Preface

Perhaps it is inevitable that cultures develop a narrowness of vision fostered especially by success in the area of activity most characteristic of their particular strengths, as is the case today of the astounding economic productivity throughout the contemporary world. Religion offers a comprehensive understanding of human life that provides, at the very least, a counterbalance to the one-sidedness that is typical of the strength of any particular culture. It is remarkable to observe that spiritual resources prove to have great potency even when they seem to have at their disposal a poverty of means and cultural visibility in the daily contests of social activity.

A startling example of this proposition is available in a new film titled *Into Great Silence*, depicting monastic life in the Grande Chartreuse, a Carthusian monastery in the French Alps near Grenoble.[1] German filmmaker Philip Gröning, drawing upon an artistic restraint that seems in its own way to be beautifully informed by the deep ascetism of the monastic life exhibited by his camera and microphone, invites the viewer to enter into the silence and contemplative spirit of the monastery. It is difficult

to imagine a greater contrast than that between the driven pace and cacophonous energy of modern economic activity set against the responsive and gentle rhythm of a life of prayer following the eight Offices performed by the monks throughout the day. Gröning forgoes the use of a musical soundtrack—how tempting it must have been to set some of the world's great contemplative music to these beautiful images. Instead the Gregorian chant sung by the monks, the sound of bells summoning them to prayer, the sound of snow melting off the roof, and the sound of fire in the stove provide the auditory aspect that lets us know what it means to listen constantly for the presence of God. The film also intersperses biblical texts into the depiction of daily life in the monastery, bringing to appearance the scriptural foundation of monastic life in the call to renounce all of our possessions as a condition of becoming a disciple of Christ.

Paul Joseph Jean Cardinal Poupard, president emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Culture, provides an insightful commentary on the film:

> To make contact with this astonishing film is to enter a separate space-time, whose pace is both solemn and very gentle. It is only in complete silence that listening can really begin, only when verbal communication disappears is it really possible to begin to see. This is the message expressed by this gentle contemplation of time, constructed on the trilogy "Repetition, Measure, Silence." *Into Great Silence* is in fact a meditation on monastic life in its purest form.[2]

It is well known that monastic life is lived not for the individual spiritual welfare of those called to such a life alone but for the good of all, even if the world seems hardly aware of the life shaped by prayer going on in its midst. A brief scene in the film depicts an airplane flying over the monastery, and we can suppose that many of its passengers are probably on their way to and from business meetings in the busy world and are oblivious to the profoundly different pat-

tern of life lived out in a daily practice of individual and communal prayer. The space and time of monastic life is separate, as Cardinal Poupard notes, but the abiding presence of God is sought for the spiritual well-being of all.

One of the most delightful scenes of the film unfolds as the camera and microphone follow the monks on one of their weekly walks into the beautiful mountain landscapes surrounding the monastery. Would the world be surprised to know that simple joy can be a part of the ascetic life? The monks converse freely on these outings, and in the scene captured by Gröning we see the monks sliding down a hill on makeshift skis, more often than not tumbling through the snow to the sound of gleeful laughter. Watching this scene, I was reminded of the episode in Bernanos's *Diary of a Country Priest* in which the unnamed priest-narrator takes great pleasure from riding on the back of a motorcycle through the countryside, experiencing for a few moments a simple childlike delight in play. Simple joy emanating from deep spiritual peace is irresistibly beautiful and something rare in a world that is driven by the multiplication of desires to serve economic ends.

One incidental measure of the distance between life in the monastery ordered around engagement in the daily prayers of the Divine Office and life in a culture driven above all else by powerful economic engines is the semantic decline of the word "office" itself. Although the word continues to carry some reference to high responsibility in contemporary usage (as in "the office of the president"), that sense of the word has grown indistinct to modern ears as the term becomes increasingly associated with the place in which one performs one's professional obligations. The linguistic shift through which the obligations of the office come to be understood primarily as economic obligations exemplies the dissociation of economic activity from other dimensions of life in the contemporary world.

