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Review of David L. Schindler's "Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God"

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David L. SCHINDLER. *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God*. Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011. Pp. 450. ISBN 978-0-8028-6430-7. Reviewed by Jason Paul BOURGEOIS, Marian Library/IMRI, University of Dayton, Dayton OH 45469.

This book is a collection of essays, grouped loosely around the common thesis that all created being contains an inherent and ontological orientation to its Creator, and that this has profound implications for any attempt to understand the proper “order” of political systems, economic systems, and being itself.

In his introduction, Schindler himself highlights certain essays as more central to the thesis of the book. “Living and Thinking Reality in its Integrity” provides the metaphysical framework that is presupposed in the other essays. In this essay, Schindler argues that human experience is most authentically grounded in the “memory of God,” that is, an at least implicit awareness that existence is a gift of love that is constituted by one’s relationship to God, to other human beings, and to the rest of creation. This calls for a response in kind, namely the “gift of self” to another in love, most fully expressed in the lifelong commitment of either consecration to God or marriage. Many of the ills of present-day society are caused by “forgetfulness of God and of being as gift” (325).

The centerpiece essay “Civil Community Inside the Liberal State” argues that the current conception of separation of church and state favors relativism, because it holds that the state should not make universal truth claims but should only protect the free choices of the individual. This conception is based on a flawed anthropology, which views the individual as completely autonomous and not as constitutively related to God and to other human beings (for example, within the natural state of marriage and family). This view marginalizes those who are manifestly not autonomous, such as the unborn, disabled, and the elderly, and thus ironically supports the violent practices of the “culture of death” such as abortion and euthanasia while claiming to support human rights.

In practice, this view also favors religious communities that regard faith and morality as private and subjective choices. Religious communities such as the Catholic church, which make universal truth claims about morality based on natural law, are in theory free to participate in political debates, but in fact they are marginalized by being characterized as putting forth just one opinion among many. The inevitable result is secularism and the “dictatorship of relativism.” Under the guise of tolerance, being open to all opinions, and protecting freedom, this viewpoint ironically suppresses those who make universal truth claims about morality. Schindler’s essay was published before the current U.S. debate about religious freedom and contraception occurred, but it is remarkably prescient about defining the terms of that debate.

Schindler's underlying argument here is that the state cannot remain "neutral" regarding the metaphysical and religious dimensions of human existence, but must at least implicitly recognize the constitutive relationship of human beings to God and to each other, if we are to uphold human rights and religious freedom in their fullness.

Two other essays, "Market Liberalism and an Economic Culture of Gift and Gratitude," and "The Anthropological Vision of *Caritas in Veritate* in Light of Economic and Cultural Life in the United States," best summarize Schindler's application of his central thesis to economic issues. Here Schindler is critical of neo-conservative economists who put forth profit and self-interest as the primary motivating factors of a successful economy. Rather, Schindler argues again that economic theory cannot be "neutral" but must include metaphysical and religious dimensions in order to express the full truth about humanity. Particularly, the "gift of self," expressed through making goods and services available primarily out of love for one's fellow human beings, and with at least implicit awareness of the anterior gift of all of created existence, is the missing factor that would humanize a free market economy. Schindler offers a detailed interpretation of the economic thought of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to support his thesis.

Overall, this book offers an excellent companion to Schindler's previous work *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, as it continues to apply themes from Balthasar's theology (such as "active receptivity" and the priority of the Marian dimension of the Church) towards a sustained critique of contemporary Western society. It reflects a cutting edge attempt to articulate the inherently theistic components of politics, economics, and being itself. The book has a dense philosophical style that bears much fruit upon careful reading, but for this reason may be more suitable for graduate students or professional scholars than for undergraduates. The overall thesis of the book will be appreciated most by those who are sympathetic to a "Communio" approach to Roman Catholic fundamental theology.