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# ARCADIA

A Student Journal for Faith and Culture



CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES  
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

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**A R C A D I A**  
A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

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## CONTENTS

Rev. Msgr. Richard Liddy ..Introduction of <b>Arcadia</b> .....	5	
Elliot Guerra .....	Issue Introduction .....	7
Thomas Reagan.....	A Resurrection and Mystery Story .....	9
Christy Guerra.....	“All Things to All People”: The Christ-Figure Present in Evelyn Waugh’s <i>Brideshead Revisited</i> .....	16
Meghan Conda .....	Reason, Love, and Contemplation as Characters and the Salvific Role of the Virgin Mary in the <i>Divina Commedia</i> .....	26
Kaitlyn Delengowski .....	A Prayer to St. Francis .....	33
	For my friend, the dreamer .....	34
	Master Plan.....	35
Thomas P. Levy .....	It is Morning, Now, Lord.....	36
Tom Nemecek .....	Inspired by the Holy Spirit .....	37
	Our Hope .....	38
	We Were Boys .....	39
	Adapted from the Song, “Weeping Mother” .	40
Gabriel Rohaidy.....	Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.....	41
	First Breath.....	43
Elliot Guerra .....	Excerpts from the Oxford Journals .....	45
Daniel Lowery .....	Excerpts from the Oxford Journals .....	49
Francis Tanczos .....	Excerpts from the Oxford Journals .....	57

**COVER ART:** Edward Guetti. “Greek Sunset.” Taken while on an Honors Program Study Abroad Trip; Summer, 2005.

# “ET IN ARCADIA EGO.”

Arcadia - A Student Journal for Faith and Culture offers a vehicle where both undergraduates and graduates can contribute to the ongoing "dialogue between the Catholic tradition and all areas of contemporary culture." A project of the Center for Catholic Studies, Arcadia is edited by students and faculty of Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ and is published bi-annually at the close of the Fall and Spring semesters.

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

### Introduction

In the third book of his *Confessions*, Augustine of Hippo recounts his late teen-age years going to school in Carthage. "I came to Carthage, where a cauldron of illicit loves leapt and boiled about me. I was not yet in love, but I was in love with love." It was in Carthage that he developed a passion for stage plays, joined the cult of the Manichees, and began to study classical rhetoric. There, in the midst of his studies he came across a book that was to profoundly change the direction of his life.

From the age of nineteen, having read in the school of rhetoric that book of Cicero's called *Hortensius*, I was influenced by such a great love of philosophy that I considered devoting myself to it at once.<sup>1</sup>

What the *Hortensius* represented for Augustine was the disinterested search for the truth, a desire that remained beneath the surface of his life during all his subsequent wanderings.

Quite definitely it changed the direction of my mind...Suddenly all the vanity I had hoped in I saw as worthless, and with an incredible intensity of desire I longed after inward wisdom. I had begun that journey upwards by which I was to return to You...The one thing that delighted me in Cicero's exhortation was that I should love, and seek, and win, and hold, and embrace, not this or that philosophical school but Wisdom itself, whatever it might be.<sup>2</sup>

I evoke this image of Augustine at this initial publication of the Seton Hall student journal, *Arcadia*, because these essays represent steps in the journeys of our Seton Hall students, not in the year 380 but in the year 2006. And what I want to emphasize is that these are *their* journeys – not the journeys of their teachers or professors, or proponents of any party line.

And like the *Confessions* themselves, the underlying story is the encounter between personal journey and ancient faith. Such encounter is much deeper than any merely "nice" or "pleasant" dialogue. These essays represent "dialectic," that is, the back and forth of positions – and ultimately, the acceptance of a "word" that cuts more deeply than any two-edged sword. As Franz Kafka put it, we need writing that cuts to the core.

If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skull, why then do we read it? So that it shall make us happy? Good God, we should also be happy if we had no books, and such books as make us happy we could, if need be write ourselves....A book must be like an ice axe to break the sea frozen within us.<sup>3</sup>

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

Eventually, after many years of wandering, Augustine found another such book – that fateful day in the garden when, in response to the child's voice chanting "Tolle lege," "Pick up and read," he picked up and read Paul's Letter to the Romans. His life was never the same again. His words reveal the depth of that experience.

Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new; late have I loved Thee! For behold Thou wert within me, and I outside; and I sought Thee outside and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things that Thou hast made. Thou wert with me and I was not with Thee. I was kept from Thee by those things, yet had they not been in Thee, they would not have been at all. Thou didst call and cry to me and break open my deafness: and Thou didst send forth Thy beams and shine upon me and chase away my blindness; Thou didst breathe fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for Thee: I tasted Thee, and now hunger and thirst for Thee: Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace.<sup>4</sup>

It is a platitude to say that one learns by doing. We learn by expression. Arcadia is a celebration of student learning by expression. These poems, essays and artistic judgments are the expressions of the contemporary encounter of faith and culture in the lives of our Seton Hall students. Some have decided to explore their inherited religious faith. Others, increasingly, have experienced significant Augustine-like moments of change or transformation in their lives. No wonder they would want to explore in artistic language these significant moments that have changed their way of looking at the world.

Or, to take it from another perspective, Pascal has the Lord saying, "You would not be searching for me, if I had not already found you."

Rev. Msgr. Richard M. Liddy, Ph.D.  
Director, Center for Catholic Studies

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1. On the Happy Life, 1, 4.

2. The Confessions of Saint Augustine, 3, 4. References to the Confessions are from the translation by F.J. Sheed, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Books I-X (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942).

3. From a letter Franz Kafka wrote at the age of 20, quoted in George Steiner, *A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 36.

4. The Confessions, 10, 27.

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Issue Introduction

Our journal's name, Arcadia, comes from the Latin phrase mysteriously written on a skull in the room of Sebastian Flyte, in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, "Et in Arcadia Ego."

Arcadia was a mythical place in Greece, often described in lush pastoral terms, an allegory for paradise. In Nicolas Poussin's pastoral paintings by the same name the phrase is translated, "I am also in Arcadia" or "I am even in Arcadia." Though Poussin's biographer Andre Felibien insists that the person in the tomb depicted was from Arcadia to suggest that the phrase, "Et in Arcadia Ego," means "I too was once in Arcadia or paradise," we assume the latter is the translation that fit best with Waugh's use of the phrase.

At a glance the phrase seems perfectly postmodern, a testimonial to how we have all fallen from grace, but I would disagree. Augustine once wrote, "memory leads to hope." Remembering becomes a sacramental act, as we recall our past selves. I echo Pope Saint Leo the Great when he wrote:

Realize, O Christian, your dignity. Once made a 'partaker in the divine nature,' do not return to your former baseness by a life unworthy [of that dignity]. Remember whose head it is and whose body of which you constitute a 'member'. Recall how you had been wrested 'from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the kingdom' of God<sup>1</sup>

What follows is a journey, the kind that becomes a pilgrimage; a conversation, the type that becomes liturgical; and a recollection, that becomes worship. Walt Whitman wrote of this conversation, one that crosses, races, countries, age and time itself. "Others the same—others who look back on me, because I look'd forward to them;"<sup>2</sup> how true.

Cardinal Newman believed that the ideal university would have no teachers. Students would conduct and lead discussions on their readings. Perhaps that idea is closer than ever. After months of scrambled work, patience, prayers and sweat this small, curious volume appears. What persists is a dialogue. A dialogue forged from questioning, experiencing and its fruit: understanding. Relationships make that understanding possible, whether student to student, teacher to student and most frequently student to him or herself.

So I find it fitting that in this, our inaugural issue, we have writings, academic and personal, poetic and prayerful, of students asking those essential

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

questions. Questions that any pilgrim would seemingly ask: Where am I going? How should I get there? Also, there seems to be a sense that these students also declare something, as if to tell their readers, that I too hope, I too learn, love and dream; I too was once in Arcadia.

Elliot Guerra  
Managing Editor, ARCADIA

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1. Pope St. Leo the Great, *Collected Sermons*. Sermon 21
  2. Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". *The Complete Poems of Walt Whitman*. Ed. Francis Murphy. Penguin, London: 1977.



Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Resurrection and Mystery Story  
Thomas Reagan

Writing is more than just putting a series of words on a page. Something amazing occurs when an individual takes his own thoughts, theories, stories, or feelings and puts them on paper. Suddenly a deeply personal individual thought is recorded and available for any literate human being to experience. Ron Hansen, author of *A Stay Against Confusion*, realized the power of writing at a young age and his passion for the art form only increased as he grew older. More than an autobiography, more than a fiction writer's tutorial, *A Stay Against Confusion*, provides the image of a complete person. The book is a deeply personal reflection on faith and writing, detailing how the two collide in Hansen's world. Hansen uses writing to not only grow in his faith but also to use it as a way to hold spiritual "conversation."

Exploring Hansen's works is to explore his faith. He describes his technique for spiritual growth saying, "I'm much more likely to meditate on a scriptural passage and try to imagine myself within the scene, rather than to look for the silence inside."<sup>1</sup> He sees himself in the scripture and is using these passages to understand what his relationship with God should consist of and how he can come to terms with his own faith. Considering his technique of spiritual learning, it is no surprise that Hansen's spiritual growth can be seen in his work.

To understand Hansen's perspectives on writing one must travel back to the event that gave him the inspiration to become a writer. In the essay, "Faith and Fiction," Hansen describes the grade school experience of putting on a Christmas play as his first time his passion for writing was ignited. As he grew up attending Catholic school, much of Hansen's early life was intertwined with God, he did not have an option at that point to accept or deny the faith. When it came time to cast the play, he was left out, so his Dominican teacher, Sister Martha bestowed on him the part of Saint Luke, the narrator. Since the role had more lines than any of the other parts, young Hansen felt his classmates looking at him enviously and his parents looking at him proudly. When reciting the lines in the play, he did not know the meaning of some words but he was mystified by the power they conveyed. Hansen goes onto describe this event as his "first impulse to be a fiction writer."<sup>2</sup>

Being cast as Luke for the play was a fair assessment of his future writing style as Hansen described Luke's gospel as "a fusion of faith and historical narrative,"<sup>3</sup> eerily similar to Hansen's work, *Mariette in Ecstasy*. Melding the historical writings of Saint Therese de Lisieux's *Story of a Soul*, and the religious meaning of a woman dealing with her love for her Lord, it is apparent the influence of Luke's gospel.

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

Ron Hansen later accounts a time in his childhood when he was influenced to be a writer, this situation also linked to the gospel. Hansen discusses being excited when he remembered the story of Jesus healing the blind man and also being taken back by the larger than life ritual of the Mass. From a young age, the excitement of his senses and the faith's concept of seeing God in all things captivated him. He liked the storytelling that was used and the universality of the message. The collection of people all following along in unison, feeling and experiencing the same thing was etched in his mind from an early age and this feeling has never left him. As a young author though, Hansen showed a less polished more immature style that would "alter facts that seemed imposed and arbitrary, to intensify scenes and situations with additions and falsifications, and to ameliorate the dull slack commodities of experience with the zest of the wildest imaginings."<sup>4</sup> This is a common tactic used by younger writers, which in effect, turns up the action and tunes out the meaning. Ron was exploring the bounds of his imagination with a youthful curiosity. When one is young there is a feeling of anything is possible. Experience, hard work, depression, insecurity, these are the things that come later in life and put a cap on that limitless spectrum we once viewed.

Another important religious turning point in Hansen's life was when he first received the Eucharist. At the age of eight when he made his first communion, Hansen was unsure what type of transformation he would go under as he was able to receive the body and blood of Christ. After receiving Communion for the first time he was almost disappointed to find that he felt pretty much like he did the ten minutes before he received it. He did feel like he was close to Jesus after the experience though and that was a soul warming experience that he treasured. Clearly his first Communion had an impact because in the sixth grade Hansen became an altar boy. He found this to be very stressful as he always was in awe of the church ceremony and now he became part of it, an integral part. This was the first time Hansen was able to observe the mystery of Christ's body and blood in such a close proximity. He remained a little skeptical about the wine and water going under any transformation but he still had the feeling that if Jesus was there you would not want to disobey what was happening. Mass become more and more of an integral part in Hansen's life as he describes it saying, "In fact, it came to seem there was a hole in the day when, on vacation or for some other reason, we did not go to church."<sup>5</sup> What Hansen questioned in his days as an altar boy must have hung over his head. In the essay, "Eucharist," Hansen goes into great detail about what Jesus did for his Last Supper and why we have the Eucharistic traditions that we do. Yet again, the spiritual conversation that he needed to have with God plays itself out in front of our own eyes.

