

Preface

A MIRACLE STORY FROM THE Middle Ages known as “The Painter and the Devil” and collected in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria of Alfonso the Wise* depicts the anger of the devil against a painter for always portraying him as ugly while portraying the Virgin as beautiful. In retribution against the painter, the devil causes a fierce blast of wind to knock the painter’s scaffold out from under him as he is painting an image of the Virgin on an inner wall of a church. The painter calls upon the Virgin to help him, and when the villagers hear the noise of the collapsing scaffold and rush into the church they find the painter suspended safely in midair supported only by the tip of his brush in contact with the beautiful image he was painting on the wall. A wall painting in Westminster Cathedral’s Lady Chapel illustrates the miraculous comedy of the scene.¹

What better way to show beauty and love defying satanic coercion and force? The heart of the comic vision in the story is the apparent disproportionality of means: a simple artist’s brush engaged in the expression of beauty and divine love is presented as sufficient to defeat the destructive force of resentment and anger.

The miraculous power of the seemingly powerless is of course a topic of constant reflection in Christianity. The comic mode of “The Painter and the Devil” is buoyant with faith, and in that presentation the destructive force of evil readily and harmlessly recedes—in the

story the villagers glimpse the devil fleeing from the church when his destructive blow is thwarted. In a modern age that has prided itself on the cultivation of power to be put in the service of either good or evil we are more likely to encounter presentations of the grim and horrifying force of evil in reflections on this topic.

A recent film (2004) by Volker Schlöndorff, *The Ninth Day*, offers a compelling example of a modern depiction of the power of the powerless in which we are asked to recognize the dark and terrifying suffering that ensues when the Nazi regime deploys its organization of massive power in support of an ideology of racial supremacy. The film focuses on the confrontation of the Nazis with a priest from Luxembourg who had published an essay opposing the race theory of the Nazis and had been engaged in resistance activities. The film is a free adaptation of the published diary of Jean Bernard, a priest who survived imprisonment by the Nazis in Dachau and later became bishop of Luxembourg. But, as Schlöndorff observes in an interview, the script departs from the diary in a number of ways, and the film does not have documentary intentions, focusing instead on the deep moral issues at the heart of the story.

The title of the film is perhaps intended to remind us that the suffering of the priest at the center of this story takes place in the much larger context of the unimaginable suffering inflicted upon the Jews by the Nazis in the Holocaust: the title calls to mind the Jewish fast day, Tisha B'Av, The Fast of the Ninth of Av, commemorating catastrophes that had befallen the Jewish people such as the destruction of the first and second Temples, with the suggestion that the Holocaust takes its place in this long history of the suffering of the Jews.

The more direct reference of the title points to the narrative structure of the film as it follows the day-by-day actions of the priest, named Henri Kremer, who had been arrested and imprisoned for having written an essay denouncing the racial ideology of the Nazis and for engaging in resistance activities. Kremer finds himself inexplicably released from the Nazi prison camp in Dachau but then learns upon returning home that he is on furlough from

the concentration camp and will be given a mission by the Nazis. He is told that if he tries to flee all the priests from Luxembourg in his prison block in Dachau will be executed. Over the nine days of his release the Nazis attempt to coerce Kremer, who is a member of an influential family, to persuade his bishop to declare the cooperation of the Catholic Church in Luxembourg with the Nazi regime or to himself draft a statement declaring that the priests of Luxembourg support the Nazis.

The film depicts the dilemma of Kremer who complains to his bishop that the Church has not been sufficiently outspoken in opposition to the Nazis but who must then consider the bishop's point that there are circumstances in which direct opposition could put Jews and Christians in greater danger. The bishop has refused to meet with the Nazis and expresses his opposition only by ringing the Church bells every day. The German commanders also regard the situation of the Church as something of a dilemma. A senior commander declares at one point, "I have no gripes with the Vatican," but a young Nazi officer named Gebhardt (who later discloses to Kremer that he is a former seminarian) rebuts this complacency toward the Church and replies "up to now," as he lays out a plan to use the Church in Luxembourg as a wedge against Catholic unity, apparently fearing that the Catholic Church would increasingly become an obstacle to the Nazi conquest. Gebhardt even proposes to Kremer that the Church should side with the Nazis in the struggle against Russia because the future of Christianity in Russia is at stake. Gebhardt presents an elaborate theological thesis about the role of Judas as a hero of Christianity, but Kremer recognizes the deep corruption that has taken hold of Gebhardt: he wishes to use Christianity in the service of power, and Kremer feels the forbidding chill of the absence of love in the heart of the young Nazi commander. He rejects Gebhardt's efforts at persuasion, defies his coercive efforts aimed at extracting a statement of cooperation with the Nazis on behalf of the priests of Luxembourg, and presents a deeply Christian resistance to the ambition of the powerful for domination.

