Laudemus viros gloriosos

Essays in Honor of

ARMAND MAURER, CSB

edited by

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Introduction

Armand Maurer: Disciple, Historian, Philosopher

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Armand Maurer was born 21 January 1915 in Rochester, New York. He received his education at the University of Toronto (BA, MA, PhD) and the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto (MSL), and was ordained in the Congregation of St. Basil on 15 August 1945. A lovely memoir of his training in Toronto as scholar and priest, "Recollections of Times Past," is included here, and I would like to thank Fr. Maurer for it. No one could have told his story, so intimately bound up with that of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, better than Fr. Maurer himself. At the point where his recollections end, his scholarly life was just beginning. My remarks here are designed simply to orient the reader toward his writings, for here too there is no substitute for Maurer himself.

As is often true for outstanding scholars, Maurer's life has not been peripatetic in its externals. Throughout his long career he has remained in one city, teaching for many years at the University of Toronto, in both St. Michael's College and the Graduate Department of Philosophy, and at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, where he is still active as Senior Fellow Emeritus. His journeys have been adventures of ideas, conducted by looking back in history. To meet this extraordinary guide, one would pass through the heavy outer doors of the Pontifical Institute—often escaping the Canadian snow—and trudge up the stone stairs to a second door, the door of an academic office. From behind this door Fr. Maurer peered with his mind's eye out on the historical course of philosophy and charted the excursions set out in his many writings. The articles from friends contained in this volume cover the millenium and a half that ranges from the earliest Christian philosophers to contemporaries of Descartes, a

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breadth appropriate because Fr. Maurer himself has ranged over that whole period, and beyond.

From his aerie on the grounds of the Pontifical Institute, Armand Maurer became an author and translator of world renown. He has been honored as Guggenheim Fellow, Aquinas Lecturer, Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, President of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, and recipient of its Aquinas medal. Maurer's writing combines the Cartesian values of clarity and distinctness with the intellectual rigor and precision that come from a lifelong study of the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. In his writing one gets the truth of the matter, set out briefly, with absolute precision and utter clarity. To my mind, this is why readers around the world have returned again and again to his writings. It also explains how he can have so successfully combined two crafts not often found in the same man: translator and philosopher.

Fr. Maurer's "Recollections" show how he was drawn to the study of medieval philosophy, to which he added the task of preserving the approach to the subject begun by Étienne Gilson. Maurer's first and critical step was to think of himself modestly as a disciple of that great historian. However, for a few in every trade apprenticeship turns into mastery; and Maurer thus became a master historian in his own right, and via this route a philosopher. Maurer's way of philosophizing, then, was "Gilson's way" or "the Institute way." As an introduction to the vast scope of his writings, let us look briefly at three themes they exhibit: Maurer as disciple, historian, and philosopher.

Disciple of Étienne Gilson

After the retirement of Étienne Gilson, Fr. Maurer began a series of essays on his beloved teacher, essays that illuminate his reasons for apprenticing himself to Gilson just as much as they explain the French historian's thought.[1] In his 1974 essay "Medieval Philosophy and its Historians," Maurer eschewed the opportunity to engage in Toronto-Louvain polemics, choosing instead to position Gilson (and himself) within a dispassionate and objective review of two centuries of scholarship about medieval philosophy.

As Maurer tells the tale, "the scientific study of the history of medieval philosophy began in the early nineteenth century, when the romantic movement was awakening curiosity in the Gothic culture of the Middle Ages."[2] He begins with two figures: Victor Cousin and Barthélémy Hauréau. Cousin thought the Middle Ages not a distinct epoch in history but "the cradle of modern society, and medieval philosophy the cradle of modern philosophy." Cousin's study of Ablelard and Heloise led him to insist on the name "scholasticism" for medieval philosophy, in order to signify reason's subservience to the Christian religion and "ecclesiastical authority," which assured a

uniformity of doctrine but also meant that "scholasticism was not strictly speaking philosophy at all. Its proper name is theology."[3] By contrast, the "rationalist and free-thinker" Hauréau saw "in medieval scholasticism 'the passionate work of minds who, too long enslaved to revealed dogma, were trying to merit and gain their emancipation.'" Scholasticism was truly philosophy, and what gave scholastics their distinctive character was not subservience to religious authority, but the fact that "Aristotle was their master."[4]

