

March 3, 1946.

Rev. Jules A. Baisnée S.S.  
Catholic University of America  
Washington D.C.

Dear Father Baisnée:

I owe you an apology. I should have written you long ago. Yet I did not want to do so until I could offer you further evidence to prove our point against Father Eschmann who has chosen to defend personalism in its most abject form. Furthermore, in refraining from any communication with you until my reply was published, I also meant to deprive our opponents of any basis for their contention that our writings are but a conspiracy and "un épisode dans une campagne odieuse contre M. Maritain". Although my students have been hankering for an open rebuttal, I refused even to mention our Adversary in class, lest I indulge in M. Maritain's unsporting practice of attacking me in his lectures, as he did in Toronto several years ago, "coram pueris, qui nesciunt de causis arduis judicare", loosely attributing to me not just conclusions, but positions quite as ridiculous as he made them out to be. Nevertheless, had I known the publication of my paper would take so long, I would have at least sent you a brief message.

My reply should have appeared last autumn. The first two chapters were barely finished when I narrowly escaped a skull fracture in an automobile accident (no distraction—I wasn't driving), with the result that I was completely incapacitated for a month. I got back to work only gradually, and had first to attend to my regular duties. Only toward the beginning of February could I again devote full attention to this problem. My text should come off the press toward the end of the week.

Doctrinally, my reply adds nothing to what I had already shown in my essay. It is difficult to believe our Assailant really read my book. He was probably too carried off by his personal enmity and resentment toward the Cardinal, Chancellor of Laval University. Who would suspect a "personalist" of

turning on <sup>you</sup> whom he calls a "dear friend" for the sake of personal vengeance on a third person? His attack came wholly unexpected. When my essay appeared, he told one of his students in Toronto (who later came here to complete his studies, Fr. Otto Eisenzimmer, O.S.B. from St. John's University, Minn.) that I had written a good book, although he did not like the Cardinal's Preface. When his first article came out in *Medieval Studies* (V), I noted two things: (a) that his collection of texts was very incomplete, (b) that the series quoted under the heading "Special criticism of the principle" must have been brought forth for the purpose of raising a dialectical problem he would resolve in the second article by introducing the more profound texts he had omitted. The procedure seemed to me rather strange, yet I could not bring myself to believe a man who claims to have pondered all the texts could do otherwise. Any misgivings I might have had were suspended for the time when I met him in Montreal, the late autumn of 1944. He repeated his agreement with my position and expressly condemned Maritain's, adding that the latter had never seriously studied the problem. As to his M.S. article, he said I would see when the second appeared. This was not an occasional meeting. My annual lecture series at the University of Montreal happened to coincide with his own at the Institut d'études médiévales. We both stayed at the latter Dominican House. I served his mass daily, and daily we spent several hours in conversation. As usual, he avoided philosophical subjects. I never knew what his true worth was. He had been invited at Laval by the head of the Social Science School. I permitted him to lecture in our Faculty on the basis of his reputation. From reports, what he taught on the common good was true enough. Even at the time of our above-mentioned meeting, I did not know exactly why he had been discharged by the Chancellor, except that, according to rumours, he had been too outspoken on questions relating to our hostilities with Germany. We had received him and, I must say, spoiled him as a poor victim of the Nazis. Only once had there been a slight altercation between him and myself, when I insisted he use as the basis for his lectures in our Faculty the very text of Aristotle's *Politics* and the commentary of St. Thomas and Peter of Auvergne. But I thought this might be settled later when he became better acquainted with our method. — Then came a letter from The Modern Schoolman, asking me for permission to quote from my book in an article "In Defense of Maritain", by Father Eschmann. I still did not believe he would attack me, but that he might make an attempt toward conciliation, however futile, on certain points. Teaching at St. Michael's where Maritain and Gilson are near formally revealed truth, I thought he might have begun to realize on what side his bread was buttered. Finally, in late June, I read his paper. Only those he believed might be turned against me had received off-prints, even people who know nothing about philosophy. He never wrote me.

