

# ARCADIA

A Student Journal for Faith and Culture



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# A R C A D I A

A Student Journal for Faith and Culture

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**COVER ART:** Elliot Guerra. "The New Colossus." Photograph.

## “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 annually at the close of the Spring semester.

### Introduction

This past Christmas season I had the joy of traveling to the west coast. As a native east coaster it was, to coin the cliché, a dream come true. Along the way I snapped photos and spoke to strangers—the pregnant woman waiting for her table in Arnold, CA the father and son with their makeshift sleds near Tahoe. In all my conversations, quips and polite laughs I was struck by a recurring sense that they too must have felt—that of a commonality that comes only with travel—we can all be our imagined selves, the stories you can tell to only a passing stranger. I found it happening to me, the passing landscape in a window took on the notion of pages turning as I met more and more people. I discovered that traveling is a type of storytelling and certainly we are at our creative best when we are away from home. What is it about the train or bus that makes us pull out our otherwise unused journals—the ones we guiltily observe collecting dust in our home libraries or desks?

In my journal writing during those cool nights, more tourist than visitor, I thought of how this particular trip out west was not only a writer's tradition but one that is particularly American. The "wild west" in this country has long had a tradition of transformation in our popular imagination. Back home, I'm still traveling—even if it's only across the Hudson, more commuter than traveler. So it is with our new issue of *Arcadia*. In the student writings collected here the same theme of travel seems to persist—whether it is those lit nativity scenes along the snowy lawns of our town centers or the epic conversation between the past and present on the road entitled our memory—of places changed, friends missed and memories gone, those conversations are all here. As it is my continued hope that *Arcadia* remains a place where these conversations can take place. Travel often, write well. I'll be seeing you.

Elliot Guerra  
Managing Editor

### Issue Introduction

Poets, artists, scholars, and ordinary Christians have long agreed on one thing: the joyful believer finds in the world the grace and beauty and redeeming love of God. But of course, as we know too well, that same world presents for the believer myriad and profound challenges. This fine issue of *Arcadia* brings into sharper focus both the tension and complementarity that exists between a world already graced and a world in need of salvation.

Era Murzaku goes to the heart of the matter in her essay on religion and the natural sciences, and she takes as her starting point recent debates which highlight the dissonance between the two. But she holds that the relationship is best perceived as one of balance and service, not competition. She speaks of science as a “service” to humanity. Yet she also contends that religion must offer itself as a service to science, that people of faith must engage deeply with science and provide a moral vision and direction that can allow science to be of *true* service to humanity.

This essay, along with the other thoughtful contributions collected here, hints at what “service” means in the Christian intellectual life. We may not find in this issue final resolution to the concerns of the past or the problems of the present. But we are invited to further study and speculation, deeper contemplation and discernment, in the light of faith and of present challenges. And here we are invited to remember that like the Son of Man, our purpose is to serve, not to be served.

James McCartin  
Member, Faculty Editorial Board

**Dante's Greater Society: The Message and Audience of The Divine Comedy**  
Andrew Trzaska

Though exiled from his home city of Florence, the ex-politician remained the optimist. Instead of abandoning political thought when his public career ended virtually overnight by the hands of a rivaling political faction supported by Pope Boniface VIII, Dante chose to critique and offer ideas up for a better way of running the world in which he lived. His "genius", as he refers to it in Canto X of the *Inferno*, directed him on intellectual missions to rethink various aspects of society in his works, from politics to social structure to religion and even literature itself. The culmination of his thought on these different aspects of a society is *The Divine Comedy*, or the *Commedia*. In this paper I will argue that Dante's purpose for the *Commedia* was to point out the need for social and political reform in order to bring humankind closer to God. I will explore this in two parts. First, I will look at Dante's grand theory that attempted to reinvent the very culture of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Then I will explore how Dante structured and directed his message in order for the public to receive it.

It should first be established that Dante's *Commedia* is a work firmly influenced by its historical context. Therefore, to explore Dante's purpose and audience for his *Commedia*, it is necessary to understand the context of Dante's Florence. The efforts of Charlemagne in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries led to the unity of much of Europe under the Holy Roman Empire, but a few port cities in Italy managed to retain some independence and self-sufficiency. Merchants in communes such as Venice restarted sea trade routes that had been lost during the Middle Ages in order to avoid taxation by feudal lords. Florence, though not a port itself, could transport their goods on the Arno River or over a relatively small tract of land to take advantage of these routes as well. These merchants were then able to sell their goods, including spices and silk, at lower prices, eventually bringing money back to Florence. These cities also abandoned the barter system that was prevalent in the Middle Ages in favor of a gold monetary system. In the span of a few generations, Florence outgrew the major Italian port cities, even surpassing the banking center of Siena in impor-



tance in a mere 50 years from 1250 to 1300. Overall, it can be seen that the merchant class essentially pushed Florence and other Italian cities out of the feudal system into their status as mercantile Communes through their trade.

Political development in these free, independent cities included democratic qualities that had ties to the economy as well. An early form of a parliamentary system of government existed in Florence, which pulled its members from the major and minor guilds of Florence. Seen as major or minor based on their size and influence, the guilds functioned as a level of internal organization in the city by regulating production, organizing laborers of similar trades. To enter the political life one had to be a member of a guild, meaning they had to play some economic role in the city; Dante himself entered the guild of apothecaries to become involved in politics. Essentially, the guilds were influential in economic matters, but also functioned as a necessary stepping stone to enter public life. As will be seen later in my argument, their political influence, via their members' places in governmental positions, would not be ignored by Dante when he wrote the *Commedia*

Political conflict between Communes and within the city of Florence was characterized for decades by the question of whether the Empire or the Church had authority over the cities. In Dante's time, as the Empire-supporting Ghibelline faction declined, the struggle between the Black and White factions within the Guelph party characterized the debate on just how much the Church could be involved in the politics of Florence.

Dante's purpose for writing the *Commedia* can be discerned by looking at this history and what his other works have to say. A good starting point for discerning what his message is would be to examine his political stance. Dante's life within the Florentine Commune likely influenced his position as a White Guelph; Dante supported the autonomy of the Florentine Commune. Within the Commune, every person was united through the welfare of the state because everyone had a role to play. While Dante was expelled from Florence after a coup by the Black Guelphs supported by Pope Boniface VIII, he did not become jaded by politics. In fact, Dante took these experiences and wrote with



them in mind. Ideas that appear in several of his minor works would eventually reappear in Dante's *Commedia* as a narrative plan for restoring the morality and unity to a sinful, factionalized Florence.

Dante makes his case for a monarchical system of government in the Monarchia. In this political treatise Dante explains in Aristotelian terms that a final cause exists for humanity because God does nothing in vain:

And to throw light on the matter we are inquiring into, it should be borne in mind that, just as there is a particular purpose for which nature produces the thumb, and a different one for which she produces the whole hand, and again a purpose different from both of these for which she produces the arm, and a purpose different from all of these for which she produces the whole person; in the same way there is one purpose for which the individual person is designed... and another for the kingdom... There is therefore some activity specific to humanity as a whole, for which the whole human race in all its vast number of individual human beings is designed; and no single person, or household, or small community, or city, or individual kingdom can fully achieve it.

Therefore, God must have developed a specific purpose for humanity, which is "to constantly actualize the full intellectual potential of humanity, primarily through thought and secondarily through action (as a function and extension of thought)." It is made clear that Dante believed that everyone and everything had a role to fill in society to achieve a state with "divine likeness," and Dante believed the Commune to be the living, if microcosmic, embodiment of this order; Dante saw beyond the city alone and knew it was part of a greater society and political system. Dante's Monarchia goes on to explain that a king would be a necessary addition because a role that could be filled by one man should not be filled by more than one man, and the divine right of a king displays God's favor towards the ruler. In a sense, Dante fuses his sensibilities about what is an effective system of rule with a deduction of what God must consider to be the best system of government (which, coincides with ideas pre-

sented about proper forms of government laid out by Aristotle in the *Politics*). Dante's discussion of humanity's purpose and the establishment of a king with divine right supports the idea that Dante wanted to bring humanity into closer union with God.

This conclusion is further supported by discussions in the *Convivio*. Aristotle's ideas of final cause, or rather the inherent purpose that everything has, appear again in the *Convivio*, taking the form of dependency; Dante explains that the individual's well-being relies on family relationships; the well-being of family relationships relies on the community, and so on. Dante systematically explains that unless there is one ruler, conflict between the different rulers and their people would keep humanity as a whole from reaching full union with God. Taken as a whole, Dante seems to connect one's happiness and well-being with something beyond one's self, in the community and eventually through a single ruler. When he discusses the divine authority given to the Romans to rule, Dante is not just showing a political theory in the *Convivio* like that in the *Monarchia*. He believes that he has come to understand God's plan for the world.

