

PART I

CIVILIZATION AND THE COMMON GOOD

“WE ARE BRUISED SOULS”:

MARITAIN’S AMERICA FIFTY YEARS ON

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1. Introduction

The title quotation above comes from the heading of a chapter in Maritain’s *Reflections on America*.¹ Maritain first wrote those reflections over fifty years ago now, for a series of seminars he gave at the University of Chicago in 1956. He released them in book form two years later. They constitute, as it were, his hymn of thanks and even his paeon of praise for the country that he visited often, where he lived for many years, including the painful war years, and with which he came to fall in love. His love for America was the love of a man from ‘Old Europe’, a man who had grown up in and been informed by the history, mores, and thinking habits of that centuries-old civilization. America caught him almost off-guard. It certainly fascinated him with its vibrancy, its charm, and its very un-European newness.

This author can speak with some confidence on this point, not only because I am following Maritain’s own remarks (especially Chapter IV), but also because I am an immigrant from ‘Old Europe’, like Maritain, who has gone through some of the same experiences. Admittedly my native country is Britain, not France, and that is no small difference. Still, it leaves us with a lot in common as well. As I read Maritain on America, both for the first time and again recently, I was struck by how often I found myself spontaneously agreeing with him. There is something tired and world-weary about ‘Old Europe’ that jaundices the way Europeans who have never been here look upon America and Americans. And there is something exasperating about trying to tell such Europeans, when one returns thither after long exposure to American life, that their opinions about America are as faulty as they are old.

¹ Jacques Maritain, *Reflections on America* (New York: Scribner, 1958), p. 83.

Let me, in fact, by way of illustration, relate a personal experience from a few years ago at a conference in Germany. One of the presenters was arguing against American foreign policy in Afghanistan (the invasion of Iraq had not yet happened). She wanted to trace such policy to the philosophical ideas of the German thinker Carl Schmitt, who was noted for his authoritarian and anti-liberal political views. Her argument was that George W. Bush was a latter day Schmittian, who needed to be exposed and resisted as such. But in fact whatever similarities there may have been at the level of effects between Bush's policies and Schmitt's statism, there were no such similarities at the level of political thinking. Bush was straightforwardly and even simply a Jeffersonian, like many Americans. He held that all men are created equal; that they have fundamental rights; that to take away these rights is only what tyrants do, and that tyrants should be resisted by all freedom-loving peoples. Bush likely knew little about Carl Schmitt and would, in any event, have rejected his totalitarian doctrines. But it was impossible to tell this to my colleague at the conference. She was convinced that a man who had started a war in Afghanistan and wanted to start another in Iraq could be nothing but a war-mongering statist. To suppose that Bush might have been motivated, however mistakenly, by love of freedom, and by the desire, however misdirected, to preserve freedom where it already existed and to bring it to victims of tyranny where it did not, was a manifest falsehood. Most of the other presenters shared a similar opinion, and some even professed ignorance of Jefferson's thought.

Anecdotes, such as this are, of course, merely anecdotal and can hide as much as they reveal. In particular, one must concede in this case that there are many Americans who held opinions of President Bush like the participants at the European conference. Few of these would be inclined to credit Bush with sufficient intelligence to know about or understand Carl Schmitt, nor would they be inclined to regard his Jeffersonian rhetoric of freedom as sincere. Still, they would admit that his rhetoric, for all its insincerity, was Jeffersonian and not Schmittian, and that only a Jeffersonian rhetoric could sell in America. The scholars at the aforementioned European conference, by contrast, were not able to reach a similar conclusion.

I repeat this story, not to build very much on it, but to signal my fundamental sympathy with Maritain's *Reflections on America* and to

illustrate the contrast, or one of the contrasts, that he sees between the American and the European mentalities, or between the idealism of the first viewpoint and the world-weariness of the second. Consider the following statement made by Maritain:

...people [in America] need...to know more unquestionably, either through better established rational convictions, or through the testimony of their fellow men, that they are right, especially as regards their idealistic incentives and their faith in the power of good will and generosity.

