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PER SPEC TIVE



ABOUT THIS ISSUE

WHEN I WAS ABOUT to begin my studies at ICS, I was given this advice: “Take every Bob Sweetman class you possibly can.” Having never considered myself a historian, and hardly even considering myself a philosopher at the time, I took this advice to heart purely on trust and found myself in classes on mystics and medievalists with surprisingly modern questions.

What I discovered in these classes is that chronological snobbery (thinking we’re so much more enlightened than those ignorant people of the past) has no place in Bob’s scholarship. He has a remarkable ability to illuminate recognizable concerns in what would otherwise be unfamiliar shapes and formulations. This skill and disposition, together with Bob’s prodigious grasp of facts historical and otherwise, inspire in themselves and provide an invaluable guide to young academics trying to chart their own path through the woods of human knowledge, history, and potential. These traits give students the freedom to run ahead, bolstered by the awareness that Bob is right there with you to help wrestle with and wonder at anything and everything that catches your eye in the landscape.

On the occasion of his retirement this May, this issue of *Perspective* is an opportunity to give three cheers for Bob. Anyone who knows Bob knows he is drawn toward stories, and you’ll see in the contributions to this issue how encounters with Bob likewise evoke imaginative comparisons from those who’ve worked closely with him. In what follows, you’ll see Bob likened to a peacemaker, a generous host, a mystic, a cheerleader, a midwife, a scholar of the heart, a master and mentor, a provoker, a bridge-builder, an adventurer, a story-teller, a gift.

Ultimately, these essays bear witness to varieties of gratitude, and to the fact that Bob is undeniably a teacher. They also allow us to consider that perhaps the most precious thing someone can learn from Bob is how to learn: how to suspend your own presuppositions in order to open yourself up in good faith to what others have to say, and how to tune in to your own voice and learn to trust your own intuitions. This is nothing less than the Golden Rule of scholarship.

DANIELLE YETT

AUTHORS



Ronald A. Kuipers is ICS’s President. He is also the Director of ICS’s Centre for Philosophy, Religion, and Social Ethics; and Senior Member in Philosophy of Religion. He is the author of several books, including *Critical Faith: Toward a Renewed Understanding of Religious Life and Its Public Accountability* (Rodopi, 2002) and *Richard Rorty* (Bloomsbury, 2013).



Pamela Beattie holds a PhD in Medieval Studies from the University of Toronto and a MSL from the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. She is currently Chair of the Department of Comparative Humanities at the University of Louisville, ICS Chancellor, and Chair of the ICS Senate. Her most recent co-edited book is titled *Time, Space, Matter in Translation* (Routledge, 2023).



Traver Carlson is a Junior Member in the PhD program at ICS. His research is at the intersection of the history of philosophy and the philosophy of education. Before joining ICS, he taught secondary English language arts and advanced algebra at Central Christian School in Redmond, Oregon. He received his MEd from Calvin University and his BA from Wheaton College.



Carolyn Mackie completed her MA at ICS under the supervision of Bob Sweetman. She is now pursuing a PhD in Theological Studies at the Toronto School of Theology. She focuses on the work of Søren Kierkegaard, particularly at the intersection of his writing on time and eternity, repetition, and selfhood.



Gilles Mongeau, SJ has been a Jesuit for 38 years, and a priest for 26 years. After studies in the US, Ottawa, Toronto, Frimburg, and Boston, he obtained a doctorate in theology from Regis College and the University of Toronto, as well as a Doctor of Sacred Theology degree from Regis College. He is presently the Assistant to the Provincial and the Director of Formation for the Jesuits of Canada.



Maria Simakova is the Coordinator for the Commission of Faith and Witness at the Canadian Council of Churches. Maria holds an MA in Theology from St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and a PhD in Systematic Theology from the Toronto School of Theology. Her PhD thesis explored ‘parrhēsia’ as a modality of truth-telling in Foucault and postmodern Christian theology.



Gideon Strauss is the Senior Member in Leadership and Worldview Studies at ICS, and the school’s Academic Dean. Gideon previously served as Director of the Max DePree Center for Leadership at Fuller Seminary, the CEO of the Center for Public Justice, the Editor of *Comment* magazine, and the Research and Education Director of the Christian Labour Association of Canada.



Ronald A. Kuipers

THE PEACEMAKING HEART OF AN ADVENTUROUS SCHOLAR

*...Christian scholarship is never done, once and for all,
but must be reconstructed ever anew in...
a delicate balance of creativity and fidelity.
Such a flowing or genetic enterprise is constitutively risky.
It demands of its participants a profound sense of adventure.*

— Bob Sweetman, *Tracing the Lines: Spiritual Exercise
and the Gesture of Christian Scholarship*

IT WAS SEPTEMBER OF 1992 when I first ascended the steps of 229 College Street to begin ICS's master's program in philosophy. Shortly thereafter, I and my cohort were thrown into ICS's Reformational philosophy "boot camp," where I first met our ostensible drill sergeant, Bob Sweetman. Such martial metaphors, however, do not adequately describe the kind and gentle teacher-scholar I met that day, the same person who professes that the image of God in Christ the "peacemaker" makes his "heart flutter" (*Tracing the Lines* (TL), 153). As ICS's Senior Member and H. Evan Runner Chair in the History of Philosophy, Bob has spent his career attuning his scholarship to this pacific Christian heartbeat, and scores of students have benefitted from his dedication.

I have been blessed to count myself as one of Bob's students for over thirty years now, including

just under twenty as his colleague. I have learned many lessons at the feet of this master, but perhaps none more important than the profound idea that Christian scholarship is simply any scholarship that is attuned to, and thus shaped by, the heart of the Christian scholar—a heart fashioned by the faith one receives and enacts as a unique, cherished member of a Christian community and apprentice to its living spiritual tradition (TL, 10). In this light, Bob's career as a Christian scholar can be best viewed as a prolonged, ongoing spiritual exercise that, through his many remarkable contributions to human thought and culture, steadfastly seeks to incarnate this unique form of spiritual attunement.