Dante's *Convivio* also shows his beliefs on the connection of a soul to God. Dante believes the ultimate desire of one's soul is to reunite with its creator, that being God. Yet, it is likely that a person will stray in his journey to God. What makes one stray from one's progress to being united with God is sin. Dante wrote the *Commedia* to show exactly how people strayed off of the path to God, and how to achieve the better life he envisioned. As noted earlier, Dante puts forth in the *Monarchia* and the *Convivio* that the well-being of an individual depends on larger social structures. These relationships reach all the way up to the divinely authorized monarch and God himself, effectively attaching the single soul to the Commune that Dante knew so well. Likewise, Dante's concept of sin seems to have roots in one's relationships with others. When we sin, we may hurt ourselves, but our sin will hurt others as well, destroying the oneness that we share with others. The hoarders and wasters of the Fourth Circle are a prime example of this; their collection and misuse of

resources denies another person those same resources without good reason.

The structures of the three realms of the afterlife, especially those of hell and purgatory, give insight into what Dante saw as especially troubling in the process of achieving oneness with others and eventually with God. It is important to discuss what Dante saw as the vilest of sins: fraud, as seen in the Eight Circle, and betrayal, the subject of the Ninth Circle. While the types of fraud vary among the bolgia within the Eight Circle, the deception that underlies them all denies the proper use of God's gifts of freedom and intellect. Fortune tellers, panderers, seducers, and flatterers told others what they wanted to hear, clouding their judgment. Sowers of discord sought to destroy the unity that God bestowed upon His people, thieves denied people the property they owned, and falsifiers created what was not theirs to create (whether that be a persona, money, or an account of events), essentially "playing God". The deeds of the fraudulent, who delude the minds of others, are only surpassed by those who forsake the actual physical lives of others, the betrayers of the Ninth Circle. By placing the fraudulent and betrayers at the bottom of hell, Dante enforces his belief that God's purpose for us is to use our intellect, to come together and to grow closer to him. Denying that intellect leads us astray.

The inclusion of purgatory in Dante's *Commedia* marks the idea that sins can be redeemed. The doctrine of purgatory was popular in the economic boom of 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century Florence. A dilemma the money-earners in the Commune faced was that their newly-acquired capital did not exactly align with the teachings of the Church on asceticism, greed and service to others. The doctrine of purgatory provided those who earned money a way to escape automatic eternal damnation; putting one's surplus funds into good works or the Church could better one's chances of getting to heaven. One critic even argues that the need to buy one's entrance to heaven actually spurred more economic growth. Donated funds went to building churches, like the churches of Santa Croce and the Santa Maria del Fiore, both of which started construction midway through the first half of Dante's life. These churches stimulated religious tourism, which brought more money into the city. Aside from the

economic aspects, the doctrine of purgatory secured the idea that one's actions could try to secure one's position in heaven through worldly intercession for the people of Florence. Dante's purgatory contains sinners just like those in hell, but their punishments can be escaped by working toward the state of grace that heaven requires. Dante's optimism shines through here by its structure; the sinners of purgatory still have hope of achieving a closer union with God in heaven. Purgatory was a necessary piece of Dante's plan for reform. Without it, Dante's *Commedia* turns into a list of good and bad people, without a call to action. If it was not in the *Commedia*, people who saw that some of their behaviors would place them in hell would have no incentive to right their wrongs; being a better person would not change their situation. Inclusion of purgatory facilitated Dante's vision for the elimination of sin, allowing for the hope that it could be overcome.

As discussed earlier, Dante felt he had come to understand God's plan for the world. While discussing Dante's understanding of God's plan, Dante even exhibits a sense of urgency to share this divine plan for the world through his character of Dante the pilgrim in the Inferno:

“Up on your feet! This is no time to tire!”  
my Master [Virgil] cried. The man who lies asleep  
will never waken fame, and his desire

and all his life drift past him like a dream,  
and the traces of his memory fade from time  
like smoke in the air, or ripples on a stream.

Virgil's scolding of Dante the pilgrim reminds him of the importance and even urgency of their journey through hell, purgatory and heaven. Yet, this passage holds significance for Dante the poet as well. This passage can be seen as Dante's commentary on his own career. Dante the poet feels a sense of urgency to complete this work because he believed the world was in such a bad condition. The sooner it could be distributed and talked about, the sooner a closer unity of the Commune, the kingdom and humankind with God could be

achieved. In turn, Dante saw the *Commedia* needed to be read by someone for his plan to be taken into action. The reduction or elimination of sin could be married with Dante's vision of a united Empire to bring the people of Florence and beyond closer and closer to God., but this process could only start if someone picked up the manuscript and read it. Dante's connections to Florence, including the pain of his exile from there, likely led to his focus on them as a general audience. This focus is undeniable; a great number of Dante's Florentine contemporaries appear by name in the *Commedia*. Dante also realized that if he were going to point out sin and how to correct everything that he saw as wrong, he would need to win vast numbers of hearts and minds, and not just the minority that knew Latin. The vernacular, however, was spoken (and written) by more people than Latin. Despite the common association between Latin and educated literature, Dante must have chosen the vernacular for its populist potential.

On the topic of Dante's decision to use the vernacular, it is worth briefly discussing how the *Commedia* was actually written down. While there are no known autograph manuscripts by Dante of the *Commedia*, one can theorize just what style of handwriting Dante used to write it down with. Several styles of script were present in Dante's Florence. The highly decorative gothic lettering was used for religious purposes and texts using it were written in Latin. Professionals, like lawyers and notaries, developed their own notarial scripts, which fall collectively into another category of script. These specialized scripts were full of jargon and abbreviations that truncated writing time and page space. While notaries were some of the first people to copy Dante's poems into their registries to separate their records, their special methods of writing would not have been used by Dante; Dante wanted his message to reach a wider audience than that expert style would allow. Instead, Dante likely used the legible and fairly jargon- and abbreviation-free mercantile style of script. The ornamentation and long tradition of the gothic script might have lent some extra credibility to Dante's writing, but being a Latin-based script might have caused some issues when writing in the vernacular. That being said, I theorize that the legible, vernacular-based and well-utilized mercantile

style of script was Dante's choice to write the *Commedia*.

Utilizing the vernacular was one of Dante's techniques for spreading his message to the people. But that was not the only tactic he used. One of the most recognizable traits of the *Commedia* is its use of actual people of Dante's time. Dante places them in different levels of hell, purgatory or heaven according to their prominent vice or virtue. Obviously, Dante knew that a Florentine readers would be surprised to see Dante dictate the eternal fates of people they knew. Dante did this to rouse his readers to action, lest they be doomed to hell with Florentines such as Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti. I also theorize that Dante also used these Florentines, biblical figures, saints, kings as identifiable reference points for his readers, hoping to increase their participation in the text. The predominantly Christian readers would know of the clergy, saints and other biblical figures like Judas in the Ninth Circle. Once one's attention was drawn to the text from the shock value, people could compare their own actions to those of the people or characters they recognized in Dante the Pilgrim's journey. The readers would realize that their own actions were in league with the actions of people and characters in hell and purgatory, and they themselves would end up in those terrible places if they continued doing the damnable actions. Presumably, readers would then dedicate themselves to righting their wrongs, and Dante provides them with models to strive for with the residents of heaven in *Paradiso*. Once people corrected the wrong behaviors explained in the *Commedia*, Dante's vision of a more perfect union with God could be reached.

The idea that Dante wrote the *Commedia* with an audience in mind is remarkable in its own right. Authors who wrote in the early Middle Ages tended to write for their own selves first and foremost, and those who might read their work were a fixed contingent. This small, elite audience was the gateway to acknowledgment of one's works, and the easiest way to make one's works known was through oral readings. To earn praise, and eventually the eye of someone willing to copy and distribute his work, the author would practically pander to the audience they wished to please, such as a patron. Since

Dante's plan involved exposing sins while naming people directly, his work would not likely please this elite contingent. Not only that, his use of the vernacular would likely be considered unworthy of those educated in Latin. Thus, Dante had to break out of the standard model of writing and think about whom he would speak; while most Italian authors before Dante knew who would be hearing or reading their work and aimed to please them, that audience never changed, so the concept of audience was a given, static value as opposed to a variable factor.

