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# Philosophy and Catholic Theology

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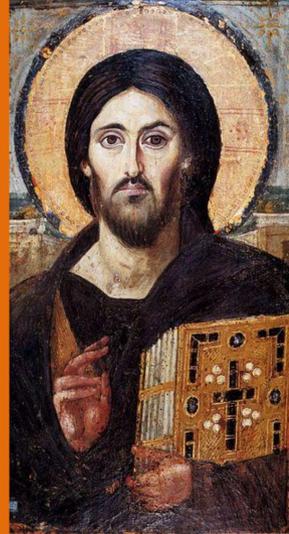
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# Philosophy and Catholic Theology: Explorations in Faith and Ethics

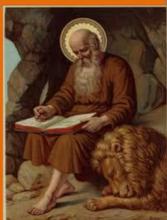
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## Abstract

My current projects are all knit together by the overlap between philosophy and Catholic theology. I have recently published work on Mary's Immaculate Conception, the abortion debate, and sexual ethics. I currently have a manuscript under review titled *Conversational Catholicism: An Invitation to Dialogue*.



Chapter 1: Scripture and Tradition



Chapter 2: The Church and her Magisterium



## *Conversational Catholicism: An Invitation to Dialogue*

(it's a working title; got any ideas?)

This book (currently under review) gives a vision of Catholicism that is generous and ecumenical but faithful to the historic and contemporary teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Its purpose is to enhance dialogue and understanding within the wider Christian community, not to proselytize. The tone is conversational and even personal, but the explanations are thorough and informative. Readers will be equipped with the information and understanding necessary to have a real conversation about the distinctive claims of the Catholic Church. This work has been supported by two student-faculty collaborative grants, one grant from the CrossRoads Project with Andrew Peterson (2011) and one Nyenhuis grant with Chikara Saito (2014).

Chapter 3: God and Humanity



Chapter 4: The Person and Work of Christ



Chapter 5: Mary and the Communion of Saints



Chapter 6: The Seven Sacraments



Chapter 7: Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory



Chapter 8: The Human Person



## I thought you were a *philosopher!*

I am, but what interests me are the core philosophical and theological commitments of my Catholic faith. My less popular work is an outgrowth of these interests (see the other folds). The work in this book concentrates on what is distinctive about a Catholic worldview in regard to the topics of the chapters. For instance:

- How do Scripture and Tradition relate?
- How can the church speak infallibly?
- Who is God and how do we know God?
- How do Jesus's life and death help us now?
- Why does getting Jesus right mean getting Mary and the saints right?
- Why don't Mormon baptisms "count"?
- How was Aristotle's thought influential in thinking about the Eucharist?
- Why can't women be ordained as Catholic priests?
- Why does the Catholic Church oppose certain ethical theories, and which ones should Catholics avoid?
- Why does the Catholic Church think what it does about abortion, euthanasia, sexual ethics, communism, and war?

## Protestant-Catholic Dialogue



### On the Immaculate Conception:

One distinctive Catholic doctrine is the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was defined in 1854 by Pope Pius IX, and it states that Mary was conceived without original sin from the first moment of her existence.

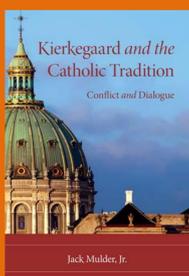
### Recent work:

Many Protestant thinkers have made overtures in the direction of appreciating Mary's role as the Mother of God, but most still regard Mary's Immaculate Conception as a step too far. In a recent paper, I used the tools of philosophical theology to challenge this reservation. In "Why More Christians Should Believe in Mary's Immaculate Conception," *Christian Scholar's Review*, 41 (2012): 117-134 I argued that virtually all orthodox Christians have serious reasons for why they should hold this doctrine. This claim has recently been challenged by two authors whose work is forthcoming in the same journal. Happily, I was allowed to respond to their work with my own rejoinder. This work has been supported in different ways by three Hope College student-faculty collaborative grants, including a Nyenhuis grant with Mike Bertrand (2010).

## Kierkegaard and Catholicism



Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is a fascinating Danish Lutheran philosopher and theologian. Much of my work has concerned his relationship to other traditions, especially the Catholic tradition.



My book, *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition* (2010; see cover photo above and right) discussed the main differences between Kierkegaard and the Catholic tradition on issues such as natural reason, natural law, human love, apostolic authority, contrition for sins, justification and purgatory, and the communion of saints. This work was supported by two student-faculty collaborative grants from Hope College, one Nyenhuis grant with Nick Engel (2008) and one from the CrossRoads Project with Robin Litscher (2009).



My continued interest in the relationship between Kierkegaard and the Catholic tradition has also been something that student Chikara Saito and I have worked on this past summer. We are scheduled to give a joint talk at Baylor's October conference, *Kierkegaard: A Christian Thinker for Our Time?* The talk will be called: "Is Love God: Kierkegaard and the Catholic tradition on God and Human Love." This topic was selected for the conference because of Kierkegaard's 200<sup>th</sup> "birthday" anniversary this year.

## Sexual and Reproductive Ethics

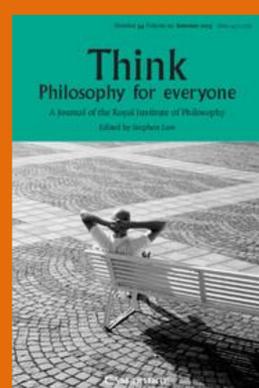
### Teaching opportunities bearing fruit:

I have begun teaching courses in the Ethics of Sex and Reproduction (fall 2011) and Sexual Ethics (spring 2013). These opportunities have supported my growing research interest in these questions. Below are some examples.



### "A Short Argument Against Abortion Rights"

In this paper (in *Think: Philosophy for Everyone*, 34 (2013): 57-68) I put forward a brief argument against abortion rights. The argument concerns itself with the two main ways in which defenders of abortion rights develop their position. The first strategy through which they tend to do this is by arguing against the personhood of the fetus. The second strategy, made famous by Judith Jarvis Thomson, is to argue that, even if the fetus were a person, its right to life would not entail the right to draw upon the resources of the woman in pregnancy, and so the pregnancy can be terminated (even if the fetus loses its life in the process). My argument provides reasons to suspect that attacks on fetal personhood are based on a questionable notion of personhood, and that the most common attempts to show that the fetus does not have the right to draw on the resources of the woman in pregnancy also have considerable problems. This will buttress the case for the view that the fetus is a person and that it has the right to draw on the resources of the woman in pregnancy.



### "A Response to Law and McBrayer on Homosexual Activity."

In this brief forthcoming paper, which I put together during my sabbatical in the spring of 2012, I argue that two recent arguments offered by Stephen Law and Justin McBrayer defending homosexual activity have gaps that traditionalists can exploit, even though both papers make several worthy and important points.

### Connection to Catholic faith

I suspect most people are aware that the Catholic Church has backed traditional positions on questions of sexual ethics and abortion. As a Catholic, I listen to these teachings and seek to obey them. As a philosopher, I seek reasons to believe them and try to articulate them in the most coherent, gracious, and compelling way that I can.