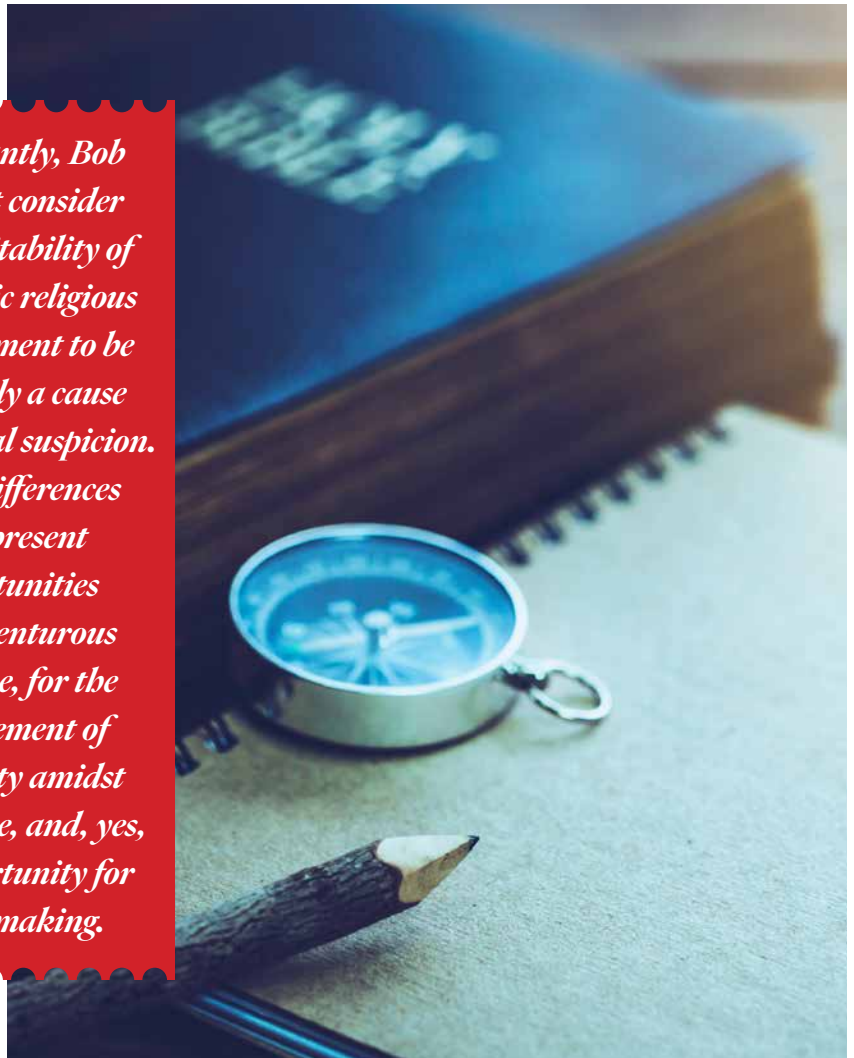
As Bob notices, anyone who wonders what makes Christian scholarship distinctive, what makes it Christian, is soon embarrassed to learn how many different answers have been and can be given to this question,

and how little agreement exists within the Christian scholarly world about it. Bob seeks to circumvent this embarrassment by drawing our attention to the heart of the Christian scholar, as opposed to the content or method of the scholarship. If we care for and nurture our Christian hearts, we can trust that the scholarship these hearts motivate will become a conduit for God's ongoing healing and creating presence in the world. The profundity of this suggestion, for me, lies in the generous space it creates for the coexistence of

a diversity of spiritual heartbeats within the Christian scholarly community, as we members of that community take our place in—and hopefully make a redemptive contribution to—the wider world of human intellectual exploration.

Bob judges the current lack of consensus about what distinguishes Christian scholarship to be a result of the very way that Christian scholars tend to ask the question. Here he spies a tendency to take an “Aristotelian” approach, as though Christian scholarship is

Importantly, Bob does not consider the inevitability of such basic religious disagreement to be primarily a cause for mutual suspicion. These differences also present opportunities for adventurous dialogue, for the achievement of solidarity amidst difference, and, yes, an opportunity for peacemaking.



simply a species of a larger (general, generic) genus (TL, 110-18). This approach to the question tempts us to search for a precise, timeless definition that will, once and for all, conceptually demarcate this species of scholarship from all the others. The problem with this approach, Bob says, is that agreement on any such definition has proved, and must prove, elusive. Is Christian scholarship distinctive as to its methods? Try telling that to a Christian physicist or mathematician. Is it distinctive as to its subject matter? Try telling that

to a Christian biologist, philosopher, or political theorist. Is it distinctive as to its founding principles? Try telling that to the Christian scholar who works in solidarity and cooperation with non-Christian scholars studying the same field, or who disagrees with other Christians as to what those founding principles might be. You get the idea.

In response to this dilemma, Bob encourages Christian scholars to take a different angle of approach. According to him, Christian scholarship occurs wherever and whenever Christian scholars join larger scholarly conversations as their complete and full Christian selves, bringing whatever 'tinker's wares' they have thereby managed to collect to the shared scholarly task (TL, 3). In this way, Bob also wants us to recognize

that all scholars, Christian or otherwise, stand on the common ground of God's good yet groaning creation. That does not mean we will always agree, for, as Bob also insists "the creation is precisely common ground, though its investigation is in principle never religiously neutral" (TL, 109).

Importantly, Bob does not consider the inevitability of such basic religious disagreement to be primarily a cause for mutual suspicion. These differences also present opportunities for adventurous dialogue, for the achievement of solidarity amidst difference, and, yes, an opportunity for peacemaking. For Bob, the spiritual orientation he achieves by attuning his heart to the Reformational ground motive of "creation-fall-redemption" prepares him not for suspicion and condemnation, but rather gives him a reflex to appreciate a broken creation's ambiguity and complexity. This reflex represents "an impulse in which one approaches something open to encountering it with indications of its original blessing, its marring and consequent ambiguity, and its reception of a new and redemptive meaning by which its original blessing shines forth again and becomes redolent of new possibilities" (TL, 142-43).