We can follow the maturation of Hansen through his writing. His first

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

book, *Desperadoes*, was not a work backed by Hansen's faith. He makes a comment that it offers a biblical like "Crime does not pay"<sup>6</sup> type of message but then again so does an episode of *Dragnet* and calling that a religious piece would be a stretch. This was merely Hansen doing as he did when he was a six year-old boy and taking an exciting topic and jazzing it up. In a radio interview from 1983 Hansen speaks about growing up in the Midwest and his childhood curiosity about the territory near him called "Devil's Sled" where Jesse was rumored to have visited.<sup>7</sup> Hansen once spoke about how fiction authors avoid religious themes, not because they are afraid their book will not sell but instead, "There's a fugitive quality to our lives."<sup>8</sup> This may be a good explanation of why he wrote his first book as a typical Western despite people telling him he was too talented to tackle a by-the-numbers genre which Westerns had become.

Hansen's second novel, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, was a turning point in his writing and would show his growth personally, artistically and spiritually. He seemed to recognize that idea of self sacrifice more, embraced the fact that there may be parts of the book that are not action packed. You can see the logical progression from one book to the next and it was almost like Hansen realized, through his own spiritual growth, that these historical "bad boys" deep down had a lot to do with his own faith. The parallel can be seen in the most basic of summaries as Jesse James is killed by Bob Ford, a man who betrays Jesse in order to "even the score." Slowly the ideas of sin were creeping out of the shadows and becoming more prevalent in Hansen's books. With intentions of incorporating his faith into the book *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, Hansen scratched the surface but never dug deep. We see him in a transition period in his life, recognizing things such as sin, but being unable to really figure out the message he was trying to convey. These factors led to the book being received as a Western, just like his "to the point" *Desperadoes*.

However, *Mariette in Ecstasy*, Hansen's third novel, serves a mile-marker on his road to maturing and coming to grips with his faith. The book, about a seventeen-year-old girl, Mariette, who joins the Covenant of Our Lady of Sorrows and on Christmas is given the stigmata, is clearly much more direct in its religious subtext. The doubts and confusion that Mariette endures is a parable for anyone who must face their faith head-on. Writing this novel may have been Hansen's way to really dispel all the uncertainty he, to carefully sort through and make sense of it all. As an author, Hansen's first instinct, when faced with internal conflict, is to work it out on paper. In the LA Times review of his third book then commented "(Hansen's) personality vanishes into those of his characters."<sup>9</sup> It is clear to see the author in the work, with startling detail throughout the 192 page novel, that Hansen may be intertwining his experi-

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

ences with those of St. Therese Lisieux. The transformation of Hansen as a person of faith can be seen in drawing a parallel between his former self, member in the Christmas play, to the older more spiritually mature writer of *Mariette in Ecstasy*. When reading as the narrator in the Christmas play, Hansen realizes the power of the words he is speaking but did not yet have the understanding that is required to have a full transformation. When writing *Mariette in Ecstasy*, Hansen described how he was “cribbing and stealing from hundreds of sources”<sup>10</sup>, his intense interest in the subject far surpassed just being able to pronounce all the words in one page of narrations. Those words of passion suddenly became a code that needed to be cracked. It was deeper than words on paper, something that only extensive research could bring clarity to. This research is a “continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality,”<sup>11</sup> this sacrifice is a pillar of the Christian faith. At the same time you see the influence that the Gospel of Luke had on the book, most adequately described by the *New York Times’ Book Review*, “one need hardly be familiar with that church’s teachings to be moved and amazed by this fable.”<sup>12</sup> Hansen realized that no matter what point must be conveyed, it may be better the message gets out rather than every fact being truthfully documented with crime scene like precision. He comments, looking back on the writing, that he modeled the book in the style “that seemed tailored to contemporary tastes but those that were unfashionable, refractory, insubordinate, that seem the products not of a market analysis but of a writer’s private obsession.”<sup>13</sup> This was Hansen breaking away from the usual Christian writer tactics of being “conformist, high-minded, and pure.”<sup>14</sup> Doing that would not have allowed him to grow it would simply be a recitation of others beliefs. He wasn’t setting out to create propaganda; he was exploring his religion, most specifically relationships with the Lord. Hansen echoes the statement when speaking on *Mariette in Ecstasy*, and comments, “We are challenged, In Jesus’ parables, to figure out how we are like wheat sown in a field, or lost sheep, or mustard seed, or the evil tenants of a householder’s vineyard, and in the hard exercise of interpretation we imitate and make present again the graced interaction between the human and the divine.”<sup>15</sup>

Yet another reason why Hansen had this passion to write can be seen in the most basic story of creation. God fashioned man with his own hands in his likeness. On an infinitely smaller scale, this is what Hansen is doing with his writing. After seeing the beauty God has created in everything, including nature and man, one cannot help but be inspired. Exclaiming, “Everything is permeated with the grandeur of God.”<sup>16</sup> Hansen is in awe of this larger than life thought. There is a need to emulate that creation, one way to do this is through child birth but it also can be seen through the creation of literature. Hansen, even as a young boy, yearned to create something with which people would be

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

in awe. This is also a topic that Hansen is passionate about in his writing. He finds it important to express humility. Nearly all of the reviews of *Mariette in Ecstasy*, comment on its extreme attention to detail and this attention to detail is brought about by the inspiration Hansen sees. The world to him is so grand that "(he) can only see four shades of green, whereas (he) know(s) there are seventeen shades of green out there."<sup>17</sup> Its that type of humility that he tries to present in his novels. With the more detail, increasingly awe inspiring the work becomes. This also places boundaries on his writing people only want to hear about the "four shades of green" if they don't have the true God-like love to appreciate all "seventeen shades."

*Atticus*, Hansen's fourth novel, continues logically on, the next step: to understand his faith and converse personally with the Lord. While *Mariette in Ecstasy* focused on the topic of passion for the Lord, Scott Sawyer comments that *Atticus* revolves around man's longing for God's limitless unconditional love.<sup>18</sup> When writing the book Hansen admits that he was strongly gripped by an old quote that he could not manage to forget that said, "When you're far from God, guess who moved?"<sup>19</sup> *Atticus*, is a very different book in which Hansen may be trying to answer some of his own spiritual questions. He names all the lowest points in his life as the times he was farthest away from God and so the creation of *Atticus* may have been a way to figure out why he strays, and then how he returns back to the Lord.

Everything Hansen writes is, in one way or another, created to be conversation with God. He comments, "I think God intends for our fiction to work on people the same way Scripture does."<sup>20</sup> He sees his writing as a way to take that which he has learned from God and pass it to the masses. Like any other conversation, though, many times it is required to question the other person, as we live in a "I have to see it to believe it world" and the spoken promise is taken with a grain of salt. Just as Leonardo da Vinci allowed his conversation with God to be reflected in his painting of *The Last Supper*, Ron Hansen used *Atticus* as his conversation. Hansen continues on the subject saying, "We're co-creators in a lot of ways, and what God relishes most about us is our creative freedom."<sup>21</sup> In an essence, this is how Hansen is showing God, his thoughts in a pure format. He is taking his writing and in a loving way, by utilizing the creative freedom God gave him, he is asking questions and maturing in his relationship with the Lord. Hansen was writing even when he wasn't making money or when he was not getting published and despite the commercial rejection of his work he still described himself as satisfied.

Hansen has been inspired by other's works on religious literature, taking what he felt were some of the most important pieces of faith based fiction. One major influence was the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hansen fell in love with Hopkins' "attention to the material world" and also his "sense of lan-

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

guage.”<sup>22</sup> As in the controversy Hansen felt with *Atticus*, Hopkins too experienced a similar resistance. Many of Hopkins’ poems were not published during his lifetime because of the fact that they were too controversial. Of course times are different now and Hansen once commented, even on his controversial books, “the book would get published somewhere, even if it were a small press.”<sup>23</sup> This disregard of the business side shows that writing is something Hansen has to do to increase his faith and if it will be accepted is just an afterthought.

Not only religious figures were an inspiration to Hansen’s writing and Faith. In his *A Stay Against Confusion*, there is an essay titled “A Nineteenth Century Man,” about Hansen’s Grandfather Salvador. Much like the scripture parables Hansen read as a child, the importance of Salvador’s stories “was not their truthfulness, after all, but their hidden wisdom about a hazardous world.”<sup>24</sup> This man was almost like a Jesse James, legendary figure to Ron. The inspiration of the stories that his grandfather told him impacted Hansen far after the passing of Salvador. “He is half of Emmett Dalton in *Desperadoes*, there are hints of him in Frank and Jesse in my book about the James gang and he is as much Atticus Cody as any man I’ve ever met.”<sup>25</sup> Hansen recalls at the end of the essay. Clearly this was a man whose determination and faith touched Hansen at a young age and was very integral in forming who Ron is today. One can hypothesize that the repeated characterization of Salvador in his books, that Hansen is still working out things with the passing of his grandfather and trying to understand the man he truly was.

To follow the progression of Hansen as a writer is to follow a man on a spiritual journey. From the early stories of being introduced into the faith and being excited by its promise, to the later mature conversations and lamentations with God, one can see the changes that transpired. Hansen sums it up best in a 1996 interview when he says, “You look for ways that you’re touched, and you write about those things. You write about your nightmares. It’s the things that shake us up and transport us that I think God wants us to pay attention to.”<sup>26</sup>

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1. Sawyer, Scott. “Puzzling the Graced Occasions: An Interview with Ron Hansen.” Fall 1996. 4/1/05. <http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr06/hansen1.html>
  2. Hansen, Ron. *A Stay Against Confusion*. New York, NY: Perennial. 2002 pg 19
  3. *ibid.*
  4. *ibid.*, xiv.
  5. *ibid.*, xiv.
  6. *ibid.*
  7. Wired Books 1983 Interview with Ron Hansen. Conducted By Don Swaim for wired-books.

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

8. Sawyer, Scott. "Puzzling the Graced Occasions: An Interview with Ron Hansen." Fall 1996. 4/1/05. <http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr06/hansen1.html>
9. Nebraska Center for Writers: What the Critics Say about Ron Hansen. 2001. 4/01/05. <http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/NCW/hanscrit.htm>
10. Hansen, Ron. *A Stay Against Confusion*. New York, NY: Perennial. 2002. pg 9
11. *ibid.*, 6
12. Nebraska Center for Writers: What the Critics Say about Ron Hansen. 2001. 4/01/05. <http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/NCW/hanscrit.htm>
13. Hansen, Ron. *A Stay Against Confusion*. New York, NY: Perennial. 2002. pg 9-10
14. *ibid.*, 10
15. *ibid.*, 12
16. Sawyer, Scott. "Puzzling the Graced Occasions: An Interview with Ron Hansen." Fall 1996. 4/1/05. <http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr06/hansen1.html>
17. *ibid.*
18. *ibid.*
19. *ibid.*
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.*
22. *ibid.*
23. Hansen, Ron. "A Stay Against Confusion." New York, NY: Perennial. 2002 pg 9
24. *ibid.*, 54
25. *ibid.*, 56
26. Sawyer, Scott. "Puzzling the Graced Occasions: An Interview with Ron Hansen." Fall 1996. 4/1/05. <http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr06/hansen1.html>

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

“All Things to All People”:

The Christ-Figure Present in Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*.

Christy Guerra

*“To those outside the law I became like one outside the law – though I am not outside God’s law but within the law of Christ – to win over those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some.” (1 Cor. 9:21-22)*

The question of who exactly is “outside God’s law” is difficult to answer. Under the traditional Christian definition, those on the outside are those who are “un-churched,” those poor souls living in ignorance of Christ’s redeeming action of dying on the cross to save the world; or worse yet, those who are aware of the Crucifixion and either deny it or chalk it up to a mystifying historical event and are content to leave it as such. The traditional Catholic viewpoint, having made a distinction between redemption and salvation (where one can be lost and not the other), can be interpreted as resting on the actions of the Catholic themselves. If one commits a mortal sin and exits the state of grace required to enter the realm of Heaven upon death (or the peace of mind required to continue life on Earth), they are automatically “ousted” and join, albeit on a different level, all those who rest outside God’s law. The catch, however, remains that because sin is the mechanism by which human mortality is judged, and no one is inherently without sin, Catholics have an especially hard time with balancing scrupulosity and holiness. Enter the buckling weight of infamous “Catholic guilt.”