As a corollary, I would say that the unjust European (and Asian) refusal to recognize the good intentions of this country, while trying to offer for the immense effort of American good will any kind of cheap cynical explanation, is of a nature to cause damage to the American soul itself.²

I am not as fearful as Maritain on this point, but he is right about the idealism and good intentions that motivate, if not all American policy, then certainly the American people's support for such policy. We will return to this point later. For the present, however, it is important to raise a more directly philosophical or rather metaphysical question. Maritain does not discuss it in *Reflections*, although he does raise it elsewhere. The question concerns what it is that makes a book like *Reflections on America* metaphysically possible in the first place. What is the being of America, or indeed of any nation, such that we are justified in attributing to it characteristics, like optimism, that would seem proper only to individuals? Is such talk when predicated of nations literal, or metaphorical, or analogical, or something else? While this question is interesting in its own right, it also permits one to thematize an important feature about America that Maritain recognized and that bears repeated emphasis.

2. Collectives and Individuals

Let us begin to answer this question by quoting and summarizing some passages from Maritain's *Man and the State*. In that book he says a great deal that is relevant, in particular by drawing distinctions among the terms "nation," "society," "body politic," and "state." By a nation,

² Ibid., pp. 46-47.

Maritain understands a certain sort of *community*, and by a community he means something whose:

...object is a fact which precedes the determinations of human intelligence and will, and which acts independently of them to create a common unconscious psyche, common feelings and psychological structures, and common mores.³

It is thus distinct from a *society* where, by contrast, the object:

...is a *task* to be done or an *end* to be aimed at, which depends on the determination of human intelligence and will and is preceded by the activity—either decision or, at least, consent—of the reason of individuals.⁴

He says further about community that it is "a product of instinct and heredity in given circumstances and historical frameworks"⁵, and that hence in a community, as opposed to a society:

...the collective patterns of feeling...have the upper hand over personal consciousness, and man appears as a product of the social group.⁶

Communities thus typically precede societies in time, but they may also follow them, since a society, in addition to its existence as a conscious and free creation around a common aim, will throw up a community and community feelings within itself. The spontaneous and instinctive operate as much in society as out of it and produce similar effects in both cases. The specific community that is a nation is described by Maritain as:

...a community of people who become aware of themselves as history has made them, who treasure their own past, and who love themselves as they know or imagine themselves to be, with a kind of inevitable introversion...The Nation has a historic calling, which is...a historical and contingent particularization of

³ Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*; italics in original.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

man's calling to the unfolding and manifestation of his own multifarious potentialities.⁷

By the *body politic* or *political society*, on the other hand, Maritain means the most perfect of societies—in contrast to the lesser societies of families, business firms, labor unions, or scientific associations. It is, of course, like a community, a body of men and so is possessed of flesh and blood, instincts, passions, reflexes, and unconscious psychological structures and dynamisms, but:

...all of these subjected, if necessary by legal coercion, to the command of an Idea and to rational decisions. Justice is a primary condition for the existence of the body politic, but Friendship is its very life-giving form. It lives on the devotion of the human persons and their gift of themselves.⁸

The body politic is thus very close to the idea of the nation and in given cases the two might be practically synonymous or the same in their extension, though differing still in their intension or their fundamental meaning. Indeed the two may so feed into each other that a national community of a higher human degree can spontaneously take shape on the basis and by virtue of the very existence of the body politic.

Nothing matters more, in the order of material causality, to the life and preservation of the body politic than the accumulated energy and historical continuity of that national community which it has itself caused to exist. This means chiefly a heritage of accepted and unquestionable structures, fixed customs and deep-rooted common feelings which bring into social life itself something of the determined physical data of nature...⁹

Maritain expressly mentions America (along with France) in this connection, thus indicating what sort of phenomenon he takes America

⁷ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

to be: a nation formed by and forming its own political reality, its own body politic.¹⁰

Still, the body politic, for all its political reality, is not the same as the state. Rather it is related to the state as a whole is related to its part, or to its topmost part. The state is identified by Maritain with the governing part of the body politic or the part that is:

...especially concerned with the maintenance of law, the promotion of the common welfare and public order, and the administration of public affairs.¹¹

Maritain's accounts of "community," "nation," "society," "body politic," and "state," which I have merely summarized here, are pregnant with significance for the understanding of human life and action, as *Man and the State* in particular goes on to show. In fact, by way of an aside, it is worth remarking that John Rawls' political thought, which is currently so dominant in academic circles, would have been much improved and have had more salutary effects, both in theory and in practice, if it had paid proper attention to Maritain's work. Still, that is not our present concern. Nor is our concern the state, whether the American or any other state. For it is clear that in his *Reflections on America* Maritain was not focusing on the American state. On the contrary, as he himself says, there is no allusion to politics to be found in that work. It is "by peoples, not by governments"¹² that his attention is captivated, and, further specifying this, he says:

...our appreciation of a country or a people has to do with the knowledge of...that immense collective personality which is a people with its history, its mores, its common psyche, its dreams, its vocation.¹³

These words clearly echo what Maritain says about the nation in *Man and the State*, so we may readily conclude that it is America as a nation in the way previously explained which is his object in *Reflections*.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹² Maritain, *Reflections on America*, p. 11.

¹³ Ibid., p. 16.

Recall, nevertheless, that the American nation is there explained by reference also to the American body politic. The American nation is not a merely biological or ethnic phenomenon, as might be some ancient tribe of Mongols or Goths. It is, like many another nation, a *political* growth. This is a point to which we will return again below.

When we put together Maritain's remarks in *Man and the State* with those in *Reflections on America*, we can therefore fairly say that he has properly isolated and explicated what he is taking as his subject matter. But while Maritain has isolated the phenomenal fact of the collective identity of a nation, it is not clear that he has fully penetrated the constitution of the fact. That is, he has yet to give an account of what it is about individuals that enables them, while remaining individuals with all the rights and privileges and dignity of individuals, to take on collective characteristics or even a collective individuality and personality. How do the many become a one? In a footnote to *Man and the State*, Maritain says the following:

The notion of moral or collective personality—in which “personality” has a *proper analogical* value—applies to the people as a whole in a genuine manner: because the *people* as a whole (a *natural whole*) are an ensemble of real individual persons and because their unity as a social whole derives from a common will to live together which originates in these real persons. Accordingly, the notion of moral or collective personality applies in a genuine manner to the *body politic*, which is the organic whole, composed of the people...¹⁴

In the same footnote Maritain denies that the state is a moral personality, except metaphorically, because, he says, it is not a whole but an agency of the body politic that it serves in some sense to represent.

Maritain is correct that the state is not a moral personality as the people are, but this statement must be qualified. For while the state is not a proper political whole, nevertheless, insofar as it is in fact constituted by and in given individuals (those vested with the authority of the body politic), these individuals can very well, and often do, form

¹⁴ Maritain, *Man and the State*, p.16, footnote #11; italics in original.

a whole and possess a collective personality in exactly the same way as the individuals who constitute the body politic can. The European critic of American foreign policy in Afghanistan mentioned above, for example, was attributing to the Bush administration such a collective personality. To that extent, indeed, she may well have been right, and may well have been correct also in attributing to the Bush administration something of a Schmittian personality. Men in power are easily tempted, and sometimes by the best of motives, into amoral *realpolitik*.

Insofar as those who actually wield political power form a collective personality and arrogate to themselves the rights of the body politic, they are committing injustice, the injustice, as Maritain himself points out, of tyranny. But then what we should say is not that the state is *not* a moral personality but that it *ought not* to be, or that, to the extent it does, in a given case, come incidentally to form one, it possesses no rights. Its function is rather to represent and foster the rights of the body politic. Maritain, to be sure, would not object to this emendation or rather clarification of his remarks, since it would seem to express what he really intended. Still it does, when made explicit, require us to return to and reflect more deeply on the phenomenon of collective personality—not, indeed, as to the fact, for that is plain to see, but as to the reason for the fact. Thus, we repeat the question, how do the many form a one?

The previously mentioned footnote from Maritain quoted above points the reader in the correct direction. It speaks of the collective personality of the body politic as deriving from a *common will* that originates in the real persons who are the body politic. But this just throws the question further back, for how do many individual persons come to form a common will sufficient to create a single personality? To repeat, the question is not whether people can do this. For it is manifest they can. The important question is *how* they do it, or what are the psychic mechanisms of this process.