Because of this spiritual reflex for recognizing complexity, ambiguity, and redemptive possibility, Bob eschews the defensive and suspicious posture of so much Christian scholarship today: "Christian scholarship, when it is built to serve as mental fortress in a scholarly world assumed to be at war, comes at too great a cost, for faith and its many works are living things that are robbed of their vitality when they are petrified so as to provide construction material for scholarly walls made of conceptual stone" (TL, 161). Bob would have Christian scholars incarnate their faith differently, encouraging us to muster the courage to undertake the risky adventure of a scholarship that trusts God's Spirit to constantly direct our intellectual noses to the sweet scent of our Maker's original blessing, as well as to the ever new possibilities for healing and transformation that constantly waft up from God's green earth. For that profound and simple lesson, not to mention spiritual encouragement, I am forever grateful. Thanks Bob! 🍀





Gideon Strauss

JOINING THE CONVERSATION IN GRATITUDE

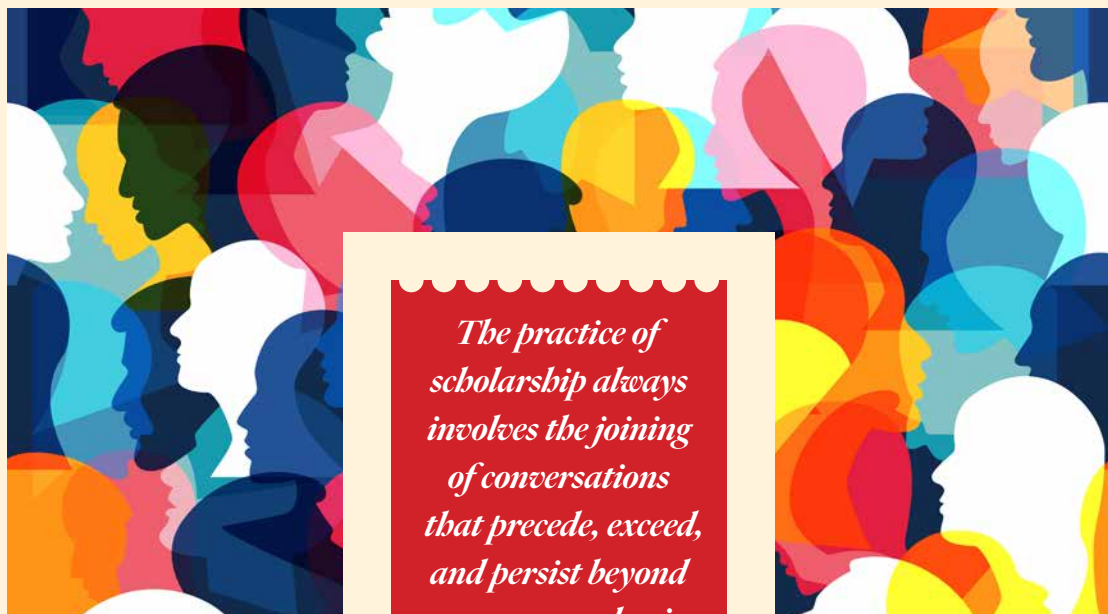
I have so many reasons to be grateful to Bob Sweetman. Here, I will limit myself to write about three of these many reasons.

FOR MY FIRST FEW years of employment at the Institute for Christian Studies, I commuted regularly from Montreal to Toronto, to teach and to participate in meetings. This was before the COVID-19 pandemic brought the great leap forward in online video technology that allowed us to imagine the kind of distributed learning that is now both commonplace in higher education and the usual practice at ICS. For most of those years, Bob and Rosanne Sweetman very generously hosted me in their basement apartment whenever I found myself in Toronto. Their practice of hospitality not only enabled me to meet my obligations to appear in person at ICS's classrooms and meeting rooms, but it also steadied my experience of being at home in God's world as I emerged from a tumultuous time in my life.

A few years later, at the same time as I moved my home from Montreal to Toronto, I succeeded Bob in the position of ICS's Academic Dean. I recall with delight the office symbols that Bob gifted to me on that occasion: a small plastic pig with a slot in its back for coins (whose significance was the fiduciary responsibilities of a Dean) and a little plastic shovel

(whose significance I invite you to imagine). Bob's personal generosity turned out to be matched by his professional generosity and good humour, as he mentored and advised me after I took on this administrative task at our school. While our administrative dispositions differ—I will never be able to match Bob's tremendous capacity for treating every individual case as truly unique and exceptional—I do hope that I emulate Bob in his passion for the mission of ICS and his care for the community of scholars for whom our school is their academic workplace.

Most of all, I am grateful to Bob for his example as a Christian scholar. Bob's way of reading, thinking, teaching, and writing about the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history has been an inspiration to me for decades, first from a distance (and mostly through his published work) and then up close as a colleague. In my 2020-2021 Reflective Practice Report to the ICS Academic Council and Senate, I explained that it is from Bob that I have learned how to coordinate my teaching and my research, and described how the pursuit of such coordination has brought clarity and coherence to my own program of research. During that year Bob had explained to me how he organizes the



The practice of scholarship always involves the joining of conversations that precede, exceed, and persist beyond our own academic careers. Bob's advice on how to join such conversations—ready to be changed as much as to contribute toward change—has been as helpful to me as his example in doing so himself.

relationship between his academic reading, teaching, and writing, and how each aspect of his scholarship serves and informs the others. I decided to follow his example, conceiving of each of the courses I teach in the ICS MA (Phil.) in Educational Leadership as the correlate of a chapter in an eventual book. This is just one—but for me, a very effective—example of the ways in which in my practice as a scholar I seek to emulate, with gratitude, Bob's practice.

Christian scholars such as we at ICS can be grateful that we have not only the tacit example of Bob's practice as a scholar but also his explicit articulation of his "scholarship of the heart," most definitively in his 2016 book, *Tracing the Lines: Spiritual Exercise and the Gesture of Christian Scholarship*. At this moment along my journey as a Christian scholar what stands out most in Bob's approach is his advice on how to join scholarly conversations:

[B]ecause we live and work as scholars within a post-Christian scholarly culture, we will join conversations that are religiously heterogeneous as well as ambiguous in their results. This heterogeneity and ambiguity, in turn, entails a two-pronged approach to the conversations we join.

In the first place, we should join the conversations open to learning from and being changed by what we encounter in the process. Furthermore, we must join these conversations in good faith, as participants prepare to take

as well as give, to learn as well as teach. [...]

In the second place, however, we should join conversations sensitive to their spiritual heterogeneity and hence to the existence and location of sites of healthy transformation. While an appropriate solidarity or care will entail that we start where our interlocutors are, accepting their ways of putting things, because

we have much to learn, we will also be looking for ways in which we feel conversations can be profitably developed (158).

