modern man makes nature conform to him, rather than vice-versa. . . . Contemporary man interferes with the processes of nature, to make nature conform to man*” (101–102, italics added by Massa, emphasizing, it seems, his approval).

Perhaps this is where a little Augustinian theology may not have been unwelcome after all, such as that which has motivated Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*, to associate this kind of position with one of the cardinal sins of modernity: “Modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality,” and again, “Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds.”⁶ Reminding us, in classical Augustinian fashion, that “we are not God,” he rejects the “tyrannical anthropocentrism,” the “distorted anthropocentrism” that prioritizes

⁵ *HV* 13.

⁶ Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Francis, *On Care for Our Common Home, Laudato Si’* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2015) 115–16.

our own utility in assessing the meaning of nature.⁷ This includes our own bodies. Invoking Pope Benedict XVI's idea of an "‘ecology of man,’ based on the fact that ‘man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will’" (citing Benedict's 2011 "Address to the German Bundestag"),⁸ Francis adds that "the acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies, turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and *to respect its fullest meaning*, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology," and this includes the meaning of "one's own body in its femininity or masculinity."⁹ It turns out that what appears to be a fallback to the "classicist" and "physicalist" understanding of natural law rejected by Massa uses such an understanding in a call to name and block the "tyrannical anthropocentrism" that impedes both ecological progress and the advancement of the preferential option for the poor.¹⁰ Massa never considers that separating the unity of the procreative and the unitive meanings or ends of each act of intercourse can lead to defining the meaning of that act progressively according to our own convenience, utility, and pleasure, making procreation almost accidental to intercourse, perhaps to be replaced by a more sophisticated biological technology (as in Huxley's *Brave New World*). The transmission of human life is then something which the reason of modern man has reduced to its own self-constructed meaning. To invoke Francis's language, this is a kind of "practical relativism," a kind of nihilism, for "when human beings place themselves at the center, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative."¹¹

Be that as it may, my point overall is that, in the "calibration and perception" of a theological revolution, there could be more data included. This would involve a more balanced treatment of the neo-Thomism leading up to *HV*, allowing some consideration of the natural law tradition of Thomistic personalism that arguably provides a context for the interpretation of *HV* at least as relevant as the "manualist" context Massa provides. It would also involve a consideration of the way in which *HV*, together with its own account of natural law, has been received positively and creatively developed by the continuous magisterium of the Church up to and including Pope Francis. It could also include as well the positive reception either of the Thomism of *HV* or its conclusions (or both) by a number of post-*HV* philosophers and theologians, formidable in their own right (e.g., Prudence Allen, Michele Schumacher, Francis Martin, W. Norris Clarke, Emmanuel Falque, and many others).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 68–69.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 155 [emphasis added].

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 156.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

For these reasons, it is difficult for a reader to know, on the basis of Massa's presentation of the figures he discusses, whether we are witnessing a theological revolution, or a massive denial of apostolic tradition that serves only to encode the basic script of modernity into Christian theology rather than to try to provide, in the mode of Pope Francis, a prophetic critique.