The moral center of the film is in the confrontation between Christian love and assertions of power no matter what the source of such assertions. At one point Kremer firmly but lovingly rejects the attempt of his brother, a powerful businessman, to use his influence and resources to enable Kremer to escape. Kremer remains in deep solidarity with all those who are suffering and dying in the concentration camps. He asserts to his brother that the brother is the type of aggressive and competent man who would know how to survive in the concentration camp by seeking out means of bribery and currying favor with the powerful. Kremer, in the spirit of Christian love and dependence upon God alone, rebuffs such self-assertions. Bernanos says somewhere that power is usually nothing more than the strong taking advantage of the weak, and Kremer knows that any such action violates the spirit of Christian love, which sees equal dignity in all without regard to personal conditions of competence, power, and advantage.

The artistic qualities of this film intensify its focus on the true sources of Christian strength in opposition to worldly expressions of power, while fully acknowledging the reality of the pain and suffering inflicted by those who use power to establish domination. In an interview included with the DVD presentation of the film Schlöndorff points to the important influence of Theodor Dreyer's famous film from 1928, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. That silent film is remarkable for its development of cinematic techniques involving close-up shots of Joan through which the deep and subtle expressivity of the human face can be offered as a kind of evidence of the dignity of the human person who is immersed in faith and love. At key moments in his film Schlöndorff uses remarkable close-up shots of the priest, Henri Kremer, that manifest the deep dignity and strength of a person who knows in a time of ultimate trial that he abides in the warmth of God's love and radiates that love to others. In contrast, the former seminarian turned ambitious Nazi commander, Gebhardt, displays a hardness of soul through his expres-

sions that lets the viewer feel the deep chill of a soul degraded by devotion to power.

These qualities of artistic expression, finally, are enhanced beautifully by the recurrent use of excerpts from Alfred Schnittke's 1977 composition, *Concerto Grosso no. 1*. Schnittke was a Russian composer of German heritage who converted to Catholicism. The film includes enough of the composition to let viewers sense the dissonance of the work that corresponds powerfully to scenes depicting the pain and suffering of life in the concentration camp. But then emerging against that dissonance is the voice of the concerto instrument, sometimes a violin and sometimes a cello, that exudes the same deep dignity of a spirit grounded in love as is conveyed by the images of Kremer. The film thereby offers a full artistic presentation of the enduring, miraculous flourishing of love even in the midst of the harshest circumstances of human evil and cruelty.

The first article in this issue of *Logos* focuses on love as the source of Christian strength. **Philip McDonagh** in "**The Unity of Love: Reflections on the First Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI**" draws our attention especially to the "gentleness of tone" in which Pope Benedict XVI addresses his readers in an encyclical that illuminates the core of Christian life, as is made evident early in the article by a quotation from the encyclical: "We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." McDonagh establishes the cultural context in which the encyclical emerges, pointing to a sense of cultural crisis in Europe in which Christian belief seems to have been dispensed with as a way of addressing fundamental issues of life. McDonagh demonstrates that "the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* can be understood as a response to those for whom our Christian roots have lost much of their meaning, for whom love is an uncertain quantity both in personal relationships

and in the ordering of society, for whom God is ‘missing but not missed.’ The encyclical is a response, in other words, to a defined deficit in today’s market-driven culture.” McDonagh offers a helpful concept for understanding the structure of the encyclical, pointing to the Pope’s use of evocative visual images and suggesting that the unity of the encyclical is analogous to “a cycle of Renaissance paintings—as if Pope Benedict has done in words what Piero Della Francesca or Signorelli, Michelangelo or Raphael, might have done with paint. On this hypothesis, once we have in front of us the ‘basic elements,’ their inner unity is supplied by us the viewers as we contemplate the whole, rather than imposed on us by rhetorical argument.” McDonagh proposes that the basic elements are “desire, self-giving, married love . . . the Eucharist . . . charitable service and the purification of reason.” In his conclusion, McDonagh demonstrates that Christian love is the basis for action in pursuit of social justice. A contemporary world that prides itself on efficiency, productivity, and the politics of self-interest must be confronted by the claims and demonstration of Christian love.