How do Catholics choose to reconcile themselves with their actions and with the knowledge that they cannot possibly, truly achieve perfection? Some choose to ignore their sin altogether and label them “bad habits” that will be addressed at some future point in time. Some live in a constant state of paranoia, worried that the bean-counting God of Catholicism will strike down in anger at any instant, ready to unleash all the pent-up punishment meant for Sodom and Gomorrah when any food other than fish is eaten on a Friday during Lent.

Some Catholics, however, do achieve balance. There is a Christ that they have found in reading the Word of God that sympathizes with them, that becomes a holy priest that can attend to them, can attest their troubles are more than merely make-believe or a high-jump they can overcome simply by putting enough money in the Sunday collection basket. Different readers can identify with different “Christs”; for example, one can be comforted with Jesus’ sorrow over the death of His friend Lazarus (John 11), where another can read about Jesus’ frustration over a fig tree that had produced no fruit to eat from



Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

when He was hungry (Matthew 21) and feel justified in experiencing times of frustration as well. The four Gospels present four different versions of Christ; and although there are many overlapping details and messages, these four versions serve a purpose of meeting each individual reader of the Gospels where they are at in their journey of faith and understanding and present a multi-faceted Savior that becomes a touchstone for the feelings and insights needed to maintain a faith-filled life.

In comparing the Christ found in these four Gospels to the Catholic characters in Waugh's early twentieth-century novel *Brideshead Revisited*, a paradigm is constructed where the reader of the book can see such action of self-recognition acted out. When Sebastian Flyte is connected to the suffering servant Christ of Mark's Gospel, for example, a connection is made back to the reader; and in a very real, faith-based way, an act of redemption is recognized. Although upon first reading, the connections between Christ and the novel's characters are not prominent, after a close reading of the text, readers will be able to identify what Waugh aimed to accomplish in the novel: "The book," he wrote, "should be about the "operation of Divine Grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters."

Arguably, *Brideshead Revisited's* most popular character is Sebastian Flyte, who is capable of not only seducing virtually every character he comes into contact with in the novel with his unique mixture of charm and seriousness, but readers of the novel as well. This is due in part because of the language the novel's protagonist, Charles Ryder, uses to introduce Sebastian to the reader:

At Sebastian's approach these grey figures seemed quietly to fade into the landscape and vanish, like highland sheep in the misty heather. Collins had exposed the fallacy of modern aesthetics to me...but it was not until Sebastian, idly turning the page of Clive Bell's *Art*, read: 'Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture?' Yes. *I do,*" that my eyes were opened.<sup>1</sup>

For Ryder to become acquainted with Sebastian is merely not an interesting event; it is an epiphany which awakens him to the idea that Sebastian is not only a person, he is immortal, untouchable. Sebastian ascends to royalty; and Ryder is more than happy to accompany him throughout his schooling years as a willing liege. Through Sebastian, Ryder becomes acquainted with the intoxicating world of elegant English partying, champagne and strawberries enjoyed in fields, and the intoxicating profusion of art and Romanticism. It is because of Sebastian that Ryder can look back at his years at Oxford with such fondness:

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

How ungenerously in later life we disclaim the virtuous moods of our youth, living in retrospect long, summer days of unreflecting dissipation, Dresden figures of pastoral gaiety! Our wisdom, we prefer to think, is all of our own gathering, while, if the truth be told, it is, most of it, the last coin of a legacy that dwindles with time.<sup>2</sup>

The trope of a royal Sebastian has a counterpart found in the Gospel of Matthew with Christ's depiction as King. Matthew presents Jesus as having a great amount of authority: his first two chapters outline Jesus' genealogy, imperative when recounting the lineage of any royal member. When preaching, Jesus speaks with authority when he addresses the crowds, and makes more references to the "Kingdom of God" than any other Gospel. In most Catholic Bibles, Matthew's chapters 5-8 are specifically titled "The Proclamation of the Kingdom." In almost every one of his parables, Jesus makes reference to Heaven as the "Kingdom of God."

In the same way, Sebastian reigns over Ryder's impressionable heart and mind, as does the entire Flyte family, even comparing the Flyte's family property, the Brideshead estate, to Heaven itself:

Perhaps in the mansions of Limbo the heroes enjoy some such compensation for their loss of the Beatific Vision; perhaps the Beatific Vision itself has some remote kinship with this lowly experience; I, at any rate, believed myself very near heaven, during those languid days at Brideshead.<sup>3</sup>

But for all his regality, Sebastian also experiences a great amount of suffering that consistently revolves around two prominent objects: his Catholic faith, and his family life.

At first, Sebastian's view of Catholicism becomes parallel to that of a child's: he believes openly, both without apology and without the impetus to doubt; and this becomes a stark comparison to Ryder's beliefs, where his staunch agnosticism will not allow him to believe as Sebastian does:

"But, my dear Sebastian, you can't seriously *believe* it all."

"Can't I?"

"I mean about Christmas and the star and the three kings and the ox and the ass."

"Oh yes, I believe that. It's a lovely idea."

"But you can't believe things because they're a lovely idea."

"But I *do*. That's how I believe."<sup>4</sup>

As the novel progresses, however, the reader senses that Sebastian adopts a more sobering outlook in terms of his faith because of the pain that is inflicted upon his family due to the binding restrictions the Catholic Church imposes. His parents, living in an utterly miserable marital situation, cannot

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

divorce because of the Church. Sebastian's sister, Julia, cannot marry Rex when it is discovered he was already married; and Julia's reaction is to turn away from the Church's teachings in order to fulfill her own desires.

In a telling conversation with Ryder, Sebastian wistfully tells him he "wishes he liked Catholics more, but cannot, because of their "outlooks on life; everything they think is important is different from other people. They try and hide it as much as they can, but it comes out all the time."<sup>5</sup>

Due to the impact the Church has on his family, Sebastian's view of religion not only defines him, it also deeply troubles him; and in an attempt to suffocate his feelings of suffering, he adopts an alcoholic lifestyle. In Ryder's eyes, it is at this point in the novel where Sebastian begins a fall from royalty and grace into a life that will ultimately end in a terrible sorrow predicted by his sister Cordelia in the novel's second half. What Cordelia is quick to point out in her prediction however, is that although Sebastian suffers, he is not far from holiness; in fact, it is through his suffering that he becomes innately tied to Christ:

"It's not what one would have foretold," [Ryder] said. "I suppose he doesn't suffer?"

"Oh, yes, I think he does. One can have no idea what the suffering may be, to be maimed as he is – no dignity, no power of will. No one is ever holy without suffering. It's taken that form with him."<sup>6</sup>

For Cordelia, to suffer is to be like Christ, arguably the most recognizable figure of Jesus from a Catholic's viewpoint. Catholic iconography mainly focus on the suffering of Christ for that same purpose. The idea of suffering as a means to holiness that Cordelia tries to explain to Ryder is exemplified by Christ in his Passion:

That is the test. It is not enough to profess the formula, "For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, He suffered, died and was buried." If we do not see the Passion of the Lord as central to our lives we are not seeing the real universe--the universe that Faith reveals. We may be famous, prominent, articulate, active but if we do not see the Cross at the center of Christianity we see everything out of focus.<sup>7</sup>

Although Jesus' suffering and passion were recounted in all four Gospels, it is the instance where he was tormented in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest that displays a great amount of terror. Mark's Gospel mentions the account, but it is Luke's that is the most descriptive of his suffering: "And to strengthen him an angel from Heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground" (Luke 22:44). Jesus' suffering, as part of the Christian

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

tradition, fulfills the Old Testament prophecy in which an innocent Messiah would be made to endure for the sins of his people: "Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was punished for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed" (Isaiah 53:4-6). In the same way, it is through the suffering of those around him that Ryder begins to realize the power of Catholicism and come to it as a way of life.

Cordelia Flyte, Sebastian's loyal sister, is a key element in the novel not only because of her insight into her brother's suffering and her sisterly relationship to Ryder, but also because of the affirmation she presents in the Christ figure of servant. This figurehead is seen repeatedly throughout the Gospels, but most prominently in Mark's account. Unlike Matthew or Luke's Gospels, which contain detailed genealogies, Mark treats Christ as a servant who needs no hereditary precursors to carry out the deeds of a master. Mark carries on this tradition throughout his writing, which includes a "character reference" from Christ's kinsman, John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-8), and teachings that focus on servitude (the Parable of the Sower, the Parable of the Tenants, etc.) over other aspects of the Christian life.

In *Brideshead Revisited*, Cordelia is the one character that embodies familiarity with the Church, especially at a young age. She embraces Catholicism fully throughout her life, unlike her siblings, who struggle with their faith and eventually walk away from it only to return at a later time. She attends Mass and Eucharistic Adoration whenever possible, and confesses to Ryder that she hopes for a vocation as a religious sister:

"I hope I've got a vocation."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you can be a nun. If you haven't a vocation, it's no good however much you want it to be; and if you have a vocation, you can't get away from it, however much you hate it. Bridey thinks he's a vocation and hasn't. I used to think Sebastian had and hated it – but I don't know now."<sup>8</sup>

In her precocious nature, she also participates in the adoption of African children in an attempt to have them baptized so they can be redeemed by Christ and the Church, seen in a humorous exchange between her and Ryder in the novel's first half:

"D'you know, if you weren't an agnostic, I should ask you for five shillings to buy a black god-daughter?"

"Nothing will surprise me about your religion."

"It's a new thing a missionary priest started last term. You send five bob to some nuns in Africa and they christen a baby

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

and name her after you. I've got six black Cordelias already. Isn't it lovely?"<sup>9</sup>

In Cordelia's eyes, more than the salvation of un-churched Africans is the importance for Ryder to come to know the Church. When she is younger, she makes it her mission to convert him from his agnostic ways, but tires of it after a time. When they are reunited in the novel's second half, Cordelia, whose life had continued in service to soldiers during World War I, becomes a witness of unconditional love that strikes him the most. Her plainness and weariness disappoint Ryder, however, who is sorry to see her vivaciousness traded for a more contemplative life steeped in manual work. That Cordelia has changed in this manner also presents another facet of Christ's personality that is adopted in the Gospels, that of Christ as Man; and this view is, perhaps, the most crucial to understanding the Catholicism behind *Brideshead*, because it is through this experience of Christ that Ryder eventually comes to terms with his faith.

Of the four Gospels, Luke presents the most full picture of Christ as a man. His gospel is the one that gives the most detailed account of his birth and his familial life, thus creating a foundation in which Jesus becomes relatable to the reader. Throughout his adult life, Christ also exhibits emotions common to many people. Although not everyone has the ability to cure demoniacs and heal those with leprosy, as the Gospel recounts, the common man can identify with Christ's rejection when returning to his home (Luke 4:16-30), the mournful lament over a city he loves (Luke 13:34-35), and the temptation he faced during the preparation for his ministry.