The Latin title of Cicero's *De Officiis*—usually translated as "On Duties"—and the deep association Cicero establishes between that word and a sense of honorability, including honoring the gods,

point to the ancient resonance of the Latin word from which "office" is derived. The word in Cicero indicates duties or responsibilities stemming from one's role, but he includes recognition of "the common fellowship of the human race," a "fellowship . . . that was established by the gods" in his account of such responsibilities and thereby seems to edge remarkably close to a spiritual understanding of the term.[3] Socrates would appear to be the great model of dutiful or responsible behavior for Cicero, and there is no doubt a great gap between Cicero's understanding of the divine and the Christian concept. Nonetheless, it is enlightening to see the way in which ancient Roman usage prepared the linguistic resources that could so readily be adapted by the Church in the process of inculturation through which the wisdom of ancient philosophy could be transformed and then drawn upon as a source of enrichment for Christian understanding.

The term "Divine Office," applied traditionally to what is also called the "Liturgy of the Hours," in the words of the Catholic Encyclopedia "signifies etymologically a duty accomplished for God." Monastic life such as that depicted in *Into Great Silence* shows us that such a duty could become the basis for a life of contemplative devotion and the principle of order for the arrangement of daily activity. The modern transposition of the concept of duty or responsibility becomes immediately apparent when we consider the contemporary usage of the term "office"—that a life can be driven by the (work) demands of the office is a common observation. We tend to understand the demands of work imposed on us by the office in a functional and utilitarian manner that deforms the ancient concept of office as duty and responsibility, and this deformation hinders the effort to recapture a sense of responsibility to an order that supersedes the economic arrangements of life.

It is not monastic life alone that continues to offer us the spiritual resources without which we would wither—there are many charisms or gifts but the same spirit, as Paul reminded us (1 Cor 12:4). It is encouraging to know even through the mere viewing

of an artistic depiction that the deep truth about the human person and the love of God somehow rebalances the world. Furthermore, that this rebalancing occurs to a degree that is disproportionate to the remoteness of the places where contemplative life continues and to the fewness of those who carry on the ascetic practice is remarkable and a source of hope.

Thomas W. Smith, in **"Catholic Social Thought and Modern Liberal Democracy"** points to the deficiencies of modern American political life that could be ameliorated by drawing upon the resources of Catholic social thought. Smith proposes that contemporary culture has not developed an understanding of the human person that is adequate to the needs of maintaining a just political order and suggests that Catholic social thought "offers a theological anthropology that might help move American democracy through the impasses we face. In the face of contemporary movements that reduce human beings to biological or economic motivations . . . Catholic social thought argues that the human heart is the driving force of history." Fundamental American political concepts such as security and freedom have become entangled in "impasses" as the relentless pursuit of security proves problematic in a variety of ways and as the American understanding of freedom becomes troublingly attenuated. With persuasive clarity, Smith urges us "to recognize that the search for justice is one with the search for richer visions of human flourishing and to ask how the Gospel vision and the traditions arising out of it bear on these questions. Catholic social thought presents itself as an orientation toward our common life that reorients us away from our conventional views and toward a richer understanding of personal and social life." Smith helps us to understand that contemporary political discourse offers opportunities that Catholic social thought can engage in the ongoing effort to enrich and deepen the current cultural situation with the spiritual richness of the Catholic intellectual and social traditions.

There is a sculpture near the graduate business school of a prominent Catholic university that depicts a blindfolded figure resolute-