In order to answer this question, we may turn to another of Maritain's writings, his *Person and the Common Good*. In that work he distinguishes between what he calls individuality and personality. He says of the former that it is the material pole of man and of the latter that it is the spiritual pole. Individuality refers to man as he is an

actually existing entity, a concrete composite of body and soul that stands out both from nothing and from all other things. In short, it refers to man as he is a primary substance. Personality belongs in the same category but is very differently focused. Maritain understands it principally through what a man, already constituted as this individual, can do, namely to love another human being. Love in turn he understands as self-gift, or the capacity we have both to give our own self and to receive back as a gift the self of another. Love may thus be the act, as opposed to the substance, of a person, but it comes from and goes to the very essence of the person and not merely from or to qualities and accidents.

Personality bears witness in us to the generosity or expansiveness of being...which constitutes, in the secret depths of our ontological structure, a source of dynamic unity and unification from within. Personality, therefore, signifies interiority to self...[which], of its essence, asks for a dialogue in which souls really communicate.¹⁵

It is clear that what Maritain means by individuality and personality are not the same as what is meant by body and soul. An individual is already, he says, the substantial unity of body and soul, but he is not yet, or not yet understood as, a person. A person is also an interior and self-possessed unity capable of self-gift, or at least that is how I would express Maritain's intention. Maritain himself, however, seems to be struggling to find the right words to say what he wants. Perhaps he is operating with distinctions that are too limited for his meaning. The distinctions in question are those of body and soul and of substance and accident. Maritain clearly wants personality to belong to the category of substance and not to that of accident, even though he comes to it, and describes it, through something that does belong to the category of accident, namely the act of love. On the other hand, he does not want to identify personality with soul, even though soul does belong in the category of substance, because soul does not express what is distinctive of personality, namely self-gift, and, further, because soul, along with body, already constitutes what he means by individuality. So in effect,

¹⁵ Joseph W. Evans and Leo R. Ward, *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain: Selected Readings* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1965), p. 8.

he says and does not say that personality is and is not substance and accident. What Maritain really wants, or at any rate needs, is to break out of the categories of substance and accident and body and soul and adopt some other way of speaking about the phenomenon of personality that he has in mind.

At the same time that Maritain was trying and failing to find the right terms to use in speaking about the person, a young man was trying and succeeding at the same endeavor. The young man, who was an admirer of scholasticism just like Maritain, was Karol Wojtyła, later to become Pope John Paul II. While accepting and using scholastic categories, Wojtyła added to them the categories (though he did not call them that) of *lived experience* and of the *self*. These categories were not new things introduced to supplement or to replace old things, nor were they new dimensions, never before noticed, of old things. Rather they were new ways of looking at or thematizing old things. They were, to speak in the terms of the history of philosophy, phenomenological ways of doing scholastic things. For that is what, in the last resort, Wojtyła was: a phenomenological scholastic, or a scholastic phenomenologist.

This can be illustrated with a few quotations from Wojtyła, supplemented by some explanatory remarks made previously by this author. First, Wojtyła wrote:

The self is nothing other than the concrete suppositum humanum which, when given to itself by consciousness...in the lived experience of action, is identical with...self-possession and self-governance...The lived experience of our personal subjectivity is simply the full actualization of all that is contained virtually in our metaphysical subjectivity (suppositum humanum)... The suppositum humanum and the human self are but two poles of one and the same experience of the human being.¹⁶

Notice here how Wojtyła, almost in verbal echo of Maritain, speaks of two poles. Maritain spoke of the two poles of *man*, which he

¹⁶ Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, translated by Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998), pp. 231-32.

identified as the material and the spiritual poles, and as individuality and personality. Wojtyła, by contrast, speaks of the two poles of *experience*, which he identifies as *suppositum* and self. Maritain, in other words, is doing ontology or metaphysics and so he speaks of the being that man is, while Wojtyła is doing phenomenology, and so speaks of the experience that man has. This difference is crucial. For whereas Maritain has difficulty saying what he means without falling into scholastic difficulties, Wojtyła, whose intention and even meaning are really the same as Maritain's, has no such trouble. To quote my own comments on Wojtyła on this point:

[T]he concept of the *suppositum*, taken precisely as such (that is, as a *metaphysical* subject), does not yet bring to light the full richness of the being of that *suppositum*, namely that it is a *personal self*. Only in lived experience, in reflexive consciousness and deliberate action, does the self both come to light and, in a sense, also come to be. The self after all, says Wojtyła, "is constituted through the mediation of consciousness in the *suppositum*." The self, we may say, is none other than the *suppositum* come to itself through a sort of re-creation of itself in its own self-conscious activity. Such a reality can, of course, be reduced to the metaphysical categories of substance and accident. But before one does that one can pause at it and take it for what it is in its own dimension as lived experience.¹⁷

In other words, when we look at the person, not through the scholastic categories of substance and accident or body and soul, but as it manifests itself to us in the category of lived experience, what we find is the self, and this self is neither mere *suppositum* nor some accident superadded to *suppositum*, but *suppositum* consciously possessed and consciously determined. It is Maritain's free self-giving person expressed in non-Maritainian and non-scholastic ways.