Nancy Enright explores the redemptive power of beauty in “**Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Augustine’s *Confessions*, and the Redemption of Beauty.**” Enright shows how Dante draws upon Augustine’s *Confessions* in the exploration of the danger posed by beauty: beauty can draw us toward God but can lead us seriously astray if beauty is not recognized as coming from God as an instrument of his grace. The article examines the role of beauty in the conversion of Augustine as presented in *Confessions*, examining ways in which a misapprehension of beauty can pose a moral danger but a proper understanding of beauty and response to beauty serve the Church and God. The article then shows how Dante draws richly upon Augustine in *The Divine Comedy*: “*The Divine Comedy* can be helpfully read as a narrative depiction of many of the key theological truths conveyed by Augustine in his *Confessions*, one of these truths being the redemption of beauty. Like Augustine, Dante, as depicted in *The Divine Comedy* and perhaps representing the typical scholar/poet of

his day, is also a lover of beauty in both its physical and literary forms.” Dante’s journey in this great work requires a confrontation with distorted and sinful responses to beauty in *Inferno*, with the spiritual conversion and development necessary to experience beauty as leading to God in *Purgatorio*, and on the “continued cleansing and regeneration” and the ongoing nature of conversion leading to a full experience of beauty in *Paradiso*. Enright calls our attention, above all, to the centrality of humility in reordering our response to beauty because we must understand that we need God’s grace to be able to rise to a vision of the fullness of beauty in divine love.

In “**Shakespearean Personalism,**” we are reminded by **Travis Curtright** that Karol Wojtyła (who of course became Pope John Paul II) had an active love of dramatic literature and developed a strong interest in the plays of Shakespeare. Curtright proposes that we can understand Wojtyła’s personalist philosophy more fully if we examine how the concept of conscience in some of Shakespeare’s plays can be drawn upon to illuminate Wojtyła’s philosophy. Curtright offers a quotation from Wojtyła to establish the basis for this examination: “We know that most of the major works of world literature center around the question of the conscience. . . . Shakespeare’s plays are all concerned with the conscience, because this force of nature is such a characteristic human feature.” The article then develops Wojtyła’s concept of conscience before turning to Edmund in *King Lear* to see how Wojtyła’s personalism illuminates Shakespeare’s plays and how the plays in turn help us understand his personalism. The article helpfully focuses on the issue of tragedy and conscience and ascertains that the modern theory of tragedy that is most fully in accord with Wojtyła’s approach is developed by philosopher Max Scheler, whose writings were well known to Wojtyła. When Curtright turns to an examination of *King Lear* and especially to the character Edmund, he ascertains that “crucial to understanding Edmund’s reversal from villain to penitent is Wojtyła’s understanding of forming identity through choice.” The nature and role of conscience in the human person and its importance in the

formation of identity through action is illustrated brilliantly by the play, even while impressing upon us the terrible weight of human suffering in the world of the play that cannot be prevented by the conversion of Edmund. Drawing upon Wojtyła's personalism, Curtright is able to articulate what Shakespeare brings to appearance in many of his plays: "Shakespeare captures something of man's divine destiny—its importance and relationship to choice—in representing his unique characters and their dilemmas."

Is there a foundation for beliefs about human rights, or do such rights depend fundamentally on dogmatic assertions? Should such rights be negotiated in a context in which we renounce the need for a rational foundation for human rights? Or should the pragmatic implications of agreements about human rights be taken as a sufficient foundation? **Leonard D. G. Ferry** in "**Floors Without Foundations: Ignatieff and Rorty on Human Rights**" takes up these pressing questions and immediately puts them in the context of the Catholic intellectual tradition as articulated, for instance, by Jacques Maritain. "Maritain believes that there are foundations for the beliefs he holds and that they precede and ground all talk of rights. For Maritain moral philosophy remains the proper study of the political theorist. His project is to vindicate the rights he is willing to agree to in terms of Thomistic natural law theory." But a number of important contemporary thinkers reject any attempt to establish a rational foundation for human rights, with Michael Ignatieff and John Rawls taken by Ferry as two important proponents of such a repudiation. Ferry argues that the positions developed by Ignatieff and Rawls—positions that reject a traditional account of the foundation of rights such as that articulated by Maritain—are unconvincing. The scope of the paper does not permit the author to develop a renewed account of the foundation of rights, but the conclusion of the article shows why we must resume the conversation that aims at discovering the grounds of human rights.

