A scene during the opening minutes of a new film, *Ida*, by Polish-born director Pawel Pawlikowski, shows a nun lovingly and patiently cleaning and restoring a painted statue depicting the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and then a small group of nuns carrying the statue to reposition it in its place outside of their convent. We can readily see why such care must be given to this statue: it stands exposed to the harsh elements as snow falls upon the group in the twilight. We soon learn as the film unfolds that such harshness is atmospheric, conveying the sense of a deeply troubled place and time: this is Poland in 1962, still suffering from the Second World War and the Holocaust and now in the grip of Soviet-era oppression. Although the film does not place a strong focus on the Sacred Heart image, that image can be recognized in retrospect as emblematic of the theme of the characters and the world they inhabit are in need of healing, and the film dares to show that as profound evil is excavated and exposed, faith and divine love offer a redemptive power, even if that power is not accepted and embraced by all. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is traditionally associated with the theme of reparation in Catholicism, and the film makes us aware
that this convent is located in a country marked grievously by the burden of sin.

The trajectory of the film reaches quickly beyond the convent. Anna is the name of the young woman shown attending to the statue, and she is a novice in the order. Her Mother Superior informs Anna that before she will be permitted to take her vows, she must leave the convent and visit her only surviving relative, an aunt named Wanda, whose existence is revealed to her for the first time in this conversation. Anna travels alone to the gray city and finds her aunt at home in her apartment. Within minutes of an ungracious welcome, Anna is told by Wanda that she is a Jew named Ida and that her parents were killed during the war. Her aunt seems to sneer at the novice’s habit while telling her, “You’re a Jewish nun.”

The suffering of this time and place is refracted through these two women upon whom the film focuses intimately: one who is only now at the age of eighteen beginning to discover the terrible conditions into which she has been born and which she has somehow survived, and the other who about eighteen years earlier had left her own young son with her sister (Ida’s mother) and her sister’s husband, desperately entrusting this Jewish family and their farm to the care of a Christian farmer and his family during World War II. Wanda had joined the Polish resistance, survived the war, and became a powerful prosecutor for the Polish government in the years during which the Communist regime consolidated its power. She was responsible for the execution of “enemies of the state” before losing influence, probably due to her alcoholism. Until now, Wanda has resolutely turned away from facing the suffering of her past, having made no effort to contact her only niece and no effort to learn how her child and sister and brother-in-law had been killed. She tries to dismiss Anna now as well, only to relent and soften with no pleading from Anna as she agrees to join her niece on a journey of discovery into the sins of the past.

Wanda, then, is at the opposite extreme to the innocence of
Anna. Wanda is weighed down both by crimes committed against her and her family as Jews and by her own crimes of accommodation with the regime in power after the war—she is both burdened and damaged.

This film, remarkably, brings to display the spiritual dimension of sin, suffering, and healing that underlies the vast political, sociological, and historical network of causes that devastated this part of the world during the twentieth century. Every stylistic choice made by Pawlikowski serves the artistic function of shifting our awareness toward the spiritual dimension. The film immediately negates the expectation of conventional contemporary cinematic spectacle by being shot in black and white, with an aspect ratio of 1.37:1 that was standard for films up until the early 1950s, after which it has been used rarely, and with a largely static camera shooting carefully framed images. Two films by French director Robert Bresson came to mind when watching this film, both in black and white: *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), with its intense sense of a place in which Catholicism is both deeply rooted and taken for granted and with its focus on a priest whose intervention in a troubled household helps a grieving mother repent for her sin against hope, and *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), in which a donkey bears the sins inflicted upon him seemingly with acceptance and compassion for a troubled world.

Anna and Wanda travel through a countryside touched everywhere by Catholicism to an old family farm that conceals a terrible sin that must be uncovered, and Anna is gradually and patiently educated by her experience of the world that her aunt uncovers during their journey. As with Bresson’s films, the style of *Ida* invites a meditative and contemplative approach in which we sense deep spiritual unrest as an affliction upon the people who dwell in this world. We are invited to wonder whether Anna’s faith will be sufficient to the needs she encounters.

