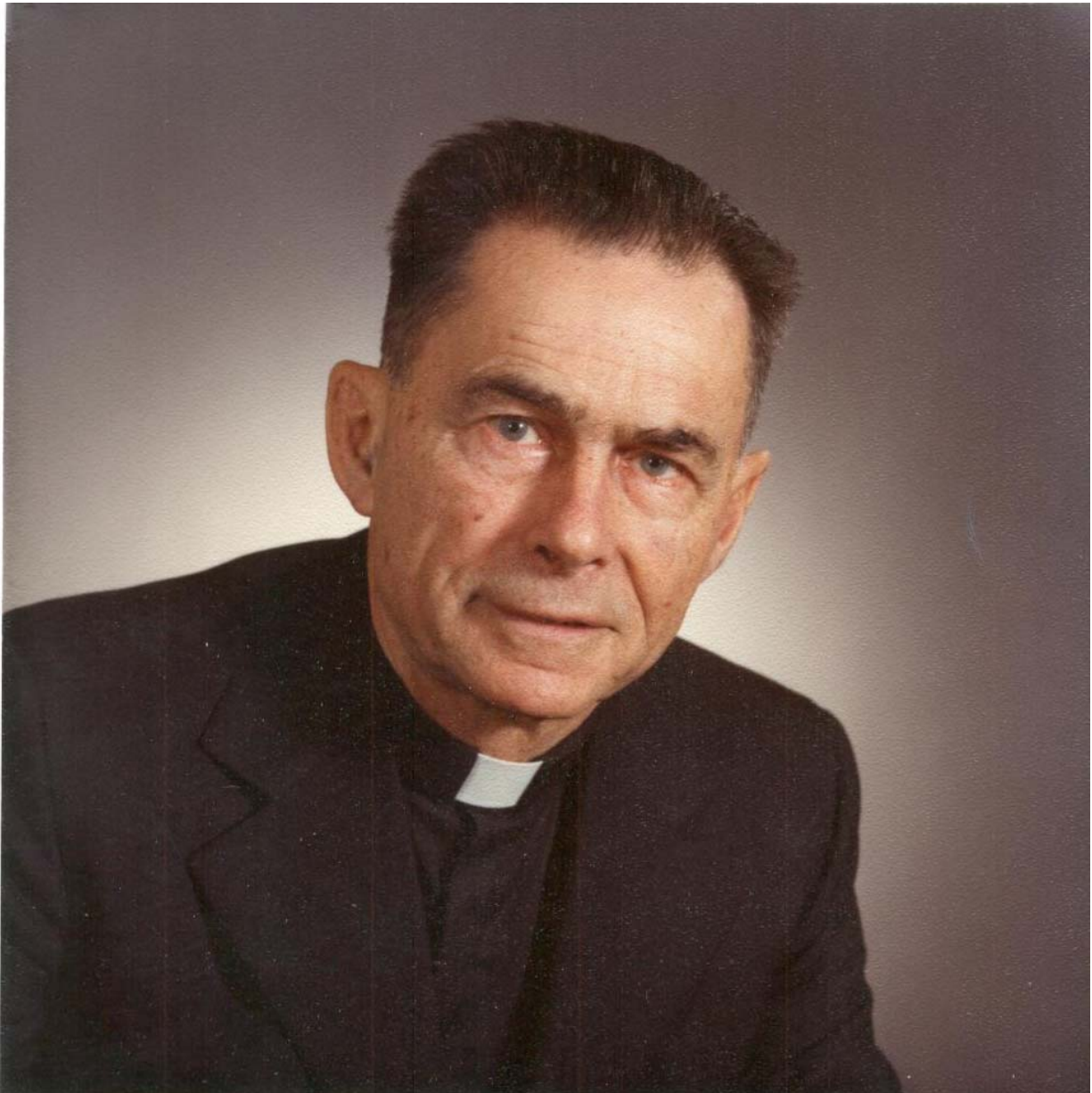


MICHAEL EW BANK

---

**Joseph Owens**  
**1908-2005**



Joseph Owens was born on April 17, 1908, in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada. He was the son of Louis Michael and Josephine (Quinn) Owens. As a young man he attended St. Mary's College, Brockville (1922-1927) and St. Anne's College, Montreal, Québec, Canada (1928-30). He was professed at St. John, New Brunswick into the Redemptorist Order on August 2, 1928. He completed his theological training for the priesthood at St. Alphonsus Seminary, Woodstock, Ontario, Canada (1930-34).

