

# Preface

A PROPER FEAR OF ARROGANCE might reasonably cause one to hesitate before exploring and crossing the boundaries that separate the various domains of knowledge. After all, each area of knowledge is vast in scope and requires a distinctive method or approach, and we all find ourselves harassed by the limitations of the time available to us for expanding our knowledge. Surely the lessons taught us by our work and by our enormously productive economic system confirm day by day the wisdom of specialization. Specialization in the workplace helps us see that we can best hone competence through discipline and through the repetitive practices that enable us to know deeper the intricacies of a craft or profession. We hear praise these days for people who are able to exercise what is called “compartmentalization,” meaning that they maintain a careful separation of distinct aspects of life such as the concerns of family, the ambition of work, and the practice of worship. Efficiency is only a mediate value, always dependent upon an end for the determination of its true worth, and yet we all count upon it on a daily basis and feel hampered and irritated by its absence as we complete our necessary tasks, and living our lives in a “compartmentalized” fashion enhances our efficiency. We have many good reasons and many ingrained habits that encourage us to respect the familiar fences we have established in our lives.

What are we to think, then, when we observe once again, as several articles in this issue claim, that the Catholic intellectual tradition

does not merely respect the legitimacy and relative autonomy of each area of knowledge, but instead insists that the presence and mark of the Creator permeates the world and overruns all human boundaries while faith correspondingly permeates the human person and overruns all internal separations of the self? How are we to understand the claim that all areas of knowledge are ultimately interrelated as they pertain to the created order and mutually illuminating as they pertain to the integrated person who seeks a deeper knowledge of God in the many different aspects of the world? Such claims, as I suggested, are made by some of the articles in this issue: that Christianity and modern science are not merely compatible but that Christianity in fact contributed to the origin of modern science; that the political order established in the world is not only the result of human plans and projects but can reflect in a mysterious way the communal aspect of the human person in accordance with our nature as bearers of the divine image; that the beauty we perceive through glorious sights and sounds in nature and in art finds its fulfillment in God; that history as an account of human achievement remains deficient if it does not also include within its reflections the deep-rooted piety that can be found embedded within every civilization.

Critics of Christianity and of Roman Catholicism in particular would not hesitate to call these claims arrogant and useless; after all, Christians insist upon speaking of “the way” and “the truth,” and Catholics recognize the teaching authority of the Church. How is it possible, critics wonder, to speak of such things without arrogance? And Christians in their love of truth should be chastened by their critics when their critics show the many times when someone in the name of Christianity has claimed as absolute a truth that turned out to be merely relative or no truth at all. But Christians who love truth love logic and it does not follow that if sometimes claims to truth have been made by Christians that turned out to be based on arrogance or prejudice or a desire for power then all claims to truth

made in the name of Christianity must be false. Christians should be chastened by the examples of arrogance that can be found in the history of Christianity but they need not be shaken to the core. For, I would argue, it is not arrogance or a desire for power that stands behind a Christian understanding of the unity of knowledge, but humility.

Humility enables us to recognize that in spite of the justified pride of achievement in the social construction of the culture in which our lives unfold, the value of the cultural world is not purely a product of our aptitude and labor; it enables a higher truth to shine through its myriad forms, a higher truth that we were striving to know in its differentiated aspects through the building up of culture in the first place. Again I can suggest that many articles in this issue point to such a phenomenon in the areas of science, history, politics, and art. If we turn to Dietrich von Hildebrand's *Transformation in Christ* we gain deep insight into how it can be that humility prepares the way for us to reach toward an understanding of the unity of knowledge:

It is in humility that we attain to an exact consideration of the metaphysical situation of man. Humility presents in specifically sharp relief that general aspect of all Christian morality—the unreserved recognition of the metaphysical situation of man, the attitude of throwing all illusions overboard and granting to the whole of reality the response that is due to it. Thus, it has been said justly: “Humility is Truth.” Correspondingly, the soul of pride is falsehood, for pride means a refusal to recognize our metaphysical situation. (128)

Pride makes the boundaries of human knowledge and human institutions staunch but rigid; humility enables us to look with wonder at the inexhaustible beauty and glory of the world, and reminds us that while we are indeed called upon to cooperate in the making of the human world it is not in the end our own creation.

The image on the cover of this issue gives witness to the continuing presence in twentieth-century art of a powerful spiritual impulse, and it is a kind of artistic humility perhaps that enables Kandinsky to trust in the power of composition employing color and abstracted form to display the world of spirituality. Kandinsky here takes a biblical theme as a starting point for displaying an abstracted spirituality (yes, spirituality abstracted from religion—we need not claim that Kandinsky preserves a strictly Christian interpretation of spirituality to find value in his early twentieth-century reassertion of the importance of the spiritual dimension in art). This apocalyptic and messianic abstract image blurs the imposed boundaries of habitual perception to break open space for spiritual epiphany, and we might reflect upon the possibility that pride is at work in the habit of the eye that will acknowledge only forms familiar from the world of practical experience and utility, while humility calls for a contemplative relaxation of our demand for the familiar so that we can open ourselves to that which surpasses us.