ly sculpting himself with hammer and chisel out of the rock—the self-made man. Enterprise and industriousness are commendable, but they produce a deadly illusion if taken to the extreme of understanding ourselves as truly the product of our own devising and labor. **Damian P. Fedoryka's** article, **"The Concept of 'Gift' as Hermeneutical Key to the Dignity of the Human Person,"** provides an account based on Pope John Paul II's concept of "the hermenutics of the gift" through which we can come to see clearly why it would be an error and illusion to regard any human being, no matter how well accomplished, to be truly "self-made." Fedoryka carefully establishes an understanding that we come to know ourselves and others truly in a receptive mode in which we experience ourselves and the world as gifts. We should note that there is a rich modern anthropological tradition of reflection upon the concept of "gift," a concept that poses special difficulty for a culture that relies heavily upon the notion of human persons as producers and consumers spinning a network of social life based on economic exchange in the pursuit of self-interest. Fedoryka demonstrates that Catholic thinkers such as Dietrich von Hildebrand, Edith Stein, Josef Peiper, and Pope John Paul II have made fundamental philosophic and theological contributions to our understanding of the concept of gift and its place at the core of human dignity. His argument captures the significance of the concept in the development of the human person: "It is the affirmation by another person that allows the individual to recognize external reality as a gift that is good and therefore as a benefit to and affirmation of his or her own being. This experience brings the awakening person into the dramatic theater of interpersonal dialogue, where each is called to receive what is offered and to respond with a *gift of self.*" The article demonstrates the emergence of the concept of "self-possession": "this personal power to possess one's own being acquires its meaning only when it is used to receive the gift of others. In the receiving, one also comes to possess oneself, a possession that is completed only in the sincere gift of self to others." Only when

we understand the centrality of love that binds God and the human person created in God's image and the meaning of the willingness to die for others as displayed on the cross do we reach the core elements of the concept of human dignity.

The concept of gift plays a significant role also in **Robert C. Koerpel's** account of the ecclesiology of theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar in his article titled **"The Form and Drama of the Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Mary, Peter, and the Eucharist."** Koerpel acknowledges the challenge established by the depth of learning, the comprehensiveness of thought, and the unsystematic character of von Balthasar's theology and then gathers together some key elements of his ecclesiology to present a view of the Church as a "mystery of love." The theological persons most closely associated with this mystery are Mary and Peter: "They are, for von Balthasar, the windows through which we begin to see the visible form of the Church as Christ's concrete partner and the role the Church performs in the drama of salvation. The Eucharist too is a window that opens upon the mystery." Mary, in this account, is the response of creation to God's gift of himself in the Word, a response that requires a special grace. Through that grace, Mary's response becomes the "exemplar and archetype of the Church's faith." The existence of Peter as theological person is "embodied in the hierarchal, the sacramental, and the institutional form of the Church." The church is simultaneously understood as Petrine institution and Marian charism (gift, grace), and these two dimensions "form the inner dramatic tension or union in distinction" of the mystery of the Church. In this tension the Church is both the body of Christ and the bride of Christ, and finally "the bridal-bodily relationship between Christ and the Church . . . finds its complete communal form in the Eucharist." Koerpel goes on to discuss the theological implications of von Balthasar's ecclesiology and examines some of the key questions that emerge from this approach to the Church as mystery.

William F. Murphy, Jr., in **"A Reading of Aquinas in Support of *Veritatis Splendor* on the Moral Object,"** offers a closely argued

account of a key point in Pope John Paul II's encyclical. Murphy demonstrates that the concept of the moral object plays a key role as the encyclical argues the importance of reaffirming the recognition that "an adequate moral theory must be able to uphold the traditional teaching that certain kinds of human acts are 'intrinsically' and therefore always evil." Murphy endeavors to illuminate the concept of the moral object in a manner that follows the direction established by a key section of *Veritatis Splendor* by drawing on the thought of Thomas Aquinas read especially in the light of the approach to Thomas taken by theologian Martin Rhonheimer. Murphy carefully examines the various dimensions of moral action and the role of deliberative reason in determining the moral character of an action, arguing that "the moral object should be understood as the proximate end or goal of the will, which is the good sought by the agent in a given act. It explains why someone performs the externally observable behavior pattern they perform so the physical performance can be understood as a human act proceeding from reason and will." After considering various ways of understanding the moral object, Murphy explicates the argument put forward by Thomas that reason "is the proper standard, the rule and measure of the morality of human acts." The argument reaches its conclusion in this proposition: "the goodness or evil of a given moral act depends upon its conformity with the reason that rightly, that is, virtuously, directs acts to good ends consistent with the eternal law and the true ultimate end."