In *Brideshead Revisited*, Ryder is the one who most fully embodies the ideal "common man." He spends most of the novel dismissing the notion of faith and preferring to see things with his own eyes, and uses the excuse of his education to hide him from the penetrating questions he finds in the Flyte's Catholicism. This action, however, becomes the most human thing about him; and as the novel progresses, the reader can come to see Ryder's slow but distinctive growth in curiosity about the idea of faith. Although he merely writes Catholicism off as a superficial fantasy when he first meets Sebastian, he eventually becomes frustrated with his lack of knowledge once he feels the Flytes cannot "prove" Catholicism to him:

"Do any of you Catholics know what good you think this priest can do?" I asked. "Do you simply want to arrange it so that your father can have Christian burial? Do you want to keep him out of hell? I only want to be told ... Let's get this clear," I said; "He has to make an act of will; he has to be contrite and wish to be reconciled, is that right? But only God knows whether he has made an act of will; the priest can't tell; and if there isn't a priest

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

there, and he makes the act of will alone, that's as good as if there was a priest. And it's quite possible that the will may still be working when a man is too weak to make any outward sign of it; is that right? He may be lying, as though for dead, and willing all the time, and being reconciled, and God understands that; is that right? Well, for heaven's sake, what is the priest for?"<sup>10</sup>

Ryder's character finds a counterpart in terms of wrestling with the notion of faith in Julia Flyte, Sebastian's sister, with whom Ryder falls in love. Like Ryder, Julia's character in the novel embodies worldliness and the weakness that comes with humanity. Although she was raised Catholic, Julia has difficulty separating her desires from her duties; and tries to concentrate on her worldly life in an attempt to leave her faith: "Nothing could have been further from Julia's ambitions than a royal marriage. She knew, or thought she knew, what she wanted and it was not that. But wherever she turned, it seemed, her religion stood as a barrier between her and her natural goal."<sup>11</sup>

In the first half of the novel, Julia is willing to compromise her faith in order to get what she desires. When she tells Rex she cannot sleep with him until she is married and does anyway to keep him with her, she asks a priest about it, but reacts selfishly:

"Surely, Father, it can't be wrong to commit a small sin myself in order to keep him from a much worse one?" But the gentle old Jesuit was unyielding as a rock. She barely listened to him; he was refusing her what she wanted, that was all she needed to know. When she he had finished he said, "Now you had better come to church and make your confession." "No thank you," she said, as though refusing the offer of something in a shop. "I don't think I want to to-day," and walked angrily home. From that moment she shut her mind against her religion.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, Julia, as well as Ryder and Sebastian, suffer terribly due to the lack of faith they had created for themselves, which Cordelia metaphorically describes towards the novel's end:

They've closed the chapel at Brideshead, Bridey and the Bishop; Mummy's requiem was the last Mass said there. After she was buried the priest came in – I was there alone. I don't think he saw me – and took out the altar stone and put it in his bag; then he burned out the wads of wool with the holy oil on them and threw the ask outside; he emptied the holy water stoup and blew out the lamp in the sanctuary and left the tabernacle open and empty, as though from now on it was always to be

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Good Friday...I stayed there till he was gone, and then, suddenly, there wasn't any chapel there anymore, just an oddly decorated room.<sup>13</sup>

Julia suffers an eventual life of solitude, Ryder suffers the deterioration of not only his marriage but also the loss of Julia, and the members of the Flyte family are all separated, not to be seen together again. Somewhat coincidentally, the characters' situations can be seen in the Gospels at the point where Jesus has died but not yet risen. Because Jesus' disciples were human, they could not comprehend the idea of a Risen Messiah, come back from the grave to see them; however, that is precisely what occurred. At the end of *Brideshead Revisited*, death also brings about new life and holiness that is welcomed by Lord Marchmain, Ryder, and Julia, who are able to find happiness once they turn back to the religion they had run away from, regardless of the reasons why they had left.

At the end of the first half of the novel, Cordelia mentions a passage from a book read during the "bad" evening of Sebastian's display of drunkenness at a family gathering: "Father Brown said something like 'I caught him' (the thief) 'with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread.'"<sup>14</sup>

The idea that man can seemingly wander anywhere around the world while still remaining within God's watchful gaze parallels Psalm 139:

Where can I go from your spirit? From your presence, where can I flee? If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I sink to the nether world, you are present there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your right hand shall guide me, and your right hand shall hold me fast (Psalm 139:7-12).

This "twitch upon the thread" occurs for each of the main characters of the novel: Sebastian returns to his faith by living out the remainder of his dilapidated life in a monastery; and although he does not achieve their levels of piety, he dies in the company of holy men; Julia sacrifices her relationship to Ryder by dedicating her life, much like her sister Cordelia, to serving and attending those wounded in the War; and Ryder undergoes, at Lord Marchmain's deathbed conversion, a powerful experience of his own: "Then I knew the sign I had asked for was not a little thing, not a passing nod of recognition, and a phrase came back to me from my childhood of the veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom."<sup>15</sup> In the novel's epilogue, Ryder is brought back to the Brideshead estate, and finds solace and peace in the chapel, where the light of the Tabernacle, which Catholics believe holds the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, still burns.

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

The issue of Ryder's conversion has held critics' attention for quite some time, because according to the novel's prologue, the conversion that Ryder experienced at Lord Marchmain's deathbed seems meaningless. Notes Laura Mooneyham, "He is sunk in moral decay sloth and bitterness, the sin of accidie. An army officer in the monstrous world of war-torn decay, Charles seems powerless and apathetic. He recognizes his "sere and lawless state,"<sup>16</sup> but sees no hope of spiritual regeneration."<sup>17</sup> This lack of spirituality, however, was seemingly Waugh's intention, as Mooneyham continues: "Waugh's strategy is to demonstrate Charles's first conversion, while shaping through the process a retrospection a deeper and more ordered re-conversion. This double conversion is meant to create a third, that of the reader."<sup>18</sup>

Ryder's conversion(s), however, could not have taken place without the "faces of Christ" he came across as he made his spiritual journey, the faces that change to make Christianity accessible to those who seek it. As with Ryder, conversion for all Christians is not a one-time process, like baptism; instead, it becomes a perpetual motion, which changes forms into whatever is necessary to achieve spiritual growth. Saint Paul thus finds Christ as a model to follow for "becoming all things to all people;" and one of the reasons why *Brideshead Revisited* has become such a touchstone of Catholic literature is that it too paints the same picture.

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2. *ibid*, 62.

3. *ibid*, 79.

4. *ibid*, 86-7.

5. *ibid*, 89.

6. *ibid*, 309.

7. *ibid*, 2.

8. *ibid*, 221-2.

9. *ibid*, 94.

10. *ibid*, 329.

11. *ibid*, 181.

12. *ibid*, 189.

13. *ibid*, 220.

14. *ibid*, 220.

15. *ibid*, 339.

16. Mooneyham, Laura. "The Triple Conversions of *Brideshead Revisited*." *Renaissance* 45.4 (1993), 9.

17. *ibid*, 226.

18. *ibid*, 226.

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**Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006**

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ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

Reason, Love, and Contemplation as Characters  
and the Salvific Role of the Virgin Mary in the *Divina Commedia*  
Meghan Conda

Florentine poet Dante Alighieri's work the *Divina Commedia* is one of the most famous allegorical poems ever written. Almost every person and situation Dante's main character, named Dante, encounters carries the weight of some deeper symbolism. While each of Dante's three guides throughout the *Divina Commedia* represents not only him or herself and the earthly influence in the life of the author, they also symbolize three of the attributes that Dante must possess in order to survive his journey and reach salvation. Yet no matter what these three characters contribute to Dante's spiritual progress, the one ultimately responsible for his salvation is the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose influence can be seen in every canticle, as well as in the three guides, throughout the solidly Marian poem.

Second only to Dante, the first character introduced in *L'Inferno* is the Roman poet Virgil. Author of the *Aeneid*, in which the main character Aeneas travels through the underworld of Hades, Virgil seems an obvious literary choice to become Dante's guide through Hell. Having lived before the birth of Christianity, Virgil had been a pagan during his lifetime and had based his beliefs solely on human reason, the characteristic of which he becomes symbolic. Dante's personal affinity for Virgil and his poetry inspires the author to attribute the guidance during the start of his journey to his literary inspiration. Dante places Virgil's soul in Limbo, a place somewhere between Hell and Purgatory, since he does not deserve eternal damnation after leading a virtuous life, but since he had never believed in Christ or the one true God he can never achieve the eternal reward of Heaven. Dante greatly admires Virgil for his use of educated human reason and he writes a more personal and intimate Virgil in the *Divina Commedia* than had ever been apparent in the ancient poet's own works.<sup>1</sup> Almost a sad figure, Virgil is portrayed at once as greater and lesser than Dante. Due to the strength of his intellect and reason Virgil is able to lead Dante, but in a way Dante will forever possess the ability to achieve the one great thing that will always evade Virgil's grasp – eternal salvation.<sup>2</sup> Human reason is a much needed characteristic that Dante must learn to possess in order to complete his arduous journey successfully but it alone is not enough to enable him, or the symbolic Virgil, to gain the ultimate goal of Paradise.

Introduced in the very first canto of *L'Inferno*, Virgil meets Dante in the dark woods when Dante realizes that he has lost The Way of true Christianity and he is no longer on the path to salvation. Realizing that there is no simple way to circumvent the beasts of sin in the woods, Virgil offers to help him find his way once again by a longer and more treacherous yet necessary path. Al-

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

ready knowing the way through Hell, having penned Aeneas' way through Hades, and in the midst of spending an eternity in Limbo rather than Heaven, Virgil is ready, willing, and able to lead the way for the man whom he will affectionately refer to as "son." As it turns out, Dante requires more of Virgil than human reason to survive the arduous journey through the fires of Hell. The main character's fears of Hell would have caused the shrieks of torture and the pains of eternal damnation to be too much for him to bear were the ancient poet not beside him to scorn his cowardice and comfort him.<sup>3</sup> Virgil teaches Dante to gird his heart against the sufferings of the souls in Hell who truly deserve their fate. The Roman poet, symbolizing human reason and intellect, rationalizes the seemingly pitiable situations of the damned souls and instructs Dante on how to view the souls with reason and not with his sympathetic heart, which is too quickly moved to pity.

The poets eventually journey to the frozen center of Hell and must come face to face with the King of Hell, Satan. By this point in the poem, Dante has become hardened to the reality of sin to the point where he begins to trick the pathetic souls and he no longer feels any pity towards them. Virgil has taught him to use his reason and has toughened him emotionally and spiritually against the temptations of the Devil, lest he end up like the pathetic souls he mocks. The journey out of Hell, however, requires Virgil to assist Dante physically as well. The pair must climb onto Satan's grotesque body and pull themselves through the center of the earth into the Southern Hemisphere. Not knowing how to accomplish this task, and still feeling some trepidation at the imposing figure of Satan, Dante is literally carried on Virgil's back for the climb out of Hell. Virgil is appropriately called upon as Dante's guide for this stage of the journey, not only for his mental acuity, keen reasoning abilities, and literary knowledge of the path through Hell, but also his sheer physical and emotional strength to lead the younger poet through the rigors and filth of the Inferno.

Once escaped from the dark filth of Hell, the poets find themselves at the base of the Mountain of Purgatory. Now hardened against sin, Dante must learn to repent truly from his wrongdoings and turn toward the light and forgiveness of God, which requires a vertical trek up the mountain. While much less frightening than Hell and almost welcoming in its similarities to the celebration of a Catholic Mass, Dante must continue to rely on Virgil to be his courage and his guide. The souls in Purgatory rejoice that their present pain will purge them of their sins and prepare them for their Heavenly reward, but they are suffering nonetheless and Dante remains nervous. His guide must continue to tell him, "Never fear while I am guiding you."<sup>4</sup> To symbolize the reason and courage required in order for Dante to overcome the sufferings of Hell and most of trials of Purgatory, the author could not have chosen a better

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

guide and role model than Virgil.

A few lessons on reason from one pagan poet is not nearly enough to lead anyone to salvation, however, and when the pair reach the summit of Purgatory Mountain, where the earthly paradise of Eden is located, Virgil must disappear. Reason is a trait that had failed Adam and Eve in the Garden and following it alone led them away from salvation, so it alone is not sufficient to lead Dante to any greater fate than that of the first man and woman. Human reason must be left behind as the sole guide into Paradise. Virgil himself cannot enter Heaven either, due to his pagan beliefs, and the character must be abandoned as well. It is at this point that Divine love must become Dante's guide in order to lead him to perfection.

In the earthly paradise of Eden atop Purgatory Mountain, the second highly symbolic guide, Beatrice, encounters Dante and begins to lead him on his journey. A young Florentine girl with whom Dante fell madly in love, Beatrice becomes the image of divine love in many of Dante's writings, including the *Divina Commedia*. The perfect symbol of love, Beatrice reflects the virtue and the love of God Himself in order to lead Dante, yet she never ceases to be the beautiful Beatrice whom Dante had loved during her mortal lifetime.<sup>5</sup> Being close to the Lord, who is true love, gives Beatrice the ability to reflect His love and teach Dante how to love as well. Even the name "Beatrice," which may not have been the true name of Dante's earthly love, means "blessed" and is symbolic of the woman's place in Heaven with the Almighty God.<sup>6</sup> The appearance of this second guide does not lead Dante to abandon the lessons of reason and courage learned from his first guide, but rather teaches him that Divine love is naturally compatible with right human reason and Beatrice only acts to further perfect Dante and prepare him for Paradise.