As Anna and Wanda journey together, Anna finds the mark of Catholicism at roadside shrines and in requests for blessings to be
bestowed; Wanda finds opportunities for hard drinking and casual sexual encounters, as well as frequent indications of nervous guilt from those she questions when she conducts inquiries about Jews who used to live in the area. But their influence upon one another does not seem to be proportionately reciprocal. Anna is inevitably rendered more worldly as she descends into the world of sin with her aunt, but Wanda seems impervious to spiritual development through interaction with her niece, showing no renewal of interest in the spiritual dimension of her own Jewish heritage and never wavering from contempt for Anna’s faith. Wanda’s prosecutorial toughness is indispensable to the progress made in the search for the truth about what happened to their family. But it is Anna’s goodness that seems to elicit the confession of sin that reveals the hidden dark truth as the son of the man to whom Wanda had entrusted her family comes forward to Anna with the proposal to show her the place where the family is buried in exchange for being permitted to continue to possess the farm that had once belonged to the murdered family, and then finally produces a confession of responsibility and guilt uttered literally from within the grave in which the family members had been buried.

Pawlikowski seems deeply attuned to the need for a transcendent love that can offer hope and healing in the face of devastation, and it is helpful to note this concern as reflected in a widely praised film that he completed about ten years ago, *My Summer of Love* (2004). That film is set in England and tells the story of two girls in their late adolescent years who seem utterly adrift with only tenuous ties to families that seem to have suffered great harm. One of the girls is from a wealthy family and in a bold adolescent manner, she speaks of Nietzsche and the death of God. The other girl is from a poor family and has been orphaned. She now lives with her older brother, who while in prison had been converted to a born-again charismatic Protestant faith, and he transforms the pub he inherited from his parents into a Christian meeting hall. The two girls fall in love, but it is a troubled and distorted love as evidenced
by the vows they pronounce in the intensity of their passion: if you ever leave me, I will kill you. To which the reply is: if you ever leave me, I will kill you, and then I will kill myself. The girls also mock the power of evil, at one point playing out an exorcism scene that they no doubt base on the popular film, *The Exorcist*. Neither the love of Christ professed by the brother nor the romantic love professed for one another by the two girls succeeds in transcending the attachment to ego and power that marks the reality of evil in the world. When the brother finds that he is unable to convert his sister to his faith, he first locks her in her room, and then becomes violent against her when she mocks his faith, an outburst that seems to fill him with disgust against himself as he turns in anger against the members of his religious group and ejects them from his home. And when one of the girls announces that she is returning to school, and we learn that she has been fabricating a theatrical summer romance, the other girl turns violent and almost enacts the vow of destruction the two had mutually pledged if one should leave the other. *My Summer of Love*, we find, has been ironically named, for it depicts the summer of the failure of transcendent love, and seems to ask us to grieve this failure.

Pawlikowski in *Ida* returns to a meditation on the deeply felt need for transcendent love. Even though many Polish Catholics have failed to live out the call to love one’s neighbor and have permitted and in some cases participated in the destruction of their Jewish neighbors, the convent and the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus continue to bear witness to God’s love. As Anna and Wanda decide to undertake their journey to discover what had happened to their family, Wanda challenges Anna to consider that she might find God is not there. It is Anna’s completion of the act of religious discernment prior to taking her vows that constitutes the decisive story frame for this film.

The road trip and the detective story elements of the film, then, are embedded by Pawlinkowski within the larger question of whether love can survive and overcome the encounter with the
presence of evil in the world. Just as *My Summer of Love* ponders love both in the context of religious faith and in the context of romantic personal relationships, so also *Ida* includes Anna’s introduction to the possibility of romantic love. During their travel, Wanda and Anna have picked up a hitchhiker, a young man who beautifully and soulfully plays songs by John Coltrane on his alto saxophone. Anna clearly finds that romantic feelings have awakened in her in the presence of this young man, but she resists those feelings to return to the convent where she plans to take her vows. But she is disturbed by the new-found sensual feelings that have been awakened in her, and at night she returns to the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to ask forgiveness, because she is not ready to take her vows. Anna’s emotional expressions have been relatively sparse and measured throughout much of the film, but as she watches the other novices take their vows, we see tears falling from Anna’s eyes. Anna returns to Wanda’s apartment in the city and literally walks in her shoes, tottering on Wanda’s high heels while wearing one of Wanda’s dresses and swigging vodka from the bottle as Wanda had often done. Anna seems capable of entering Wanda’s experience of the world to an extent that Wanda could never reciprocate, having previously turned aside Anna’s invitation to her aunt to attend the ritual in which she would take her religious vows.