Dante does not look to curry favor among his audience. Instead, he instructs them. Dante knows his teaching of the divine order of the universe that he puts forth in the *Commedia* will reach beyond the city walls of Florence to the rest of Italy and even beyond; Dante's vision of united rule under one king given divine right would allow his work to reach beyond his small region of Italy. Dante's Monarch would unite all of mankind under him, and since God deems it right to have one ruler, his subjects would grow closer to God through the king's rule. Yet, Dante seems to realize that his ideas of oneness would not immediately reach the whole world; he could not quickly distribute manuscripts all over the world. Therefore, the implementation of his plan had to start in a specific place. Because of Dante's history there, Florence was an obvious choice. But for his changes to take place, his audience needed some sort of power in the Commune. The guilds of Florence had the influence Dante sought; they are the audience Dante wrote for.

The power of the guilds in the Italian Communes during the late Middle Ages is undeniable. The classes of merchants, skilled laborers and professionals grew very large and wealthy, and with these came a growth in influence. In fact in the years leading up to Dante's exile, the government in Florence, (as well as the *popolo* government in Bologna where Dante spent time in exile while writing the *Convivio* and *Inferno*) were composed of these people. The existence of these burgeoning classes could not be ignored by Dante; he had many people he could name in the Fourth Circle, the location of avaricious hoarders and wasters of Fortune. Yet, Dante the Poet does not mention a single



person by name. This is further evidence that Dante envisioned his initial audience to be the guild members who were growing wealthier; Dante omitted names from the description of the Fourth Circle because his affluent audience would understand they belonged in that circle without needing people for reference.

The inclusion of purgatory in the *Commedia* provides some evidence that Dante wanted to win the hearts and minds of the money-earners, who liked the idea of non-permanent purgatory. The *Inferno* provided the immediate audience concepts of what was inexcusably sinful, while the *Paradiso* provided a vision of more ideal behavior, both extremes existing alongside some political rhetoric. Dante the pilgrim's journey towards Beatrice in paradise demonstrates to the reader that by fixing and perfecting one's will one can move out of purgatory into paradise. This transitive movement makes Dante's plan an active one for the reader. The inescapable hell gave reason for the readers to a consequence for sin, but that alone could not drive a reader to positive action, but instead to mourn or deny their bad fate, and those who sinned might cut their losses and sin more. Dante sees that the inclusion of purgatory, a popular concept among guild members, allowed Dante's message to be taken into action; one who tried to escape sin but might not have immediately gotten into heaven, but there was still hope, so right action and striving for oneness with the Commune and God was a worthwhile endeavor.

Ultimately, Dante envisioned his audience to be anyone in the world with power to make the changes he proposed in the *Commedia*. When these people with power united together under one monarch and people became free from sin, Dante's vision of oneness with God could be achieved. Unable to reach the whole world with his ideas immediately, Dante geared the poetry of the *Commedia* towards those with power in Florence, who happened to be the members of the Florentine guilds. Dante's vision for reform obviously did not spread over the whole world to political and social leaders able to follow through on Dante's vision. His work did find an audience, however. It is interesting to note that while Dante's message did not spur action from the peo-

ple he had hoped, it did become very popular with merchants. Dante's use of the vernacular lent prestige and nobility to the language of Florence's common people. The merchants and others literate in the vernacular now had a masterful work to read and pride themselves on. Dante was not likely a supporter of the new, avaricious merchant class of Florence, but his *Commedia* can be seen as a stepping stone towards their rise in civilization and the development of the Italian language.

In conclusion, one can see that the Florentine guild audience and the full vision of Dante's plan are tightly interwoven. Dante's wide-reaching message of unity among men and with God, seen in other works of his as well, relied on the removal of sinful behaviors, which are described in the first two sections of the *Commedia*. For Dante's plan for social, political, religious and intellectual change to take effect, Dante needed to reach an audience of people capable of making the reforms. Within Dante's initial Florentine audience, this group of able persons happened to be the growing, money-earning guilds, which held the keys to political power in Florence through their requisite membership policies. To call these Florentines to action, Dante used certain literary techniques when creating the *Commedia*, including the vernacular and the direct naming of people for shock value and reference points. At the same time, the immediate Florentine audience Dante strived to reach had influence on how Dante structured his message, most importantly through the inclusion of purgatory. A staple of religious tradition for merchants and people of other trades who were growing richer, Dante's use of this familiar doctrine becomes the lynchpin of his plan for the end of sin; it gives sinners an incentive for correcting their wrong behaviors. Only when this sin ended could humanity unite and grow closer to God, a goal that Dante explored in many of his other works.

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Anonymous. "Untitled." Photograph.

**Haul Out the Holy: A Catholic Perspective  
on Public Religious Displays at Christmas**  
Eilish R. Harrington

Introduction: "Where Are You, Christmas?"

Based on Clement Clarke Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas," commonly known as "The Night Before Christmas," John Leo's parody "A Blight Before Christmas" exposes the difficulties that contemporary people encounter when celebrating Christmas. Among the topics that Leo covers are government decoration of public property, inclusiveness at office holiday parties, and latent religious symbolism in supposedly secular aspects of the holiday. In the poem, the "eight tiny attorneys" express a typically secularist point of view: "A sleigh full of toys is OK, we suppose,/ But faith-based incursions we've got to oppose." Leo elucidates that Americans who glorify the secular aspects of Christmas in an effort to be inclusive are in fact hoist with their own petard, since they thereby exclude the majority of Americans, for whom the holiday is pregnant with religious meaning. Because people have a wide variety of opinions on the ideal relationship between church and state in the United States, there is no consensus in American public philosophy or law as to whether religious symbols should be permitted on public property, and if so, under what conditions. The level of influence that religious life should have on public life is debated, and this controversy leads many Americans to question various facets of the celebration of Christmas. Americans ponder the significance of the status of Christmas as a federal holiday in an increasingly pluralistic society. Also, Americans disagree on whether privately-owned establishments that are frequented by many members of the public should overtly display Christmas decorations and on how the employees of such establishments should express their holiday greetings to patrons. Issues surrounding the celebration of Christmas in the public domain highlight the interface of religious practice and American life. While many issues in this larger debate over the relationship between church and state are significant, this paper will focus only on whether and under what conditions Christmas decorations should be allowed on public property in the United States.



The debate over Christmas decorations on public grounds is a controversy that can be resolved in a way that is consonant with both the *Constitution of the United States* and Catholic teachings. Reflection on a variety of American citizens' opinions on the topic, on the rulings of Supreme Court Justices, and on theologians' assertions about the true meaning of religious freedom illuminates a path to appropriate expression of religious beliefs in the public square. After beginning our discussion by investigating the current controversy over decorating public grounds for Christmas, we will plumb the subcutaneous layers of political and religious thought that contribute to stances on this issue. Examining the opinions of those who write for a general audience enables us to appreciate the controversial nature of this issue, whose religious, legal, and social dimensions lead people to arrive at multifarious conclusions. Looking at a number of perspectives on the decoration of public property for Christmas opens the door for individuals to consider the legal ramifications of any viewpoint on the relationship between church and state. Pertinent Supreme Court cases explain the reasoning behind the rulings of the Justices who are experts on the legal process in America. Once we have ascertained the reasoning behind the Justices' views, we will examine whether the laws by which Americans abide truly protect those whom they are intended to serve. After considering whether the laws that govern this issue respect the dignity of the human, as celebrated in late twentieth-century Catholic theology, we will arrive at the conclusion that, in the United States, a public policy must be enacted whereby the freedom to publicly express religious belief as part of a group is protected, in line with principles laid out in the First Amendment and with the thought of Catholic theologians.

“God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen, Let Nothing You Dismay”:

Our Contemporaries Enter the Fray

Those who argue against decoration of public property for Christmas believe that by sanctioning the use of Christmas decorations, the government favors Christians, while simultaneously denigrating those of other religious beliefs and those of no religious belief at all. A Jewish woman married to a Catholic, Jane Praeger has feelings of terror each year when her family buys a Christmas

tree. Within the private sphere of her own abode, Praeger claims that the mere spectacle of the tree reminds her of “2,000 years of persecution and genocide, of horror and sorrow.” This personal sense of being a victim of discrimination is often extrapolated into the public sphere, as is illustrated by the case of Professor Warren Blumenfeld. Teaching at a public university, Blumenfeld considers Christmas decorations on campus and on public ground in the town to be “imposing, promoting, [and] in some ways assaulting.” The Jewish Blumenfeld is opposed not only to public Christmas decorations but also to public Hanukkah decorations, since he deems religion a private affair. Taking note of the religious diversity of the United States, American Christians, too, are concerned about how to avoid offending people of other religious persuasions. Emily Groff, a Christian college student, thinks it necessary to tread very lightly when it comes to celebrating Christmas in contemporary America. She emphasizes the need for all interpretations of Christmas to be valued equally, suggesting: “originally Christmas commemorated the birth of Jesus, the leader of Christianity. However, the holiday means many different things to Americans today.” Groff is correct in asserting that many people celebrate Christmas only in a secular way. However, does the holiday cease to mark a religious feast day, as Groff implies?