Basil Meeking examines the thinking of Pope Benedict XVI on the fundamental principles of Catholic liturgy in **"Celebrating the Liturgy with Pope Benedict XVI."** Meeking observes that to see the Pope celebrate the Mass is to receive "a glimpse of what the renewal of the liturgy proposed by the Second Vatican Council really means when it is understood and practiced as part of the unbroken tradition of the Catholic Church that mediates the revelation given in Jesus Christ." The article reviews the modern history of liturgical reform, examines some of the key controversies that have emerged, and commends the position taken by the Pope that a true understanding of

the liturgical reforms introduced by the Second Vatican Council must recognize the renewal of the liturgy taking place in a manner that is in continuity with the tradition. This view recognizes the possibility, historical reality, and importance of change but emphasizes the necessity of organic development that does not violate the divine content and essential structure of the Mass. The liturgy is the "work of the Holy Spirit with the Church, who in every age keeps her vital." Meeking then builds upon this proposition with an account of Catholic liturgy that recognizes the essential elements of "sacrifice, presence, and adoration" as the heart of the liturgy. Murphy concludes that "what Pope Benedict will keep on reminding us both in his teaching and in the way in which he himself celebrates the liturgy is that the liturgy exists to make us able to take part in the mystery of God so that we can become the kind of people God wants us to be."

Longtime contributor to *Logos* **H. Wendell Howard** offers us an attractive account of the mystery novels of Ellis Peters in his article, **"The World of Brother Cadfael."** As Howard explains, the twenty books of the Brother Cadafel Chronicles emerge from Peters's masterful understanding of twelfth-century England established as the setting for the novels, suggesting that the novels as a whole constitute "a tapestry formed from the warp of power politics some eight hundred years past but as modern as yesterday and the woof of emotions, temperaments, and ambitions of characters as human as members of one's own family." Howard helps us understand the "fullness, the authenticity, and the artistry with which Ellis Peters creates the manners, mores, customs, characters, and monastic practice of twelfth-century England," but goes on to point out that as impressive as this artistic accomplishment is, it forms the context for the intriguing mysteries that are the heart of the novels. The article especially draws our attention to a passage in the tenth of the twenty novels, *The Pilgrim of Hate*, in which Ellis invites us "to be in the presence of the divine" in an account of the festival of St. Winifred that culminates in a beautifully depicted scene of a miraculous healing. Howard impressively delineates the

beauty of these novels as chronicles of a historical era, as engaging mysteries, and as novels that have the power to "captivate the mind and ensnare the heart."

This issue concludes with an insightful meditation on **"Envy and Grace"** by **Lloyd W. J. Aultman-Moore**. The author combines an informal phenomenological account of his own struggle with envy and an insightful presentation of envy that draws upon philosophical, theological, and literary sources to portray the nature and power of this vice. The personal dimension remains in play as Aultman-Moore employs the insights gained from his examination of envy to point to the problem of overcoming the grip of envy in one's own heart. Describing a moment of grace in which he glimpsed the possibility of being released from envy, the author again brings forward philosophical and theological sources that help us understand what the nature of such grace could be and how we are called upon to receive such grace into our lives. These reflections lead to powerful observations on the concept of humility as developed by Dietrich von Hildebrand. Aultman-Moore returns in his concluding paragraph to the personal struggle with envy that forms the motivation for this article, but now is able to bring forward hope that it is possible to be released from such a damaging vice.

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Notes

1. *Into Great Silence*, director's two-disc special edition, written and directed by Philip Gröning (2006; Düsseldorf, Germany: Zeitgest Films; DVD release, October 2007).
2. Paul Joseph Jean Cardinal Poupard, "Cardinal Poupard Statement," disc two of director's two-disc special edition of *Into Great Silence*.
3. Cicero, *On Duties*, trans. and ed. M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 110. The passage is in Book 3, section 28.