

Frederick G. Lawrence, *The Fragility of Consciousness: Faith, Reason, and the Human Good*, ed. Randall S. Rosenberg and Kevin M. Vander Schel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

Frederic Lawrence's outstanding contribution to philosophy and theology is internationally well respected and treasured. His interdisciplinary engagement with theology and hermeneutic philosophy associated with three eminent academic centers, Rome, Basel, and Boston is a testimony to the call for thinking as the focus on the very possibility and radical responsibility to think that which needs to be thought. The volume addresses three major themes of Lawrence's academic work: The practice of conversation, the interplay of faith and reason, and the crisis of culture. Following Gadamer's primacy of the conversation in philosophical hermeneutics, Lawrence understands conversation as praxis, as the way in which we do hermeneutics (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*).

Lawrence adapts Lonergan's notion of theology as a collaborative and interdisciplinary enterprise mediating the Christian tradition and its cultural contexts. Such an understanding allows for practicing theology in a critical engagement with the historical development of the faith tradition. As the personal response to the Word of God, it calls the believers to know and to witness the truth in the rapidly changing global environment.

Lawrence's bringing together conversation and conversion is particularly inspiring from the hermeneutic perspective. If conversation means placing oneself in different horizons, it always requires conversion, a real change of human heart (*μετάνοια*). Entering redemptive tension in a personal encounter with God calls for a constructive engagement with the conversational life of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. This means active participation in a divine dance (*περιχώρησις, circumincession*), which opens up a new horizon of meaning and new possibilities for personal development. Understanding the intrinsically conversational nature of God discloses the essential plurivocity of understanding. By overcoming the historical, cultural, and religious barriers, the new outpour of divine energy at the Pentecost into the created world makes evident the universality of hermeneutics. The mystery of the Trinity as a *comm-unio* of life and love to which a human being is invited calls for understanding.

Reading Lawrence on crucial philosophical and theological insights is always an intellectual delight and a challenge. It requires undivided attention to what calls for thinking and does not allow for any shortcuts. Rather, it is an invitation to think together, to engage each and every aspect of the matter to be addressed, and to welcome the other into the community of inquirers, marveling at the beauty of creation. The diversity of views addressed by Lawrence is not only a demonstration of his erudition. Neither is it a methodical trick in order to lead the reader into sheer ambiguity. It is rather a form of discourse, which I call the internal logic of the argument. This methodologically indefinable logic of the discourse often obliges us to search for an understanding *per viam longam* (Ricoeur), and not to succumb to the temptations of shortcuts. Lawrence allows himself to be

seduced by the internal logic of the discourse, and with radical responsibility, patiently attempts to uncover what wants to be disclosed, unveiling for us, and maybe even more importantly for himself these dimensions of theological philosophy, which can be easily obscured by petrified formulas on the one hand, and by sheer entertainment of the variety and diversity of cultural trends.

The fragility of consciousness reminds us of the essential incompleteness of any human action and as such calls for humility as the conscientious endeavor to (re)discover our place in the created universe: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.” (1 Cor 3, 6) Growing (αὐξάνω) with the grace of God is the key to authentic discipleship. Giving voice to our inner world, we welcome the blessings bestowed by divine and human intimacy. This requires a willingness to be vulnerable as a condition for healing and transforming a personal life and community. And this is the key to an authentic being-in-the-world in the realm of constant personal development.