Father Owens was ordained a priest in 1933 and served as a parish priest at St. Joseph's Church, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada (1934-35). He was then assigned to St. Patrick's Church, Toronto (1925026). His teaching career began with a position as instructor in philosophy at St. Alphonsus Seminary, Woodstock, Ontario, Canada (1936-40), but was interrupted during the war years (1940-1944) by an assignment to Maria-Hilf Church, Tomslake, British Columbia, Canada. He returned to teaching at St Alphonsus Seminary in 1948, and was encouraged to pursue advanced studies so that he could contribute to the intellectual formation of members of his institute, the Redemptorists. He received the degree of Doctor in Medieval Studies (M.S.D.) from the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies at the University of Toronto in 1949. He was the first to be so honored. His doctoral dissertation entitle *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* was published in 1951 by the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies with an introduction by Etienne Gilson, which proved to be a controversial, enduringly valuable investigation. It was to be the first of many major publications, eventually meriting three revisions of its preface to respond to ongoing criticisms and misinterpretations of his exposition throughout its four subsequent printings. Yet, after his brilliant defense to secure his doctorate, Owens humbly returned to his pastoral work.. In 1953-54, he was Instructor in Medieval Moral Doctrine at the Accademia Algonsiana, Rome, Italy, and in 1954 he taught at Assumption University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada (now the University of Windsor).

A highly respected scholar who evidenced profundity and subtlety in numerous published works concerning philosophy's history, whether about pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Scotus, Suarez, or later figures, as well as topics pertaining to metaphysics and ethics, Owens was renowned for the catholicity of his erudition and concerns. His profound reflections on cognition, the reciprocity of conceptualization and judgment, and the synthesizing character of being, will likely suggest further paths of exploration to future speculators inspired by Aquinas's doctrines. He taught at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto from 1954 until retirement at the age of seventy-five. Colleagues often confirmed their high regard for his professional and personal integrity. Early on he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and subsequently he was chosen to be president not only of the Canadian Philosophical Association, but also the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy, the Metaphysical Society of America, and the American Catholic Philosophical Association, which awarded him its esteemed Aquinas Medal.

A complete bibliography of Owens's publications up until 1982 appeared in an important Festschrift on the occasion of his retirement, *Graceful Reason: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*. He continued to write, teach, and direct dissertations for approximately eight more years. Overall, his meticulous scholarship and creative speculation are woven into nine important published books, as well as approximately 150 scholarly articles along with reviews of forty important philosophical works in authoritative journals. Apart from the work on Aristotle already

mentioned, one should note: *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics, A History of Ancient Western Philosophy, An Interpretation of Existence, St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics, Towards a Christian Philosophy, Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry, and Human Destiny*. There remains one important work in typescript that Owens completed before his powers declined, Aristotle's Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E-Z, which will eventually appear under the editorial guidance of Lloyd Gerson.

Memorial tributes to unique, integrative, creative contributors to the philosophical enterprise can easily bring to mind Pericles' words in his eloquent funeral oration concerning departed great predecessors: "it is difficult to say neither too little nor too much; and even moderation is apt not to give the impression of truthfulness." Joseph Owens is now among that illustrious company of recently deceased philosophi et magistri appropriately acknowledged in this journal that encourages inquiries into fundamental questions from all philosophical approaches, and to which he so often contributed. Joseph Owens died in Toronto, on 30 October 2005, after a long illness.

*Written by Michael Ewbank  
Seminary of the Fraternity of St. Peter*