

JOHN SENIOR AND THE RESTORATION OF REALISM

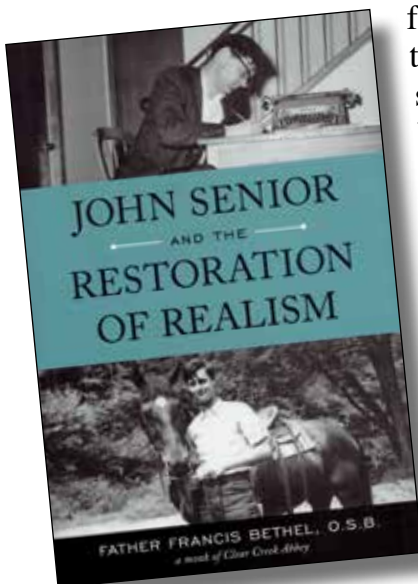
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John Senior and the Restoration of Realism, by Father Francis Bethel, O.S.B., Thomas More College Press, 452 pages.

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

This book about John Senior and his teaching, penned by our Dom Francis Bethel, has been so long in coming—truly a lengthy labor of love—that its publication will come as no surprise to many who frequent Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey. No one, I think, will lament the time spent in its preparation, as the subject matter is a serious one, demanding that we rise above the fleeting “busyness” of our contemporary *saeculum*, in order to catch a glimpse of a beauty that endures. Some things take time, especially if they have to do with eternity.

Let there be no misunderstanding, however: John Senior, the incomparable teacher, was not seeking to escape the real in order to contemplate worlds that never were. This convert to the Catholic faith held firmly to the reality of things as to concrete expressions of the divine Truth, of that Wisdom that came to earth to be wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a Manger. Having suffered in the years before his conversion from the withering influence of thinkers such as Baudelaire, who led him for a time into their infernal pipe dreams of *The Way Down and Out*, Senior, having once found his bearings, never looked back, but embraced the wisdom that is not just about symbols and ideas, but about the Word made flesh.



As the years go by, I am amazed how often people—especially young people—speak to me about John Senior. One of the more surprising instances of this phenomenon came to me a couple of years ago, while I was reading in a French Catholic newspaper of a young Spanish woman, Natalia Sanmartin Fenollera, who had written an international bestselling novel based on the ideas of the professor from Kansas! Having subsequently corresponded with

the author of *The Awakening of Miss Prim: A Novel*, I can say that what I read in the interview was quite accurate: the inspiration for this book came substantially from John Senior.

I will not retell here the story of Senior’s decisive influence on the founding of Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey, as I have written about this many times. Moreover, today we are in possession of a

much more complete picture with this new book of Dom Bethel's in our hands. The focus of the book is on John Senior's ideas, but it is impossible to capture the ideas without considering the man and the influence he exercised on others. It is all in the book.

I am especially indebted to Dr. William Fahey, President of *The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts*, for having taken up the challenge of publishing a long and unusual manuscript. *The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts*, like a number of other new Catholic institutions of higher learning, is dedicated to introducing young people to "the best that has been thought and said," following the expression of Matthew Arnold.

As a conclusion to this short presentation, I would like to cite a passage from John Senior's *The Restoration of Christian Culture*. It is a quote that Father Bethel uses to excellent advantage in his own book in view of encapsulating the message left to us all by the venerated professor. How we need this message in America today!

There is something destructive—destructive of the human itself—in cutting us off from the earth whence we come and the stars, the angels and God himself to whom we go. . . John Donne said, 'Be more than man, or thou art less than an ant.' And a Catholic would add the complementary truth: Admit that you are less than angels or you will think yourself more than God.

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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P. S. If you would like to order a copy of *John Senior and the Restoration of Realism*—you can order it directly from Clear Creek Abbey. Please see the enclosed pledge form.



From left to right: Dom Antoine Forgeot, John Senior, Father Francis Bethel.