From the novice college journalist to the politically savvy professional commentator, supporters of public celebration of Christmas express their concerns in a defensive manner, focusing on their perception that Christianity specifically is under attack by secularists. Anthony McKee, columnist for the *East Carolinian*, uses vulgar language and *ad hominem* attacks in making his case against “Liberalism and Political Correctness run amok.” He asserts that in moving to purge Christmas of its religious meaning, liberals achieve the very end that they crusade to avoid, in that the majority of Americans, Christians, are offended. Journalist John Leo picks up on this paradox of alienation, declaring: “Banning all signs of religion from schools and public property (neither of which is called for by the Constitution or the Supreme Court) is exclusion posturing as inclusiveness.” Any standard of belief and practice will always be cast aside because at least one person will feel excluded. When a

person takes offense at a tradition, not only will the norm be inverted but also those who adhere to the norm will be at risk of impending litigation. Best-selling conservative author Bill O'Reilly bemoans the fact that although the courts often decide in favor of traditionalists, many schools and municipalities fail to openly celebrate Christmas because they fear that so doing would bring on costly lawsuits from the American Civil Liberties Union or other organizations. News analyst and former Presidential candidate Patrick J. Buchanan is outraged by the intrusions of secularists upon Christmas, and proclaims: "What we are witnessing here are hate crimes against Christianity." Although Buchanan represents the side of the debate opposite from that of secularists, both viewpoints are animated by the American values of freedom of expression and inclusion. While people who have differing opinions on this issue disagree on who is being victimized, most who partake in this debate do so out of concern that individuals be able to express themselves freely without the threat of discrimination. Despite the fact that the issue of public recognition of the religious basis of Christmas has been debated in many court cases, a unified response by the government remains to be heard. As we will see, the Supreme Court itself has come up only with temporary and piecemeal rulings on the topic.

#### Deciphering "Who's Naughty and Nice":

##### Supreme Court Rulings on Holiday Decoration of Public Property

The 1984 Supreme Court Case of *Lynch v. Donnelly* set a precedent for deeming certain Christmas decorations secular and for examining subjective elements such as the setting of and viewers' possible interpretations of public holiday displays, and the intent of the governing body in sanctioning displays. The issue at hand in the case was the presence in a Pawtucket, Rhode Island city-owned and co-sponsored holiday display of a crèche among a menagerie of holiday heralds and symbols bearing no explicit reference to the Christ child. The presence of such a blatantly Christian symbol as the crèche prompted citizens to take a closer look at the relationship between church and state. After the Nativity scene's presence was ruled by the District Court to have breached the First Amendment's order against the establishment of any

religion by the government, the Supreme Court overturned this decision by a vote of five to four.

The Supreme Court Justices provided differing reasons for which the display did not violate the Establishment Clause. Chief Justice Burger resolved that since the separation of church and state is not meant to be complete and the *Constitution* “affirmatively mandates accommodation, not merely tolerance, of all religions, and forbids hostility toward [any],” the crèche could remain as part of the public display. Additionally, Burger articulated that the crèche serves to educate the populace about the origin of Christmas, which he acknowledged is a federal holiday in the United States. Burger based his judgment on the Lemon test, which holds that “a statute or practice which touches upon religion, if it is to be permissible under the Establishment Clause, must have a secular purpose; it must neither advance nor inhibit religion in its principal or primary effect; and it must not foster an excessive entanglement with religion.” This test is inadequate from a religious perspective, however, because it forces religious expression to take on secular meaning in order to have any standing in the public sphere. Justice O’Connor concurred with Burger that “[c]elebration of public holidays, which have cultural significance even if they also have religious aspects, is a legitimate secular [purpose].” Drawing on the crèche’s physical proximity to non-religious Christmas decorations, O’Connor argued that while the crèche retains its religious significance, this reality does not imply that the government supports the crèche’s Christian message. In its inclusion of the crèche, the government is merely celebrating the national holiday. While both Burger and O’Connor supported the inclusion of a symbol that relates divine truth to mankind, they did so for the wrong reasons. Relating Christian truths to serve a “secular purpose” at the behest of the government is not consonant with freedom of religion and the freedom of the Church. The stances of Burger and O’Connor, however, at least acknowledge that symbols that reflect the beliefs of Christian Americans have a place in American life.

Other Justices called for a complete governmental removal of the Christian meaning of Christmas from public decoration. Justice Brennan exempli-

fied this stance, declaring: "To say that government may recognize the holiday's traditional, secular elements of gift giving, public festivities and community spirit, does not mean that government may indiscriminately embrace the distinctively sectarian aspects of the holiday." The presence of the Nativity scene was exclusionary, according to Brennan, and prevented the exhibit from fulfilling its goals "of celebrating the holiday season and promoting retail commerce." Brennan remained unswayed by arguments that the presence of the crèche did not imply government endorsement of Christianity. He insisted that the crèche cannot be considered a secular decoration. Describing it as such would insult not only Christians, who believe that Christ is the Messiah but also non-Christians, who believe that the birth of Jesus is not an essential part of our shared national history. Brennan charged that the expenditure of public funds on a sectarian Christian display showed a movement toward the establishment of Christianity and toward the disenfranchisement of non-Christians. In his ruling, Brennan made clear that the government may celebrate only what he considered secular aspects of Christmas. While it is admirable that Brennan showed concern for protecting the interests of all Americans, both Christians and non-Christians, his shortsighted view of Christmas is harmful to Christians and non-Christians alike because it implies that Christmas is significant in America only insofar as it is a secular and commercial holiday.

The 1989 Supreme Court Case of *County of Allegheny v. American Civil Liberties Union Greater Pittsburgh Chapter* extends the debate about the constitutionality of decorating public property for religious holidays by considering both government-owned and privately-owned holiday decorations on public property. One display involved in the case was situated on the property of the City-County Building in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and included at its focal point a Christmas tree, flanked by an oversized menorah and a sign recognizing liberty. The Justices considered whether this display was indicative of government endorsement of both Christianity and Judaism, solely of Judaism (because of the religious meaning of the menorah, as opposed to the secular interpretation of the Christmas tree), or of no specific religious sect at all, but of pluralism, which renders Americans free to choose any religious belief or no

whether such a display unfairly favors one religious group or whether it simply allows the group to express its beliefs freely. Justice Blackmun held government neutrality with regard to religion as a weighty goal. He suggested that not sanctioning the expression of beliefs in public by religious groups will maintain the government's neutrality. Blackmun judged that while religious decorations favor Christians over non-Christians and therefore must be eliminated from the repertoire of public displays, it is acceptable for the government to erect secular Christmas decorations in order to celebrate the secular aspects of the holiday, as this action would not favor non-Christians over Christians. Further, Blackmun ruled that a sign on display, attributing responsibility for the crèche to a private religious organization, "demonstrates that the government is endorsing the religious message of that organization, rather than communicating a message of its own." In Blackmun's opinion, this tacit approval conflicts with the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. Dissenting from the majority opinion, Kennedy emphasized that government must be instrumental in allowing religious groups to freely practice, noting that "in some circumstances the First Amendment may *require* that government property be available for use by religious groups...and even where not required, such use has long been permitted." He also pointed out that it seems to him less offensive for a private group than for the government to subsidize a religious display on public property. The differing determinations, in this instance, were caused by the Justices' varying interpretations of the First Amendment, of both the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause.

The Supreme Court's rulings in both *Lynch v. Donnelly* and *Allegheny v. ACLU* show a heavy reliance on the Lemon test, which perhaps is not the best determinant of the conditions under which Christmas decorations should be permitted on public property. The Lemon test allows the presence of religious symbols only insofar as they contribute to a secular agenda. While proponents of the Lemon test believe it to be a sound means of preventing religious or non-religious minorities from being excluded, it is clear that the Lemon test belittles religious belief, since it insinuates that religious expression on public grounds has no value of its own, but is worthy only if it promotes a supposedly

religious belief at all. The other display at issue was a Nativity scene owned by the Holy Name Society. Allegheny County had allowed the private group to display this scene, complete with an indication of the crèche's ownership, on steps of the County Courthouse. The display of the privately-owned crèche, too, provokes Americans to question whether the government is fulfilling its duties both to protect the freedom of all citizens to express their religious beliefs and not to favor one religion by preferential treatment that would coerce citizens to adhere to a specific faith.