This point needs some further elaboration. Elsewhere, Wojtyła speaks of what he is doing as "pausing at the irreducible" in man.¹⁸ He does not mean, of course, pausing at the metaphysically irreducible, for man is manifestly reducible in this way (namely to the being of body

¹⁷ Peter Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2001), p. 17.

¹⁸ Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, p. 213.

and soul and of substance and accident). He means pausing at the experientially irreducible. For our subjective being as concrete selves or self-experiencing subjects is indeed irreducible as a lived experience. It cannot be expressed or explicated in metaphysical or scholastic terms but only, as Wojtyła puts it, in *personalistic* ones. This does not mean abandoning metaphysics or scholasticism (Wojtyła is insistent that there is no opposition here but rather complementarity). It only means abandoning metaphysical or scholastic terms that are arguably the source of Maritain's embarrassment and confusion. He wants to do with one set of terms, those of scholastic metaphysics, something that can only be done with another set of terms, those of personalist phenomenology.

But let us not be unduly harsh on Maritain. For, despite the inadequacy of his categories and his vocabulary, he succeeded in isolating what is distinctive of the person, namely the self-possession of self-gift. Moreover, he used this idea, though not these words, to shed light on many matters, political and moral and theoretical and practical. His *Man and the State*, as I have already remarked, not to mention others of his writings, was outdoing Rawls even before Rawls put pen to paper, and he himself, through his service at the UN, was outdoing rights activists before rights activism had come of age. Moreover, and more to the point of the present analysis, his ideas, as re-expressed in the terminology of Wojtyła, can be used to answer the initial question posed above: namely how can the many persons in a nation and a body politic become the one that is that nation and body politic and take on the corresponding characteristics?

The answer can be articulated by appealing to the aforementioned concept of self-gift, which is common to both Maritain and Wojtyła. For it is by and because of self-gift that several persons can come together and form a single whole or a community. Still, we need to know precisely what is meant by self-gift, or how it is that persons can give themselves to each other and thereby become a one from many. In a previous treatment of this subject this author noted:

...participation is the acting together of two or more persons who, through such joint action, are constituting, as it were, a joint self. Each is thus energizing his personal freedom (which only the person himself controls) in the service of the other's

energizing his personal freedom. This amounts to self-gift in the sense that the self that is constituted through that action...is given to the other so that both may, as regards their realization in that action at least, be one joint self and be jointly realized and fulfilled in that one self. The one is being constituted in the other as the other is being constituted in that one.¹⁹

The key concept expressed here is that a community, or at least a deliberately formed community, is the self-determination by several individuals of their individual freedom in the realizing of a common activity, and thereby the formation, by those same individuals, of a self that is many—because formed in many individuals—and one—because formed by one activity. For if the self, as Wojtyła explains, is the self-determined activity lived by and in the *suppositum humanum*, then any self-determining of this *suppositum* is creative of the self, and a self-determining activity of the *suppositum* that is at the same time the self-determining activity of other *supposita* is creative of a self that is the self of many *supposita* at once. This resulting joint self is genuinely many because it is realized at the same time in many *supposita*, and genuinely one because it is one activity done at the same time by these many. This activity could not, for instance, exist, at least not as this activity, if only one of the many was in fact acting, since the activity is, *ex hypothesi*, common and not single. Such a reality, despite its conceptual complexity, is exceedingly common. Two or three people willingly pushing a car up a hill together are, on this account, constituting a joint self for themselves in that joint action. The creation of a joint self through the self-gift of many is thus as ordinary as the day.

If we understand the one that is a nation along these lines, we will be able to say both how a nation is a genuine reality and not, for example, a mere being of reason formed by an act of mental aggregation. We can also explain how a nation can have characteristics that are personal and conscious. For it will be a reality constituted in acts of which many *supposita* are equally the self-determining agents.