Joining the journeying poet outside of the Garden of Eden, Beatrice leads him across a river and into Paradise. Before entering, she censures him on why he has lost the way, just as a mother would discipline an unruly child who has no excuse for breaking a rule.<sup>7</sup> Her behavior towards him comes not out of anger or impatience, but rather the opposite. She loves him and truly desires that he be successful in his journey, which means that he must be held accountable for his past offenses and not use reason to rationalize his behavior; another reason that Virgil cannot join him on this leg of his journey. All through Heaven she continues to mother him, giving him clues as to how to behave and react and presenting him to the saints of Heaven as if he were a "bachelor of art undergoing examination for a higher degree."<sup>8</sup> Again and again he is plagued by curiosity and Beatrice, having undergone the Heavenly examination and been found worthy, knows how to answer his inquisitive and boyish nature with loving attention. Helping Dante to move from mere reason and rejection of sin to true love of God through His divine love for humanity,

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Beatrice serves as the appropriate guide for the second leg of Dante's salvific journey. The poet now becomes illuminated, prepared for union with God, and no longer dependant upon the symbolic presence of Beatrice.<sup>9</sup> It is at this point in *Il Paradiso*, when Dante reaches the level of understanding shared by all of the saints of Heaven, that Beatrice leaves him and returns to her eternal seat in Paradise.

Without missing a beat, Beatrice takes her leave and Dante's third and final guide in the *Divina Commedia*, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, joins him in *Il Paradiso*. Present for only the final three cantos of the final canticle of Dante's poem, St. Bernard serves the supremely important role of assisting Dante through the highest peaks of Heaven in order for him to encounter the Blessed Mother and achieve the Beatific Vision of the Trinity. A prolific writer during his lifetime on topics such as Mariology and contemplative prayer, Bernard is seen by Dante as an authority on contemplative theology, and the saint comes to symbolize contemplation and faith.<sup>10</sup> Based primarily, if not solely, on knowledge of Bernard's writings, Dante inserts this sainted man at the end of his poem as a character symbolic of contemplation in order to show that human reason, rejection of sin, and repentance are not enough on their own to lead anyone to salvation. Divine love, contemplation of God, and a life devoted entirely to Him and carrying out His will are necessary for any person truly to see the face of God one day in Paradise, Dante seems to say. The addition of the contemplative St. Bernard completes the three stages of Dante's physical and spiritual journey and eventually leads him to the vision of Mary and the ultimate grace of the Beatific Vision.

Appearing only in the final three cantos, St. Bernard does little traveling with Dante, but he plays an important role in the story, a role for which he is most appropriate. He appears just as Dante is about to experience the vision of Mary and, almost as a member of the nobility would introduce a companion to an earthly queen, the saint presents Dante to the Queen of Heaven. Bernard's devotion to the Blessed Mother existed not only during his life on Earth but Dante also depicts it in *Il Paradiso* where he constantly burns with ardor and passion for the Mother of God. His love for the Virgin is so great that he need not say much to his ward but Dante needs merely to watch how the saint burns with devotion and he learns to emulate his new guide. The author gives Bernard a theologically complex prayer to offer to the Virgin demonstrating that Dante must have had some knowledge of Bernard's writings and that his conception of the Blessed Mother may have been formed by the contemplative saint.<sup>11</sup> Affected during his lifetime by the saint and his devotion to Mary, Bernard, appropriately, is the one to "present Dante to the Virgin Mary, as a suppliant for the grace that will enable him to proceed to the direct and unmediated vision of God."<sup>12</sup> Having been a contemplative Mariologist during his

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

lifetime, and considering that Dante is nearing the end of his journey and his behavior and curiosity are more polished and subdued, St. Bernard needs mainly to lead the poet through right action and prayer, entirely appropriate to the historical figure of Bernard and his character in the *Divina Commedia*.

Despite the influence of Dante's three guides and the items they symbolize, the *Divina Commedia* is ultimately a Marian poem in which the author credits the Blessed Mother with his conversion and salvation. The Virgin Mother of God is referenced in every canticle of the poem and Dante praises her for her hand in the salvation not only of himself, but of all who look to her as an intercessor. It is revealed by Virgil in *L'Inferno* that Mary shows compassion for Dante and his sorry predicament even before he realized that he had lost The Way. Virgil praises the Virgin saying "Blessed be that Lady of infinite pity" because she has so much love for Dante and she so desires to see him saved.<sup>13</sup> Her love and compassion are so powerful that even a soul forever to remain in Limbo, as is the fate of Virgil, rejoices at her desire to assist the lost Dante. While the Blessed Mother of God can never enter the filth of Hell, Virgil reflects Mary's pity and becomes Dante's reason and guide in deference to the wishes of the Queen of Heaven.

Reflecting the motherly nature of the Blessed Virgin, Virgil begins to call Dante "son" as they travel through Purgatory. Mary's presence is strongly felt in the joy and praise from the souls journeying up the mountain to Paradise and this, combined with Virgil's careful guidance, eases Dante's fears as he learns to repent for his sins. The most obvious presence of the Virgin Mary on Purgatory Mountain is in the "Whips" found in each cornice. Designed to goad the traveling sinners upward in the purgation of their sins and towards the emulation of the virtues they depict, these carvings or visions of men and women who have not fallen victim to the sins on each cornice, or those who have fully repented from their sins, appear. One whip in each cornice shows a scene from Roman history, and one is always a story from the Old Testament of the Bible, but the first and most prominent one is inevitably a Marian scene. In each cornice, Dante witnesses scenes such as Mary displaying her humility at the Annunciation<sup>14</sup> in the cornice of the Proud and her chastity is praised with song in the cornice of the Lustful.<sup>15</sup> The souls in every cornice praise Mary's virtues which inspire them and Dante to imitate of her life, which she lived for God. While still not physically present in *Il Purgatorio*, just as she was physically absent from *L'Inferno*, the presence of the Virgin is seen endlessly in some form on Purgatory Mountain, and she continues to lead Dante on his way towards salvation.

At the entrance to the earthly paradise, where one needs to rely on more than human reason, Virgil is replaced by Beatrice, who had also been sent as a messenger of Mary. Reflective of the beauty of the Virgin, not only in

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

her virtue but also in her physical beauty due to her blessedness, Beatrice is sent straight from Mary's side in the Mystical Rose of Heaven down to Earth to assist Dante. Symbolic of Divine love, Beatrice radiates the motherly love of divinity for Dante, the type of love Mary feels for her Divine Son and all of humanity, more than the earthly love Dante had felt for her. Having completely abandoned the things of Earth for the ways of Heaven, Beatrice exists only to perform the will of God, with which the will of Mary is perfectly attuned, and she reflects this in all of her actions and dialogue with Dante. Having been treated by Beatrice with "the ardor of discipline and knowledge"<sup>16</sup> of a mother's love and not the lustful, passionate love of a romantic partner, Dante is taken aback but realizes that his new guide works as a reflection of their Heavenly Mother. Mary herself is the "Lady in High Heaven whose messengers are Lucia and Beatrice"<sup>17</sup> and her messengers reflect their most blessed mother in the ways they deal with and relate to the man in their care.

Mary's presence is obviously felt much more strongly in *Il Paradiso*, since she resides body and soul in Heaven, where the canticle is set. When Dante is presented to the Virgin, he cannot turn his eyes away from her "delectation and perfection."<sup>18</sup> He prays that Mary will intercede for him that he may receive the graces to turn his gaze towards God and experience the Beatific Vision. Her role in Dante's salvation here is pivotal in that through her intercession he is able to reach the pinnacle of Heaven and view the Trinity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Dante has learned that her prayers alone can help to save him and prepare him for salvation.<sup>19</sup> That she shows her love and compassion for Dante at the height of Paradise by helping him to achieve the vision of God demonstrates that she is the being ultimately and most directly responsible for the salvation of the lowly poet.

This intercession of Mary on Dante's behalf is not brought about unprompted, but rather through the fervent intercessory prayers of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. While on Earth, Bernard composed intensely personal devotions to the Virgin and his character seems to speak in the same way, with the goal of intensely provoking the hearts of Dante and Mary alike.<sup>20</sup> Bernard reflects the Virgin in his intercessory action on behalf of Dante, whom he desires to receive the sacred visions even more than he had desired to experience them for himself. The saint also reflects the Blessed Mother and her main role in salvation in that he recognizes the hierarchical structure of Heaven and he goes through the proper channels in order to aide Dante in achieving the Beatific Vision of God. While it had not seemed directly evident until a late point in the poem, "man may not gaze on God directly but most approach through the hierarchy of creatures,"<sup>21</sup> something that all of the guides, especially Bernard, had been leading Dante to do. In the poem, Dante must go through the hierarchy consisting of his three guides, especially Bernard, and the Blessed Mother before

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

was able to have the vision. Bernard formally realizes this and reflects his knowledge of Mary's higher seat in Heaven through a contemplative intercessory prayer, reflecting the intercession the Virgin already performed for the poet and foreshadowing the future grace-bestowing intercessions. The last of the three guides to appear, St. Bernard of Clairvaux most clearly reflects the Virgin Mary and her role in the salvation of Dante.

While the symbolic roles of Virgil, Beatrice, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, as human reason, divine love, and contemplation respectively, serve a great purpose of leading Dante back to The Way in the *Divina Commedia*, they merely work as reflections of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose pivotal role in the poem is responsible for Dante's eventual achievement of the Beatific Vision of God and eternal salvation.

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1. See "The Divine Comedy" essay by Jorge Luis Borges in Hawkins, Peter S. and Jacoff, Rachel (ed.) *The Poets' Dante*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001, pg 119-135.
  2. See "The Sweetness and Greatness of the Divine Comedy" by Robert Duncan in Hawkins and Jacoff, pg 186-209.
  3. Gilbert, Alan H. *Dante and His Comedy*. New York: New York University Press, 1963.
  4. Gilbert, pg 70.
  5. See "The Figure of Beatrice" essay by Charles Williams in Hawkins and Jacoff, pg 15-27.
  6. Gilbert, pg 138.
  7. Gilbert, pg 139
  8. Gilbert, pg 142
  9. Dunbar, H. Flanders. *Symbolism in Medieval Thought and its Consummation in the Divine Comedy*. New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1961, pg 92
  10. Botterill, Steven. *Dante and the Mystical Tradition Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. pg 148.
  11. Botterill, pg 151.
  12. Botterill, pg 168.
  13. Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John Ciardi. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1970. *Inferno*, II.130, pg. 45.
  14. *Purgatorio*, X.31-42; Ciardi pg. 239.
  15. *Purgatorio*, XXV.127-128: Ciardi pg. 337.
  16. Dunbar, pg 90.
  17. See "The Sweetness and Greatness of the Divine Comedy" essay by Robert Duncan in Hawkins and Jacoff, pg 196.
  18. *Paradiso*, XXXI.138; Ciardi, pg. 587.
  19. Dunbar, pg 93.
  20. Botterill, pg 167-168.
  21. Dunbar, pg 93.



Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

A Prayer to St. Francis  
Kaitlyn Delengowski

It pains me to see people suffer.  
Suffering that is hidden by a smile, a wave, a friendly glance.  
I see through the rock hard façades.  
Changes in an instant.  
That moment that I spot their insecurities, when they break down the barriers-  
even for a moment-that shelter them and protect, when they are at their  
most vulnerable.  
I want to help.  
To fix.  
But I can't.  
So I listen.  
I listen so hard sometimes it hurts.  
Listen when there is nothing to listen to.  
Silence is deafening.  
I cry for them.  
For their families.  
For that inherent good that I try so hard to believe is real.  
I wish that my tears could heal - they can't.  
To wash away the pain.  
I am strong.  
Let me help.  
Let me take some of theirs away.  
I can handle it, I know I can.  
I hear that waver in their voices.  
That nervous laugh to fill the air so thick you could cut it with a knife.  
The look of pure terror, instantly covered up by quick shrug.  
I know we all suffer, but it gets to me.  
Those beautiful spirits being dragged down from their place in the sky.  
Let them shine!  
Let them fly!  
*Let them have their moment in the sun.*  
*Hold them in the palm of your hand.*

"O Master, grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved, as to love with all my soul."  
*prayer of St. Francis*

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

For my friend, the Dreamer  
Kaitlyn Delengowski

A dreamer, cautious, kind, hides behind sorrows.  
Sorrows, sweet, sweet sorrows, never shared sorrows, scared, lonely sorrows.  
You are *not zagubiona w tłumaczeniu* dreamer,  
You know what to say, in beautiful tongues, say it.  
Be not afraid, dreamer.  
Let out your pain dreamer, *speak*, the world wants to hear you.  
*You* want to hear you.

Let *love* be the defining point, dreamer, let your guard down,  
Don't let him define you, learn from him, *accept* it, and *release* it, beautiful  
*release*.  
HE is not the definition.  
Define *yourself*, dreamer.  
Don't let him hurt you anymore.  
Sad eyes, *Pozwul te smutne oczy zeby plakaly*, dreamer.  
Broken, broken, broken, *ty nie jestes zlamana*.  
*Fixed*.