The practice of scholarship always involves the joining of conversations that precede, exceed, and persist beyond our own academic careers. Bob's advice on how to join such conversations—ready to be changed as much as to contribute toward change—has been as helpful to me as his example in doing so himself. From my observation of the work of former and current ICS Junior Members who have had the privilege of being taught and mentored by Bob, I can say that they have benefitted from his example at least as much as I have.

While I have learned much from Bob as a colleague

and through his writings, I have never had the privilege to be his student formally. I was therefore delighted to learn that he intends to continue to teach at ICS after his official retirement as a Senior Member, in particular because I have found myself at a juncture in my research that requires a deeper understanding of what Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas had to say about practice and prudence than I have been able to achieve thus far—and these are philosophers about whose work Bob is an expert (perhaps, when it comes to Aquinas, the unexcelled living expert in our city of Toronto). And so I eagerly anticipate adding to my debts of gratitude to Bob my learnings from his course *Aristotle, Aquinas, and the Scholastic Approach to the History of Philosophy*, which I will be taking in the Winter term of 2024. What a marvelous prospect! 🌹





Carolyn Mackie

THE WORK OF A TEACHER, THE WORK OF LOVE

As Bob Sweetman often reminds us, scholars are formed one-by-one and one-to-one in the relationship between mentor and student. A former student reflects on this experience.

IN THINKING ABOUT BOB Sweetman's role as a mentor, there are many pedagogical models or metaphors that could be fittingly applied: Bob as a mystic, attending to the great mysteries of existence and finding common language for his private revelations; Bob as the scholarly master, with whom an eager apprentice might practice *aemulatio*—the mutual, continual striving to surpass one another in love and good scholarship; or perhaps Bob as indefatigable cheerleader—to use his own self-description, rooting for his students and cheering them on.

Yet another fitting model comes to mind, this time borrowed from Socrates: Bob as midwife. In Plato's *Theaetetus* dialogue, Socrates states that, although some people mistakenly believe that he is “an eccentric person who reduces people to hopeless perplexity,” he is, in fact, a midwife, whose task is to help birth the thoughts of those who come for aid. “The highest achievement of my art is the power to try by every test to decide whether the offspring of a young man's thought is a false phantom or is something imbued

with life and truth” (*Theaetetus* 148e). As midwife, Socrates doesn't tell prospective mothers-of-thought what to think, but rather aids them in their labour and delivery. So does Bob.

My own philosophical darling, Søren Kierkegaard, has a preference for this Socratic midwife model of pedagogy. For Kierkegaard, the highest pedagogical task is that of helping the other become herself before God. Rather obviously, no one can do this for anyone else. Therefore, the teacher or helper has the difficult task of assisting in this process of becoming without getting in the way. Love's constraint—that I seek not my own in the other but enable her to become fully herself—requires something more: that I hide myself.

Drawing on this Socratic model of the midwife, Kierkegaard then layers another image or metaphor atop of it, this time a punctuation mark: “—”. The teacher as the dash. Kierkegaard writes:

Many authors use the dash on every occasion of thought-failure; there are also authors who use the dash with insight and taste; but a dash has truly never been



The dash causes the voice to pause, the eyes to hesitate.



In the dash, the helper and the one being helped



are simultaneously held together and distanced.



A space is created between them—a space in which the teacher



lovingly hides himself. The student is not dependent



on the teacher or created in his image but can become fully herself.



used more significantly... than in this little sentence... He is standing by himself—that is the highest; he is standing by himself—more you do not see. You see no help or support, no awkward bungler's hand holding on to him, any more than it occurs to the person himself that someone has helped him. No, he is standing by himself—through another's help. But this other person's help is hidden from him.... It is hidden behind the dash (Works of Love, 275).

The dash causes the voice to pause, the eyes to hesitate. In the dash, the helper and the one being helped are simultaneously held together and distanced. A space is created between them—a space in which the teacher lovingly hides himself. The student is not dependent on the teacher or created in his image but can become fully herself.

When I re-read old emails from Bob or comments on class assignments, there are some recurring themes that stand out, themes that have shaped me and remained with me through the years: affirmations of my philosophical intuitions and of the significance of the questions I was asking; assurances of support

whichever path I chose going forward; and of course, his indefatigable cheerleading, quelling the voices of imposter syndrome and self-doubt. As my mentor, Bob helped me find my own voice, learn (slowly) to trust my own instincts, and find my own way in the philosophical landscape. He understood, better than I did, how philosophy might be for me (as he put it in an email) “a way to find a new set of tools to inquire into, discover, and begin to speak what lies deep within you.”

Kierkegaard writes, “What a wonderful remembrance the one who loves acquires as thanks for all his work! In a way he can pack his whole life into a dash. He can say: I have worked as much as anyone, worked early and late, but what have I accomplished—a dash!” (*Works of Love*, 279). Yet this is truly a work of love.

For those of us who have had the extraordinary privilege to have Bob Sweetman as mentor, his expertise and exertion have been lovingly packed into a dash, hidden in a punctuation mark. He has laboured with us for our academic success and our well-being as humans. Bob as midwife, Bob as dash. I am forever grateful. 🌸





Maria Simakova

THE CARE FOR TRUTH, OR THE PLEASURES OF BEING WRONG

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH Bob was a failure. As a fledgling PhD student in my second semester, I boldly signed up for his deceptively simply titled seminar, *Individuality in the Franciscan Thought of John Duns Scotus and William of Okham*. At that time, I identified as an Eastern Orthodox theologian and was seeking to gain a better insight into Scotus, who often functions as a straw man and a convenient *bête noir* in contemporary Orthodox theology. Very quickly, I realized that my lack of training in the intricacies—or, let's be honest, in the basics—of Aristotelian metaphysics and logic barred me from fully appreciating Scotus' and Okham's difficult, scintillating, and mesmerizing flights of thought. So I quit.

The failure, I must hasten to say, was mine, not Bob's. Ever the cheerleader and patient mentor, he kept assuring me that, even without the Aristotelian chops, I could and would gain much from the course. But, at that point, partial knowledge or a shimmering glimmer of insight were not enough for me. I wanted to get it all, I wanted to get it right, I wanted to be perfect. I wanted the whole truth or none at all.