However, there is more that needs to be said. For Maritain is insistent, and correctly so, that there is something biological and even

¹⁹ Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, p. 56.

automatic about the being of nations, something that is sub-conscious or pre-conscious in their make-up. A nation, unlike a body politic, is not in every respect a deliberately formed self. There are elements in it that happen to its members and that its members do not choose or do. Now Wojtyła is himself insistent on this difference between what happens to or in us and what we do. It is the latter and not the former that makes us to be the selves that we are. Nevertheless, what happens to or in us cannot simply be dismissed. On the contrary, it is a real part of what we are. Moreover, where possible, it supplies matter to be taken up by self-determination and consciously integrated into the selves we are making. For whatever belongs to us in some way, whether physically or psychologically or emotionally, is going to be caught up, if only unconsciously, into the self that we are creating through our acts of self-determination. That we are male or female, for instance, black or white, tall or short, even hairy or bald will have some effect on the whole that we are whether we want it to or not. The whole realm of the bodily, and consequently the whole realm of spatial and temporal determinations, is of this sort. There is no doubt that we do not have to pay express attention to all or even much of this most of the time. We can let it be as part of the mass of contingent material that always conditions our environment and that pretty much takes care of itself. But we can pay attention to it and any of it can, at particular times and places, become something we should pay attention to. So, the fact that we are bald or balding may require us, in very hot or cold weather, to wear some protection and thus baldness will become matter for conscious self-determination as regards headgear.

Such matters are perhaps relatively minor, but other bodily parts and certainly our passions and feelings are not so. They are in particular need of conscious integration if we are to be fully harmonious wholes. The same holds also for the features that Maritain notes as proper to the formation of nations. While these, in a sense, just happen to us, they can become consciously chosen or even consciously rejected. Our native language and our particular accent as well as our mannerisms are of this kind. Of course we can, at least when we come of age, consciously embrace them or consciously go about changing them. Admittedly, we cannot do much to change our color or our height. But we can do something to change our bodily shape and mannerisms so as to conform to those of another nation or class. We

can certainly subject ourselves willingly to the unconscious processes that form languages and accents and mannerisms by living among those who have and display those characteristics.

Emigration and immigration are, in fact, among the archetypal processes whereby we do this, and, at least in the case of America, the phenomenon of immigration is of the greatest significance. For America, both North and South, is, almost solely, a creation of immigrants. True, there are descendants still among us of the pre-Columbian peoples, but these have been reduced to minuscule proportions or are now, through intermarriage, merged and mixed into the general mass. What stands out as the overwhelming fact and feature of America is immigration.

3. Immigration and Bruised Souls

An immigrant is that strange creature who, having abandoned the nation or people he happened to be born into, has made a self-determined choice to join another nation or people. He is someone who has chosen to turn what, for others, is happenstance into a self-conscious creation. Why anyone should do that; why anyone should leave his ancestral hearth and home and embrace what was never his and become what he never was, is an interesting question. But let us not downplay its metaphysical peculiarity. For an immigrant is the closest a human being can normally come to remaking himself from scratch, or to making the happenstance in him to be as much a matter of personal choice as the deliberately chosen. He is the closest to being a self-made man. Immigration can happen for many reasons, including those of force and compulsion. But the immigration that formed, and still daily forms, America is voluntary immigration. Typically, it is the voluntariness of both regret and hope: regret that leaving hearth and home was necessary and hope that arrival would make the leaving worthwhile.

Such regret and hope return me to the title of my talk and to Maritain's chapter in his *Reflections* on "bruised souls." He heard the words "We are bruised souls" from an American friend and they struck him, he said, in an "indelible" manner.

They alluded to the wounds and sorrows of ancestors, and that memory of the sufferings caused by persecution and

prejudice which they left to their progeny as a spiritual patrimony...Each day, each year brings to the shores of America a flux of men and women who come from every part of the world and every cultural tradition, nearly broken by the moral persecutions, moral distress or physical poverty suffered in the Old World.

