

Preface

THROUGHOUT THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL and artistic traditions we find periods of cultural upheaval and transition in which a dialectical tension between Christianity and culture comprises a significant force within culture. Such tension sometimes provokes new theological insights and gives rise to the development of new ways of articulating Christian truth. In other cultural periods such tension reinfuses Christian values into modes of thought and forms of art that had drifted away from a Christian mooring and brings a renewed understanding of the ways new cultural developments can give fresh expression to a Christian understanding of the world. The vitality of Christianity in its relationship to culture becomes evident in the many forms of this dynamic tension. Recognition of this tension can be found in John Paul II's 1999 "Letter to Artists," which culminates in two provocative questions about the relationship between faith and culture: "Does the Church need art?" and "Does art need the Church?" The letter proposes an affirmative answer to each question, but the perceived need to raise such questions arises from the search for the relationship between faith and culture in each cultural period.

A surprising example of this tension can be found in some of the compositions of contemporary Russian composer Alfred Schnittke (1934–98). Schnittke is aptly described as the greatest Russian composer in the second half of the twentieth century after Dmitri Shostakovich, and his work was followed avidly in Russia in the

closing decades of the twentieth century. Schnittke, like Shostakovich, worked under a cloud of official suspicion within the Soviet regime. He was a spiritual seeker who converted to the Roman Catholic Church in 1982, although, according to the biography by Alexander Ivashkin, he maintained close ties with the Russian Orthodox tradition as well, making his confessions to a Russian Orthodox priest.¹ We know now that even as Schnittke mastered contemporary compositional techniques such as serialism and explored far-reaching innovations in contemporary music, he also drew upon a Christian vision of life as an element of his compositional style as early as 1966 in his *Second Violin Concerto*. Schnittke remained silent about this aspect of the concerto at the time of its first performance, but the latest recording of the work now includes the following note by Schnittke: “The work was conceived as an account of the Gospel, resulting in a specific dramaturgy of tone colour: the treatment of the soloist and strings (Jesus and his disciples) is linear and thematic, that of the winds and percussion (the hostile crowd and soldiers) is aggressively dotted and aleatory.”² Schnittke continued to draw on Christian sources as his music developed, bringing him into conflict with Soviet authorities. He composed a requiem between 1972 and 1974, but this work had to be “written undercover as part of the incidental music for Friedrich Schiller’s play *Don Carlos*, produced at the Moscow Mossover Theatre,” according to Ivashkin (132). In his first and second symphonies, Schnittke draws on Gregorian chant, and in his fourth symphony (completed in 1984), he derives melodies from Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Orthodox traditions, “heard above a repeating phrase created by the Orthodox line” (Ivashkin, 161). Perhaps his most powerful work drawing on Christian sources is his *Concerto for Mixed Chorus* written in 1985 (also known as *Choir Concerto*), which sets texts from Armenian poet Gregor Narekatsi (951–1003) and expresses the penitential spirit of Christianity in music that is pro-

foundly moving. There are many more instances of the ways in which Schnittke brought a Christian sensibility into some of the most advanced forms of contemporary composition and into a culture whose official opposition to Christianity remained strong until the very end of his career. In the world of contemporary music Schnittke is far from alone in the striking interplay of a Christian perspective with innovative musical styles. The vitality of Christianity in its reinvigorating contact with culture appears in remarkable ways.