The issue of the menorah shows a divide on whether decoration must be secular in order for it to be acceptable to the judges. To Justice O'Connor, the issue at stake was whether the display as a whole demonstrated government endorsement of Judaism or whether the government remained free from partiality toward any religion or non-religion. According to O'Connor, the menorah's religious significance was deemphasized by its proximity to the Christmas tree, which O'Connor deemed a secular decoration. Therefore, she considered the exhibit a secular celebration of freedom and pluralism, and ruled in its favor. O'Connor's methodology was criticized by Justice Kennedy, who asserted that the Court's attempts to designate holiday decorations as either religious or secular are frivolous. He quipped: "This Court is ill-equipped to sit as a national theology board and I question both the wisdom and the constitutionality of its doing so." Unlike O'Connor, who attempted to make excuses for the continued presence of religious decorations, Kennedy contended that the religious meaning of a religious decoration need not be muddled by the accompaniment of so-called secular decorations. To Kennedy, the notion that the inclusion in public displays of religious decorations such as menorahs constitutes a step by the government toward establishing a religion is preposterous. For very different reasons, in fact, for reasons nearly the opposite of one another, the Justices of the Supreme Court determined that the menorah would be allowed to remain as part of Pittsburgh's holiday display.

The placement of the crèche, unmitigated by juxtaposed "secular" decorations, on public property by a religious group raises the question of



inclusive program, which actually disregards the religious. Although religion does have a significant social component, it is unreasonable to suggest that religion can be stripped of its facets that are not overtly oriented toward a polity. Religious beliefs or distortions of religious beliefs should not be used by a government to promote its own agenda. In order to come to a determination as to whether and under what conditions Christmas decorations may appear on public property, it is essential to examine the rights that the Church claims for herself and that are secured for all religious groups in the *Constitution*.

“Through the Years We All Will Be Together,” Which the Law Allows:

The Rights of Religious Communities in a Democratic Polity

At the heart of the debate over the decoration of public property in the United States for Christmas are varying understandings of the relationship between church and state. The First Amendment, which governs this relationship, shows the flexibility of the law with regard to church practices. Because it is stated in general terms, the meaning of the First Amendment is frequently debated. While protecting citizens from the imposition of any religious beliefs, it also protects the rights of religious groups to practice freely. Such policies are in line with the ideas of twentieth-century theologian John Courtney Murray, S. J. and with the principles expounded in the Vatican II promulgations *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae*. Carefully considering these various strands of political and religious thought can lead us to a conclusion on the appropriateness of Christmas decoration of public property.

Because by their nature humans seek the truth, and their search can lead them to the Source of truth, it is to be expected that questions about religious expression would arise in societal life. “[T]he recognition of God is in no way hostile to man’s dignity, since this dignity is rooted and perfected in God,” declare the bishops of the Vatican II Council in *Gaudium et Spes*. Because knowing God increases an appreciation for human dignity, it contributes to social life. Since man is social by nature, he must be free to seek the truth in a religious community. Men are “to assist one another in the quest for truth” by means of free expression and teaching. The religious community as a whole

must also have the freedom to express its ideas and beliefs, and through the religious community, man can “give external expression to his internal acts of religion.” Additionally, in *Dignitatis Humanae*, the attendants of Vatican II assert the importance of the state’s allowing the individual the freedom to choose his religious persuasion, as this is a matter of conscience and should not be regulated by temporal government. Ideally, the government should neither sanction any one religion nor prevent members of any religious group from practicing their beliefs.

While it seems from the well-reasoned Vatican II documents that there should never exist a conflict between church and state, since they are complementary in that they allow individuals to partake in entities larger than themselves and to work toward the common good, conflicts regarding the interplay between church and state still do arise. Law professor Stephen L. Carter criticizes the way in which Americans are expected to separate their public lives from their religious lives, while religion has a social dimension that should spur people on to public activity. This divide in the very heart of the person is reflective of Martin Luther’s view of the Christian as divided in two, a secular person and a Christian person, each with his own loyalties. Responding, perhaps indirectly, to Luther’s thesis, and to those who used it as a starting point for their own secularizing ideas, Pope Pius XII asserts the confluence of religion and human concerns: “True religion and profound humaneness are not rivals. They are sisters. They have nothing to fear from one another, but everything to gain.” Answers to the questions that arise about the appropriateness of public religious expression can be derived from a realization that religion is a humanizing institution at the center of social life, and that as such, it assists people in their pursuit of the truth.

While religious and temporal authorities need not conflict with each other, their responsibilities are not identical. Murray explains that two institutions, the Church and the state, are most influential in human affairs. When allowed freedom to fulfill its mission, the Church serves as an intermediary between the individual and the government. Also, when free, the Church is able

“to teach, to rule, and to sanctify, with all that these empowerments imply as necessary for their free exercise.” The government can contribute to the fulfillment of the Church’s mission by allowing the Church freedom and by fostering conditions that free people to seek the truth. Permitting the Church to conduct its own affairs as long as it does not breach public order “is the fundamental principle in what concerns the relations between the Church and governments and the whole civil order.” If the Church were sponsored by civil authorities, it would risk becoming an arm of the government. Although government should not give preferential treatment to one religion over others, it must not harbor apathy toward religion, since religion so significantly contributes to the common good. The Church is the organ through which people can attain “spiritual liberation.” While government cannot provide “spiritual liberation,” it can aid the Church by establishing “those conditions of freedom, peace, and public prosperity in which the spiritual task might go forward.” Through directing people toward “the life of reason,” government works in the service of God’s plan of leading people to the truth. The state must allow the Church room to represent the truth as the Church understands the truth, and should not act as a spokes agency for religious truth. The people and individuals have a responsibility “to profess faith in God and to worship Him,” but the state cannot organize and lead this worship since “government...has no competence in liturgical matters.” The state must not overstep its bounds by usurping the spiritual authority of the Church.

Largely because of the freedoms secured by the First Amendment to the *Constitution*, the United States is a suitable venue in which the Church can pursue its mission. Although most people have a concept that this amendment provides for separation of Church and state, it actually states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof[.]” This amendment is designed to protect the freedom of religion of individuals and of groups, not to vanquish religions. According to Carter, “the metaphorical separation of church and state originated in an effort to protect religion from the state, not the state from religion. The religion clauses of the First Amendment were crafted to permit maximum freedom to

the religious.” Carter goes on to assert: “There is nothing wrong with the metaphor of a wall of separation. The trouble is that...the wall has to have a few doors in it.” The institutions of government and religion cannot be utterly independent of each other since the Church must carry out its ministry in the public sphere, and government would be remiss if it did not make provisions for the free exercise of peace-promoting and humanity-appreciating religion. Murray also posits that while the First Amendment requires the American government to refrain from privileging any religion over another, it does not call for “a neutrality of indifference towards religion.” The First Amendment provides a framework within which the government can support legitimate religious practice, which, in turn, contributes to the welfare of the state.

It is consonant with Catholic views that the government of the United States is responsible for seeing to it that religious groups be allowed to express their faith in a public forum. The Vatican II Council emphasizes that government should “show [religious activity] favor, since the function of government is to make provision for the common welfare.” Religious life enriches the whole of social life, so “religious communities should not be prohibited from freely undertaking to show the special value of their doctrine in what concerns the organization of society and the inspiration of the whole of human activity.” While the government should not mandate adherence to any one religion, and individuals must be allowed autonomy in making decisions regarding their own religious life, the government must recognize that religion promotes awareness among its adherents of the needs of humanity, and can thereby contribute to the welfare of the state. The Council further charges that since governments are instituted to protect human rights, one of government’s fundamental duties is to defend and promote religious freedom. The government should use laws, the tools at its disposal, to protect the freedom of religious expression. Through their ability to grow in their faith, members of faith communities also become increasingly conscious and concerned citizens. While religious expression should not be hindered, Justice Kennedy rightly noted that it was hindered in the majority decision that the crèche at the Allegheny County Courthouse had to be removed. In order to respect the Establishment

Clause, he asserts, the government is required to “recogniz[e] and accomodat[e] the central role religion plays in our society.” Failure to allow religious expression in the public sphere would indicate “latent hostility toward religion, as it would require government in all its multifaceted roles to acknowledge only the secular, to the exclusion and so to the detriment of the religious.” Religion and government can be mutually beneficial if each institution appreciates the function of the other.