They come over to commit all their remaining forces to the common task of the land of promise which receives them. Their children will be told of their sufferings and keep them in memory, but they will share in the youthful force, hope, and activity of their new national community. They will embark on the pursuit of happiness...Here lies, in my opinion, a distinctive privilege of this country, and a deep human mystery concealed behind its power and prosperity. The tears and sufferings of the persecuted and unfortunate are transmuted into a personal effort to improve human destiny and to make life bearable...

But what is the objective meaning of that transmutation of the sufferings of the poor and the wounded into a new strength and a new hope—if not a Christian meaning projected into the sphere of temporal, social and political existence? Except under the shade of the Gospel such a phenomenon could neither take place nor make sense in human history.²⁰

Picking up on this theme in the last chapter of the book, entitled "America is Promise," Maritain says:

There is one thing that America knows well, and that she teaches as a great and precious lesson to those who come in contact with her astounding adventure: it is the value and dignity of the common man, the value and dignity of the people...America knows that the common man has a right to the 'pursuit of happiness'; the pursuit of the elementary conditions and possessions which are the prerequisites of a free life and the denial of which, suffered by such multitudes, is a horrible wound in the flesh of humanity...²¹

²⁰ Maritain, *Reflections on America*, pp. 83-85.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

Of course we are all aware, and Maritain is aware, of how America has denied this truth, beginning with the treatment of Blacks and Native Americans. But it is peculiar also how America, or the idea of America, was what kept America aware of the truth that she was at the same time denying. Those ringing words from Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*, that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, have never ceased to accuse Americans within their own consciences and thus have never ceased to motivate them, sometimes at the expense of their treasure and their lives, to make that truth real, not only for all Americans, but also for all men.

We should not, of course, be starry-eyed about any of this. As Maritain is not slow to remind us, America, for all its gospel roots, is a human construction, not a divine one, and is as flawed and will be as temporary as any other human construction. Nevertheless, even human constructions are suffused with the divine and we should always ask about any one of them where and what the divine within them is. In America's case, the divine is the assertion of the equal dignity of all men from the greatest to the least. Moreover, the worldwide recognition, within public rhetoric at least, of such dignity is due almost entirely to the fact and success of the American experiment. The French experiment of equality, liberty, and fraternity, which followed closely on the heels of the American Revolution, has, as a matter of historical fact, been nowhere near as decisive. France never managed to form itself, or any other people, into a nation according to those ideals.

In America things have, for the most part, developed differently, despite the drive that has kept on manifesting itself in US history to imitate European oligarchy at home and European imperialism abroad—on which points, by the way, Mark Twain's exposés remain incomparable (as in his "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" and "Banquet for a Senator"). The reasons are still those that Maritain identified, namely that immigrants in pursuit of a more fully human life flock here because only here do they hope to find it. As a young man explained, just after becoming a citizen, in answer to the question why he had chosen to come to America, "here everyone has a chance." That is perhaps still not as true as it should be, but it is truer here than almost anywhere else. In too much of the rest of the world, birth into

the wrong family or religion or class or place condemns one to a lifetime of inferiority. If this is ceasing to be as true in any particular place, as in parts of Europe, it is because of the increasing number of immigrants going there. In America, while there are social divisions, as there are elsewhere, these divisions are not fixed, or not in the sense that movement from one to another is hard or impossible. On the contrary, movement is fluid and rapid, and, as Maritain noted, he who is famous and rich one day may be forgotten and poor the next and the reverse again the day after.²² That is why Maritain said America was a classless society and had no bourgeois—not because there were no extreme differences in wealth and privilege but because no such differences were static or fixed and no class mentality could accordingly develop.

The point at issue here might be put like this. In America, the human capacity to create one's own self through one's own self-determination, and not under the ineluctable pressure of fixed structures and traditions, is at its freest. Less is determined for people in advance and more is left for them to determine for themselves. The national character, unconscious as well as conscious, is to let the self determine the self. The national self, the joint product of many selves acting freely together, is that the self should be a free creation of each. To use Maritain's terms, the common object about which this human society has formed itself is personalist and pluralist²³; or, to use Wojtyła's words, America has made self-determination the object of its own self-determination. It is the deliberate creation of the conditions for the fullness of self-determination for all, and so the deliberate creation of the conditions for the recognition, actual and concrete, of the human dignity of each. Although there are many for whom this is not true, there are many more for whom it is.

