



Volume

152

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& Christian conviction

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The use and abuse of news

Jeffrey Bilbro’s *Reading the Times: A Literary and Theological Inquiry into the News* (2021) is published by InterVarsity Press. Bilbro’s other books include *Virtues of Renewal: Wendell Berry’s Sustainable Forms* (University Press of Kentucky, 2019; discussed on Volume 148). With co-author Jack Baker, he has written *Telling the Stories Right: Wendell Berry’s Imagination of Port William* (Wipf & Stock, 2018) and *Wendell Berry and Higher Education: Cultivating Virtues of Place* (University Press of Kentucky, 2017; discussed on Volume 140). He also writes regularly at the Front Porch Republic website (frontporchrepublic.com), where he serves as editor-in-chief. One of the books Bilbro engages in *Reading the Times* is a 2016 work of speculative theology by Paul Griffiths: *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Baylor University Press, 2014). Griffiths is cited in the context of Bilbro’s discussion of why we must sustain a belief in God’s Providence when we are dealing — in journalistic settings, in social media, and in personal interaction — with controversial and contested issues. As Bilbro writes, “Pascal thinks that even if we are advocating for a political or social cause that is in line with God’s will, we must remember that God himself allows others to oppose us: “The same motive power which leads us to act, leads others to resist us, or permits them at least.” As Griffiths summarizes Pascal, Christians should “understand opposition to a proposal you favor as an opportunity to suffer anything at all in the service of establishing . . . what seems to be the truth of the matter, and you should welcome this opportunity instead of rejecting or muttering against it. . . . [T]he LORD . . . who has, as it seems to you, shown you the truth about the controverted question under discussion is the very same LORD who permits there to be obstacles to what you would like to happen.” In Bilbro’s words, “We can be more certain that God wills opposition to our preferred causes than that we ourselves are being motivated by God. This is a sobering thought.” And a thought that could radically lower the temperature of social media. During

the conversation with Bilbro on Volume 152, mention was also made of another book by Paul Griffiths: *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Catholic University Press of America, 2009). Zena Hitz also referred to Griffiths, who treats at length the distinction traditionally made between *curiositas* and *studiositas*. Griffiths says that what *curiositas* wants “is new knowledge, a previously unexperienced reflexive intimacy with some creature. And what it seeks to do with that knowledge is control, dominate, or make a private possession of it. Curiosity is, then, in brief, appetite for the ownership of new knowledge.” *Studiositas* orients the knower differently: “[T]he studious do not seek to sequester, own, possess, or dominate what they hope to know; they want, instead, to participate lovingly in it, to respond to it knowingly as a gift rather than as potential possession, to treat it as icon rather than as spectacle. A preliminary definition of studiosusness, then, is: appetite for closer reflexive intimacy with the gift.” Both Bilbro and Hitz advocate seeking knowledge *studiosly*.

Other books mentioned

Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn’s *Ars Vitae: The Fate of Inwardness and the Return of the Ancient Arts of Living* (2020) is published by the University of Notre Dame Press. Zena Hitz’s *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life* (2020) is published by Princeton University Press. James L. Nolan, Jr.’s *Atomic Doctors: Science and Complicity at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age* (2020) is published by The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Bp. Robert Barron’s *Renewing Our Hope: Essays for the New Evangelization* (2020) is published by The Catholic University of America Press.

Jason Blakely’s *We Built Reality: How Social Science Infiltrated Culture, Politics, and Power* (2020) is published by Oxford University Press.