In the first article in this issue of *Logos*, we find an account of a different kind of tension exhibited in the relationship between faith and culture. German theologian **Martin Rhonheimer**, in “**Mel Gibson’s ‘The Passion of the Christ’: A Plea for Fairness**,” observes that suspicion of Gibson’s film in Germany seemed to have reached official levels. He describes encountering a sign outside the theater where he saw the film on which a government commission warned “that the film was sadistic and brutal, historically unreliable, and contained religious propaganda which could encourage anti-Semitism.” Rhonheimer offers a careful analysis of the film and a response to the charges made against the film and argues that “the golden thread running through the entire film is the absolute sovereignty of the God-man, Jesus, over all that is happening, and his acceptance of the Father’s will.” “The theology underlying the film is biblical and exact,” in Rhonheimer’s view, and he goes on to show how the film brings into contemporary culture a biblically based message of love and salvation, citing the verse from Isaiah placed briefly on the screen by Gibson at the beginning of the film: “He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; by His wounds we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). Rhonheimer also addresses the question of anti-Semitism by presenting an account of the historical development of a “specifically Christian anti-Judaism,” but argues that Gibson does not in fact contribute to such views with this film.

Peter E. Hodgson in **“Galileo the Theologian”** illuminates a conflict between faith and culture in the area of scientific thinking and brings to this subject the insight and nuance required to overcome popular misconceptions of the Galileo conflict. Hodgson agrees with the observation offered by Stillman Drake that Galileo’s “frequent avowals of zeal for the Church were not just conventional phrases but actually expressed his heartfelt convictions.” According to Hodgson’s account, “the central question, then and now, is how to interpret the Bible, who has the authority to do so, and how the interpretation is related to the conclusions of contemporary science.” Pointing out the urgency of this question in Galileo’s time brought about by the Protestant Reformation, Hodgson helps us understand how this conflict developed as it did. Hodgson delineates the errors made by Church officials in dealing with Galileo and then calls attention to the rehabilitation of Galileo culminating in a statement by John Paul II that Galileo was “more perceptive in his Biblical hermeneutics than the theologians who opposed him.”

Amelia J. Uelmen describes a courageous and faith-filled response to the devastation of the Second World War in **“Chiara Lubich: A Life for Unity.”** Chiara Lubich is the founder of the International Focolare Movement, “known especially for its work in interreligious dialogue, and more generally as an effective instrument to build unity between people of different cultures, races, and social backgrounds.” Uelmen describes the development of the Focolare movement as a response of faith to a number of contemporary cultural problems and explores the spiritual teachings and practices that have enabled the Focolare Movement to become a spiritually powerful force for peace in the world.

Does the world of the theater need to be enlivened and illuminated by a renewal of its connection to religious experience and understanding? **Edwin Block** in **“Drama and Religious Experience, or Why Theater Still Matters”** examines the impoverishment of drama when detached from religious experience and argues that “drama continues to satisfy a deep need that is related to but differ-

ent from that which is satisfied by religious experience.” Drawing on a variety of thinkers including philosopher Louis Dupré and theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (among others), Block envisions the rich religious potential of drama: “a dramatic experience which most closely analogizes religious experience—a sense of the numinous, ‘the Mystic,’ the limit-experience—will have the potential to transport the audience beyond the boundaries of the everyday world, providing an intimation of the infinite.” Block’s essay demonstrates the powerful cultural enrichment that flows into forms of art when they are thoughtfully reintegrated with a profound awareness of their involvement with religious experience.

Economic and political changes in culture entail concomitant developments in Catholic social thought, argues **Thomas D. Williams** in “**Beyond Distributive Justice.**” After presenting a concise account of Newman’s concept of the development of doctrine, Williams turns to the concept of “distributive justice” and demonstrates ways in which issues of social justice in the relationship between economically wealthy and economically deprived nations in the modern world must move beyond simple accounts of the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. Drawing on John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus annus*, Williams shows that the issue at stake is not merely an analysis of equitable distribution but depends “rather on participation and integration into circles of productivity and exchange.” Christian concepts of solidarity and participation need to be brought into the foreground in the analysis of such issues, and this encounter between faith and the contemporary economic conditions of culture leads to the conclusion that “it would seem that the time has come to rework our moral lexicon. If modern notions of distribution are fraught with misconceptions that no longer reflect today’s socioeconomic situation, our vocabulary should undoubtedly move toward more appropriate language.” Williams suggests in his final pages that the Catholic understanding of participation as laid out in the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can supply the needed conceptual support.