Self-determination is, to be sure, not some rudderless liberalism or individualism that is so adrift it cannot hold a course for human solidarity or responsible choice. There is no social indifference or moral relativism lurking beneath the surface here. That would be to deny the presence of truth in the American national character and in the idea of

²² *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

self-determination. That all men are created equal and are endowed with rights is not an opinion, or an ethnic preference, or a historical quirk of mind; it is a self-evident truth. Our elites may want to forget or deny this, for example our trendy intellectuals, or our fevered hedonists, or even self-righteous secularists. But immigrants seldom do. Still, one might well wonder why the immigrants' intuition of what America really stands for—as opposed to what the elites say it does or should stand for—does not occupy a firmer place in the expression of public opinion or in the pronouncements of public figures. The foreigner has to dig out for himself the actual practice of America and the real experience of Americans. He can feel it, perhaps, as soon as he arrives; indeed, he has already felt something of it at home in imported movies, or music, or machines. But he lacks an adequate name for it. He knows the name of freedom, to be sure, but what content is he to give it here? What more does it mean in the concrete beyond what names like McDonald's and Microsoft and Marlboro mean? Indeed, what do even these names mean; that is, what human and metaphysical reality do they express? For there are many who cannot get beyond the names of McDonald's and Microsoft and Marlboro, or who, if they do, see in them only a reality that, while of some material advantage, is spiritually sinister.

Maritain took note of this problem:

You are advancing in the night, bearing torches toward which mankind would be glad to turn; but you leave them enveloped in the fog of a merely experiential approach and mere practical conceptualization, with no universal ideas to communicate. For lack of adequate ideology, your lights cannot be seen. I think it is too much modesty.²⁴

It is interesting that Maritain spoke of a lack of *adequate* ideology and not a lack of ideology simply. For we have had, in the public realm, quite a bit of very powerful ideology over the years. In more recent years, unfortunately, the ideology has been that of a relativist liberalism trying desperately to justify to itself the freedom, amongst other things, to kill babies in the womb and old people in their beds, and to export the same freedom throughout the World.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

Now, it is not enough to protest this ideology or to oppose these deeds. A better ideology and better deeds must be put in their place. Such an ideology, or at least its fundamental ideas, has been present in America from the beginning, in those words from the *Declaration of Independence* quoted just above. What is needed, though, is not merely to repeat these words, for the true depth of their meaning is rarely penetrated. What is needed is to articulate them, as Maritain said, in an adequate ideology. Maritain can give us a lot of that ideology, but he cannot give us the whole thing. Moreover, he cannot give it to us in a powerful and distinctively contemporary form. He pointed the way forward; however, that way leads ultimately to the other author previously mentioned, namely Karol Wojtyła. Wojtyła's articulation of Jefferson's words and of Maritain's development is arguably the adequate ideology that Maritain wanted. This point was discussed previously, but it can be further illustrated by the words that Karol Wojtyła, or rather John Paul II, delivered in Saint Louis on his last visit to America in 1999:

America first proclaimed its independence on the basis of self-evident moral truths. America will remain a beacon of freedom for the world as long as it stands by those moral truths which are the very heart of its historical experience. And so America: If you want peace, work for justice. If you want justice, defend life. If you want life, embrace the truth – the truth revealed by God.²⁵

At the same time I know that you will hear my plea to open wide your hearts to the ever increasing plight and urgent needs of our less fortunate brothers and sisters throughout the world. This too – the spirit of compassion, concern and generous sharing – must be part of the "*Spirit of St. Louis*". Even more, it must be the renewed spirit of this "one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all." God bless you all! God bless America!²⁶

Much has changed since Maritain composed his reflections on America and much has remained the same. Most importantly, the idea

²⁵ John Paul II, "Homily at Vespers," January 28, 1999, Cathedral Basilica, St. Louis (*L'Osservatore Romano*, February 3, 1999).

²⁶ John Paul II, Arrival Speech, St. Louis Airport, January 26, 1999.

of America, as Maritain identified it, has remained the same. It is under attack, to be sure, as it was many times in the past, both at home and abroad. But many immigrants, Maritain's bruised souls, still know it and still embrace it. John Paul II also knew and embraced the American idea. He knew how to articulate it, to give it its adequate ideology, not only for the bruised souls, but also for the elites. Maritain's America fifty years on, if it is to continue true to itself, must be Karol Wojtyła's America.