Although Carter champions the protection of the right of Americans to express their religious beliefs, which seems to be in line with Catholic teaching, he stops short of embracing the principles set forth by Murray and by those in attendance at Vatican II. According to Carter, if the government sponsors a crèche, an overtly religious decoration that is inextricably bound with a Christian celebration of Christmas, on public property, it thereby endorses Christian belief. In Carter’s view, “[i]f the crèches are maintained at public expense, they should not be there.” Carter arrives at this decision not because “members of ‘minority’ groups are offended,” but because he thinks that public funding of such displays violates the Establishment clause. However, Carter does not discuss the presence on public ground of Christmas decorations that are privately owned and maintained. While Murray and the Vatican II promulgations do not directly tackle the issue of the decoration of public property for Christmas, it is possible to base a viewpoint on this issue on their teachings about the proper relationship between church and state. The issue of possible government endorsement of a particular religion by decorating for its holidays can be resolved by the government’s decorating for all religious holidays. While this practice would fail to represent the views of those who do not adhere to a specific religion, it also would not favor any one religion over another. In fact, it would have the effect of turning all public decorations for religious holidays simply into educational tools that would likely pass the most stringent application of the Lemon test. Enforcing such a governmental policy, however, would work against the Church’s idea of religious freedom, which calls for religious groups to be able to represent themselves, unmediated by a state. By presenting the beliefs of all religious groups for its own purposes, the

United States government would be undermining the churches' relationships with their people. Such an infraction would be undeniable, whereas Carter's concern that governmental support for religious Christmas decorations breaches the Establishment Clause is still highly debated. The Establishment Clause is significant, in that it prevents the government from sanctioning the practice of a particular religion, but the Free Exercise Clause is perhaps preliminary to the Establishment Clause, since it recognizes that Americans have a right to practice religion in the first place.

While some consider the fundamental problem with government decoration of public property for Christmas to be the potential offending of minority groups, from a Constitutional and from a Catholic perspective, the problem lies elsewhere. The main problem is not even, as Carter suggests, "whether the government is placing its imprimatur on a symbol of a particular religion." Simply denying religious decorations does not prevent the government from installing secularized decorations for religious holidays, irrespective of the federal status of these holidays, and possibly for questionable purposes. As Justice Kennedy expounded, government's willingness to celebrate only the secular aspects of an overtly religious holiday reveals "callous indifference toward religious faith." What is striking is that the problems that the government encounters in this issue arise solely from the government's usurpation of the Church's function as a representative of its own truths.

#### Conclusion: Decking the Halls Is Not a Folly

The United States government ought to act on its responsibility to enable groups to express their religious beliefs by making provisions to allow private religious groups to decorate designated public areas for religious holidays in a way that befits the religious content of the holidays. Although some Christians might find it heartening that the government has made moves to celebrate Christmas by decorating for it, the government is likely to misrepresent the true meaning of the holiday. Since many people perceive Christmas as a time for commercial growth, government-sponsored decorations are likely to emphasize this perception while ignoring the religious significance of Christ-

mas. An accent on materialism would present an inaccurate portrayal of a Christian feast day. This erroneous presentation could lead non-Christians to develop a negative impression of Christianity and Christians who are not strong in their faith to become disenchanted with Christianity. Christians have a duty to “reveal the authentic face of God and religion.” Since the government has the responsibility to allow religions to fulfill their mission and since the First Amendment to the *Constitution* ensures that it is legal for religions to operate freely, it is within reason to place the onus of decorating for religious holidays on religious groups themselves. If the federal government agrees that there must be areas that are equally available to all religious groups to decorate at different times of year, state and local governments can manage logistics involving location, time restraints, and necessary permits. Any such arrangement would be in accordance with the Supreme Court’s *Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board v. Pinette* ruling, expressed by Justice Scalia, in that the displays would be privately funded and would “occur...in a traditional or designated public forum, publicly announced and open to all on equal terms.” Most importantly, such a policy would make true the assertion that Americans have the freedom to practice their religion as set forth in the First Amendment.

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**The Oxford Experience**  
Christin Grow

Before March 2005, I never fully believed that a week had that capacity to change one's life. For the first time that year, though, I went on a spring break collegiate challenge with habitat for humanity. It was wonderful, and I decided to go again the following year. So on Saturday March 10, 2007, thirty-two Seton Hall students and two faculty members arrived back to campus after departing from Louis Armstrong International Airport in New Orleans, Louisiana three hours earlier. These thirty-four, including myself, were involved with an alternative spring break organized by the university chapter of Habitat for Humanity in conjunction with relief efforts for Hurricane Katrina. Returning, however, was not quite the same as leaving. Some of the participants in March 2007's Collegiate Challenge had not yet been involved with habitat builds. Some had. None of the thirty-four however, were quite prepared for NOLA. Furthermore, there remains no sufficient explanation by any of the impact of the experience for friends, family members, faculty members or classmates. However, that week spent below the Mason-Dixon Line is still surging beneath the surface of all of us, searching for adequate explanation—and every once in awhile, we all have a little inclination to go back, to give back—and to hammer something.

I have seen a lot of tragic conditions in my experiences with Habitat for Humanity. One of the ideas always stressed behind our trips are the idea of vocation and servant leadership. I never quite understood that expression though. I suppose we were offering our services of hammering and nailing, but for what greater purpose? Over the last several months, particularly since arriving back from NOLA, I have been undergoing what could most dramatically be entitled a crisis of faith. I wouldn't call it that though. I have always fully believed in the truths claimed behind my religion, and I try and spend a little time from each day with God if I can. I think what began my crisis was a conversation I had one evening with my boyfriend. He had told me that after all of his years of Catholic schooling, he found that the concept of "God" was just a comfort for those who feared their own deaths. He spent hours scouring over philosophy books, and when he found no evidential proof, he told me that he had come to the conclusion that his explanation just made more sense. I needed to get away, and I needed to remind myself of my own faith that I had begun to drift from. And then there was Oxford.

The course aspired to be everything that I was looking for in abroad experience. I wanted to explore my faith. That's exactly what I did; I spent two weeks in one of the most history-drenched cities in the world studying history, philosophy and theology. While I can't say that I came out of the program with a complete understanding of my faith, I can say that I came out of the program without my constant need to justify my faith to myself and others. Oxford not only allowed me to be at peace with myself and my beliefs, but also at peace with the religious beliefs of others. I no longer feel like I need to hide my faith or justify it to my friends and family. My faith is for me. Something Monsignor Liddy had said still resonates from the trip, nearly a month after returning; "Religion is faith and a relationship with God; if you try and empty it out, you'll lose it." That's what had been happening to me; I had tried to empty out my faith. Now, I am simply comfortable in my faith and my service of others. My response to that faith is to continue to help others through Habitat for Humanity, because in fact it is not all hammers and nails, but a lifestyle choice—a vocation for service to which we of faith are all called. And it is true ~ that a week can in fact change your life.



Anonymous. "Untitled."  
Photograph.



Elliot Guerra "The Preamble."  
Photograph.

**OP~ART**  
Elliot Guerra

“These United States”



Summer Study Abroad 2007 students  
at Oxford University.





Elliot Guerra "Manifest Destiny."  
Photograph.





Elliot Guerra. "Where Do We Go From Here?"  
Photograph.



Elliot Guerra. "These Fifty States?"  
Photograph.



Elliot Guerra. "The Smithsonian."  
Photograph.





Elliot Guerra. "The Rights of Man."  
Photograph.



Elliot Guerra. "Gatsby's Green Light."  
Photograph.

**The Coexistence of Science and Religion  
in the Shaping of the Modern World**  
Era Murzaku

Science and religion have classically been deemed to be warring, mutually exclusive elements of society. The general notion is that one cannot embrace scientific thinking while still holding onto religious belief. Some have even gone as far as to say that modern science is a detriment to today's culture and that it is responsible for the decline of morality and the secularization of the Western world; belief in science, essentially, is seen to be replacing belief in God. These ideas could not be further from the truth. Science and religion do not contradict one another, but instead, complete each other. Science is not harmful to modern culture, but rather, together with religion, defines culture. Not all scientists are atheists; Isaac Newton, Gregor Mendel, and Albert Einstein are only a select few of the many of history's most prominent scientists who have, in fact, held very strong religious beliefs. The inherent ability of science and religion to coexist will be made evident through analyzing the complementary natures of science and religion, considering the ways that science enriches and advances culture and humankind, and exploring the religious background of some of history's most illustrious scientists.

Science and religion are complementary in the sense that they answer different aspects of typical human questions, especially involving human existence, the mysteries of life and death, and the great unknowns of God's creation. Religion answers the spiritual questions that science cannot even attempt, whereas science puts order and meaning into the natural world. Science, however, has certain limitations, including questions of conscience, morality, human will, the human spirit, and the afterlife that faith is able to fulfill. The late Pope John Paul II, in a 1996 address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, discusses these restrictions of science and the ways in which theology and the Church can complete the gaps that science leaves:

The sciences of observation describe and measure the multiple manifestations of life with increasing precision and correlate them with the time line. The moment of transition to the spiritual cannot be the object of this kind of observation, which nevertheless can discover at the experimental level a series of very valuable signs indicating what is specific to the human being. But the experience of metaphysical knowledge, of self-awareness and self-reflection, of moral conscience, freedom, or again of aesthetic and religious experience, falls within the competence of philosophical analysis and reflection, while theology brings out its ultimate meaning according to the Creator's plans.