turning on whom he calls a "dear friend" for the sake of personal vengeance on a third person? His attack came wholly unexpected. When my essay appeared, he told one of his students in Toronto (who later came here to complete his studies, Fr. Otto Eisenzimmer, O.S.B. from St. John's University, Minn.) that I had written a good book, although he did not like the Cardinal's Preface. When his first article came out in *Medieval Studies* (V), I noted two things: (a) that his collection of texts was very incomplete, (b) that the series quoted under the heading "Special criticism of the principle" must have been brought forth for the purpose of raising a dialectical problem he would resolve in the second article by introducing the more profound texts he had omitted. The procedure seemed to me rather strange, yet I could not bring myself to believe a man who claims to have pondered all the texts could do otherwise. Any misgivings I might have had were suspended for the time when I met him in Montreal, the late autumn of 1944. He repeated his agreement with my position and expressly condemned Maritain's, adding that the latter had never seriously studied the problem. As to his M.S. article, he said I would see when the second appeared. This was not an occasional meeting. My annual lecture series at the University of Montreal happened to coincide with his own at the Institut d'études médiévales. We both stayed at the latter Dominican House. I served his mass daily, and daily we spent several hours in conversation. As usual, he avoided philosophical subjects. I never knew what his true worth was. He had been invited at Laval by the head of the Social Science School. I permitted him to lecture in our Faculty on the basis of his reputation. From reports, what he taught on the common good was true enough. Even at the time of our above-mentioned meeting, I did not know exactly why he had been discharged by the Chancellor, except that, according to rumours, he had been too outspoken on questions relating to our hostilities with Germany. We had received him and, I must say, spoiled him as a poor victim of the Nazis. Only once had there been a slight altercation between him and myself, when I insisted he use as the basis for his lectures in our Faculty the very text of Aristotle's *Politics* and the commentary of St. Thomas and Peter of Auvergne. But I thought this might be settled later when he became better acquainted with our method. — Then came a letter from *The Modern Schoolman*, asking me for permission to quote from my book in an article "In Defense of Maritain", by Father Eschmann. I still did not believe he would attack me, but that he might make an attempt toward conciliation, however futile, on certain points. Teaching at St. Michael's where Maritain and Gilson are near formally revealed truth, I thought he might have begun to realize on what side his bread was buttered. Finally, in late June, I read his paper. Only those he believed might be turned against me had received off-prints, even people who know nothing about philosophy. He never wrote me.

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The Modern Schoolman allowed me only about ten pages for my reply and were not entirely certain they would be able to publish it. Originally I should have liked at least the space they had accorded Father Eschmann. Instead of writing first a short reply in the magazine in which the attack had appeared, and then a more detailed answer on some other occasion, I chose to make the refutation complete right from the start, thus forestalling any possible half-baked retraction from the Adversary or pretence at having been misunderstood. In the meantime I heard of the unusual success of his article. (See, for instance, Theological Studies, Sept. 1945, p. 439) The result is that my reply turns out to be about three times the original essay.

Father Eschmann has already claimed that the English text of his article does not quite convey what he means. Mortimer Adler too, while publicly stating he agrees with Father Eschmann's doctrine, at the same time claims the passage of his Theory of Democracy I criticize does not say what he means. They always manage to say just the opposite of what they mean.

Your article is referred to in the last chapter of my reply. I did not want to quote his "Pacem amicis..." until the reader could appreciate who makes Catholic scholarship a laughing stock.

You will, I'm sure, agree with me that, per accidens, Father Eschmann has rendered the cause a distinct service. He has expressly defended the most fundamental position implicit in the personalism of those Catholic authors who uphold it, and proved my essay was not a "qui venture". Father Farrell and Mortimer Adler had been quite explicit (that is why I named them), but only on the question of the temporal common good. The former recently stated he never had in mind but the ethical problem. If I had named all the authors you mentioned, the ensuing discussion would have been both endless and futile. Professor Yves Simon is still convinced I am in full agreement with M. Maritain, and yet he refuses to pronounce himself on Father Eschmann's article. See what a beautiful mess these personal loyalties over and above the truth can get one into?

There is yet another service he has rendered. He has unwittingly brought to light the abysmal ignorance under which labour the Historical Point of View conjurers who devote all their time and precious paper to research on problems which arise only from their own shallow and contemptuous acquaintance with the simple elements of philosophy. I have good reason to believe even those of his peers who encouraged him will, in the end, desert him.

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As I had done in the case of the personalist conception of marriage, and in that of the nature of theology according to Fathers Charlier and Chenu, I venture to say that Father Eschmann's personalism will in time receive the same official censure. In this too, his article will have been a useful contribution.

I hope you may consider yourself sufficiently vindicated. With kindest regards, I am

Cordially yours,

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Charles De Koninck