Despite this all-or-nothing attitude and perceived failure, some things indeed stayed with me. That course introduced me to the Franciscan-inspired philosophical privileging of particularity and indi-

viduality as the creative locus of human thought and flourishing. More personally, I resonated with Bob's attentive, affectionate, and vulnerable approach to medieval philosophical texts not as cultural fossils, but as living, individual beings that have something to say to us in the present. And I thrived in the atmosphere of openness and friendship that is Bob's classroom. So, the following semester, I took Bob's course *Nietzsche, Foucault, and the Genealogical Approach to the History of Philosophy*, and that seminar completely changed my thinking and my life.

While I've always felt drawn to postmodern thought—to its critical impetus, its bold open-endedness, and its fearless commitment to thinking the (im)possibility of truth—I did not know how to reconcile this affinity with my respect for tradition and history. So my imagination was immediately caught by the provocative thesis of that course. Bob contended that genealogy (the philosophical method inaugurated by Friedrich Nietzsche and introduced into ever-widening fields of human inquiry by Michel Foucault) could be productively understood as a contemporary expression of a particular strand in the Western philosophical tradition. Namely, it could be seen as similar to the *protreptic*—an ancient exhortative genre of *rhetoric* deployed to produce the audience's *philosophical* conversion or 'turning' from appearance to reality,



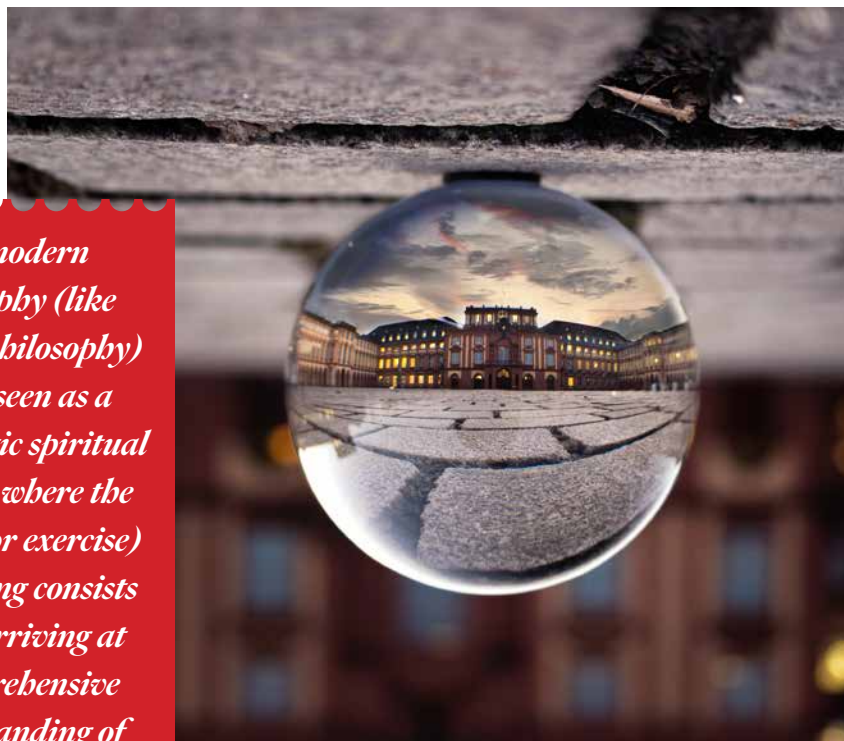
from foolishness to wisdom, from illusion to truth.

Genealogy, Bob suggested, represents the postmodern and deeply historicist manifestation of this protreptic tradition in philosophy, although its practitioners no longer urge their audiences to convert from something ‘negative’ or ‘privative’ (such as ‘untruth’) to something ‘positive’ or ‘perfect’ (such as ‘truth’). Rather, postmodern genealogy analyzes the ways in which we speak—particularly the binary terms ‘false/true’, ‘appearance/reality’, ‘evil/good’ as products of human history and culture—in order to provoke the reader’s realization that the ‘good’ or privileged term in these binaries is *actually* the ‘bad’ or privative term in disguise. The transformative shock of this

insight, however, is not meant to coerce the reader into following some prescribed path or program of philosophical thinking, but rather to effect their ‘turning’ from what Bob eloquently called “a closed determinacy of nature” to the open possibilities of human existence seen as a work of art.

At that point in my academic life, I did not fully appreciate the originality, incisiveness, and immense scope of Bob’s provocative thesis. But I immediately recognized its existential, rather than ‘academic’, possibilities for my own thinking. If I took Bob’s claim seriously, it meant that Nietzsche and Foucault were part of the living fabric, the living history and tradition of philosophy. What is more, I began to see

Postmodern philosophy (like ancient philosophy) can be seen as a therapeutic spiritual exercise, where the askēsis (or exercise) of thinking consists not in arriving at a comprehensive understanding of 'truth' or 'reality', but in cultivating an attitude of open anticipation, which allows one to see something unpredictable and new in both the past and the future.



sophical life as care for truth in the absence of truth and certainty. What is more, postmodern philosophy (like ancient philosophy) can be seen as a therapeutic spiritual exercise, where the *askēsis* (or exercise) of thinking consists not in arriving at a comprehensive understanding of 'truth' or 'reality', but in cultivating an attitude of open anticipation, which allows one to see something unpredictable and new in both the past and the future. This kind of postmodern philosophy, I also realized, practices its craft as a test of thought and life and cherishes failures and 'untruths' as productive—and even pleasurable—ascetic exercises.

What Bob brought about in that seminar was nothing less than my 'conversion' from the closed determinacy of my then-understanding of 'true' philosophy to the open-ended praxis of postmodern philosophy as a work of art that uses, subverts, and creatively re-shapes the structures inherited from ancient philosophy. The gift he gave me was much more than a better understanding of Nietzsche and Foucault, Scotus and Okham, postmodern philosophy and ancient rhetoric. The gift he gave me was the possibility of living a philosophical life that carefully attends to—and cares for—the particular, individual, fragile, yet fearless truths which are not fossilized in the past, but stretch into and actively shape the future. 🌸

that Nietzsche's and Foucault's postmodern choice to commence with—and to privilege—the 'privative', the 'untruth' evinced not their indifference to (or, worse, hatred of) truth, but their earnest concern for truth.

