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This and That . . . Not to Be Missed

Friday, May 27, 2005

ITEM ONE: John M. Swomley, Professor Emeritus of Christian Social Ethics at the St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, is worried that Justice Antonin Scalia might be nominated as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Writing in [Christian Ethics Today](#), he cites the fact that Scalia, a Roman Catholic, regularly attends the annual Red Mass, which he describes as “a medieval institution that has been repackaged in the United States in the twentieth century to influence judges and other lawmakers as well as the culture of the states and nation.” According to Dr. Swomley, “there is an underlying assumption that law and morality began with the Roman Catholic Church and divine revelation.” Well, the law and morality didn’t begin with the Roman Catholic Church, but they are ultimately established by divine revelation. From whence—or from whom—does Dr. Swomley think they have come?

Several years ago, Dr. Swomley [argued](#) in the same periodical that “abortion *per se* is not morally wrong, but should be left to private decision and medical judgment.” Further, “Public policy must defend the rights of existing living persons as over against religiously based claims made on behalf of fetal life.” And just who are those “existing living persons,” anyway?

ITEM TWO: Norman Mailer writes “[On Sartre’s God Problem](#)” in the current edition of [The Nation](#). He accuses Jean-Paul Sartre of having “derailed existentialism” by his godlessness. Atheism, Mailer avows, is “a croplless undertaking when it comes to philosophy,” supposedly able to deal with ethics, but unable to contend with metaphysics.

Mailer would replace atheism with theological relativism: “Great hope has no real footing unless one is willing to face into the doom that may also be on the way. Those are the poles of our existence—as they have been from the first instant of the Big Bang. Something immense may now be stirring, but to meet it we will do better to expect that life will not provide the answers we need so much as it will offer the privilege of improving our questions. It is not moral absolutism but theological relativism we would do well to explore if our real need is for a God with whom we can engage our lives.” In other words, Mailer is characteristically absolutist in his program of theological relativism.

Above all, Norman Mailer retains the power of expressive language. He describes Martin Heidegger as having “spent his life laboring mightily in the crack of philosophy’s buttocks, right there in the cleft between Being and Becoming.”

Perhaps not the most sophisticated philosophical analysis, but rather hard to forget.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: “The anointed talk about the sexuality of the young as if they had discovered it and copyrighted it. Why do they think people in olden times had such things as chaperones, early marriage, separate dormitories, and a thousand other ways of trying to cope with youthful sexuality and its consequences?” —[Thomas Sowell](#) in [Barbarians Inside the Gates and Other Controversial Essays](#) [Hoover Institution Press].

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