The second phase in Maurer's tale can be dated from 1879, when Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Aeterni patris* and brought medieval philosophy to the forefront of Catholic interests. The Chair in Thomistic philosophy at the University of Louvain in Belgium that the pope requested in 1880 was awarded to Désiré (later Cardinal) Mercier, whose job was "to revive scholastic philosophy in the modern world."[5] For historical help he turned to Maurice De Wulf, who held two "important" theses. In one thesis he took sides "with Hauréau against Victor Cousin," affirming "the independence of medieval philosophy from medieval theology." Scholastic reasoning was autonomous philosophical reasoning, even though De Wulf admitted that the scholastics had a passion "for combining (but not confusing) philosophical and theological questions in the same work," as Aquinas did in the *Summa theologiae.*[6]

De Wulf's other thesis concerned the content of scholastic philosophy. The similarities among medieval philosophers were not due to subservience to Church authority, as Cousin had said, nor simply to Aristotelian form, as Hauréau held. There was in medieval philosophy a common *content,* a "common scholastic synthesis," with the consequence that "the scholastics formed a school in the strict sense of the term." De Wulf placed individual medieval philosophers along an historical trend-line that began with "pre-scholastics" in the early middle ages, moved to "pre-Thomists such as Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure" in the early thirteenth century, and culminated in Thomas Aquinas, whose philosophy was "set forth as a grand and enduring system," one worthy of reappropriation by the Church in the early twentieth century.[7] "De Wulf's notion of a common scholastic philosophy came under severe criticism as early as the first decades of the twentieth century" and he "somewhat modifed his views," but De Wulf "never abandoned his thesis of a common body of philosophical ideas shared by the leading scholastics and expressed most systematically by Thomas Aquinas."[8]

The third phase of Maurer's story concerns Étienne Gilson, whose career began in earnest after World War I, when De Wulf was at the height of his fame. Though a Catholic, Gilson was not trained in scholastic philosophy but at the Sorbonne during the high tide of positivism, where he learned the skills of the historian of philosophy. Gilson would do for medieval philosophy what he had seen his teacher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl do for Hume. He concluded that De Wulf's two central theses were both

demonstrably wrong. First, there was no "common scholastic synthesis." Gilson's proof can be seen by comparing his *Le thomisme* (1919), a doctrinal study of Aquinas, with his *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure* (1924), whose "most remarkable conclusion" was that "the thought of Bonaventure cannot be described as an inferior form of Thomism, a *thomisme manqué.* Like the philosophy of St. Thomas, that of St. Bonaventure is thoroughly Christian in inspiration and purpose, and yet it is a different philosophy, neither conflicting nor coinciding with Thomism."[9] By interpreting what united medieval philosophers as common *doctrinal* content, De Wulf had distorted the facts, a matter that can be resolved by looking closely at medieval philosophical texts.

But if so, how explain the remarkable similarities among medieval philosophies? And should not Christianity play a role here? Here Gilson saw the shortcomings of De Wulf's other "important thesis," that philosophy in the middle ages was "independent" of theology. None of Gilson's three predecessors had seen the subtlety of the very real connection between philosophy and faith. "Gilson's study of the Middle Ages convinced him that it produced, besides a Christian literature and art, a Christian philosophy," the reality of which "was forced upon Gilson by historical facts." It was because they "were created under the influence of the same Christian revelation" that there was "a kind of unity among the philosophies of the Middle Ages." As a result, "Gilson in effect substituted the notion of Christian philosophy for the outmoded concept of a common scholasticism. But Christian philosophy, in his view, had no doctrinal unity; it embraced a number of diverse and even mutually incompatible philosophical syntheses, the chief of which were Augustinism, Albertism, Bonaventurianism, Thomism, Scotism, and Ockhamism."[10] Gilson's notion of "Christian philosophy" does have one consequence that he was slow to embrace, but eventually accepted: ". . . what he presented as the Christian *philosophy* of St. Thomas is in reality a part of his *theology* — the part, namely, which St. Thomas considered to be demonstrable by reason. In short, what Gilson called medieval philosophies were in fact 'truncated theologies.'"[11]

