

Preface

CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS of religion and culture are too often conducted in polarizing terms that exert leverage for the sake of increasing division instead of in a manner that seeks illumination and the shared understanding such illumination can bring. The deep links between cult and culture offer ample opportunity for the enlargement of a vision of common purpose if only we can step aside from the heat of conflict long enough to retrieve an understanding of the ways in which we are created to live in community. *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* strives to renew such an understanding and does so from multiple directions simultaneously within each issue. Conflicts between religion and politics and religion and science are two primary areas of contention in the world today, and we all stand in need of insights that can quell such conflicts and lead to social healing. *Logos* strives in each issue to make its own modest contribution to such healing, and this issue offers several articles that take up the problems posed in those areas of contention.

One ultimate expression of conflict between religion and politics comes to expression through martyrdom, either through political persecution that tries to assert the state as the highest authority or through the witness of one who is willing to sacrifice life in the expression of steadfast love for God over all other sources of value and authority. Whether in Christianity or in Islam, martyrdom can never be properly understood in purely political terms and must be understood through a comprehensive understanding of the religious context in which it takes its proper meaning. In an article titled

“The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam,” A. Ezzati makes this point about Islam as “an all inclusive systematic religion,” demonstrating “how the concept of martyrdom in Islam is linked with the entire religion of Islam,” and can be understood only in such comprehensive terms.¹ In the context of Christianity, a compelling insistence on this point is provided in dramatic terms by Georges Bernanos in his play *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. In the context of the French Revolution, as a group of Carmelite nuns face persecution and contemplate their own martyrdom, the prioress offers a stern warning to any of the sisters who might be eager for the glory of martyrdom: “What! You seek to pray for sinners, that is, for their betterment, and at the same time you hope to see them commit the gravest of murders—against consecrated persons?”² Love is at the very root of Christianity, and one who would forget love of God and love of the enemy in a moment of crisis would fail to act as a witness to the ultimate truth. It is because martyrdom expresses love as supreme truth that one can speak of the spiritual beauty of martyrdom, as John Saward points out: “The beauty of martyrdom is the beauty of the martyr’s heroic virtue, of the Theological Virtues of faith, hope, and charity exalted to a valiant degree.”³ Later in this preface, I will discuss an article in this issue that shows how a great work of visual art provides deep insight into the phenomenon of martyrdom.

Conflicts between science and religion have been longstanding but have usually displayed deep mutual misunderstanding. Usually such misunderstandings stem from a fear or concern that the claims to truth made by religion are undermined by the coexistence of scientific propositions, or that the progress of scientific exploration will be impeded by the coexistence of religious faith. Each exerts considerable influence over contemporary worldviews, and it is inevitable that dialog is needed to reach an understanding of the complementarity that pertains between them. *Logos* has published a number of articles over the years that try to put to rest various aspects of the misunderstandings that cause conflict between science

and religion, and in this issue, we address the continuing discussion of the compatibility between a scientific theory of evolution and Christian theology.

Archbishop **Józef M. Życiński** draws upon the teachings of John Paul II to develop a view of the relationship between evolution and Catholic theology in **“Evolution and Christian Thought in Dialog according to the Teaching of John Paul II.”** Życiński recognizes that the dialog between science and religion is one part of the larger dialog between faith and culture, and the importance of the natural sciences in contemporary culture brings urgency to this dialog. The article traces the many efforts made by John Paul II over the years to promote mutual understanding between science and religion, and shows that the message of John Paul II “definitely excludes the possibility for a reconciliation with the Christian position of those versions of fundamentalism in which in an attempt is made to put in opposition a biblical and a scientific interpretation of the origin of man.” At the same time, modes of thought in science analogous to religious fundamentalism must be put aside: “In the rich variety of contemporary theories of evolution, it is possible to meet radical proposals in which the attempt is made to subordinate even the most sublime realms of human experience to uncomplicated mechanisms.” Having put aside those views on either side that exclude the possibility of meaningful dialog, Życiński (in his presentation of the thought of John Paul II) shows the open field in which dialogue can take place: “It is possible to be a Christian and to keep an open mind on the subject of Darwin’s theory. . . . The drama comes only when, in the name of private fancy, someone attempts to force on Christians a war on the theory of evolution.” The article quotes these words of John Paul II as a call to reconciliation between science and religion: “What is critically important is that each discipline should continue to enrich, nourish and challenge the other to be more fully what it can be and to contribute to our vision of who we are and who we are becoming.”

The Church can make an important contribution to political stability through the promotion of international law, argues **Paolo G. Carozza** in “**The Universal Common Good and the Authority of International Law.**” As readers will discover if they consult the helpful index of authors available on the *Logos* Web site, we previously published an article by Carozza on the idea of human rights in Latin America. Carozza’s article in the current issue draws upon the Catholic intellectual tradition to assert this proposition: “International law and international legal institutions should be considered to have a special moral status in the contemporary global order in virtue of the existence and requirements of the universal common good.” Just as discussions of religion and science must put aside reductive understandings of either domain to establish the possibility of dialogue, the exploration of international law within a Christian perspective requires that we set aside “the reductive positivist account of law,” an account that has never been at home in the Catholic tradition. Carozza presents the concept of “the universal common good” and offers reflections on the content of such a concept in the Catholic tradition and then goes on to show that such principles can guide reflections on international law. Carozza argues that “existing institutions [such as the United Nations] do in certain significant cases serve to realize the universal common good, but are at the same time not necessarily authoritative,” and on that basis, he goes on to explore the responsibilities of states for international law and institutions. The article concludes with a call to transformation that will promote the possibilities of international law: “Our action in law and politics needs to be founded on a true education, an education of the human heart to recognize and act with constant regard for the mystery, meaning, and truth of the human person.”

