

Pope Benedict contemplates truth

By Chris S. Morrissey
Special to The B.C. Catholic

THE REGENSBURG LECTURE. By James V. Schall (St. Augustine's Press, P.O. Box 2285, South Bend, Ind. 46680, 2007), 180 pp. HB \$20.00.

THE SUM TOTAL OF HUMAN HAPPINESS. By James V. Schall (St. Augustine's Press, P.O. Box 2285, South Bend, Ind. 46680, 2006), 218 pp. HB \$28.00.

With these two books, the well known and widely published James Schall joins the distinguished ranks of the authors published by St. Augustine's Press. St. Augustine's has been smart enough not only to print copies of the epochal Sept. 12, 2006, lecture by Pope Benedict XVI at Regensburg, Germany, but also to bind the lecture in hardback with James Schall's insightful commentary on it.

(After over a year since the lecture, why has no other publisher printed it? The lecture will be studied for generations. Will they all be reading it only on the ephemeral Internet?)

Violent reaction and rioting greeted this lecture, in which the Pope affirmed that it is contrary to God's nature to act irrationally.

With his inimitably accessible style, Schall explains how Pope Benedict's brief lecture encapsulates the whole theoretical history of the Church. The Pope's theological genius thus serves the Church in a unique way in this speech.

In order to orient minds for meeting today's greatest challenges, Benedict offers an indispensable synopsis of where we have come from. It is to Schall's great credit that he not only recognizes the significance of the Regensburg lecture, but also is able to explain this significance so clearly and congenially.

Just as thoughtful readers will want Benedict's speech and Schall's commentary together in this keepsake hardback edition of The Regensburg Lecture, a permanent possession for their bookshelves,



Pope Benedict XVI lectures on faith and reason at the University of Regensburg, while Alf Zimmer, head of the university, listens.

so too will they also want to have at least one collection of Schall essays for easy bedside access.

It is tempting to pass by published collections of Schall's essays, because he has so generously made so many of his essays and articles available for free on the Internet. (In particular, his regular and frequent writings for the excellent IgnatiusInsight.com Web site are treasures freely disseminated, and intelligent Catholics everywhere know not to miss out.)

Yet longtime readers of Schall will have noticed how intensely meditative and contemplative his writing has become recently. For this reason, Schall's essays are perhaps best read in printed collections, in a quiet room away from the flickering distractions of the Internet. With The Sum Total of Human Happiness, St. Augustine's Press offers readers a rich serving of recent examples of

is a stellar example of Schall's method of intellectual exploration. Schall likes to circle about select phrases and striking quotations, showing the reader how they point to powerful hidden winds of thought upon which the mind may soar.

In this essay Schall begins by inquiring into the distinctive nature of human happiness, proceeds to meditate on all of what is (Schall's favourite Thomistic phrase for designating the overwhelmingly intelligible existence that constitutes the reality of things), and then concludes with a virtuoso recapitulation of all the essay's key meditative themes, all of which imbue his concluding rhetorical question with a synoptic intellectual force: "How could we not see all things in Him who sees all things?"

Of course, one who has not read Schall's entire happiness essay will not yet fully perceive the insight, but that is why Schall is worth reading: there's always a punchy literary payoff.

Hence I encourage contemplative readers everywhere not to miss out on the intellectual riches offered by these two books. Should further evidence be required, allow me to end my exhortation by quoting a mere paragraph from another essay (P. 120) in *The Sum*

Total of Human Happiness. It should illustrate how just one page of Schall is always fit for our contemplative leisure:

"What people want to hear is that even if they do any desired thing, even if they define sins as virtues, as we do today, usually in the name of human rights, there are to be no ultimate consequences of anything we do. What most seem to want is a world of no risk, of no consequences. If we want God to take the risk out of our world so that nothing we do makes any difference, so that we can believe or do whatever we want with no untoward results, then what we have logically done is to remove any reason for our being created as free human beings in the first place.

"So at this stage, I should like to say that what goes on in this world is the carrying out in history of the risk that God took in creating creatures.... He made them to return to His own inner Trinitarian life which is being offered to each. Any effort to deny Augustine's point about the seriousness of our acts in order that we might not have to worry about their consequences does not enhance but destroys human dignity."

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May the blessings of Christmas remain with you throughout the coming year



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