

# Preface

THE MODERN UNIVERSITY continues to be an exemplar of the complex but often hidden bonds that connect the various regions of contemporary culture in accord with an inner coherence that is open to rational exploration and illumination. Even relatively recent developments such as the emergence of business as a field of academic study composed of a set of disciplines such as finance and marketing gives evidence of the felt need to find a place within the rational wholeness of the university for the powerful modern institution of business. The drive toward professional status in business provides at least a tacit recognition that the power of any cultural institution is somehow insufficient as the basis of its own legitimation for that institution—it must seek its legitimacy within the university where its connection to the rational coherence of the whole can be discovered and established. The university, in turn, expects to exert a transformative power upon each of its components as it participates within society so that cultural practices extending well beyond its boundaries become shaped by its inner vision of coherence. Widespread conversations about business ethics and the social responsibility of the corporation give evidence of this shaping influence exerted by the university.

A more subtle demonstration of the importance of unity within the university is found on many Catholic campuses in recent years

in the emergence of Catholic Studies programs. Such programs make explicit what is sometimes only tacitly true in the universities in which the programs emerge—that the complementarity of faith and reason serves as a deep source of the unity of the diverse fields of study at home in the academy, that theology has both the capacity and the responsibility to fulfill an integrative function among the many fields of study, that the dialogue of faith and culture and the many intercultural dialogues themselves provide the threads that connect the academic disciplines, and that each academic discipline is enriched when illuminated by its particular connection to the dimension of faith. Here again the university seeks to strengthen its inner coherence in an effort to fulfill its mission to strengthen the coherence of the cultures it serves.

We find a remarkably profound account of the mission of the academy in a recent address by Pope Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections.”<sup>1</sup> The Pope movingly recalls his own experience as a professor at the University of Bonn, noting especially the extensive interaction among faculty in many different disciplines: “We made up a whole, working in everything on the basis of a single rationality with its various aspects and sharing responsibility for the right use of reason—this reality became a lived experience.” The participation of theology within the university was an especially important feature of academic life, and the Pope claims the integrating role of theology was acknowledged by faculty in all disciplines: “It was clear that, by inquiring about the reasonableness of faith, they too carried out a work which is necessarily part of the ‘whole’ of the *universitas scientiarum*, even if not everyone could share the faith which theologians seek to correlate with reason as a whole” (first paragraph). Even the rational challenge to the question of the existence of God provided further evidence of the complex nature of the university in which such questions had their proper place.

The lecture goes on to propose succinctly that two great and troubling historical developments have threatened our ability to

grasp the coherence of the university and of culture as a whole. On the one hand, a process of “dehellenization” in Christian theology unfolded in various stages in the Middle Ages and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and this process sought to dismantle what the Pope seems to suggest was perhaps the providential convergence of biblical faith and Greek philosophy. At the same time, a new understanding of reason emerged that limited reason to that which is empirically falsifiable and thereby excluded any legitimate place for faith within a rational culture—a position that has been expounded again at length in a number of very recent books.

The Pope calls for the reintegration of faith and reason by restoring the integral importance of reason within the domain of faith and by “broadening our concept of reason and its application” to recognize that philosophical and theological questions beyond the methodological reach of modern science continue to have living importance in our culture. “Only if reason and faith come together in a new way” can we overcome the cultural limitations and dangers posed by their dissociation and by limitations placed upon the reach of reason.

The argument concludes with a bold statement: “Only thus do we become capable of that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today” (final paragraph). In the context of such a claim we can recognize the importance of Catholic Studies within the university. By energizing the dialogue between faith and the whole range of academic disciplines, such programs bring renewed vitality to the search for coherence that is the true heart of the university. Catholic Studies programs and theology could well take upon themselves as a charge the words that Pope Benedict urges upon religion in our day: “The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur—this is the programme with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time” (*ibid.*).

The first article in this issue examines one area of the “debates of our time” in which the tangle caused by a loss of clarity about

the relationship among faith, family, economics, and public policy is untangled by an approach that seeks to properly coordinate those areas of discourse. **Elizabeth R. Schiltz** argues in **“Should Bearing the Child Mean Bearing All the Cost? A Catholic Perspective on the Sacrifice of Motherhood and the Common Good”** that a concept of justice grounded in Catholic social thought can be developed in a manner that is compatible with the insights of many feminist legal scholars to provide a clearer understanding of this issue in light of the common good. Schiltz articulates the insights of these scholars concerning the limitations of an undue emphasis on the concept of the autonomous individual when grappling with family and public policy issues. Giving proper recognition to the inevitability of human dependency at various stages and in various conditions of human life is more fully in accord with the truths of human nature. The refusal to give this recognition results in the “marginalization of care work,” which includes the failure to recognize the unpaid work of parents (and most often women) in their homes and extends to the low wages given to those who engage in child care or in care for the elderly. Feminist dependency theory is in agreement with Catholic social thought in calling for recognizing the work of caring for the dependent as a component of the common good and thus as a social responsibility. But recognizing care for the dependent as a social responsibility is not by itself sufficient. Schiltz shows that Catholic social thought about the role of women in society does not limit that importance to care for the dependent. Catholic teaching also demonstrates that “women have unique contributions to make in solving many of contemporary society’s most critical problems and that women must have access to the public sphere in order to make these contributions.” In light of this argument, it is important to establish public policies that go beyond supporting women to undertake the important work of caring for the dependent; we also need policies that assist women to bring the full range of their talents to the enrichment of the culture. “This is the aspect of Catholic thought that should compel us as Catholics to

