

REASONABLE FAITH IN AN AGE OF FEELING

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Robert P. George, Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth: Law and Morality in Our Cultural Moment (Encounter Books)

St. Thomas Aquinas sums up the moral life in five words: do good and avoid evil. Rather obvious, right? However, what once felt like common sense isn't anymore. Moral discourse now sounds like a room of people speaking different languages. Catholics defend a baby's right to life, the secular left a woman's "bodily autonomy." Both claim the moral high ground, yet we talk past each other.

As Alasdair MacIntyre observed, we still use the language of morality, but we've lost the framework that gives it meaning. Cut off from virtue, tradition, purpose, and any hierarchy of goods, words like *rights* and *dignity* collapse into slogans; moral claims devolve into expressive individualism; and we drift toward what Benedict XVI warned was a "dictatorship of relativism." Without a common standard, feelings drown out reasons, free speech erodes, cancel mobs form, and some even justify political violence against those labeled hateful, as the assassination of Charlie Kirk showed.

In *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth: Law and Morality in Our Cultural Moment*, Robert P. George names our predicament the "Age of Feeling" and proposes a commonsense alternative—reason. Across twenty-three essays on metaphysics, bioethics, jurisprudence, political philosophy, culture, and education, he argues that truth in contested matters can be known and isn't remade by feelings or lived experience. He offers clear public reasons for the morality Catholics know by revelation, restoring the common ground for civil discourse.

The book's opening chapters present a comprehensive pro-life anthropology: every human being has full moral worth at every stage (embryo, fetus, infant) and in every condition (including severe cognitive impairment). The fundamental question is: What is a human being? George answers with the classical view that the human person is a unity of body and soul.

In a secular age, the "soul" can sound like a fairy tale, but George argues this is a mistake. We can't explain our rational nature—our capacity for conceptual thought, deliberation, and free choice—without an immaterial soul. Catholic teaching holds that intellect and will are spiritual faculties making us in God's image. You can see this in the way our minds grasp universal, nonphysical realities. You have never bumped into "the perfect circle" or "truth itself" as physical objects, yet you can understand them. Because our minds can know these immaterial realities, the intellect and soul must be immaterial as well. While science excels at explaining the material world, it can't exhaust human personhood because we're more than atoms and laws scaled up.

Based on the kind of beings we are, George draws a moral conclusion: every human is a rational creature with intrinsic dignity deserving respect. He draws on Aristotle and St. Thomas, who distinguish a thing's substance (its enduring reality) from its accidents (changeable features). For humans, our substantial rational nature stays constant, even as accidental traits like IQ or developmental stage vary. Therefore, from conception to natural death, every human being remains equally worthy of dignity and respect, including the smallest, weakest, and least wanted.

By contrast, body-self dualism— an Enlightenment form of the Gnostic heresy—treats the "real person" as a mind or will separate from the body he inhabits, like a ghost in a machine. This erroneous idea erodes equal dignity by treating humans at early stages of life or with impaired capacities as mere

bodies without personhood. It leads to unethical positions on abortion (the unborn have bodies but no personhood), euthanasia (the person departs from his living body), and transgender ideology (the “real self” is trapped in the wrong body). George counters with the Aristotelian-Thomistic view: the human person is one composite substance, a living body animated by a rational soul, and both share in dignity.

He then turns from what we are to how we should act. Natural law isn't a man-made law like a constitution, or a physical law like gravity; George argues it's the moral order knowable by reason from basic human goods such as life, knowledge, friendship, and religion. These goods yield duties not to attack them, and rights protect those duties. Much is knowable without revelation: don't lie, murder, or cheat. Natural law isn't a comprehensive rulebook; it supplies first principles for society to apply prudently.

George's influential account of natural law again complements Church teaching: it is the universal moral law inscribed on every heart, expressing human nature's orientation toward ordered goods and ultimately God. Conforming to it helps us discern right from wrong and grow in virtue by knowing, loving, and serving Him.

Throughout the book, I kept coming back to the Catholic synthesis of reason and revelation, of natural and divine law. Philosophy discerns natural law and shows morality's rational intelligibility; theology purifies and completes it, ordering us to our supernatural end in God. Theology is the queen perfecting her handmaid, philosophy. Thus, faith and reason aren't rivals but united ways of participating in the one Truth, as God authors both. As Benedict XVI noted, the Church has long united Greek reason with biblical faith, laying the foundation of Western thought.

Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth stands in this philosophical tradition, harmonious with Catholic theology. More than just

critiques of the “Age of Feeling,” it’s an excellent field guide for Catholics to bring reasonable faith into the public square, and re-ground our moral language not in feelings, but in Christ, the one Truth.

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