But Anna never relents in her journey down the path of discernment, and she clearly recognizes that she does not have a calling to the life of romantic love and perhaps marriage, foreseeing not fulfillment but a sequence of events in the future of such love: “and then? And then what?” The concluding scene of the film indicates that Anna is joyfully resolute in heeding her vocation to the religious life, as she again wears the nun’s habit and strides determinedly back toward the convent. This is the only scene shot with a handheld camera as we hear Anna’s footsteps and mark the decision signaled by her posture, gait, and demeanor: the energy of the scene is clear and positive. Although music is featured beautifully throughout this film, up until the concluding scene the music has always
been located within the world occupied by the characters, heard, responded to, and sometimes performed by them. At the end, we hear a chorale by J. S. Bach transcribed by Busoni, and the music confirms the testimony to the reality of the love of God embraced by Anna as a fulfillment that flourishes even within a world that bears the scars of evil.

The film has been heralded by some critics as a masterpiece and has won a number of awards around the world. In interviews, Pawlikowski has confirmed that the religious theme pondered by the film holds intense importance for him. After noting that the historical situation of his native Poland in 1962 poses significant narrative challenges, he observes, “But the theme has haunted me for years: what does it mean to be Christian? Can you be a good Christian without being Polish Catholic? Is religion a tribal demarcation or is it something spiritual within you?” He also notes the genesis in his thinking of the two main characters in the film. The story of the nun who discovers that she was born a Jew occurred to him based on an account of a priest who late in life discovered that he was of Jewish heritage. The discovery changed him by deepening his faith. The character of Wanda was based on a woman he had met in Oxford and who he learned later had been an official in the Polish government after the war and had participated in the Communist consolidation of power. Pawlikowski tells us in this same interview that he learned that his own father had been half-Jewish, which is why his family had disappeared, and that although his family was not particularly religious, “I rediscovered religion for myself, strangely, when I was living abroad and met a very wise Dominican priest. I’m not deeply religious, but I’m definitely part of that electro-magnetic field.” He concludes this line of thought by observing, “Let’s just say that Christ’s teachings are not irrelevant.” Ida as a cinematic work of art indicates that Pawlikowski is deliberately engaging in understatement in that comment.

The first article in this issue of Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture presents an account of the importance of the philosophi-
cal work of Karol Wojtyła, who at the time at which the Polish film, *Ida* (discussed above in the preface), is set, would have been a priest for about sixteen years and the auxiliary bishop of Krakow. Richard Spinello, in “The Enduring Relevance of Karol Wojtyła’s Philosophy,” does not attempt to connect Wojtyła’s life experience in Poland to the development of his contributions to philosophy, but the article highlights contributions to the philosophy of freedom and to social philosophy, both areas in which life in Poland during that time period would have inevitably been deeply instructive. Spinello notes that “Wojtyła’s philosophy of freedom remains faithful to Thomism, but goes beyond Thomism by carefully exploring the subjective, lived experience of freedom,” and it is this grounding in Thomism combined with “his limited openness to contemporary philosophy, especially phenomenological realism” that Spinello finds to establish a promising direction for Catholic philosophy. The article makes it clear that Wojtyła’s philosophy develops an important defense of the nature and dignity of the human person that stands in opposition to the many destructive forces unleashed against the human person in that time and place.

Volume 17:2 of this journal presented the first part of a two-part article by Timothy W. Burns, and we offer the concluding section here: “John Courtney Murray, Religious Liberty, and Modernity, Part II: Modern Constitutional Democracy.” Here Burns takes up the argument made by Murray’s followers and the outline of which can be found in Murray’s writings that modern constitutional democracy is the best political order because of its compatibility with Catholic principles. The article establishes the problems that are inherent in this view according to Burns, and thereby seeks to open a path to a much richer critique of the limitations of modern political regimes so that a reinvigorated search for the proper ends of the human person in political life can be undertaken from a Catholic perspective. “Modern political philosophy, on this telling, is a bold experimental project that sets out to refute the validity of all transcendent longings, above all the
longings that give rise to the various opinions about the rule of a mysterious if just God. But modern political philosophers appear to have been crucially mistaken in at least one important respect: human beings show no sign of having become so fully content with the security and comfort brought about by commerce that we feel no longer the desire to escape our mortal condition. We have not lost our longing for transcendence.”

Francis J. Beckwith provides an account focusing especially on the philosophical considerations that led him to a fuller understanding of the Church’s teaching about grace that contributed to his 2007 reversion to the Catholic Church while serving as the president of the Evangelical Theological Society. “Philosophy, Grace, and Reconciliation: Reflections of a Catholic Revert” points to Beckwith’s realization that training in philosophy and the ability to grasp key philosophical categories used in Church documents such as the Council of Trent were indispensable toward achieving a proper understanding of concepts such as Trent’s account of operating and cooperating grace. The article concludes with an explanation of how the philosophical component of his reversion to the Catholic Church has also opened the way for the liturgical and sacramental dimension of religious practice that have become indispensable for the author.