Fr. Maurer summarizes his results by returning to the nineteenth century:

Thus Gilson proved that Victor Cousin was right: the philosophy of the Middle Ages was in fact theology. But he also proved that Barthélémy Hauréau was right: schoolmen such as St. Thomas developed strictly rational philosophies worthy of the name. This must be qualified, however, by adding that unlike modern philosophies those of the Middle Ages were created within theologies for theological purposes.[12]

Maurer learned the Gilsonian position from the master himself and accepted the truth that there was no scholastic synthesis, but that medievals developed what could

be called Christian philosophy. The philosophy of the theologians was the dominant strain of Christian philosophy, but philosophy was also taught and developed by Masters in the Arts faculties. While most Masters of Arts were unwilling to accept a conflict between faith and reason, those called "radical Aristotelians" or "Latin Averroists" like Siger of Brabant are important precisely because they do not fit the model of "Christian philosophy." Maurer notes that "radical Aristotelianism is important in the history of philosophy because it introduced into the medieval world the separation of philosophy from faith and theology that became the ideal of modern thought."[13] Current attempts to find an "enlightenment" philosophy in the thirteenth century, one that is a source of modern philosophy's wall of separation between faith and reason, have focused on the Arts faculty and the radical Aristotelians in particular, a result quite in accord with Maurer's story. Maurer was not content to investigate just one form of medieval philosophy. In the compendium of his articles entitled *Being and Knowing,* he included studies of philosophizing theologians: the Dominicans Thomas Aquinas and Dietrich of Freiberg, the Franciscans William of Ockham and Francis of Meyronnes, and Henry Harclay, a secular master; but he also treats radical Aristotelian Masters of Arts Siger of Brabant and John of Jandun.

Historian of Philosophy

The flavor of Maurer's historical studies is readily perceived in his studies of two Masters, where Maurer's efforts moved scholarship well beyond Gilson. He has devoted a considerable body of work, spanning thirty-seven years, to Siger of Brabant. With his usual precision, he summed up his view of Siger in the introduction to his edition of the *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* (1983). I translate from Maurer's French:

> In his commentary on the *Metaphysics,* Siger depended upon numerous sources, but in the end the philosophy contained in its lectures is his own philosophy. It cannot be reduced to that of any of his predecessors, even Aristotle. Siger has been called a "heterodox Aristotelian," and rightly so, since Aristotle was his preferred philosopher and, on occasion, he did not hesitate to follow him even when such fidelity put him in contradiction with the Christian faith. He has also been presented as a "Latin Averroist," owing to the influence of Averroes on his thought; but he was too independent to follow Averroes slavishly, and sometimes he left Averroes in favor of Avicenna, Proclus, or Thomas Aquinas for the solution to a philosophical problem. All things considered, the philosophy of Siger is a personal synthesis, nourished no doubt by numerous sources, but incontestably marked by the seal of its author.[14]

It is impossible to read Maurer's phrase "personal synthesis" and not see him following the path pointed out by Gilson; and it is equally impossible to read the Latin text of Siger that Maurer has edited and not see how much farther down that path Maurer has proceeded.