Postmodern genealogical criticism, if seen as a protreptic unsettling, a protreptic interference that assists the readers in challenging their dearly-held assumptions, becomes an invitation to the philo-



Traver Carlson

LOOKING TO MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE OF LEARNING WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

We all intend our scholarship to be a seamless piece of our total living with the scriptures and our total worship of the God revealed therein.

— Bob Sweetman, *Tracing the Lines*

IN THIS OPENING STATEMENT, Bob Sweetman offers a Christian assessment of what it is to go about being human: to give steadfast love for the sake of having been given love. One can observe two facets of this love in the Latin Vulgate translation, *diligere*, and the Koine Greek, *agapân*, of John 3:16. *Diligere* indicates both a willful choosing and a loyalty to that choice that arise from the movement of desire in the embodied soul for God. *Agapân* indicates the self-giving compassion or kenotic love given within the context of friendship and motivated through the desire for the gift of a new self from the other, as Christ exemplified in his self-giving offering. Both of these senses, *diligere* and *agapân*, are present in Bob's summation above. Worship is an embodied and holistic direction of desire among a community to the ultimate object of that desire. Hence, the total worship of God infuses and blossoms as the "total living" in which desire for God infuses all aspects of existence.

As personal experience readily teaches, distractions arise and the desirous self is easily seduced in myriad directions. Even novel seductions like those the shift to digital communication technologies in classrooms invite have a long history in Christian communities under various guises. With concerns regarding the difficulty of intending learning "to be a seamless piece of our total living" in "total worship of God," I share with Bob the conviction that the Christian tradition has wisdom to share for the present; not to restore the past, but to see with new eyes a familiar struggle. I also turn with Bob to the pedagogy of the cathedral schools of the 11th and 12th centuries. And I conclude that the desire to imitate for the sake of the transformation of the self within community can open up a horizon of possibility teachers and students can often feel is closed.

Education in these cathedral schools developed at a time of intellectual and ecclesial blossoming during the growth of scholasticism. Before the



transformation of the cathedral schools into the first universities, the school functioned not merely as a special-purpose institution but as a home for becoming, a community of practice. Cultural historian Stephen Jaeger argues that, in the framework of the cathedral schools, the whole person of the teacher “is the curriculum, his presence radiates a force to the students, dips them in its magic aura and transforms them in his image and likeness. This quasi-magical creation or transformation of character is reduced by the bald phrase, ‘teacher imitation’” (*The Envy of Angels*, 76).

During the dawn of scholasticism, one staunch critic of the scholastic curriculum, John of Salisbury, decried the bifurcation of philosophy and the discipline of living well: before this, practice and theory were integral (85). To him, the shift to abstraction coincided with a shift to viewing the individual as a producer of conceptual systems (86), and the liberal

arts shift from an end unto themselves into a means to an end: knowledge products to distribute to textual and mental containers for another repetition of the same sort. The desire to excel, then, became a matter of the school’s products rather than the transformation of its members and substance as a community.

The concerns of 12th-century faculty like John of Salisbury are not far afield from present concerns in education. In *Digital Life Together: The Challenge of Technology for Christian Schools*, David Smith and his colleagues conduct a case study in which they observe that while a school introduced laptops and tablets for the sake of efficiency and consolidation of resources, doing so did not open up space for learning that invited complex communication and negotiation of perspectives between community members. Instead, the decreased time and wider availability of instructional material correlated with online shopping, fantasizing with image and

narrative about products, and the capacity to acquire these products relative to their competitors (*Digital Life Together*, 131-3). Then as now, when education becomes an instrument, the possibility for individual and community transformation becomes so narrow as to be beyond the horizon.

The present age does not only share a familiar concern with the struggle over desire and transformation in 12th century Europe, but also a glimmer of a solution. Smith and his colleagues observed that spiritual exercises recognizable to the Greco-Roman schools of philosophy—such as meditative reading, experience of the moment, and even encounter with the other through open dialogue—were effective both in the invitation to and the actualization of an individual sense of belonging and participation in community, even in digital spaces. Their findings indicate that spiritual exercises have the capacity to open time and digital space to provide windows of opportunity for transformation of self and community.

In a workshop Bob recently led on the topic of gratitude, he stated that the medieval university “was a community of friends united by a common task, to be sure, but also by the norms of a friendship of virtue, for the master’s pedagogical goal was to *inspire his students to desire to become another self of him or her.*” With the teacher embodying the spiritual, intellectual, and even physical maturity of the liberal arts, the “envy” that the student directs toward the teacher and peers charges the community with a zeal that drives learning forward and opens space for the radical transformation of individual and collective identity.

In his historical investigation of gratitude as a spiritual exercise, Bob observes the nature of friendship in Paul’s call to “join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us” (Phil. 3:17, NRSV). The imitation of Paul emptying himself for the sake of his friends toward giving self and receiving a new self is the substance of Christian friendship. In his workshop on gratitude, Bob suggests that Christ exemplifies the ethos of this friendship in the self-emptying love of the incarnation. Hence, just as Smith and his colleagues observed of the promise of spiritual exercises, Christianity’s unique innovation to the Greco-Roman practice of gift-giving (with the exhortation to imitation in community) suggests that a retrieval could open up a familiar horizon in a peculiarly Christian way. Here, Bob shows us the path forward in the present. The spiritual exercise of gratitude, if a school appropriates it as the cathedral schools did, could reopen the cultivation of a friendship that embodies the gift given by another such that one’s giving of that very gift inspires the friend to “reach out for richer life and existence.” 🌸

