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CONTACT:

Emily Stack Davis

517-803-3745

PR@hillsdale.edu

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Hillsdale College Hosts Bishop Robert Barron for Drummond Lecture in Christ Chapel

Barron's lecture addressed the necessity of contemplation.

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Bishop Robert Barron, founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, presented a talk in the “Drummond Lectures in Christ Chapel” series for the 2024-25 academic year on March 20. His lecture, titled “The Necessity of Contemplation,” drew on the thought of Josef Pieper to argue for a turn away from rationalistic materialism and toward contemplation and worship.

According to Barron, there has been a shift from knowledge for the sake of contemplation to knowledge for the sake of practicality, resulting in a shift from experiential knowledge of the truth to mere information.

“Data of information are detachable from the reality that produced them,” Barron said. “They can be transported effortlessly across enormous distances to various devices, where they become available to numberless others, who, in a similar way, had no immediate experience of that which gave rise to them. And as they become increasingly detached from reality, data of information become also increasingly manipulable — subject to the whim of those who share them and comment on them. But all of this must be sharply contrasted with authentic knowledge of the truth, which, as the Bible suggests in its peculiar usage, carries the sense of unsurpassed intimacy.”

Barron argued that since God “thought it into being,” the world is both intelligible, because God is intelligent, and incomprehensible, because we are finite.

“Since all things have what Josef Pieper calls an ‘eternal name’ that’s unavailable to us, ‘they possess these two properties: on the one hand, their ontological clarity and self-revelation, and on the other hand, their inexhaustibility. Both are true at the same time,’” Barron said. “This

obviously has nothing, as I suggested, to do with modern skepticism, but with a kind of mystical perception of the limits of the human mind and the wonder of the being of things.”

Barron said that leisure — the idea for which Pieper is most famous — involves man’s affirmation of the goodness of being, and that praise of God, the source of being, is therefore the most intense form of celebration.

“If our festivity is divorced from ritualized expression of gratitude to God and is devolved into celebration of nature or politics or celebrity, then we will live, spiritually speaking, on blasted ground,” Barron said. “Therefore, along with the exercises that foster the philosophical act and a more correct understanding of the nature of God, perhaps the most important thing we could do is to reclaim the mantle of the Hebrew prophets and summon our people back to right praise and away from the false gods.”

Robert Barron is bishop of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester (Minnesota) and founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries. He received his B.A. and M.A. from the Catholic University of America, his S.T.L. from Mundelein Seminary, and his Ph.D. from the Institut Catholique de Paris. He has taught as a visiting professor at the University of Notre Dame and the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas and was twice scholar-in-residence at the Pontifical North American College at the Vatican. Episodes of his podcast, the Word on Fire Show, have been listened to over 35 million times, and over a half-million subscribers receive his daily email reflections.

The “Drummond Lectures in Christ Chapel” series presents faculty, staff, and students with lectures on faith, learning, and related issues of the day. Previous speakers include Heritage Foundation President Kevin Roberts, Grove City College Professor Carl Trueman, University of Findlay President Katherine Fell, Anglican minister and scholar Lee Gatiss, and Tikvah Fund Executive Director Eric Cohen.

For photos of Christ Chapel, click [here](#). For photos of Hillsdale College, click [here](#). For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click [here](#).

About Hillsdale College

Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, *Imprimis*, with a circulation of more than seven million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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