advocate for restructuring the workplace to accommodate mothering, not just to subsidize mothering in the home. And I also think it suggests to us, as Catholic scholars, a way to help develop the richer, dependency-based notion of justice that is being articulated by so many of the feminist theorists.” Schlitz concludes by arguing that the common good is not the flourishing of the family per se but that the common good instead comprises “the flourishing of society, the realization of the kingdom of God here on earth. And enabling mothers to contribute their feminine genius to the public sphere is another means to that same, greater common good. That broader conception of the common good more honestly acknowledges the real tensions in the Church’s teachings on these issues, and is consistent with the intellectual agenda of developing a richer notion of justice.”

Some brilliant and beautiful examples of Catholic views on the integrated connections between family, community, and social justice have been offered from time to time in American popular culture, and few as engagingly as in some of the films of Frank Capra. **Christopher Garbowski** brings to the surface the underlying Catholic sensibility in some of Capra’s films in “**Community and Comedy in Frank Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life*.**” American concepts of radical individualism must be confronted and overcome to enable a true “sacramental sensibility” grounded in a Catholic concept of community to shine out, and Capra’s films address this purpose with convincing vigor. Garbowski ventures to propose that “to some extent, many of Capra’s films hearken back to the comedies of grace from the Middle Ages,” and to that extent his films participate in an artistic tradition that is deeply grounded in a Catholic perspective. Historically, Capra also grounds his films in an ethnic historical experience in which faith was infused with community life to an extent not seen in the broader culture as a whole; it is in such ethnic communities that a “sacramental sensibility” remains active within culture. Garbowski brings to light what he calls the “covertly ethnic community” in *It’s a Wonderful Life* from which George derives the

values that enable him to stand up against the increasingly dominant economic individualism that is threatening to take control of society. Having shown that the film is a kind of divine comedy, Garbowski concludes that the film is “a comedy of rebirth,” with hope as its powerful culminating image, and adds the observation that “Capra’s best films are primarily parables of hope.”

The dissociation of faith and reason and the resulting diminished understanding of the common good has had deleterious effects on the modern concept of education, and only a full understanding of education in relation to the human soul and the good of human nature can restore education to its proper purpose and importance. So **Patrick Danielson** argues convincingly in “**Education and the Human Soul**”: “Education is concerned with the properly developed human soul, and this concern reveals education to be first of all a moral and a spiritual enterprise depending for its well-being upon a philosophy of the human person.” If public life is dominated by the view that successful economic activity is the highest good, education will be severely distorted by this impoverished account of the good. And when government determines that religion should play no part in public education, then it is inevitable that the concept of the human person at the heart of such a view of public education will be inadequate in the eyes of faith, and the concept of education will itself in turn be unfruitful. Danielson carefully reconstructs an account of human nature drawn especially from Aristotle and St. Thomas, a view that recognizes the central importance of the “divine origin and destiny” of the human person, and shows how only a view of education that recognizes the full depth of human nature can cultivate the good of that nature. Danielson then turns especially to St. Augustine to bring forward the concept that Christian love is indispensable to a proper understanding of the human good. “Love is the greatest of the theological virtues for under its influence all the other virtues are perfected, and the dignity of the human person is displayed as fully as it can be in this life. When the source and nature of that dignity are understood, so is the respect, the latitude

or liberty, due each person in pursuit of his chief good.” Although it is beyond the scope of this article to consider the practical steps that can be taken to reform education in accord with a true understanding of its mission, the article provides us with a vivid account of an educational vision giving full respect to true human dignity.

**Richard Gill** in “*Oikos and Logos: Chesterton’s Vision of Distributism*” argues that Chesterton brought a valuable Catholic perspective to modern debates about capitalism and socialism by arguing that neither system addresses the importance of establishing a proper understanding of the ownership of limited private property: “In Chesterton’s Christian-Aristotelian vision of distributism, limits are placed on the life processes of nature—the acquisition of goods and human sexuality—as both aspects of economy are transfigured in accordance with the will of the Creator and the needs for sustaining a human community.” Both property and human sexuality have been profoundly distorted by a culture that has lost touch with its religious roots, and the integrated vision of life in which sexuality, family, and economic activity achieve their true meaning has been lost: “With the collapse of the household, however, property and sexuality have lost these Christian-humanist dimensions and spiraled off as unlimited desire for personal wealth and sexual fulfillment.” After carefully developing Chesterton’s arguments on these points, Gill turns to some of the concepts developed by Wendell Berry and by Erazim Kohák to bring out the continuing importance and vitality of the thinking of Chesterton on these issues.

