We are in an odd position in relation to visual images. Technologists and entrepreneurs have invented and produced powerful devices of various types that enable us to summon to appearance images both still and moving from almost anywhere at almost any time. We are saturated with images. But are we generally attentive and responsive to the spiritual quality of images, especially considering that the human capacity to imagine and artistically render and preserve images seems to have emerged for spiritual purposes in the first place? I am thinking here of the words of Jean Clottes, a French expert in prehistoric cave paintings, who, when contemplating the images drawn on the walls of what is now called Chauvet Cave in southern France more than 30,000 years ago, summarized how he regards human beings in relation to our remote ancestors who drew these images: “Homo sapiens is Homo spiritualis.” These words indicate that we find the origins of our kind in the capacity for spiritual experience rather than knowledge. Clottes disavows for himself any specifically religious claims, but when considering what we might now call the remarkable collected words in numerous caves completed in the Paleolithic age by our remote ancestors,
it seems right that we can discern something like spiritual ancestry in relation to the unknown artists or religious celebrants who painted these images. The cultural differentiation indicated by the terms “art” and “religion” makes it necessary for us to imagine the fusion of these concepts in an undifferentiated form that probably prevailed for the makers and users of these images. We live in a time in which we possess the technological capability of discovering, studying, comparing, reproducing, and preserving these images to an extent never before possible. But the ability to discern the spiritual qualities and purposes of these images is probably rare.

Although we might think that the extensive knowledge of ancient and contemporary religious doctrine and practice in Christianity would place us in a position of ready responsiveness to Christian religious images, there is reason to believe that this is not generally the case. This point is made clear by Dominican theologian and historian of art François Boespflüg, who has recently published a monumental history of artistic images of God in the Christian tradition titled *Dieu et ses images* (God and His Images), which he calls in the title of his introduction “Une histoire iconique de Dieu” (An Iconographic History of God). Boespflüg asserts that God seems to have departed from contemporary art, that in European art of the second half of the twentieth century depictions of the crucified Christ are almost the only images of God to be found and that these depictions generally seem disconnected from the essential Christian affirmation of Christ as the Incarnation and the Savior, and that generally those contemplating these images are not inclined to make the same declaration as the centurion who, while gazing at Christ on the cross, exclaimed: “Truly, this was the son of God” (484).

But the purpose of Boespflüg’s book is not to bemoan this current cultural condition, which may, after all, turn out to be temporary. Instead, he recognizes that a number of confluent conditions make an iconographic study such as his possible today, especially the accessibility of an enormous number of images from across long periods of history and the possibility of easy consultation among
experts facilitated by the Internet, and the development of the disciplines of art history and theology such that the former no longer need restrict itself to analyses of provenance and style and the latter need no longer rely exclusively on written documents and linguistic sources in seeking to understand theological truths. Nor is it necessary to subordinate an iconographic history to biographical, political, social, and economic strands of historical change—artistic images can be understood as expressions of faith, and however contested and even sometimes interdicted such expressions might be, they form their own pervasive history and exist in a kind of communal relation to one another in ways that are often independent of other strands of historical change.

This iconographic history, according to Boespflüg, is above all the story of an “immense historical process of the humanization of God,” which can be understood as a kind of pictorial version unfolding slowly over time of the Incarnation. This vast historical process is complex, with many stages and contradictions and controversies in its unfolding, but is one in which the descent of God in the world of forms can be discerned (486). Boespflüg reminds us of the ancient theological expression that forms the heart of Christian anthropology: *homo capax Dei*, the human person has the capacity for God. But as a result of his iconographical history, he proposes an inversion of this expression: *Figura Dei capax totius hominis*, the figure of God has the capacity to encompass all human beings, that is, we have discovered through the artistic figuration of God the wide range and variation of the human person (485). This claim is consistent with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et spes*: “Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” (22). Boespflüg’s iconographical history would indicate a kind of parallel confirmation of the theological truth expressed in those words. Recognizing this relationship between a theological truth that unfolds in the iconographic tradition and a truth that finds linguistic expression in the teaching of the
council, we can better understand Boespflüg’s claim and hope that the iconographical history he has produced can be a partner to the history of the Church (492).

The irremediable limitations in our knowledge of the culture of the Paleolithic period will probably prevent any certain knowledge of the religious practices and sensibility that stand behind the great paintings found in places such as Chauvet Cave. But the same technological and cultural forces that have made it possible to see consistent patterns and relationships among these images can also be brought to bear, as François Boespflüg has shown, to reveal the inner coherence of the vast historical record of artistic images of God in the Christian tradition, and it has become possible to see all the more clearly the theological significance of the artistic tradition. Boespflüg ends his book with the expression of hope that his history can make a contribution to ecumenism and to interreligious dialogue; it is plausible that a richer understanding of the religious significance of images in the Christian tradition will make us all the more capable of recognizing such significance in artistic images well beyond our own tradition as well.

The first article in this issue of Logos addresses from a philosophical perspective the challenge of analyzing what we might call the apparent modern lack of receptivity to a religious understanding of the world conveyed by the concept of disenchantment and then finding a path through such disenchantment toward a renewed understanding of religious truths. Brian D. Robinette in “Heraclitean Nature and the Comfort of the Resurrection: Theology in an Open Space” approaches this topic through an examination of a sonnet by Gerald Manley Hopkins titled “That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and the Comfort of the Resurrection.” Robinette finds in Hopkins’s poem a kind of paradigmatic view of the modern tension between a Heraclitean (and postmodern) view of the universe as a vast and impersonal space and “a vision inspired by the Resurrection that can be characterized by a hope for its transfiguration into Christic
form.” Drawing upon the work of Charles Taylor, Robinette traces the rise of modes of conceptualization shaped predominantly by secularization in the centuries of the modern age, and then seeks the sources for “recovering the cosmic breadth of eschatological hope.” Above all, allowing our vision to be shaped by the Resurrection, developing what Robinette calls an “Easter-shaped vision,” provides a path of recovery to a way of seeing and imagining the cosmos in a manner that recognizes the presence and participation of God in the world. The article offers a careful and well-delineated account of the particular ways in which such a mode of vision can be recovered in contemporary intellectual and cultural life.

