

Preface

Few readers of this journal would dispute that modern Western culture stands urgently in need of renewed contact with its spiritual foundation to attain the depth and rectitude that correspond to our true human needs. The renewal of modern culture is a longstanding theme, and the theme of the “crisis” of modern culture has been explored from numerous perspectives for many years now. Can such renewal be achieved without repudiating the many benefits of modern liberty, scientific knowledge, technological proficiency, and economic productivity? In this issue of Logos we examine accounts drawn from historical, cultural, literary, theological, and spiritual perspectives showing the many paths of renewal that are open to us.

Three key modern figures emerge from these pages, each discussed (as it happens) in at least two articles in this issue. Those figures are (in chronological order) St. Therese of Lisieux, recently proclaimed a Doctor of the Church; Christopher Dawson; and Pope John Paul II. That no direct line of influence need be drawn among these three indicates merely the rich expansiveness of the Catholic intellectual and spiritual tradition. Each figure exemplifies in both thought and lived experience a deeply Catholic encounter with modernity that opens vast channels of spiritual depth to irrigate the thirsty soil of modern culture. The explorations offered in this issue expand beyond these three key figures to include also Mariology, the possible “crypto-Catholicism” of Shakespeare, and the gift of Benedictine spirituality that can be practiced within the daily routine of modern life.

Our “Reconsiderations” feature in this issue brings us a lecture first published forty years ago by **Christopher Dawson** discussing “**America and the Secularization of Modern Culture.**” Dawson claims that the technological order developed in the West is the basis of secular culture, and in America the technological order has achieved its greatest triumph. But, he goes on to say, the ends of that culture are disproportionate to the technological means we have developed because the ends are meager. I believe it was Leo Strauss who once commented that the West in its modern phase aimed low in its goals but achieved them as we sought mastery over nature to increase human comfort, and Dawson shows how the technological power we have produced threatens to blind us to the spiritual principles that alone can guide and control technology. Dawson’s words take on added urgency today as we ponder the success of the Human Genome Project and wonder how our society will find the moral knowledge and resolve that will be needed in the face of the awesome technological power accumulated in this research.

Gerald J. Russello provides some reflections on Dawson’s lecture and shows how Dawson throughout his work points to the spiritual foundation of culture and argues that societies that forget their spiritual foundation are doomed to collapse. Russello shows that Dawson’s comments in this lecture look ahead to a period in which Catholics in America can play a leading role in American society and “reclaim the public aspects of their faith as a counterbalance to the technological order.”

We turn to another dimension of historical study as **Michael Alexander** offers a concise account of the religious sociology in Shakespeare’s time that clarifies well what

it would mean to regard Shakespeare as a “crypto-Catholic.” In “**Shakespeare’s Catholicism? or ‘You would pluck out the heart of my mystery,’**” Alexander argues that there is some historical probability that Shakespeare was indeed a crypto-Catholic and he suggests ways in which the Catholic ethos that resides just beneath the surface of many of the plays can be brought to light in a manner that illuminates our understanding of the works. Understanding Shakespeare’s Catholicism is a contribution to recovering the spiritual foundation that reverberates throughout our culture.

Glenn W. Olsen points out one path to the recovery of our spiritual foundation, and that is “through the study of ages very different from our own.” In “**Why and How to Study the ‘Middle Ages,’**” he argues that the Middle Ages provide a fuller understanding of ways of being human in the world than are commonly available from contemporary life and culture. Olsen goes on to show the importance of Dawson’s view of the relationship between religion and history and the centrality of Christianity in the development of the West.

The development of modern culture in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment shaped many aspects of contemporary society, and the Enlightenment is usually described as relying upon empirical observation and reason as the basis for knowledge. **Rafael E. Tarragó** in “**The Americans in Two Works of the Enlightenment**” points out, however, that if we examine eighteenth-century views of the population of the Americas, we find Enlightenment thinkers arguing for the inferiority of that population in comparison to Europeans and relying upon speculative theories supported by prejudice, while Catholic thinkers drew upon first-hand observations to defend the intellectual acumen of Native Americans and other inhabitants of the American continents. Tarragó thus makes us aware in this concrete instance that contrary to the claims of many Enlightenment thinkers there is no necessary contradiction between Catholicism and empirical reasoning.