("Truth" 1)

Science has the capabilities of breaking down and understanding the complexities of the functioning of the natural world and of the human mind and body, but science will never be able to fully analyze the spiritual components of existence. Biology may be able to illustrate the way that nerve impulses are sent in the brain, but it will never be able to explain human rationale, self-perception, conscience, and morality. Chemistry may be able to break down all living matter into molecules and atoms, but it cannot begin to unravel the divine origins of life and of the material world. Physics may be able to demonstrate planetary orbits and the layout of the universe, but it can never answer exactly how or why these things are the way that they are. Science evidently succeeds in giving order to and determining the function of the numerous components of God's creation, whereas religion has the unique ability to complete the missing pieces of the story that science leaves out, fulfilling the spiritual dimension of science's purely physical world.

In addition to working together to answer intrinsic human inquiries, science and religion propel each other and mutually benefit from one another. Science has the capability to advance society, to aid humanity, and to cause the progress of culture, but it cannot achieve this unless its potential is driven towards these humanitarian goals. According to the acclaimed historian and philosopher Christopher Dawson, science finds this driving force towards morality and goodness in religion: "We have seen that science is unable to realize all

of its vast potentials for the organization and transformation of human existence unless it is driven by a moral purpose which it does not in itself possess. And it can find this dynamic in a truly historic religion such as Christianity” (*Progress and Religion* 246). Instead of using science to build weapons of mass destruction, religion pushes science towards finding cures for deadly diseases, solving world hunger by harnessing the capabilities of nature, and learning more about the endless wonders of God’s creation. Not only science benefits from religion’s humanitarian driving force, however, but religion also benefits from science’s organization and ability to advance society. Christopher Dawson reflects on these ways in which science and religion mutually benefit from each other and in turn are responsible for the shaping of modern Europe:

From Christianity [Europe] has derived its moral unity and its social ideals, while science has given it its power of material organization and its control over nature. Without religion, science becomes a neutral force which lends itself to the service of militarism and economic exploitation as readily as to the service of humanity. Without science, on the other hand, society becomes fixed in an immobile, unprogressive order, like that of the Byzantine culture and the Oriental civilizations in general. (247-248)

Religion gives science a purpose, whereas science forces religion to grow with the times. Religion and science, then, are clearly not opposing forces, but instead grow and advance because of one another.

As it is proven that science and religion coexist by driving one another and answering different aspects of fundamental human questions, it can also be argued that the very origins of science are religious. Scientific development is the work of God, and much of modern science thus has its roots in religious pretenses. In a 1985 address to a general audience, Pope John Paul II affirms how God Himself guides scientific research, further proving that science and religion in no way contradict each other, but instead originate from the same source:



If methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith. For earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed whoever labors to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind is, even unawares, being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity.  
 (“Scientists” 1)

Similarly, the world’s various religions largely concern themselves with making sense of the natural world, and science aids them in this process, once again elucidating the shared origins of science and religion. In *Progress and Religion*, Christopher Dawson reflects on this unique, complementary relationship of science and religion by looking at the common foundations of both science and religion: “In the past, as we have seen, it is the rule rather than the exception for religion to concern itself with the knowledge of nature. The very origins of science are to be found among the medicine men and priesthoods of primitive people, and at a higher stage of civilization cosmological speculation occupies a considerable place in the development of the great religions” (236). From the beginnings of time, then, the intertwining natures of science and religion have been quite evident. Instead of opposing and contradicting each other, science and religion complete one another and grow together and as a result of each other. Science and religion share common roots and are inspired and driven by a similar source. Science and religion have a lot more in common than may initially come to mind.

Further exemplifying the fact that religion and science are indeed compatible and are not wildly opposing forces are scientific societies and academies that have been created in very religious institutions, of which the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences is a prime example. The Academy was originally founded as the Academy of Lynxes by Pope Clement VIII in 1603. Dissolved following the death of Pope Clement VIII, the Academy was recreated in 1847 by Pope Pius IX and was given the name the Pontifical Academy of the New Lynxes. The Academy then was re-founded by Pope Pius XI in 1936 and

was given its current name; it has since then been supported and updated by every Roman pontiff (Sorondo 1). The academy is a prime example of the collaboration between religion and science, and its chief goals include the investigation of “specific scientific subjects belonging to individual disciplines” and the “promotion of interdisciplinary cooperation” (Sorondo 1). By bringing together the world’s most eminent scientists, the academy serves as a place where scientists can meet regularly to discuss their research, to communicate with each other, and to work together to progress humankind. The academy also serves as a “valuable source of objective scientific information which is made available to the Holy See and to the international scientific community” (Sorondo 2). Throughout its tenure, the Academy has consisted of a number of Nobel Prize winners, including Lord Ernest Rutherford (Nobel Prize for Physics, 1908), Guglielmo Marconi (Physics, 1909), Max Planck (Physics, 1918), Niels Bohr (Physics, 1922), and Sir Alexander Fleming (Physiology, 1945) (Sorondo 4). The Academy is a clear illustration of science and religion working together. Throughout the centuries, some of the world’s foremost scientific thinkers have come to the Vatican in order to collaborate with each other, to share their discoveries with each other, and to learn from each other. Instead of opposing scientific development, religion, in this case illustrated by the Catholic Church, has fostered and supported science. The Church realizes the potential for science, its importance to modern culture, and its numerous capabilities for good; in turn, these scientists, most of whom are also believers, recognize that religion, too, is necessary for culture, and that religion, too, is an important driving moral force. The Pontifical Academy of Sciences has united these two forces of science and religion, and together they are working towards “the investigation of truth and a shared growth in the responsibility for the good of the peoples of the world and their future” (Sorondo 22). As Pope John Paul II beautifully states, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences is clearly a “visible sign, raised amongst the peoples of the world, of the profound harmony that can exist between the truths of science and the truths of faith” (Sorondo 6).

As science and religion's ability to coexist is demonstrated through the complementary and mutually beneficial natures of science and religion, the forces of science and religion working together are further elucidated by the manner in which science and religion jointly make up modern culture. According to the American historian Russell Kirk, culture arises from the cult, or a group of people sharing similar beliefs and together attempting to communicate with a higher being: "A cult is a joining together for worship- that is, the attempt of people to commune with a transcendent power. It is from association in the cult, the body of worshippers, that human community grows" (7). Russell Kirk believes that people become tied together by religion, and this is undeniably true; history's great empires have arisen from small groups of people joined together by a common belief; take the Romans as an example- their empires grew as more and more people became united in the beliefs of Christianity. Culture today continues to maintain a religious core, but modern culture is also profoundly impacted by, and likewise unified by, science and scientific advancement. Christopher Dawson argues that science has even deeper roots in European culture than religion does, and is therefore greatly responsible for the very character of modern Europe:

Our civilization has a peculiar duality which is not found among the simpler and more homogeneous cultures of the East, or those of the ancient world. There is a second element- the scientific tradition- which is even older than Christianity, since it has its origins in the Hellenic culture of classical times, and which has, to some extent, followed an independent line of development. It does not possess the dynamic social power which is the peculiar characteristic of religion, but nevertheless it has conditioned the whole development of our culture and has given Europe a power of material organization that no other civilization has possessed...Everywhere it seeks to bring order and intelligibility alike into the material world and into the world of thought. (*Progress and Religion* 235)

Together with religion, science has had a tremendous impact on the shaping of the modern world and of modern culture. Science, then, does not harm cul-

ture, but rather has a large role to play in the positive development of culture. Science, in many ways, actually enriches culture, especially when used in accordance with moral norms.