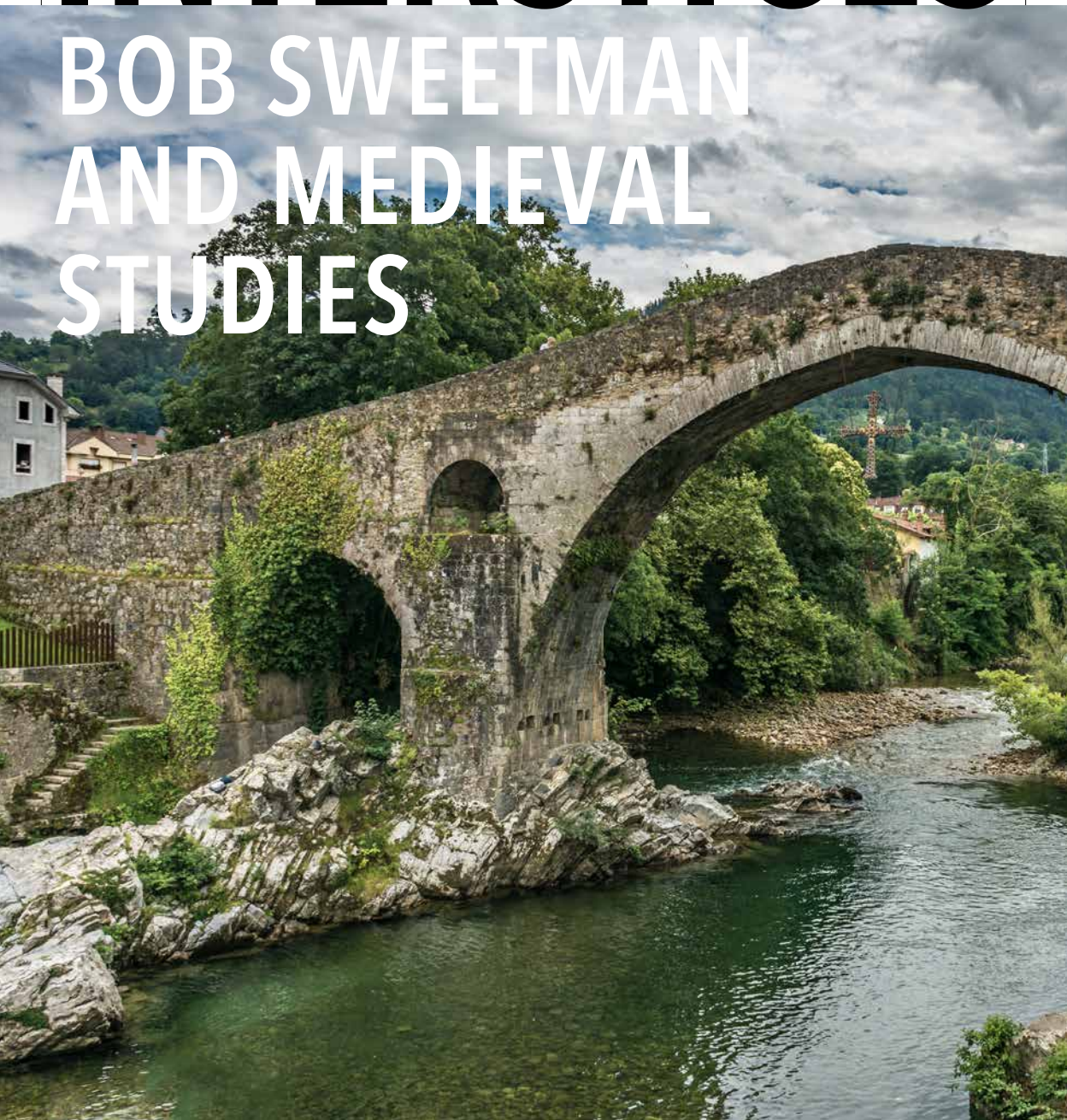




Pamela Beattie

INTERSTICES

BOB SWEETMAN
AND MEDIEVAL
STUDIES



& BRIDGES



BOB SWEETMAN'S FORMATION AS a medievalist was strongly influenced by the Gilsonian tradition of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto—a tradition which takes the lives, experiences, and thought of medieval people seriously, not primarily as objects of critique (an approach traditionally taken by Protestant scholars for centuries) but as forerunners of a living tradition. In his intellectual work, Bob has successfully synthesized this approach to the Middle Ages with the scholarly questions characteristic of the Reformational thought tradition of the Institute for Christian Studies, which became his academic home for most of his career.

Medieval Studies is by definition an interdisciplinary field, but in addition to being able to adeptly cross disciplinary borders in his perceptive and imaginative work on medieval figures both well known (John Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, or Julian of Norwich) and more obscure to non-medievalists (Thomas of Cantimpré, Christine the Astonishing, or Gerard of Frachet), Bob has also successfully traversed the boundaries between different theoretical and ideological approaches to medieval thought and religious experiences. Such scholarly efforts are challenging but also deeply rewarding, and the mark of Bob's success is the positive recognition that his work has received amongst other scholars of medieval philosophy, scholasticism, mysticism, and Dominican thought.

An example of this recognition is the fact that Bob has successfully collaborated with other medievalists, frequently publishing in volumes of collected essays, organizing festschrifts, symposia, and conference panels, and being welcomed as an affiliate scholar by a variety of institutions. It is exciting and inspirational to see a scholar working from within a distinct con-

fessional perspective being taken seriously outside that particular tradition. Bob's scholarly work has been a bridge, linking different textual communities (to borrow a term that most medievalists would be familiar with) and bringing them into meaningful conversation with each other.

One of the most effective ways to be a bridge builder is to find the spaces and meaningful gaps that exist between different points of view or experiences. These can range from the historical to the contemporary. And the way to find these interstices is to venture off the beaten path by interrogating lesser known texts and historical figures with imaginative and sometimes unconventional questions. Bob has done this in his scholarship. To paraphrase Bob's own words, his work has shown us that we can learn *from* the objects of our study just as much as we can learn *about* them.

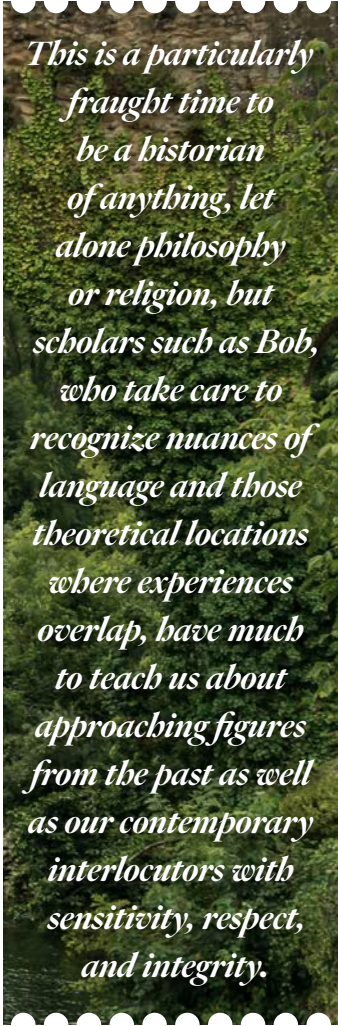
This is a particularly fraught time to be a historian of anything, let alone philosophy or religion, but scholars such as Bob, who take care to recognize nuances of language and those theoretical locations where experiences overlap, have much to teach us about approaching figures from the past as well as our contemporary interlocutors with sensitivity, respect, and integrity. In this sense, Bob's studies of the performative reading of scriptures in the Middle Ages, preaching, pastoral care, and the piety and spirituality of women in particular, have made important contributions to understanding the complexities of medieval religious cultures. His scholarship finds the spaces where philosophy and literature, or popular piety and scholastic learning,