Distinguished theologian **Lawrence S. Cunningham** in “**Francis of Assisi as a Catholic Saint**” reflects upon the importance of St. Francis and pursues three fundamental points: “(1) to argue that Francis did not appear out of the blue without precedents as if he

were a flower blossoming in the desert of the Medieval Church; (2) to argue that Francis was a perfectly orthodox medieval Catholic who had been deeply influenced by the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council; and (3) to raise the question that if my second point is plausible, why then is St. Francis such a perennial point of reference not only for Catholics but by other Christians and non-Christians alike?" Cunningham sets the historical context of Church reform as the background from which Francis emerges and examines his actions in this light, and then shows that the concerns of Francis were to implement the concerns of Lateran IV: "Francis's intense faith in the real presence of Christ under the eucharistic forms of bread and wine were part of a larger vision of faith that gives us some insight into the coherent theological vision of Francis." The article proposes that the widespread admiration for Francis derives, however paradoxical this may seem, from "his sense of the particularity of Christian love flowing from faith in Christ." This particularity of love "makes his life a lesson in universality." Francis, Cunningham concludes, "has taught us that it is possible to be a profound exegete of the Scriptures not in study but in act."

Nathan Schlueter in "**The Virtue of 'Lying': Recovering the 'Saving Beauty' of Plato's Poetic Vision,**" delves into Plato's *Republic* to harvest Plato's profound insight into the power and significance of beauty and to illuminate our understanding of the proper function of art in a complete human life when understood from a Christian perspective. The article presents an exegesis of Plato's treatment of art and language in *The Republic*, then shows how these views were influential within the tradition of Christian thought. The concluding section of the article develops the concept of "the tyrannical imagination," rooted in the thinking of Machiavelli, which ultimately leads to a deep contemporary crisis: "The fruit of the tyrannical imagination is the culture of death." A Christian understanding of the imagination is needed to overcome such a crisis, and Schlueter invokes the call of Jacques Maritain for the emergence of "artists who, informed by their Christian vision,

seek to express beauty in all its splendor, who are unafraid to explore and confront all dimensions of reality in their art, confident that ‘the whole creation’ has been redeemed by Christ and even now groans for the completion of that redemption.”

In **“The Role of the Holy Spirit in Gerald Manley Hopkins’s Poetry,” Timothy F. Jackson** develops a reading of Hopkins’s work that brings to light the pervasive emphasis on the activity of the Holy Spirit within the vision emanating from the poetry. Jackson helpfully builds upon the traditional understanding of the Christocentric character of Hopkins’s poetry, and turns to the third person of the Trinity in expanding our understanding of the theological richness inherent in the poetry of Hopkins. Jackson draws upon sermons and other writings by Hopkins to build his case and then offers readings of several of the key poems by Hopkins to demonstrate the importance of the Holy Spirit within the poetry. The gifts of the Holy Spirit emerge as a recurrent feature within the poems and provide a keynote for our understanding of the developing vision of the great poet.

J. Ranilo B. Hermida in **“Simone Weil: A Sense of God,”** begins with the apparent paradox that although Weil’s sense of God is deeply embedded in her many writings, she nevertheless claims for herself: “I may say that never at any moment in my life have I ‘sought for God.’” Such ironies are typical in the work of this important but sometimes elusive writer, and Hermida seeks to illuminate more precisely the contour of the sense of God in Weil’s work: “To bear a sense of God, for Weil, is to go beyond a mere religious perception of reality. It is more than an intellectual stance but must spill onto the very conduct of life, onto a way of life that renounces the sense of self.” The article develops some key concepts in Weil’s vision, especially “decreation,” which is “the human participation in the creative action of God in the world,” and “malheur” (misery or affliction), which Weil sees as “an integral part of the human experience.” Hermida offers a stirring conclusion to his account of Weil’s sense

of God: “To be religious, for Weil . . . is to verily incarnate uninhibited obedience to . . . the God who is absent, who emptied himself into the world and transformed his substance in the blind necessity of that world, who died in the inconsolable pits of affliction.”

This preface began with a reflection on martyrdom as the site of an ultimate conflict between religion and politics, and the final article by **David Salter** explores the insight into martyrdom made available by a great painter through his art. “**Anthony Van Dyck’s St. Sebastian: Reimagining the Death of a Martyr**” brings forward the traditional accounts of the life of St. Sebastian that were available to the great seventeenth-century Flemish painter and points out the early fascination this subject held for Van Dyck in the early stages of his career. Salter shows how the painter was able to “reconceptualize the nature of Sebastian’s sainthood,” which enabled him to bring about “a fundamental shift in his portrayal of the saint’s subjective spiritual and emotional states.” Salter contrasts Van Dyck’s work with more conventional depictions of St. Sebastian and shows how Van Dyck enacts a “shift in emphasis from action to contemplation and from an exterior state of being to an interior state of mind.” Van Dyck uses the erotic undertones of the scene he depicts to exhibit the profound spiritual ecstasy of the martyr in union with God, thereby making evident the centrality of love in the phenomenon of martyrdom.

Editor’s Note

In the text on the back cover of the Fall 2005 issue, we incorrectly stated the address for Notre Dame de l’ Hermitage (the site of the fresco featured on the cover of that issue). It is in Saint Chamond (not Noirétable), France.

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Editor

Notes

1. A. Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam," <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/Concept-Ezzati.htm>. Accessed November 7, 2005.
2. Georges Bernanos, *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, part 4, scene 1 (trans. Michael Legat), in *The Heroic Face of Innocence: Three Stories by Georges Bernanos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 106.
3. John Seward, *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 176.