Andrei Gotia views Graham Greene's novel, *The Power and the Glory*, as a powerful artistic illumination of the concept of the human

person as made in the image of God in **“God’s Image: The Betrayer and the Betrayed in Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory*.”** Greene’s novel confronts the suffering produced by the modern alliance of ideologies of domination, political power, and technological force as a powerful Mexican lieutenant (a figure, come to think of it, who is not unlike the Nazi officer Gephardt in *The Ninth Day* discussed previously in this preface) pursues an unnamed priest in an effort to eradicate the opposition of the Catholic Church to the revolution to which he is devoted. The alcoholic priest, usually referred to as the whiskey priest, finds all trappings of privilege and power stripped from him as he flees his pursuers while continuing to serve the people as a priest. Such persecution, however, paradoxically strengthens the priest’s understanding of his vocation: “this severe purification only strengthens the core of his faith truly identified as a mystery. . . . The priest, in his continual conversion, keeps on discovering Christ’s image among the people he meets and tries to help others see the same reality.” Furthermore, Greene reflects and sometimes contrasts the priest in a number of other characters in the novel, including the lieutenant who pursues him (and again the confrontation of the whiskey priest and the lieutenant is similar in interesting ways to the confrontation between Father Kremer and Officer Gephardt in *The Ninth Day*). Gotia offers a moving and insightful conclusion, suggesting that “it is the Church who is the heroine of the novel. It is to *her* that both the priest and the half-caste belong, and it is *her* victory that is invisibly hailed in the martyrdom of the protagonist.”

In **“An Odd Couple? A First Glance at Chesterton and Newman,”** David Paul Deavel sets Chesterton and Newman side by side in an illuminating way, acknowledging contrasts both real and apparent but then demonstrating that both are exemplars of “a rationality set free and escaping the tiny circles of rationality in which others spin their wheels” and showing us that “both feasted upon the common vision of the heavenly banquet.” Deavel places these two Catholic converts in the context of the intellectual and cul-

tural controversies and perspectives of their times and shows how each distinctively confronted questions of truth and authority and concluded that the Roman Catholic Church was able to serve as a living voice of authority, was able to draw upon first principles as it showed how they served the needs of the moment, and had the power to draw out good and reject evil. Deavel concludes by pointing to the extensive worldwide influence exerted by both men in the years since their deaths. The article helps us understand why we must keep drawing upon these distinctive figures as we encounter some of the key questions of faith in the modern world.

The final article in this issue proposes that the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* provides a powerful account of the Christian community in the contemporary world, articulating a commitment to social justice that can be drawn upon by Protestant Free Church Christians. **Michael D. Beaty, Douglas V. Henry, and Scott H. Moore** in **“Protestant Free Church Christians and *Gaudium et Spes*: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective”** propose that Free Church Protestantism throughout most of the nineteenth century had developed documents from within their own tradition that served similar purposes but that such documents for a variety of reasons could no longer be relied upon as a sufficient guide to the contemporary age. The authors suggest that the moral philosophy texts used widely in Protestant colleges in the nineteenth century, most prominently *The Elements of Moral Science* by Francis Wayland, served as documents that clearly articulated the relationship between a Christian vocation and a commitment to social justice from a Christian perspective. The article proposes various reasons why such documents are no longer sufficient for Free Church Protestantism and argues that Baptists and other Free Church Evangelicals today should critically engage *Gaudium et Spes* in order to “retrieve the intellectual resources necessary to resist the siren voices of a dominant culture that has distorted and undermined a vibrant account of freedom, the good, and the right.” The article considers some of the objections to such a proposal that might be raised by Baptists and other Free Church Christians and

provides a response to those objections. The article concludes with a compelling ecumenical vision: “we envision a pilgrimage that, without giving rise to full communion, nonetheless involves a critical engagement with Roman Catholicism as a touchstone of vital tradition and teaching authority about Christian faith and practice.”

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Editor

Notes

1. The story and image are available at http://www.pd49.dial.pipex.com/places/mizmaze/cant_074.html (accessed on 11/16/06).