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Master Plan  
Kaitlyn Delengowski

what are we?  
a single episode  
in God's master programming schedule?  
or are we destined  
to be a major motion picture event?  
simply a script-  
left dusty on a shelf,  
never to be produced-  
an idea lost in  
the giant void.  
He would never let us pass by.  
episodes perfected, ready for sweeps?  
classic black and white reruns  
cutting edge, destined for cancellation  
a series of carefully orchestrated rehearsals  
for a beautiful musical.  
truth.  
each is loved by one.  
few (some) by many.  
have faith in the Agent.  
find that One.

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

It is Morning, Now Lord  
Thomas P. Levy

it is morning, now, lord

and i have waked  
for near half a clock's  
rotation  
spinning in the dreamy  
haze  
of the blurred line  
between the real & the euphoric

i believe, now, lord  
that i've known  
all the languages of the world  
    henceforth,  
    it is only  
    a matter of remembering

i'm certain i've the strength  
to create tsunami waves  
of the sweet ivory piano keys  
playing the springly sonata  
    in my sleeping ears

and lord, i will share with you  
    that all the yelling  
    is not caused by me  
    for life is great, long, grand,  
        ephemeral  
    and my throat cannot bear  
        for me to scream  
    much more than  
                                i already have

it is morning, now, lord

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Inspired by the Holy Spirit  
Tom Nemecek

The earth is a fruit  
And the children  
Are the sweetness within

Eternal sunrise  
In my eyes  
As You welcome me home  
to Heaven

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

**Our Hope**  
Tom Nemecek

We reach out in the distance  
A star's glowing light  
To supplant the grief and loneliness within  
We long for the star  
Eternal glowing light

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

**We Were Boys**  
Tom Nemecek

They cut you with  
Their knives  
And took away  
Your skin  
Left you there to die  
I will now protect  
Your kin

If I could keep you strong  
I would  
But I know that it's  
Too late  
Oh Mother Nature  
Mother Nature  
Thy home captivates

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

Adapted from the Song, 'Weeping Mother'  
Tom Nemecek

Roses red from our hearts we share them with you  
Though we fail  
Was it so hard to be human  
2000 years ago  
Mother of us all I'd rather die than to see you cry but  
Tear drops fall

Weeping Mother why do you cry?  
Blood on the statue, Tears from your eyes  
Weeping mother why do you cry?  
Blood on the statue, Tears from your eyes

O weeping mother  
Roses fall on the ground where you walk  
Is there something that we can do for you?

'Cause I want us to be happy again  
'Cause I want us to be happy again



Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam  
Gabriel Rohaidy

as life was drawn  
from me  
and my lungs breathed  
out but didn't breathe  
in  
i was taken to  
the gate where the angel  
sat with two  
glowing keys and on  
his belt a sword of  
fire yet he sat  
unburned

do you come bearing a  
message  
asked the seraph

the only message  
i bring is  
mine own self seeking  
to pass through the  
eye

'tis true many  
have come  
through this way  
and their journey has been  
one of ease  
because you loved

as i prepared  
myself to step  
through the  
eye  
a shadow passed  
through my heart  
as the seraph's hand  
grazed the hilt

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

of his flaming sword  
and the center of  
my back began  
to itch

*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*

my eyes  
b/l/i/n/k/e/d  
and alternating inside  
my lids i saw  
myself as on  
a screen  
and flashes of  
a lonely  
carpenter

as my life's reel  
winds tears fall  
from the  
carpenter eyes  
and his life's work  
becomes his life's end

for some your  
works have been  
enough but  
for you  
much has been  
given  
and much has been  
expected

many here have  
you to thank  
but  
you can  
not  
enter

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

First Breath  
Gabriel Rohaidy

my bones are still  
my lungs take no breath  
i have begun to rot  
my being has the stench of death  
about it

i lie  
entombed  
in the belly of  
the rock that swallowed  
a god  
bound hand and foot  
perfumes barely  
masking the rotten air

wondering when will  
the stone be rolled

the stone that  
sealed the mouth  
but  
could not choke  
the life out

when will i be called  
from the calm that is death  
awakening my heart  
bringing life back into my body  
dank air turned gold  
pain of being  
alive returning  
coming back with  
opportunity and  
responsibility

until then  
i lie  
being digested in

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

this stone stomach  
not waiting  
waiting is for the living  
i just lie

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

*This past summer the Center for Catholic Studies sponsored a trip to Oxford, England, where students from around the country, and those from England and Spain, had the opportunity to learn and share each other's experience on the campus of St. Hugh's College. The course, "Foundations of Christian Culture" explored the philosophical, theological, artistic and cultural implications of our ancient faith. Students were asked to keep a journal, to share their experience, the following are excerpts from these journals.*

Excerpts from the Oxford Journals  
Elliot Guerra

Tuesday, July 26, 2005 *De Ente En Essentia*

I hope it's everything I dream it should be. I'm crucified to hope these days. I hope the food is terrible, the flowers fresh, and the laughs plentiful. In this chair I realize my unknown grandfathers died with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading skills and now their boy is in Oxford (for a few weeks). I'll make sure not to start a fight Dad, and I'll wear a tie to class Mom, (she figures that's the way to show respect to your teachers) I'll say please and always thank you. I'll do my homework and pray. I'll look both ways before crossing a street and smile at the old English ladies, that is if they actually are old English ladies (I guess that could be a stereotype I've gathered from PBS), I'll chew with my mouth closed Mom, I'll defend my pride Dad. I'll, "let them know where I come from." I'll check out the music shops, Julian, and I'll hug every homeless person I meet, Christy. Of course I'll "dance and be silly." I'll smoke cigarettes and write, and I know my arms are too weak these days but I'll try and wrap them around the whole world, I'll make sure to brush my teeth and make my bed.

But most of all, I'll let the world, if not just Oxford know, that I was here. In the same city of all these minds, this city of history and of culture, I will let them all know with a prayer in my heart and my arms in the air that I too was here, I too, with the memories of pills, and white curtains, I will scream to them all, I too was here, that I too loved once, learned once, and I too dream of heaven, so I too will be remembered. No Dad, I won't make us rich, no Mom, they won't put my statue here one day, but those pictures in the brochure, this map of England, these walls, they will, they must remember me.

Thursday, July 28, 2005 *Naked*

"Smoking Kills" the English sign reads and so do the memories, but these ivy covered walls, the young Italian students holding hands, dreaming,

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

the tourist taking pictures, the books, the ale, this isn't for me I've come to realize. This is for Charlene in the hospital, all those beautiful lost faces that looked like the portraits found on Saint prayer cards, in the Bergen Regional Medical Center, my brother's chubby fingers around the guitar, my father's hands my mother's tears. It's for them, and the cool English breeze and gray clouds will lament with me.

Today I found a beautiful garden on the college grounds and as the smoke from my Camel rose like incense and the ulcer in my stomach told me I shouldn't be here I stayed in the garden, my garden. It's everything I dreamt it would be, as I thought I heard God strolling alone, hands behind his back, humming a dirge he had long forgotten the words to. I hear he prefers English gardens these days, he can't walk through Eden anymore, it hurts too much, memories of that terrible day when he found them hiding, fearing their beautiful naked selves. So this afternoon when all seems OK it's just me and God and our garden

"If today you hear his voice, harden not your heart." The Psalm sighed this morning and maybe it was the tie I bought with 50 cents at the Goodwill store before I left or maybe it was the tobacco but for a moment there—just for a moment there, I thought I heard God whisper, "It's OK Elliot, you deserve this too."

I should get going now. Immanuel Kant is calling.

Sunday, July 31, 2005 *A Prayer*

Dear Jesus,

Sorry I interrupted, I know you're busy with the poor bastards in London, the lepers, and Newark but I just wanted to ask about my soul. How is the poor thing? I couldn't tell you so I figured go to the source, I know you look at just that, there are plenty of tattooed, hairy, blued eyed Cubans to look at so since you seem to know it so well and if its not too much how are we doing?

How are the people I try to forget? How is Gino, my boyhood friend in Miami, is his father still dead? Were you able to hop over there on the way to Galilee to resurrect him? How is the "family," still in jail? Are there any Teaneck High graduates in heaven yet? How is St. Joseph's youth group? How are Kevin, Jen and Ivan and Father Paul? How is the lover of dreams, Toby? Is he still mad at me? Dear Jesus, how's Caitlin, how's her tongue, hips and her brain? Is her beautiful Irish grandmother still warm and lovely like the water

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

at the docks this summer? How are my kids at the center? How is Raymond, Charlene and the other apostles at Bergen County Medical Center? How is Dylan?

How is Las Vegas, England, how is my long lost soul, Jesus? Does Miami still glow, like it does in my dreams? How is my soul, Lord Jesus...? It's made up of these people, dirt, whiskey, poetry, gasoline, and more.... If it's not too much, please let me know.

But most importantly... how are you? I'm growing up to look like you I think. A scraggly beard and red eyes, both our father's work with their hands, both are poor, both had no friends. Dear brother, Jesus... Dear Saving Jesus, Dear, lonely, lonely, holy Jesus, I miss you. You don't seem to come around as much anymore, I suppose that's my fault. If it makes you feel any better, I stopped being so me... and a little more you, there are no more girls, no more binges, just some loyal apostles, some pints, and a dream...

Yours, with divine madness,  
Elliot

Thursday, August 4, 2005 *Letter to My Unknown Grandfather*

Dear Grandfather,  
Of course I know not where you are  
or how you sound, but I hope all is well wherever it is you call  
home.

What thoughts I had of you today grandpa (if I can call you that)  
as I woke up yet again with this sky,  
this aching stomach  
and these thoughts of you.  
We can laugh if you want to  
drink, if you'd like  
and talk, if you feel it is safe.

Was it you mowing the lawn in the English dawn  
or that still burning cigarette yours that I saw on the sidewalk?  
If it was I'm glad you shared it with me.

Have you ever had the feeling,  
dear

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

lost  
grandpa  
that the world was made just for you?  
Between all those shifts at the book publisher's office,  
between your daughters' weddings  
and all that beer have you ever felt that the world was created  
uniquely, and selfishly for you?

Why is it, lost grandpa that Alex, the young son of Gloria  
walks a few steps behind his mother dreaming in Oxford's chilly summer  
night?

Why is it that young, beautiful English girls wear dark, warm, brown skirts?  
Dark and warm like the place you now call home?

Oh dear, mad grandpa look what God has given me today!

Every tree planted, every bee buzzing, every brick laid just for me.

Who will share this with me, if not you Grandpa? Because I fear the morning  
will become too hot, the afternoon too cold, and when night falls, I'll be alone.

Sunday, August 7, 2005 *Littlemore*

Oh Sprit of this place, hold me. Comfort me, as I once again return to staring at  
things I can not own. Spirit whisper to me in front of this fireplace so that I can  
remember what to do, when returning to a home where you have to jiggle the  
toilet handle, and be careful not to put the faucet on "full blast." Oh sweet,  
loving, beautifully afraid Cardinal Newman, stay with me now. For if I should  
ever forget this place, let me feel a lack. One memory, a smell, and I will be  
yours again. Let me remember you the way you were in *this* room, *this* place so  
you may remember me.



Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Excerpts from the Oxford Journals  
Daniel Lowery

Friday, July 29, 2005

As this two week experience at Oxford began, I found myself in a moderate state of anxiety. I was concerned about how well I would be able to re-enter the world of ideas after a two month summer siesta in intellectual limbo. It was not that I disliked the idea of a return to the studious environment—on the contrary, I have a serious love of thinking, studying, learning, especially in matters pertaining to philosophy and religion, which is what this course is all about. Rather, it was that I tend to experience a tension, a sort of incommensurability, between these two avenues of life, both of which I love—namely, the serious, intellectual life that I live during the school year; and the “normal,” commonsense, practical, material, down-to-earth life of summer working outdoors in the Texas sun. These two ways are indeed not antagonistic to one another—it is simply that when I am embroiled in one, the other automatically becomes obscure, distant, seemingly unimportant. And when I am in the one, I don’t want to leave it to embrace the other, although I know full well that I will be happy either way.