Ryan N. S. Topping in “The Divine Comedy and Four Lessons in the Catholic Moral Vision” offers reflections drawn from contemporary difficulties of the danger of releasing ourselves from the claims of moral law, and then balances this account of the importance of moral law with a reminder of the indispensability of enacting moral claims in the spirit of love. Recognizing that Dante’s great poem provides an illuminating moral vision through which we can strengthen our understanding of the interrelationship of morality and love, Topping turns to Dante to draw out four points of illumination of the Catholic moral vision. First, he finds in the poem a reflection on the pedagogical nature of pain and pleasure, with the horrifying depictions of pain in “Inferno” bringing to appearance the import of the choices we make and with the lovely and life-enhancing sensory qualities in “Paradiso” reminding us of joy in communion with God. Next, he shows how the poem illuminates the nature of the act of conscience and then turns to finding an account of the doctrine of the mean within the poem. Finally, he shows how the poem impresses upon us a vision of the primacy of love. Topping concludes with praise of Dante for the “clarity with which his images synthesize classical and Biblical traditions of moral philosophy.”

Caery Evangelist provides a response to a recent book by Nicholas Boyle, Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature, in an article titled “Imaginative Inventions: A Purposive
**Account of Literature in Response to Nicholas Boyle.** Evangelist commends Boyle for his effort to show how sacred and secular writings can be understood as ways of conveying religious truths and joins in that effort while suggesting that the undertaking can be improved by working out a better account of the what is meant by secular literature. Evangelist argues that Boyle’s definition of secular literature as “nonpurposive” is misleading and inadequate, especially when taken in conjunction with Boyle’s argument that we can read literature as a source for learning sacred truths. But, according to Evangelist, this interferes with the attempt to distinguish between literary art as nonpurposive from other nonliterary forms of discourse that are dominated by the particular utilitarian purposes they serve, since seeking sacred truths would seem to be a purposive activity. Drawing primarily upon the work of Paul Ricoeur, Evangelist develops an account of literature as “imaginative invention,” discourse that seeks to open a door to new possibilities about how we might reflect on, respond to, and experience the world we inhabit.” After developing this line of reflection further, the article returns in a cooperative spirit to Boyle’s book with the suggestion that the conceptual clarification put forward by Evangelist can support the project Boyle has undertaken in his study.

Joseph T. Stuart in “Christopher Dawson and the Idea of Progress” provides a clear and comprehensive account of the ways in which Dawson confronted the prevailing conceptualization of progress in his time and developed an understanding of history that overcame the deficiencies of the dominant views of this era. Dawson, above all, developed a concept of history through which the relationship of human beings both to nature and to the divine could be properly understood. Stuart suggests that Dawson was neither infected by the optimism of some of his contemporaries in their view of progress nor tainted by the pessimism that prevailed among others, managing to establish in their stead a realistic perspective that recognized both the destructive and the life-enhancing historical forces at work in human culture. Stuart concludes his article
with a reflection on the concept of hope as emphasized in a recent encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, and suggests that the vision of progress put forward by Dawson can nourish such hope.

In “C. S. Lewis’s Till We Have Faces and the Transformation of Love,” Nancy Enright draws upon Lewis’s account of love in his book, The Four Loves, to illuminate the way Lewis reconceived a pagan myth in a Christian light in his great novel. Enright shows how various sections of the novel clearly embody the four concepts of love identified by Lewis, with storge (affection), philia (friendship), and eros (romantic love) finally culminating in the redemption of these lower forms of love by agape (charity). Enright’s detailed study of the novel demonstrates the congruence of Lewis’s thought in various forms and illuminates the power of the novel as it offers a Christian vision brought to light through ancient myth.

Daniel Moran in “The Man Who Was Thursday: Chesterton’s Duel with the Fin de Siècle” provides an insightful reading of Chesterton’s novel understood in the light of Chesterton’s critical encounter with the prevailing worldview in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. The article draws richly upon Chesterton’s writings while concentrating on key characters in the novel through which Chesterton’s revulsion against the predominant intellectual climate of the period comes to appearance. The novel, according to Moran, is “a sustained harangue against moral, philosophical, and artistic entropy disguised as a thriller,” and its artistic purpose is centered in a playful depiction of the search for a path through which the damaging elements of that climate can be overcome in an affirmation of Christian orthodoxy.

Our previous issue included the first part of a two-part article by Patrick F. O’Connell, and in this issue we present “‘Leisure to Make Rhymes’: St. Thomas More as English Poet, Part Two.” O’Connell continues and concludes his insightful and appreciative study of More’s verse written in English, and argues on the basis of his study that More deserves “a firm if minor place in the early modern development of the English poetic tradition.”
Finally, we conclude this issue with an offering in our ongoing occasional series of Reconsiderations. In honor of the beatification of John Henry Newman, we reprint “Sermon 23. Love the One Thing Needful.” Newman’s sermon is introduced and set within the framework of his thought in an article by David Paul Deavel titled “Iron Hardness, Surpassing Sweetness, Newman as Preacher.”

Michael C. Jordan
Editor

Notes

2. François Boespflüg, Dieu et ses images (Bayard: Montrouge, 2008).