or the spirituality of a Dominican male cleric and an "astonishing" female layperson, or religious doctrine and practice, all intersect. The juxtaposition of seemingly disparate topics and interlocutors can be a remarkably fruitful way to generate scholarly insight.

Those who know Bob know that he is a great story-teller. It is not everyone who can captivate an audience with the "story" of how a certain Latin technical term, such as *aemulatio*, was used within different medieval spiritual traditions. But Bob can do that! To be a good story-teller, one has to understand how narrative operates as a particular mode of discourse. Bob's attention to the relationship of narrative and argument in the medieval texts that he has studied—largely Dominican in origin—has made significant contributions to our understanding of the complexity of medieval religious experience as something that is simultaneously rooted in the local but revelatory of broader cultural currents.

In his retellings of the stories of 13th- and 14th-century mystics and saints, and in his interrogations of the texts composed by the clerics who originally told the stories, Bob's work builds bridges between seemingly disparate groups in medieval society and effectively brings their stories, and the import of those stories, to the present. The import of such efforts for medieval studies and for the

Reformational scholarly traditions of ICS cannot be overestimated. Scholarship that recognizes both the continuities as well as the discontinuities with our medieval Christian past is a rare gift to our community of scholars. Bob has given us that gift. 🌺



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Gilles Mongeau, SJ

DECENTERING, DEPTH, AND DESIRE: THE ECUMENICAL *DUCTUS* OF BOB SWEETMAN THROUGH THE WORLD OF AQUINAS

The work of the scholar is the work of the heart, and Bob's love for Aquinas serves as a model for the rich possibilities of scholarship that overcomes division.

I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR this invitation to write something of Bob Sweetman's contribution to ecumenism through his work on Thomas Aquinas, and to offer something to Bob on the occasion of his retirement, as an expression of my friendship and affection for him.

Bernard Lonergan defines the scholar as one who lives comfortably in the common sense of a culture different from his own in either time or space, and who can shuttle comfortably between the common sense of his own culture and that of the other. I would add that the scholar who is also a gifted teacher can help others make the journey towards and into that other form of common sense, and return transformed by the encounter.

Bob is a uniquely gifted scholar-teacher in this way. His love of Aquinas is not just love of the text, but love of medieval Dominican life and spirituality, and love of the intellectual culture of the medieval university and the medieval city. Bob is particularly comfortable

within the *sensus communis* of the rhetorician, whose talents and skills informed every dimension of the text, life, spirituality, and intellectual pursuits of a man such as Aquinas. This love expresses itself particularly as a yearning and a genius to help others get to know this world on its own terms.

Those students who allow Bob to lead them along this *ductus* into another realm of meaning and value experience a *decentering* of great importance for the reconciling dialogue at the heart of the ecumenical enterprise. Many students have re-examined positions and purposes they thought central to Christian thought and life, learning to hold them much more lightly and with greater openness upon their return from the world of Aquinas.

These same students (and many colleagues!) have also been led into a much *deeper* appreciation of the *whole* of their Christian tradition. Catholics break free of a thin 20th-century neo-Thomist veneer to discover a lively and thick (pun partially intended) Aquinas who



Decentering, Depth, and Desire: The Ecumenical Ductus of Bob Sweetman through the World of Aquinas

is a master of dialogue with classical, patristic, and high medieval figures, who faces the problems of his day with hope and verve, who listens to the Scriptures to recover the word of *consolatio* given to him in his intellectual contemplation. Protestants of various kinds discover there is life before Luther and after Augustine, and renew warm ties with their predecessors in the faith. But more than this, Bob's emphasis on a disciplined and thoughtful reading of the text empowers students and colleagues to achieve greater *intellectual depth* in their own appropriation of the Angelic Doctor. And this, too, renders a huge service to the ecumenical enterprise; it creates a community of scholars across the various Christian (and other) intellectual traditions who share a common love for Aquinas, who can engage in a collective quest for wisdom: a sincere *communio* rooted in real *conversatio*.

For Bob, this *conversatio*—in all its dimensions of a common way of life, an ongoing dialogue, and a continually-being-transformed—is consciously rooted in another element dear to his heart: *aemulatio*.

Aemulatio is rooted in *desire*. *Aemulatio* is that desire for the good another possesses that empowers one to strive to acquire that good, not in a mimetic rivalry à la

Girard, but in a conscious imitation that improves upon or develops the good found in one's model.

For many of us, students and colleagues, Bob has been and continues to be a model to be imitated in intellectual generosity and hospitality, spiritual and human curiosity, and simple downright goodness. And it has been my unfailing experience that he assists others to surpass him and achieve their own excellence. This too has been a great boon to ecumenism, breaking us free of the envy that too often marks Christian divisions, and empowering a genuine *aemulatio* of one another whereby we incite each other to greater virtue and service in Christ's Church.

Decentering, depth, and desire: three signposts that mark Bob

Sweetman's *ductus* as a scholar and teacher through the world of Thomas Aquinas. And three creative elements of his service to ecumenism. Thank you, dear friend. 🌻

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59 St. George Street
Toronto ON Canada M5S 2E6

416 979 2331 telephone
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Perspective is produced by:

Editors: Héctor Acero Ferrer, Danielle Yett

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Contributors: Pamela Beattie, Traver Carl-
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59 St. George Street
Toronto ON Canada M5S 2E6

416 979 2331 telephone
888 326 5347 toll free (North America)
info@icscanada.edu

USA subscribers/supporters contact:

Friends of ICS

info@friendsofics.org
www.friendsofics.org

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