**Basil Meeking** presents an insightful view of Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical in “**Proclaim the Truth through Love: A Comment on *Deus Caritas Est***.” Meeking immediately confronts a modern debasement of the concepts of love and truth represented by a view that regards the two as antithetical, with love understood as acceptance and compassion and truth as harshly insisting upon authority and judgment. Truth and love can be understood only when their essential relation is grasped, and Meeking shows that the Holy Father has examined this relationship in many of his works over the

years. According to Meeking, “He explains that what is true and what is good cannot be separated from one another. It is only by knowing the truth about God that the truth about what is good, the truth about love, becomes accessible. The only weapon truth has is itself and the love which it begets.” The article develops this view carefully, drawing upon the encyclical and a variety of theological sources, and confronts the impediment for many people in accepting such a view posed by the historical fact of the imperfections that mark the Church. Meeking shows that “it is possible to accept the Church, to love the Church, as she is because, amazingly, she is ‘the truth in love,’ as St. Paul describes her. She is truth in the deepest sense of living truth, essential truth, a divine fullness of life.” Such love in the midst of imperfection is a continual striving toward God and here again the bond between love and truth must be recognized. Meeking’s account of the encyclical concludes with a consideration of the subject of forgiveness as taken up by the Pope: “Only love gives the power to forgive that is to accompany the other on the road of suffering, and to overcome untruth.”

**Guy Mansini** in **“Doing and Speaking, Created and Uncreated”** delves into the writings of St. Thomas to bring forward a far-reaching account of the conventional distinction between doing and speaking. It is striking to discover how even such a familiar pair of concepts has been distorted by a cultural perspective that values action, results, and deeds over the seemingly frail and ephemeral power of the word. Mansini examines the fundamental distinction between doing and speaking in great depth and eventually guides the reader to consider the philosophical and theological implications of the distinction as exemplified by God’s act of creation through a kind of speaking and of the understanding of the Incarnation as the Word. Mansini argues that creation is a “doing by way of a speaking, but a doing that, just of itself, is not a speaking” while “the doing that is a speaking is the procession of the Second Person of the Trinity, where begetting is speaking and speaking is begetting.” (The reader will need to follow Mansin’s careful argument to capture

the meaning of these distinctions.) Mansini's account culminates in the presentation of the concept of the world as "the theater of our moral action and the field of our making, the space of both *praxis* and *poesis*. But that is penultimate. In the end, the last end, it is for beholding, which is to say, the world is for being displayed, and not to God but to created mind."

**Gary M. Bouchard** in "**The Roman Steps to the Temple: An Examination of the Influence of Robert Southwell, SJ, upon George Herbert**" examines in depth the implications of Robert Southwell's influence upon George Herbert. The article especially considers the ways in which the public execution of Southwell in 1595 shaped his influence upon readers and other writers, and seeks to establish a better understanding of "the distinctiveness of Herbert's voice and his place in the history of the religious lyric." The article examines the religious distinctions evident in the writings of the two poets, one a Catholic priest and the other a priest in the Church of England but concludes that the similarities between the two may finally be more important than the differences: "For central to the poetry and life of each man was the Christian sacramental life, with its accompanying words and images, and an understanding and acceptance of human suffering within the context of the paschal mystery of suffering, death, and resurrection."

In "**Hans Urs von Balthasar and Some Contemporary Catholic Writers**," **Ed Block** provides us with an important account of the extraordinary contribution of Hans Urs von Balthasar to the Catholic intellectual heritage and then shows we can draw upon Balthasar's work in a manner that will illuminate our reading of three modern Catholic writers: novelist Jon Hassler, playwright Brian Friel, and poet Denise Levertov. The first part of Block's essay is especially insightful in the demonstration that Balthasar was able to engage successfully with the secularizing tendency of much modern thought by his ability to "appropriate the thought of even anti-Catholic writers and philosophers." Especially important in this regard is Balthasar's encounter with the work of Martin Heidegger.

According to Block, “Balthasar’s familiarity with Heidegger is, in fact, a way in which the Catholic intellectual heritage enters into dialogue with a significant strain of secular thought.” Block guides us through an account of Balthasar’s understanding of beauty, focusing especially upon Balthasar’s brilliant but difficult essay, “Revelation and the Beautiful,” and then shows how Balthasar—perhaps more powerfully than any other writer—has considered and confronted the situation of beauty in the modern world. In the second part of the essay, Block helpfully calls our attention to three Catholic writers whose writings in various ways contribute to the continuing vitality of the Catholic artistic tradition and whose work can be all the more deeply appreciated when considered in the light of Balthasar’s theological aesthetics.

Michael C. Jordan  
Editor

### *Notes*

1. Pope Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections.” Lecture at the University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html).