So as I entered the Oxford life, I found myself initially very reluctant to jump into the intellectual sphere, saddened by the prospect of leaving the summer life, despite my confidence that as soon as I shifted gears I would rediscover the joys of contemplation and study. But now, having spent three days at Oxford, my anxiety over this tension, this radical shift, has been relieved by several remarkably consolations. First is my delight in Oxford itself. Being physically present in a place of such scholarly and historical wealth immediately restored my collegiate way of life. This profoundly studious place is infectious, and one cannot help but happily surrender to its invitation to contemplation. The second consolation is derived from some reflections on the discussions during our first two days in class. I noticed that throughout these discussions there arose again and again a series of complementary polarities, each pair of which were difference, but evidently related: faith and reason, matter and spirit, sacred and secular, historical and eternal, necessary and contingent, examined life and unexamined life—and there are probably more. Now, a significant conclusion from our discussion was that the two elements in each of these pairs are by no means in opposition to one another, but are complementary, harmonious, such that if you were to take one without the other, if you were not to give each the attention it is due by its very existence you would end up with a distorted view of reality, of life, of the universe, of human nature—

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

you would disrupt the natural harmony between the two. What allows us to perceive this harmony and integrate it into our life is our recognition of the reality of the Incarnation. In the Incarnation, God becomes man, the eternal enters time, human reason is confronted with the consummate mystery of faith, and a clearer vision of the divine plan underlying the surface phenomena of human history begins to emerge. By means of the Incarnation, we recognize the reality of the sacramental principle—that on account of Christ entering time, God becoming man, matter and spirit are forever engaged in a unity, the spiritual truths actually exist in the material forms. We can distinguish the two in our minds, and separately attend to the spiritual, the abstract, the universal, the sacred, in contrast to the material, the concrete, the particular, and the secular; but that is only by a mental act—in reality, the two exist as sacramental unity. By the sacramental principle, the barrier between the sacred and profane is abolished. The Christian reality is at once spiritual and material, universal and contingent, sacred and secular. And we live as Christians by recognizing and attending to both aspects of that reality. Chesterton said that we must be at once at home in the world and utterly astonished by it. We must balance the examined and the unexamined life. If we are solely rational, we will go mad; if we neglect the intellect we will be irrational. We must be both spiritual and material, sacred and secular, intellectually and physically alive, historical beings with a recognition of the underlying a historical reality.

Now, how does this parade of ideas function as a consolation to my anxious hopes of resolving the tension between the two walks of life that I find myself in? I can't say the answer is altogether clear, but I am encouraged by the thought that these differing modes of living correspond to the various polarities whose fundamental harmony can be understood by virtue of the Incarnation. When I am living the physically active, practical, simple life of the summer, I am always convinced that it is the surest way to truth and the good life. But likewise when I am in college, I am convinced that the intellectual pursuits are the surest way to those same goods. Perhaps the sacramental principle suggests that there is a certain unity between these seemingly disparate spheres. They are both the way to truth and the good life, and one must not fail to attend to either in order to achieve these supreme goods. To be materially and spiritually, physically and intellectually successful, to be a Catholic, to appropriate the reality of the Incarnation, I must seek to integrate these two dimensions of life into a unified way of living. As Chesterton suggested, the Catholic must live both the examined and the unexamined life. And as far as I can see, Chesterton did a pretty good job of finding that balance—so I'd better read some more of his books. I've got a long way to go, but I'm making progress.

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Saturday, July 30, 2005

One particularly impressive and satisfying aspect of this trip has been the physical, material access we've had to the ancient Christian tradition. It's one thing to sit at one's desk back home and study Christian philosophy and theology, and history, to try and apprehend Christian truths through an intellectual approach. It's quite another to walk around Oxford, to marvel at Canterbury Cathedral, and to experience, to physically enter into, the living history of the Church, the Christian culture.

It reminds me of our discussion in class about two of the signature elements of modernity, rationality and autonomy. The Enlightenment thinkers taught that human beings should take control of their own minds, consciences, and wills, should think and act for themselves, like the autonomous, rational beings they are. And on reflection, it seems to me that during my three years at Seton Hall, my approach to life, and in particular my approach to Christianity, has been heavily influenced by this typically modern teaching. My attempt to be an authentic believer has been more intellectual than anything else. I have studied arguments—historical, philosophical, anthropological, etc.—for and against Christianity, to try and make a rational, autonomous decision to be a Christian. I have wanted to be a Christian not because I was raised a Christian, but because I was rationally persuaded that Christianity was the truth.

I am still a Christian after three years of eager questioning. And the questioning continues, my intellectual appropriation and apprehension of Christian truth progresses. But my experience thus far at Oxford has exposed me to a different way of approaching Christianity, of understanding its truths, of being a Christian. Living in this astonishingly historical place has reinforced my recognition of the fact that as a Christian, I am participating in a two-thousand year old tradition, I am an inheritor of an historical revelation of God. When I contemplate this, I see myself less as an autonomous agent, a child of the Enlightenment trying to be a rational Christian, than as a member of a great communion of the faithful, a believer belonging to a mighty tradition, trying to understand and follow the teachings of a man who came two millennia ago, under the guidance of the Church he instituted. I think when I am in the thick of my studies during the year, I get so caught up in trying to understand and appreciate Christianity intellectually, that I tend to forget this critically important dimension of being a believer, namely that a Catholic is Catholic by virtue of his participation in the tradition of the Church. As a Catholic, I am primarily a part of the Church, not an isolated, autonomous be-

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

liever. And perhaps this forgetfulness poses a detriment to my attempts to be a faithful Christian. Thankfully, Oxford has afforded me a jolting reminder of this aspect of the faith. Let's hope I don't forget it again.

Monday, August 1, 2005

In class this morning we discussed Cardinal Newman with Msgr. Liddy, whose evident love for Newman was inspiring. I myself have a growing admiration for his work, beginning with the simple fact—or rather, complex—that he was a convert to Catholicism. To relinquish one's own cherished tradition, and to endure all the suffering that must entail, for the sake of what one perceives to be the truth is an act of inimitable courage, integrity, and honesty. But admittedly I feel a tension here too. On the one hand, I am encouraged by the fact that Newman believed Catholicism to be true, as it reinforces my own religious convictions and commitment to the Church. On the other hand, I feel compelled to follow Newman's lead and seek the truth honestly, with the recognition that my discoveries may force me to change my beliefs if I wish to maintain the integrity that Newman so exemplified. Of course, my faith allows me to trust that Catholicism is true and that my reason, guided by faith, will never fail to perceive that that is the case. But it is still a torturous predicament. I can only study hard, contemplate, and pray for God's guidance.

And as has been impressed upon me this trip I must continue to live the life of faith, to see faith as a way of being, and not just as a guide to reason. Perhaps this related Newman's study of apprehension in his "Grammar of Assent." We can have "notional" apprehension, which is the domain of reason, of the intellectual pursuits; and we can have "real" apprehension, which is the deep, concrete, experiential. It seems this real apprehension is concerned with this notion of faith as being. I remember reading somewhere that faith is the knowledge born of love. And love is not the business of reason, but of being. The knowledge of faith must inform the conclusions of reason, just as it is faith that guides reason. And so I must not forget that the experience of the living faith, of the Catholic community and culture, is the most reliable guide to truth, and not merely the isolated thoughts and doubts of reason ticking away at the desk.

Tuesday, August 2, 2005

This morning Msgr. Liddy led a seminar on Lonergan reminding me how intrigued I am by Lonergan's ideas. The whole model of human consciousness, of experiencing, understanding, judging, acting, and loving, with

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

the corresponding transcendental precepts of being attentive, intelligent, rational, and responsible, and all this as being a normative, cross-cultural, trans-historical guide to reality, objectivity, and human authenticity, is as fascinating as any philosophical scheme I've come across. Particularly compelling is the straightforward notion of humans as questioning beings. It sounds simple, but it's really incredible when I think about it. If you look at reality as a universal whole, and then point out us persons as those parts of reality that can do this bizarre thing of asking a question, of inquiring into the Truth, of seeking to know, it's astonishing. And then add to that the idea that our questions are not utterly open, but connected to the truth, intending true knowledge, containing an anticipation of truth, and this thing called questioning becomes even more marvelous. It seems to hint at the secret of human nature, of the universe. The very fact that we ask "why?" itself constitutes the beginnings of an answer. Does this impulse to ask, to know, not suggest a divine Creator who intended for us to long for the Truth for which we were made? "My heart is restless until it rests in thee." My questions do not cease until my soul resides in Truth. And all this talk of questioning reminds me of my favorite quote from Eric Voegelin, which is particularly relevant for our course's theme of faith and culture, especially in the contemporary world: "the problem with modernity is not the loss of the true answer, but the loss of the true question." Accordingly, Lonergan's transcendental imperative of asking question upon question for true understanding, is critically important.

Wednesday, August 3, 2005

Today we made an enjoyable excursion to London to visit Westminster Abbey. Seemingly less a place of religious devotion than a national tribute and memorial, it was half a monumentally impressive shrine of English history and half a pompous display of regal pride. Regardless, it was thrilling and chilling to be in a place so materially suffused with history. And moreover, it was an exceedingly tangible testament to the way in which the authentic practice of Christianity can get smothered by the social and political baggage that is heaped on top of it. The connection between Church and State, and the way in which the Church is adopted as a means of political expedience and social status, is dramatically visible in the Abbey, where you cannot walk a foot without seeing yet another awesome shrine or memorial to some king, queen, noble, or great thinker.

It's very odd to physically encounter the remnants, the tomb, of some historical figure who hitherto has only existed for me in my imagination. History is somehow recalled in a much more direct, immediate, and tangible way,

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

almost experientially, when in the physical presence of the past. I've read "Henry V," seen the movie, written on it, contemplated it—but to actually see his tomb is rather startling. It's difficult to fully appreciate the reality of the past, to get beyond the textbook imagination, in our natural preoccupation with the immediacy of the present. So when the past is presented to us in the present, it becomes more personal, more familiar, more recognizable.

These thoughts led me to wonder what kind of awakening I would have if I encountered the tomb of Christ. The past would then be in the tangible present. Yet I need not encounter the past to encounter Christ. Unlike Henry V, Christ is sacramentally present in the present. As a sacramental Christian, I believe that every experience I have as a historical being, everything that is immediate, tangible and contingent, belongs to the deeper realm of the sacred by virtue of the sacramental presence of Christ. And that is immensely more startling a thought than any that might have crossed my mind at Westminster.

Saturday, August 6, 2005

This morning we enjoyed an insightful discussion with Stratford on the Trinity. I found it particularly compelling, as it did much to help flesh out the understanding of the human person as an essentially loving being, as discussed yesterday in our reading of Lonergan. God is love, is a society of three persons eternally engaged in the supreme act of self-giving reciprocal love, and created human beings in His image for the purpose of love. It is thus in the full act of self-giving love that we act in accordance with our nature, and become the persons we were created to be. We make sense of our capacity and need for love, and thus for society, by reference to the Trinitarian nature of God. Discussions of the Trinity are, on the one hand, exceedingly abstract, dealing as they do with such a baffling proposition as three persons in one Being. Yet on the other hand, they are delightfully rooted in the down-to-earth, commonsensical experience of love and society. Just as we understand, on the highest speculative level, our own being by virtue of the Trinity, the reality of Trinitarian love is made palpable, accessible, by the love of everyday human life in which it is reflected. The happiness, the joyful aura, of our little community here at Oxford, our society which coheres in loving friendship, is a dim approximation of that sheer delight that belongs to the Trinity. I think C.S. Lewis wrote somewhere that that intrinsic society that makes up the Trinity is not only a relationship of joy, but of fun—it might even be thought of as a kind of dance. Such a rich conception of the Trinity makes a tremendous load of sense when we see it as the divine basis for the experience of human friendship, such as here at Oxford, in which our society is not only loving, but fun-loving, and

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

that immensely healthy sort of fun that derives from simply enjoying the company of others in a celebratory spirit of good humor. Just as Chesterton said that the one secret Christ kept from the human race was his sense of humor, I am certain that that inner society of the Trinity must be resonating with a prodigious laughter in exuberant joy. As a last aside, I would like to remark that while all this talk of the Trinity is bound up in a terribly difficult doctrine, difficult to grasp much less to accept, the Trinity affords a consummately superior explanation of the phenomenon of human love in all its varieties. It is not only robust (especially in the modern confusion about love), exciting, and beautiful, it is exceedingly reasonable. By which I mean not that the mystery of the Trinity is all that accessible to human reason, but that Christianity itself is rendered that much more persuasive, more rational, by offering such a might foundation for the human experience of love, for that thing that seems to reside in the very core of our existence, our being.