Stratford Caldecott offers a contemporary account of Mariology in “**The Final Mystery,**” showing the connection of Mariology to the ressourcement movement among some Catholic theologians that renewed theological contact with the early Church Fathers. Drawing especially upon the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Caldecott describes a modern “mariological synthesis” that incorporates Marian devotion within Trinitarian and ecclesiological thinking, thereby bridging popular Marian devotion and theology. This mariological synthesis facilitates a theologically sound contemporary spirituality that can offer rich resources to a culture that hungers for spiritual nourishment.

Devotion to St. Therese of Lisieux is strong in some Catholic circles today and **Roger Duncan** draws our attention to the continuing presence of this saint as an exhibition of her relics tours the world. In “**The Little Flower and the New Evangelization**” Duncan addresses the mistaken tendency on the part of some Catholics to dismiss St. Therese as of little significance and he supports the claim that it is her “heroic apostolate of the radically new” that justifies her having been recently proclaimed a Doctor of the Church. Duncan demonstrates the special importance of St. Therese for

the modern world, showing that her teaching brings out the sanctity available through work and relationships, reconciles the apparent conflict between work and contemplation, and establishes a connection between work and mission in a manner that suffuses daily life with meaning.

Readers can then reflect upon a rich selection of passages from the writings of St. Therese as **Michele Marie Schumacher** guides us through what she calls the “spiritual maternity” of the saint in “**Therese, Woman In the Church.**” Schumacher demonstrates that St. Therese exemplifies that integration of thought and personal experience that is sometimes claimed to be distinctively feminine in character and she shows how the existential theology of the saint responds in a special way to contemporary concerns and to modern modes of spiritual experience.

Surely one key component of contemporary Western culture is the prominent position accorded to sexuality as a distinctive governing principle within the human person. Any attempt to bring renewed spiritual strength to contemporary culture must take cognizance of the role of sexuality in human life and culture. In this light, attention is increasingly being paid to the general audiences delivered by Pope John Paul II between 1979 and 1984 and now published as *The Theology of the Body*. George Weigel has recently pointed to the importance of these documents: “It will be well into the twenty-first century before the Catholic Church, much less the wider culture, even begins to assimilate the contents of John Paul II’s theology of the body. A secondary literature capable of unpacking these dense, compact audience addresses is badly needed.”¹ We are pleased to offer two scholarly efforts to bring out the significance of this teaching. **Sister Paula Jean Miller, F.S.E.**, in “**The Body: Science, Theology, and Humanae Vitae**” shows that the Pope formulates a theological anthropology of the human person in the light of which fully human sexual relationships can be understood as an integral part of the physical, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of the human person. Only within such a perspective does the true importance of human sexuality come to light, and we discover that Catholic teaching holds deep respect for the sexual dimension of life when properly understood.

Mary Shivanandan, S.T.D., provides a cultural analysis of John Paul II’s theology of the body in “**Body Narratives: Language of Truth?**” Her article demonstrates that like some feminist critiques of contemporary Western culture the Pope’s views challenge dominant assumptions in the view of the body and human sexuality. Shivanandan adapts the critical methods of anthropological ethnographer Emily Martin to perform a reading of modern natural family planning manuals, revealing that these manuals draw upon an understanding of human sexuality that is far deeper and truer than most other accounts found in the dominant culture as a whole. Drawing upon John Paul II’s theology of the body, Shivanandan brings out the concept of the body as the medium of the gift that husband and wife bestow upon one another, and she shows how the concept of gift captures the deepest meaning of the human body.

This issue ends with an insightful account of Benedictine spirituality offered by **Will Derkse** in “**Listening and Responding: Benedictine Spirituality in Non-monastic**

Contexts,” showing how deep respect for the practices and routines of daily life can be achieved through the exercise of Benedictine disciplines. The holistic spirituality of the Benedictines can be carried into every corner of modern life, so that we are not required to repudiate the modern technological world in our effort to reconnect ourselves to the spiritual depth through which we can find the true fullness of life that we desire.

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Notes

1. George Weigel, “John Paul II and the Crisis of Humanism,” *First Things* 98 (Dec. 1999): 33.