Maurer has spent even more time with the theologian William of Ockham. In his book on Ockham, published in 1999 at the age of 84, Maurer introduces his concluding chapter this way:

> Martin Heidegger once made the perceptive observation: "Every thinker thinks but one single thought." . . . If we were to choose a single thought that plays this role in Ockham's philosophy, what would it be? The divine omnipotence and the razor are likely candidates because of their prominence in shaping his philosophy. But neither was original with him, nor was he the only one who used them; they were common coin for the schoolmen. It is true that he interpreted them in his own way, but always under the influence of his new notion of the individual. The evidence presented here leads to the conclusion that the central theme of Ockham's philosophy is the singular or individual thing (*res singularis*), as common nature (*natura communis*) is the focal point of Scotism and the act of existing (*esse*) is at the heart of Thomism.[15]

In this short passage, Fr. Maurer manages not only to point out the central theme of Ockham's philosophy, but also to offer a memorable comparison with Scotism and Thomism. He can do so because he looks at Ockham's philosophy doctrinally, that is, he concentrates on showing how Ockham's important conclusions flow from his even more important principles. Hence, the full title of the book: *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in the Light of Its Principles.*

In this respect, Maurer's work can be viewed as a reply to Marilyn M. Adams's huge 1989 work, *William Ockham.* Though a treasure trove of detailed arguments, its bulk is so overwhelming that the reader can lose sight of Ockham's overall doctrine. Always a gentleman, Maurer does not explicitly present his own book as a response; but it is. And Maurer's way of presenting Ockham's thought may well last as long as Gilson's book on Bonaventure, still the premier work on the topic three quarters of a century after it was first published.

Thomist Philosopher

For Fr. Maurer, the history of philosophy was his own chosen route into philosophy itself. Of all the historical figures he has studied, the most important is Thomas

Aquinas; and when Maurer philosophizes he philosophizes as a Thomist. For this reason, some of his most important philosophical contributions take the form of his own presentations of Thomas Aquinas or of his favorite expositor of St. Thomas, Étienne Gilson. To get a feel for the range and importance of Maurer's own contributions to the long history of Thomism, let us glance at three of his favorite topics: Christian philosophy; the "division and methods of the sciences," to use Maurer's own phrase; and Thomistic existentialism.

Since Maurer adopted the idea of "Christian philosophy" from Gilson, some of his most memorable formulations of this doctrine come in the course of his explanations of Gilson's thought. In the "Translator's Introduction" to his 1993 translation of Gilson's 1960 work, *Christian Philosophy: An Introduction,* Maurer reminds his reader of Gilson's "first description of Christian philosophy" in his Gifford lectures, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (1931–32): "every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders [of philosophy and supernatural revelation] formally distinct, nevertheless considers the Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason."[16] Looking back over several decades at this much disputed definition, Maurer then offers his own gloss on Gilson:

> When philosophy is incorporated in theology, as it is in the theology of St. Thomas and other scholastic theologians, it can be viewed from two different angles. As philosophy, it retains its essential rationality, deepened and enlightened by the higher wisdom in which it dwells. Thus Gilson insists that the theology of St. Thomas "includes, not only in fact but necessarily, a strictly rational philosophy." But that same philosophy is theological when it enters into the service of theology, for then it belongs to its household. Formally distinct as philosophy and theology, these two different wisdoms intimately collaborate with each other without any confusion between them. With the help of philosophy, theology achieves the structure and status of a science, and it gains a deeper understanding of the contents of faith. Philosophy in turn benefits from its service to theology; for example, metaphysics makes deeper progress in understanding the primary notion of being.[17]

Here Maurer, the second Master, is clearer than Gilson, the first.

