

## The Natural Law, I

where there is no joy, love, light, certitude, peace, or help for pain. No certitude he says. Which is one reason why theories of governments written by men like Arnold see the importance of a system of checks and balances...since all thought is opinion, and one opinion as good as the next, then we'd best make sure no one opinion can hold sway for long.

The question then to us is, what do we do about this prevalent attitude? We can't punch Arnold or any other radical skeptic in the nose. There are too many for one thing. But that might be the best thing to do, to punch and then ask "What, no certitude? Your nose will tell you different. You really were punched." Again, we can't go around punching people. What we can do is proclaim the truth. We can say "Nonsense!" to this skepticism. We can proclaim natural law. Which is why I must commend Mr. LaPointe on his good initiative. So here are some things about natural law which might be of use to you.

First, what has it meant historically? Any Roman jurist of the 2c BC would tell you that nature has laws; that there is an order that governs the material universe, they largely called it the laws of nature. And immediately we see the incoherence of Arnold's skepticism, or that of the modern relativist. For the very people who proclaim radical skepticism, are the same ones who proclaim the laws of nature, the knowledge of which makes modern science possible. Granted, the universe is flawed, but the order is still there.

But that isn't really the problem is it? Getting back to the Romans for a moment, they thought that the laws of nature included those instincts and emotions common to man and the animals, such as the instinct for self-preservation or attach-

ment to offspring, which no one I think, would have a problem with. The real problem for contemporary society is not these sorts of laws. The problem is ethics. That there might be a rule or rules of conduct which are laws deriving from the very nature of things, or better yet, that they can be known because a Creator wrote them; aye, there's the rub. So I wish to focus on the rub, ethical behavior, which is the part of natural law that is most crucial for us to understand and promote.

At the invitation of Mr. Greg LaPointe, Director of the Center for Natural Law, I and Fr. Hearty gave talks on the subject. Several parishioners asked for copies; they are available from the Center, but in the meantime, I wish to use my talk as some bulletin inserts.

The time we live in, is a time underneath and afflicted by a dictatorship of relativism, as was so clearly put by Pope Benedict XVI. It has been building for a long time. To show this, let us turn for a moment to a poem written by Matthew Arnold, in 1867. Keep in mind that the Renaissance was well over, and the so-called Enlightenment had passed into great skepticism by this time.

The sea is calm tonight,  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the straits; on the French coast the  
light  
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England  
stand,  
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil  
bay.  
Come to the window, sweet is the night  
air!

Only, from the long line of spray  
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd  
land,  
Listen! you hear the grating roar  
Of pebbles which the waves draw back,  
and fling,  
At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago  
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought  
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow  
Of human misery; we  
Find also in the sound a thought,  
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round  
earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
Retreating, to the breath  
Of the night wind, down the vast edges  
drear  
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world, which  
seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for  
pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle  
and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Just a few comments on the poem. First, if you're familiar with Sophocles, he wrote tragedies which were relentlessly grim, and rather miserable, despairing even of the gods. Arnold is saying that we have come full circle and are back to Sophocles, with the Sea of Faith retreating all the time. There's truth in that line. Then follows a list, where every word is important to express a despair about truth,