**Christopher O. Blum** brings us the fruit of his research in Paris in 1998 in an insightful consideration of the interrelationships that can be discovered among art, politics, and religion in the Middle Ages. His article titled “**Art and Politics in the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris**” takes us on a tour of the Sainte-Chapelle in the heart of Paris, commissioned by St. Louis IX, and the article demonstrates the great power of Christian art: “Far from the work of royal propaganda . . . the Sainte-Chapelle is the consummate work of Christian political art: by exalting the kingship of Jesus Christ it teaches earthly kings humility and a spirit of service.”

Through a fortunate coincidence, the second article begins with a view of a church in St. Paul, Minnesota, that is dedicated to St. Louis IX. **Siobhan Nash-Marshall** calls our attention to a window in this church depicting Joan of Arc and shows how this image indicates clearly the claim that “France is a sacred nation.” Nash-Marshall in “**On the Fate of Nations**” then undertakes a philosophical consideration of the problems inherent in such a claim, whether per-

taining to France or any other nation. She considers closely the communal nature of the human person and points to the “polyphony” that depends upon differences brought together in unities of different orders. A fresh understanding of the “mission” of nations emerges from this argument and Nash-Marshall concludes with a reminder of why we are responsible for the welfare of the nation within which we live.

Regular readers of this journal know that from time to time we offer a featured called “Reconsiderations” in which we reprint a neglected text that we think holds some importance within the Catholic intellectual tradition, and we offer a scholarly introduction to the reprinted text that is meant to illuminate its significance. My introduction to the work of Dietrich von Hildebrand, titled “**The Theological Axiology of Dietrich von Hildebrand,**” claims that we can understand von Hildebrand’s important writings in the areas of philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, and Christian spirituality, by noting how he consistently develops a rigorous account of values and demonstrates again and again the religious and theological significance of values. In “**Beauty in the Light of the Redemption**” by **Dietrich von Hildebrand**, an essay originally published in 1951, von Hildebrand takes up the challenge of those who would argue that the beauty of visible and audible things—beauty in art and nature—has no deep significance from a Christian perspective. The essay presents the arguments against the significance of beauty from a Christian perspective in strong terms, so that von Hildebrand can then vanquish those objections and bring before our eyes the wonder that we ought to experience when in the face of beauty. Whether we are aware of this or not, von Hildebrand argues, the beauty of art and of the world around us calls us toward the ultimate beauty of the Creator, and the fullest response to beauty makes us deeply aware of its religious significance in our lives.

This issue also offers two articles that explore the meaning and significance of piety in a historical light. **Gerald Malsbary** in “**Pietas and the Origins of Western Culture**” offers a “panoramic perspec-

tive” on the concept of piety in the ancient and early medieval periods to illuminate this aspect of the roots of western culture. Malsbary reminds us of the classical image that guides our understanding of the Roman concept of *pietas*: Vergil’s portrayal of Aeneas carrying his father on his back, the statues of the ancestral gods in his father’s arms, his son at his side, as they flee Troy starting a voyage that will culminate in the founding of Rome, and then goes on to explore Greek, Roman, and early Christian concepts of piety. In **“On Piety and History: The Lifelong Ambition of Monsignor Giuseppe De Luca,”** **Giulio Silano** takes up the question of historiography as examined in the work of an early twentieth-century Italian priest who undertook a monumental collection of materials to provide a history of piety. Pointing to the neglect of piety as a subject for consideration by modern historians, Silano (following Monsignor De Luca) calls for historians to understand the human person “from the inside,” that is, with due consideration given to the spiritual dimension of human activity as reflected in piety.

**Peter E. Hodgson** in **“The Christian Origin of Science”** examines the important issue of the relationship between science and religion and argues on the basis of the history of ideas that, contrary to some popular views that suppose Christianity and science to be always in conflict, Christianity can be seen as preparing the ground for the emergence and development of modern science in some significant ways. Hodgson concludes that “Christian theology has proved decisive for the birth and development of modern science.”

**J. L. A. Garcia** submits to philosophical scrutiny the question of theological dissent with Church teachings in the light of the 1998 Apostolic Letter *Ad Tuendam Fidem*. He helpfully examines the various meanings and levels of assent and clarifies the various ways in which dissent can be understood and experienced in this light, focusing especially on the practical implications of theological dissent with the moral teachings of the Church. Garcia’s examination of the issue leads him to this careful conclusion: “Because of the rupture it

marks in the Catholic's relation to her Church, even if active public expression of dissent is sometimes legitimate, it should occur infrequently and with the greatest reluctance."

The final article in this issue, "**On Liberal Education**" by **J Macoubrey Hubbard** sifts through many of the conventional accounts of the concept of liberal education in search of a fresh and rigorous understanding. Distinguishing liberal education from the liberal arts, Hubbard shows four distinct senses in which liberal education can be understood and argues that liberal education in the fullest sense should incorporate study of the traditional liberal arts, study of the fine arts, study that conveys the "cultured knowledge of a discipline," and studies that pursue "the liberal disciplines, wherein are to be found the explanations of the workings of the world."

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