In typical fashion, Maurer then goes on to draw a lesson that covers the history of modern philosophy in a glance:

> The theologians of the Middle Ages produced a variety of metaphysics as their instruments. With Descartes the ties between religion and metaphysics were cut, as metaphysics prided itself in dispensing with the theology from which it came. Metaphysics then lost its sense of identity, and philosophy took up arms against

it with Kant's critique and Comte's positivism. Metaphysics died at their hands, and the condition of its revival is the return to theology.[18]

The ties that should bind faith and reason began to loosen in the lecture halls along the Street of Straw in Paris in the thirteenth century; they were fully "cut" by Descartes, writing in a farmhouse in Holland in the seventeenth century; with the result that metaphysics "died" in the nineteenth century. Not content to explain its demise, Maurer ends on a prophetic note. To rise again metaphysics must be reconnected to religion, a prescription not irrelevant to the practical task of developing in the twenty-first century a philosophical curriculum that fulfills the program of John Paul II's *Ex corde ecclesiae.*

In his attempts to counter the positivistic foreshortening of the "range of reason" and to resurrect metaphysics in his 1932 book *The Degrees of Knowledge,* Jacques Maritain had made use of Aquinas's *Commentary on the De trinitate of Boethius.* Maurer subsequently made this work his own, translating Aquinas's questions 1–4 as *Faith, Reason, and Theology* and questions 5 and 6 as *The Division and Methods of the Sciences.* In his "Introduction" to the latter, Maurer explains Aquinas's rationale for following the Aristotelian division of theoretical knowledge into the physical sciences, the mathematical sciences, and metaphysics. Maurer notes the difference between "empiriological knowledge gained through controlled observation and measurement of the physical world" as found in modern science, and the kind of "philosophical" or "ontological" knowledge "of the very being and essential structure of things."[19] As an historian, he concentrates on the latter. For Aquinas, the scope and differences among sciences are determined by their "subjects," which in turn are understood through the doctrine of abstraction. Three kinds of abstraction locate the three kinds of sciences.

The first is "abstraction of the whole" universal from individuals possessing a common feature. "All the sciences use this type of abstraction, for they all leave aside the individual and accidental features of their object of study and concentrate on those that belong to it necessarily and universally. However, it is especially characteristic of natural philosophy, which studies the natures of material things."[20] Consequently, Aristotle had written different books devoted to different "subjects," such as moveable being, soul, animal, and dreams.

The second is "abstraction of form from sensible matter." This is the abstraction of the quantitative features that are only part of the reality of physical substances, from their substantial natures that characterizes the mathematical sciences. "Quantity is not abstracted from substance, but from the sensible qualities and the activities and passivities of material substance."[21] It cannot be completely abstracted from matter because quantity is an accident of substance, but mathematicians ignore substance

in favor of quantity—both medieval mathematicians who knew only arithmetic and geometry, and moderns who have expanded the frontiers, but not the nature, of mathematics.

Maurer is most concerned with the third kind of abstraction, because it authorizes the revival of metaphysics after its apparent death at the hands of Kant and Comte. Here Maurer sets out Aquinas's teaching in a masterful overview of an exceedingly contentious topic:

> The abstraction used by the metaphysician to grasp his subject is properly called separation: *separatio.* This is a radically different mode of abstraction from those we have already discussed, for it is effected through negative judgment, not through simple apprehension. . . . For judgment is primarily pointed to the act of existing of things, whereas simple apprehension has to do rather with their essences or natures. As a result, the subject of metaphysics will have an existential character not found in those of the other two speculative sciences . . . the subject of this science is universal being (*ens commune*), or being as being (*ens inquantum ens*). It also deals with the transcendental properties of being, such as goodness and truth, as well as with God, who is the first cause of universal being. Now none of these depends on matter and motion for its existence, as do the objects of natural philosophy and mathematics. Some of them *can* exist in matter and motion, as for instance being, goodness, act and potency; but these can also be found apart from matter in spiritual being. God, of course, exists absolutely independent of matter and movement. We can conclude, therefore, that the objects with which the metaphysician is concerned either actually exist or can exist without matter. And it is this truth that is grasped by him in a negative judgment in which he denies that being is necessarily bound up with matter and material conditions. Through a judgment of this sort he grasps being in its pure intelligibility, and primarily in its value of existence, and forms the metaphysical conception of being as being.[22]