Monday, August 8, 2005

The Caldecotts discussed in class today the dilemma of faith and culture, and the sorts of problems posed by the contemporary world to Christian evangelization. An insightful ideas proposed was that our culture is a culture of boredom. The contemporary mind is motivated by a consumerist mentality that seeks to be constantly entertained. The world exists for our consumption, and entertainment becomes the premium object of desire. Yet when we fail to achieve that desire, when the world no longer entertains, we find ourselves in a state of utter boredom. Beneath the superficial realm of entertainment, life has nothing to offer the mind captivated by consumerism. Boredom, a sort of apathetic despair, is all that resides beneath the surface.

It reminds me of T.S. Eliot's view that beneath the surface of modern life lies first boredom, and ultimately horror. Now horror is more terrifying than boredom, but perhaps it is not worse, because it at least has passion and vivacity. It is alarming, and thus motivating, while boredom is neither: boredom is simply bland and impassionate. If the consumerist mind cannot get beyond boredom, therefore, it is in dire straits, because it is lifeless. And it cannot get beyond boredom because it cannot get beyond itself. It is lifeless because it does not partake in the reciprocal act of self-giving, of love, that is the source of created life and well-being. Our life becomes empty to the extent that we get caught up in the dynamic of boredom and entertainment.

It is this lifelessness that lies at the root of boredom that is real problem. It is the inability to be inspired by, to be passionate about, either good or evil.

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

At least the atheist convinced by the problem of evil is passionate about what seems to him to be a lack of goodness in the world. But the bored, atomistic individual of modern society is not even swayed by evil. In Chesterton's novel "The Man Who Was Thursday," one character states, in a favorite line of mine, that the problem with the world is that we only see the back of the world, and it is brutal and uninspiring. The human imperative is to get around to the magnificent front, and thus repair our vision. There we will behold the consummate goodness of the world. This imperative seems to me particularly relevant to the bored mind, for the bored mind is the blind mind. It cannot see beyond itself and its lack of entertainment to see the goodness in the world that is the source of true entertainment. For entertainment is curiously a very Christian thing—it partakes in that fun that is the essence of Christian joy. But it becomes unChristian, even anti-Christian, when it becomes a vehicle for escaping life rather than an essential, natural part of life itself. We don't exist to be entertained, but to entertain each other as a society of persons. If the bored modern mind could get at this distinction between true, good entertainment and false, escapist entertainment, it would be well on its way to getting around to the true front of the world, to use Chesterton's metaphor. In the Christian view, life beneath the surface is the source of vital entertainment, not the lack thereof (as in the consumerist mentality). Just as the fully Christian life is captivated by joy, it is immune from boredom. Boredom is a symptom of the disease of faithlessness—an increasingly common ailment of the modern world.



Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

Excerpts from the Oxford Journals  
Francis Tanczos

Thursday, July 28, 2005

Since arriving to Oxford, yesterday, I have already been exposed to a world of new things. Of course, coming to England is one of them. However, I also took part in the Latin Mass at Oratory Church. I thought a lot about the significance of this particular experience to me and found that it interesting that of the fourteen years or so of my Catholic education, this had been my first Latin Mass. What is even more significant is that, on the contrary, my parents and grandparents grew up (in Hungary) only hearing Latin Mass making this experience one that I am sure to truly remember.

Needless to say, the Mass was simply a beautiful experience. Of course, I must also admit that Latin translations books were a "saving grace," as the only thing I remember from high school Latin class was the Pater Noster.

The first morning for me in Oxford, only one thing was in my mind: how cold it is here in July! Perhaps, there is some correlation between drinking and the weather here. But in all seriousness, I found that there is definitely something warm about celebrating Mass together in a smaller community, no matter how early or cold it is in the morning.

For me personally, the first session of today's class introduced me to the tone of the entire course. I must admit that it is always refreshing to be challenged to think in a new way. In this case, as an international relations major, thinking philosophically is something generally new (other than ethics) and combining the two disciplines is a very engaging experience. More specifically, it is interesting for me to take a "stroll" down a new avenue where I can come across a new array of terminology and theory. For example, the 'bicycle accident' allegory (not only humorous) exhibited the metaphysical explanation versus physical explanation and system versus contingency. I am sure that ordinarily I would have never ventured a second thought at this situation if it were to happen to me but put philosophically, a door is opened to endless questions (some of which we answered in class). Such is the same I find when examining human history (i.e. the philosophies of history as according to Hegel, Augustine, Dilthey, etc.).

Continuing on to the second session of the first day, one concept appealed to me above all of the others and that was the concept of "perfection."

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

The topic of perfection was raised through the discussion of the different connotations of history. The question in my mind was: are human beings perfectible especially if there is no real consensus on what "perfection" is? I find that, through Catholicism, the answer seems to be that there is the hope that this can be achieved but only if we challenge ourselves to become perfect by our actions and not only our words.

Friday, July 29, 2005

A perfect way to start off any day, the morning Mass gave me the "spiritual energy" to start off the day even though I must admit that "jet lag" was still working against me. Monsignor Sullivan's homily struck me with intrigue today when he said that "we must let ourselves be loved." As the day went on, I thought about and contemplated the meaning of love and subsequently, the meaning of God's love. Someone could make the argument that this statement holds no validity but that would be not only narrow-minded but wrong. Asking myself why this is, I had come up with the idea that the truth is that God loves each and everyone of his children and has loved them throughout the history of humankind (the evidence for this seems more clear to someone with faith). In this sense, as we learned in class about timelessness, so is God's love, in addition to being limitless. And then I asked myself: why is it that man has constantly gone astray throughout history falling into the hopelessness of evil (from Adam's temptation to today's acts of terrorism)? The answer seems pretty clear after a while and that is because we have not let ourselves be loved by God and thus, we have not completely turned away from sinful acts.

The morning and afternoon sessions of today's class were again filled with insightful philosophical lecture and discussion. But what caught my intrigue was the topic of the convergence of religion and science (secular). For me, John Lukacs is not only a fellow Hungarian but also a wonderful writer and philosopher. By all means Lukacs makes a valid argument by pointing out the "outdated" feud between religion and science. I believe that Lukacs is alluding to the fact, the two are reconciling and as of the last couple of years, they have successfully coexisted. In other words, what he is saying is that, in general, no one is greater than the other in modern thought.

Finally, at the group discussion about our "life-changing" decisions, I came to another realization. During the exercise, I couldn't help but be reminded of Robert Frost's famous poem of "Two Roads Diverged in A Wood." I know that I, personally, as many other people, have found myself making several important decisions throughout the course of my life but perhaps, we find

Volume 1, Issue 1 - SPRING/SUMMER 2006

ourselves at Frost's scene more often than we would think. In retrospect, I believe that sometimes it is necessary to think back at the decisions one has made whether out of nostalgia or improvement. After all, our own history should matter to us.

Friday, August 5, 2005

What is objectivity? What is subjectivity? These are two relatively difficult questions to answer especially put into the context of today's class discussion. What seems to be the right answer is that there are no "right" answers. Through today's class discussion, the fact that we live in a world where everything is relative had become even more apparent to me. Listening to the responses in class, each student had a different interpretation of how to explain these two terms and I believe that there was even a mention of the two being one in the same with no real distinction between subjectivity and objectivity.

Father Lonergan's theory on the structural system of how we humans obtain "knowledge," though difficult to understand in one sense, is very intriguing. As Monsignor Liddy explained, Lonergan provides that the definition for subjectivity is: the fruit of authentic objectivity. Interestingly, however, the same is also true the other way around. So then, what is the difference? In essence, I believe that Lonergan's theories are basically set up with the question – what do I know, when I make a decision – in mind. In other words, there has to be a distinction between empirical knowledge and that which is speculative.

What is even more interesting is that you can tie this topic into the modern and the post-modern way of thinking. The modern view would provide that there should be a continued drive towards knowledge and the quest for certainty. In doing so, it would allow for objectivity to exist whereas the post-modern way of thinking provides that achieving certainty is, not only impossible, but naïve. In this sense, people must yield to subjectivity.

Sunday, August 7, 2005

This morning, instead of going to Littlemore, I stayed in Oxford to attend the Latin Mass at Oratory Church once again. Although I am still not used to the Mass in Latin nor do I understand it completely, the mysticism of the Latin chants has always impressed me. I remember learning that in the early times of the Christian church the chanting was an effective means of remembering the prayers and responses especially for the lay people. Through my personal experiences, I find that this is indeed the case because even after the

ARCADIA: A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

Mass many of the chants and responses stayed in my mind.

Something else which I believe was an interesting coincidence was that this Sunday's Mass commemorated Cardinal Newman, whom we learned so much about from Monsignor Liddy's lectures, as well as reading his sermons for this class. During the homily, the priest spoke about the necessity of acting in our faith or in another sense the church being the "arm" of God. The priest then went on to quote Cardinal Newman in one of his works called *Prayers, Verses and Devotions* saying,

If I am sick, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my response to that perplexity will result in glory of Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may even serve Him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be the necessary components of some great end, which is now quite beyond us. He is a practical God and permits nothing to be spent in vain.

I can't help but agree with this because the truth is serving God does not mean going to Mass on Sundays or praying to Him when we are in need but rather, acting out our faith with our minds, bodies and souls. For any Christian, there is no greater calling than this and I believe that this is what Cardinal Newman is alluding to in these great lines.

Monday, August 8, 2005

It has occurred to me over the past two weeks that in the foundation of the Christian culture and faith there is a myriad of people and events that created a "fellowship" between nations and people. From the invaluable contributions of the great philosophers to those of the martyrs and saints, our Christian church has become a diverse community transcending time and region to unite a people in a common belief and worship of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Though history may have separated the Church in the way it worships (i.e. Catholics and Anglicans, East and West, etc.), the faith in God is what unites the Christian Church.

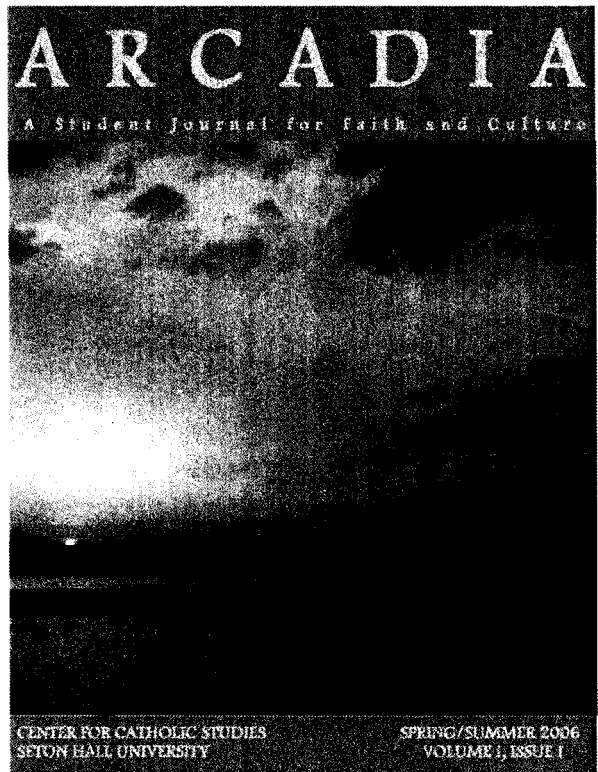
In our quest in understanding the foundation of Christian culture, we have turned towards the essential writers of the faith, from the early Christian writers like Augustine and Aquinas to the more recent writers such as Newman, Chesterton, Lewis and Tolkien. Through reading their words and understanding their theories and philosophies, perhaps, we as Christians have come to a better understanding of our faith and the history of our faith. These writers were our "windows" into the history of Christianity. In this way their contri-

but ion to the Christian faith and they, themselves, have truly become immortal.

# ARCADIA

## Call for Submissions!

All student papers, poems, and journals that engage with Catholic Ideas are welcome for submission. (Limit of 3 works per author) Please submit all pieces in hard copy to Fahy Hall 318 and as an attached MSWord Document to [guerrael@shu.edu](mailto:guerrael@shu.edu) by Monday, October 2.



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**In this issue:**

**Resurrection and Mystery Story**

Thomas Regan

**“All Things to All People”:  
The Christ-Figure Present in Evelyn Waugh’s  
*Brideshead Revisited***

Christy Guerra

**Reason, Love, and Contemplation as Characters  
and the Salvific Role of the Virgin Mary  
in the *Divina Commedia***

Meghan Conda

**Poetry**

Kaitlyn Delengowski

Thomas P. Levy

Tom Nemecek

Gabriel Rohaidy

**Excerpts from the Oxford Journals**

Elliot Guerra

Daniel Lowery

Francis Tanczos