In “Dinah Morris as Second Eve: The Fall and Redemption in Adam Bede,” Ryan Marr shows how George Eliot’s knowledge of scripture, derived from her upbringing in a low church Anglican family, informs her first novel, Adam Bede. The first part of the paper examines the novel’s use of a certain set of biblical ideas, demonstrating the particular ways in which biblical typology is an important component of Eliot’s literary technique in the novel. The second part of the paper establishes how the names given to the character establish a connection to the book of Genesis. Using this material to contribute to the interpretation of the novel, Marr argues that the novel rises above the silencing of women that takes place as a reflection of the culture in which the novel is set and
offers hope for redemption through the character of Dinah Morris serving as a mediatrix of grace.

The concept of the development of doctrine is for good reason associated with the work of Blessed John Henry Neman, but Thomas G. Guarino provides an insightful account of a much earlier theologian in whose writings this concept can be found. “St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Doctrine” undertakes the retrieval of the thought of a fifth-century monk, whose great work, titled Commonitorium (Reminder), written in 434, was lost for about one thousand years before its rediscovery in the sixteenth century. Guarino cites several reasons why St. Vincent’s work is again neglected in our day but argues that the concept of the development of doctrine presented in his work offers a principle for understanding doctrine that meets contemporary theological needs. “For Vincent, divine providence is always at work in history, ensuring both the preservation and the cultivation of the Christian faith. The Church’s tradition bespeaks a dynamic process, one deeply rooted in Scripture, yet allowing for a homogeneous and architectonic unfolding over time.”

Donald L. Wallenfang in “The Heart of the Matter: Edith Stein on the Substance of the Soul” examines how Stein presents the soul as the inner life of the human person and as the substantial image of God the Father. The article examines these concepts to establish the contribution they make to contemporary rational accounts of the human soul. In Stein’s account, the soul forms an organic personal whole involving the intellect, affectivity, and the body, and exists in an indissoluble relationship with God. “Through the joint efforts of metaphysics and phenomenology, Stein accurately construes the human soul in its spiritual substance and in its particular being in relation to the body and to the Divine Spirit. Stein’s work effectively counteracts the postmodern tendencies to reduce the human being to categories of material being alone.”

In “The Christian Socrates: Autobiography and Conversion in the Consolation of Philosophy,” Melinda Nielson provides a
reading of the great work by Boethius according to which the work establishes a first person narrator who “causes, tests, and accepts the philosophical propositions in the book.” The article examines the context of ancient and medieval first person narrative and establishes important differences from modern autobiography that must be recognized. Boethius uses self-description “to scrutinize his assumptions, motives, and operating principles,” and then also engages in what Gilson has called “Christian Socratism” to reach toward knowledge of the principles of the created order. Through the narrative style of the work, the reader is drawn into a more intimate understanding of the experience of conversion.

Louis J. Rouleau in “Holiness and the History of the Church in Benedict XVI’s General Audiences” examines the sequence of 170 talks given during the weekly General Audiences by Pope Benedict XVI between 2006 and 2011. These audiences selected and presented in chronological order significant figures in Christian history, ranging from the apostles down to St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Rouleau describes this account as “the historical unfolding of sanctity.” The article offers a table dividing the talks into ten categories and explains that with a few exceptions each talk “offers a brief biography, surveys the individual’s literary output, and highlights some of the principal themes that emerge from this person’s life and work in order to identify what is of enduring relevance for contemporary Christians.” These talks, according to Rouleau’s analysis, put forward a vision of history in which faith is the key dynamic force.

Theresa M. Kenney in “‘God did play the child’: Robert Southwell’s ‘Christes childhoode’” offers a close reading of Southwell’s poem, showing that the poem remains mostly silent about the received folkloric accounts of the Christ Child as wonder worker while reaffirming his divine knowledge and power and surprisingly retaining one extra–biblical aspect: an account of the Christ Child at play. Kenney arrives at what I understand to be a kenotic understanding of this depiction of Christ at play as a child: that Christ
even as a child restrained his divine power and exercised his boyish playfulness in keeping with a complete Incarnational understanding of his nature. Southwell, then, while rightly recognizing the divinity of Christ in the Christ Child, takes care also to display the humanity of the boy as well.

Michael C. Jordan
Editor

Notes