On the doctrine of essence and existence, Maurer's introduction to his translation of *De ente et essentia* contains an unsurpassed short description:

> The basic metaphysical themes [Aquinas] adopted at the beginning of his career remained the same throughout his life; yet he developed and deepened them as the years went by. Already in *On Being and Essence* he describes being (*esse*) as the actuality of essence, the two forming a composition that results in a being (*ens*). God has no other essence or nature than being; he is being in all its purity (*esse tantum*). Creatures receive being as a participation of the divine being, their essences limiting the degree of this participation.[23]

Ever the historian, Maurer again sets Aquinas's doctrine within a picture of the history of metaphysics his reader can take in at a glance:

> While not neglecting other aspects of being, such as form and essence, St. Thomas offers a radically new interpretation of being by emphasizing its existential side. This was a decisive moment in the history of Western metaphysics, for St. Thomas was transforming previous Greek and mediaeval conceptions of being, which gave primary place to form. Before St. Thomas, important progress had been made in the direction of an existential interpretation of being by the Arabian philosophers Alfarabi and Avicenna, and by the Christian theologian-philosopher William of Auvergne. But St. Thomas was the first to appreciate fully the supremacy of the act of existing over essence.[24]

By helping us understand the past, Maurer illuminates a central metaphysical thesis relevant to this and every age.

The themes I have pointed out here are but a few of the many found in Maurer's writings, but they are important themes, important enough to be reflected in several of the pieces here offered to him by students, colleagues, and friends. Speaking for all the authors here assembled, as well as his many other students, friends, and readers, let me close by noting simply that these offerings are our humble way of saying: "*Laudemus virum gloriosum* (let us praise an illustrious man)," one in particular, Armand Maurer.

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Thanks are due to many for this book. Let me begin by thanking the authors who contributed to this appreciation. All are scholars well-recognized in their own right, and I want to thank them all for taking time in the midst of their various projects to sing the praises of Fr. Maurer here.

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Most of all, however, I would like to thank Armand Maurer himself. He has been for many years the living personification of an historical way of doing philosophy coming out of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto. His way is not the only way to do philosophy or to study the history of philosophy or even to follow the inspiration of Thomas Aquinas; it is simply the best way.

28 January 2004,
Feast of the Translation of the Relics of St. Thomas Aquinas

Notes

1. In Maurer's bibliography, nos. 21, 48, 61, 67, 71, 74, 77, 83, 89.

2. A. Maurer, "Medieval Philosophy and its Historians," in *Essays on the Reconstruction of Medieval History,* ed. V. Murdoch and G.S. Couse (Montréal/London: McGill–Queens University Press, 1974), 69–84; repr. A. Maurer, *Being and Knowing* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 461–80. Quoted from the reprint, p. 462.

3. Ibid., 462–63.

4. Ibid., 463–65.

5. Ibid., 471.

6. Ibid., 470–71.

7. Ibid., 468.

8. Ibid., 469–70.

9. Ibid., 474.

10. Ibid., 476–77.

11. Ibid., 477–78. Emphasis added.

12. Ibid., 478.

13. Ibid., 475.

14. Siger of Brabant, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam,* ed. A.A. Maurer (Louvain: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de philosophie, 1983), 19–20.

15. Armand Maurer, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in the Light of Its Principles,* in Studies and Texts 133 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 540.

16. Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (New York: Scribner, 1936; repr. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 37.

17. Étienne Gilson, *Christian Philosophy: An Introduction,* trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), xvi–xvii.

18. Ibid., xviii–xix.

19. Armand Maurer, *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Division and Methods of the Sciences,* 4th ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986), x.

20. Ibid., xx–xxi.

21. Ibid., xxi–xxii.

22. Ibid., xxii–xxiii.

23. Armand Maurer, CSB, "Introduction," *St. Thomas Aquinas: On Being and Essence,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968), 9–10.

24. Ibid., 10–11.