Flannery O'Connor in the United States and Simone Weil in France each struggled with secularized modern cultures and each strove to find artistic, cultural, and life expressions that would reconnect modern life to Christian faith. **John F. Desmond** in **"Flannery O'Connor and Simone Weil: A Question of Sympathy"** shows that O'Connor came to recognize Weil as an important thinker concerning faith in the twentieth century and finds that "Weil challenged orthodox Christianity and, in so doing, challenged and helped clarify O'Connor's own religious beliefs." Desmond finds indications of Weil's influence in O'Connor's later fiction and especially in *The Violent Bear It Away* as she struggled "to dramatize the conflicts over faith in a culture that both she and Weil found to be hostile or indifferent to the hard demands of belief." Desmond quotes O'Connor's view that Weil was "the example of the religious consciousness without a religion," and shows how O'Connor responds to this central issue in modernity. Desmond concludes, "reading Weil over seven years, absorbing and contending with her views, helped O'Connor define and deepen the dimensions of her own faith and her art."

In **"The Proper Order of Conjugal Love: The Relevance of St. Augustine's Insights,"** **Perry J. Cahall** draws on St. Augustine to illuminate an important aspect of marital love. To a culture that sometimes seems to be obsessed with a soul-mate concept of love according to which the beloved person is expected to fill one's deepest spiritual needs, the illumination supplied by St. Augustine's understanding of love is much needed: "The insight that marital intercourse is about seeking the good of one's spouse according to the order of love, an order that is designed to enable us to experience the infinite Love of the Trinity, and not about getting anything from one's spouse is surely as valid for modern culture as it was for Augustine's." Cahall draws on St. Augustine's account of the "order of love" and derives this insight from the endeavor: "Augustine provides spouses with a much needed realism as together they support each other in their efforts to unite themselves, by cooperating with

grace, with their heavenly Spouse who alone can bear the weight of their deepest longings and truly be enjoyed in the sense that Augustine describes.”

There is a current fascination on at least one television show with demonstrating how the power of greed can enable people to overcome fear and surmount disgust. Without meaning to trivialize the topic, this stands as a perversion of a theme that can be found in the lives of many saints: their struggle in the fulfillment of love for those brought low by body-destroying illness to overcome disgust at the degeneration of the body in illness. **Molly Morrison** explores this phenomenon in one saint in particular in “**Strange Miracles: A Study of the Peculiar Healings of St. Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi**,” a Renaissance Italian nun who lived from 1566 to 1607. In her “fervent desire to care for the ill,” this saint gave rise to miraculous cures with a loving touch that included the licking of wounds. Morrison places such actions in historical and theological context in the life of Maria Maddalena and demonstrates a distinctive element that emerges in the life of this saint: the actions described were not part of a discipline to develop her spiritual strength or to prove herself but were modeled on Christ as healer. Morrison brings us to this conclusion: “Maria Maddalena’s strange miracles remind us that the imitation of Christ can be as astonishing and as paradoxical as the lives of the saints themselves.”

Philosophers **Jeffrey E. Brower** and **Michael C. Rea** explore the deep problems posed by the Christian doctrine of the trinity in “**Understanding the Trinity**” and explore especially why the mystery of this doctrine is particularly difficult for the contemporary mind to grasp. After bringing forward the logical difficulties posed by the doctrine, the authors consider a number of contemporary strategies for addressing these problems—strategies that rely on the development of analogies that can help cultivate insight into the doctrine and the mystery it poses. Brower and Rea discuss the urgency of making this indispensable Christian doctrine more amenable to modern understanding, and while acknowledging that

none of the analogies they consider is flawless, they argue persuasively that the analogies to varying degrees shed much needed light on the mystery of the Trinity.

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Notes

1. Alexander Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 160.
2. *Schnittke: Complete Violin Concertos* (CD: Teldec 3984-26866-2, 2000), page 6 in the CD booklet.