The ways that science enriches culture are most evident in the service science has done for humanity throughout the last few centuries. Scientific research has led to numerous monumental advancements in the fields of medicine and technology, making considerable improvements to health and to everyday life. Vaccines and antibiotics now protect humanity from diseases that a few years ago had the potential to destroy the human race, whereas computer technology has transformed communication, information retrieval, and learning capabilities. Needless to say, it is indisputable that the vast majority of people would prefer to live in current times instead of in the sixteenth century; the quality of life has just improved exponentially thanks to modern science. In a 1991 address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, the late Pope John Paul II articulates the huge strides science has made for the betterment of mankind: "Science for its part, instead of being in competition with culture, is actually a fundamental and now indispensable element of all culture which is ordered to the good of the whole person and every person. In the most diverse fields, scientific and technical progress aim to guarantee the human person a better life so that he can completely and more readily fulfill his specific vocation" ("Science" 1-2). Science has given mankind the ability to fulfill its limitless potential by increasing knowledge and improving life as a whole; this, obviously, is the positive side of scientific growth and a clear representation of science working with religion and with morality in order to improve life. Science, however, is a power that can easily be misused, and in today's world there are numerous examples of science being used in opposition to conventional morality, and, instead of advancing the human race, damaging it. Take abortion, nuclear weapons, and euthanasia as examples. Instead of aiding humanity, these scientific "advancements" have instead been used for evil and immoral means; they have been used for murder and for power. Pope John Paul II stresses the use of conscience in science. He notes that potential of science and the ways that it is widely being used for good, but he also calls to

mind the evils that can result from the improper use of science:

We are witnessing an extraordinary scientific and technological development. The limits of knowledge seem to be endlessly receding. But, at the same time we shudder with fear when we see the uses to which it is put... Today we are more aware, than in the past, of the ambivalence of science. Man can use it for his betterment, but also for his destruction. Science has so many implications that it calls for an increased awareness on the part of the conscience. ("Science" 2)

Science has frequently proven itself to be at the service of mankind, but at times, its motives can err, and rather than working towards progress and maintaining the primacy of the human person, it has instead brought about unspeakable evils, including war, death, and destruction. It is imperative that science continues to reflect moral and religious belief by coexisting with faith instead of becoming "entirely indifferent to moral considerations, and [lending] itself with sublime impartiality to any power which knows how to use it" (227) as Christopher Dawson warns. Science is clearly a crucial component of modern culture. In order that it continue to enrich culture, it is quite necessary that science continues to coexist with and to complement religion. Only then can it be ensured that science's potential indeed be used, as it has countless times before, for the betterment of humankind.

Science and religion have been proven to coexist by analyzing their complementary natures and by discussing how, when their forces are joined together, they enrich and make up modern culture. Similarly, the manner in which science and religion coexist can also be proven by discussing some of history's most prominent scientists, who also happened to be devoutly religious. The notion that scientists are either atheists or agnostics is rather widespread, and goes hand-in-hand with the belief that science seems to lead people away from God; this, however, could not be further from the truth. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis relates a series of letters sent from an older and more experienced demon, Screwtape, to his nephew and a novice demon, Wormwood. Wormwood is given a particular person to watch over, to tempt,

and to lure away from Christianity and religion in general, and Screwtape is advising Wormwood about how to draw the person to whom he is assigned away from God and closer to the devil. In one of his first letters to Wormwood, Screwtape urges him to “not attempt to use science as a defense against Christianity” as science will “positively encourage him to think about realities he can’t touch and see” (Lewis 4). Lewis seems to be suggesting that instead of drawing people away from God and faith, science draws people closer to religion, as both science and religion require a belief in the intangible. Because of this similarity in belief in science and belief in faith, most scientists are in fact believers. In an address to a general audience, Pope John Paul II cites a 1950 survey of 398 of the most illustrious scientists in the world in which “only 16 declared themselves unbelievers, 15 agnostics, and 367 believers” (“Scientists” 1). Clearly, the vast majority of these scientists held some sort of religious belief. Do Isaac Newton, Gregor Mendel, and Albert Einstein sound familiar? Well, they are a select few of the numerous famous scientists who were also religious. Isaac Newton will forever be remembered for his discovery of gravity and for his laws of motion, but few people are aware that Newton was also a very pious man who believed that God was the source of all the wonders of the physical world. In addition to discussing the concepts of mass and matter, the forces of nature, and space and motion in his revolutionary book *The Principia*, Newton also declares that “the most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being” (Deem 2). Gregor Mendel was an Augustinian monk who is also called the father of modern genetics; by observing pea plants in the monastery’s garden, he devised the rules of inheritance and the idea of genetic dominance. Albert Einstein is perhaps the most famous physicist of the twentieth century, renowned for his theory of relativity as well as his famous equation concerning the conversion of matter into energy,  $E=mc^2$ . Einstein was also Jewish and had very clear perceptions about God and faith, and, in a paper that he published in *Nature* in 1940 dealing with science and religion, he wrote that “science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind” (Deem 4). Einstein, Mendel, and Newton are only a select few of the world’s scientific masterminds who held religious beliefs; other notables in-

clude the likes of Sir Francis Bacon, Johannes Kepler, Michael Faraday, William Kelvin, Rene Descartes, Robert Boyle, Blaise Pascal, Carolus Linnaeus, and Antoine van Leeuwenhoek. The fact that so many of history's most illustrious scientists were also religious further proves science and religion's ability to coexist and sheds light on the common misconception that most scientists are atheists.

By investigating the complementary natures of science and religion, by exploring the effects of science and religion on culture and on human advancement, and by discussing the lived faith of some of the world's most eminent scientist believers, science and religion have not been proven to be contradictory and conflicting forces, but rather mutually inclusive and mutually dependent forces. As Christopher Dawson reiterates in *The Modern Dilemma*, science and religion address different aspects of existence as "science deals with the material world and gives us the power to control the external forces of nature, while religion is concerned with spiritual things and teaches man to know God and his own soul" (71). Science and religion further complete each other as religion propels science towards humanitarian goals by providing a moral drive and prevents the misuse of the powers of science, whereas science advances religion and progresses humankind. The world's finest scientists have likewise pursued scientific research while still maintaining religious beliefs and have asserted the necessity for science and religion to coexist. Science and religion, then, are not in adamant opposition as much of the general public seems to believe; they, in fact, recognize the importance of one another and work to complete each other. Science is not leading to the demise of the moral world, but instead, together with religion, is enriching and renewing modern culture. All scientists are not atheists; their very studies, in fact, frequently lead them to religion. Science and religion are not warring elements, but are instead together are revolutionizing and revitalizing the modern world. The harmony of science and religion is not a myth; it is necessary, it is a reality, and it has very much contributed to the shaping of the modern world.

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Elliot Guerra. "Untitled."  
Paper and Ink Print.

### The Artist Above

James Harris

O Lord, your radiant beauty, the splendor  
of its magnificence , shines forth upon my face.  
Though not able to explain it, the sun burns a  
fire in my heart, which keeps me ever moving.  
You are an artist at work, starting from scratch,  
and I wait to see what shall become of the sky blue canvas.  
The brush of elegance you dip in white, forming the first of bodies,  
two, four, seven clouds.  
Ordinary, basic, yet sublime, there is nothing to compare with your  
inconceivable perfection.  
“More!” I exclaim, I wish to behold the continual motions of your  
right hand.  
The clouds you stretch across the horizon,  
intertwined with the orange glow of Earth’s hearth.  
A wondrous design, a delighted hue, no mind but yours.  
O Lord, could have made such an ineffable depiction of your glory.  
Now, perhaps, a new body? Yes, there it is! You have done it again!  
A spectrum of colors you portray through the rain in my eyes  
by the guise of your rainbow.  
It is but a taste of spiritual honey that you give my soul,  
and I crave it all the more as I observe the artwork you give me from above.



Anonymous. “Untitled.”  
Spray paint on Brick.

**SHU Gym, 1988**

Rev. James M. Cafone

Excavating  
for a Gym  
they go past asphalt, stones and gravel sludge,  
to slime, to gray sponge clay with tiny pores,  
then down, past cows and lush green meadow,  
to the blue sky hidden in the stream,  
to stumps of giant trees, to swamp,  
to farther down till no one now  
can read it anymore:  
to where  
I am.



Anonymous. "Untitled."  
Photograph.

**The Friends**  
Rev. James M. Cafone

Behold the earth, the even-tempered  
Quite predictable ground, the human's den.  
She grows the grass, the trees,  
And being round, supports  
The cities and the hearts of men.  
Her feasts are ample; with a little care,  
She will be mother always to our loving.

Not so the sky, the sky is other-wise.  
Several days of sunny smiles  
From blue-bright eyes, and then  
The dull grey thud of thunder,  
Rain, so overdone or under,  
Cold, hot, never satisfied  
Wonder and wandering.

**Jesus**

Rev. James M. Cafone

My mind gets cloudy  
In the Autumn bright  
Blue days when higher  
Things are on my  
Heart grows hazy light  
Incredible the ways  
You lead me to be  
Lost be nobody at  
All I still believe.

### **Misty Day**

Rev. James M. Cafone

It's gray today, the rain  
the mist, the world's infected  
with it. There's no hope for  
anyone or anything, except  
the fire that burns inside,  
that melts the gray, that makes  
its way from me to you, to  
meaning we no longer hide.



Elliot Guerra. "Sun Shower/Rain Shower"  
Photograph Digitally Washed.

**The Long Ago**  
Rev. James M. Cafone

Sometimes I think when words are tired  
No one ever could remember long ago  
as I do. No one ever would remember  
turtles dying in a flat glass bowl and  
being buried underneath an apple tree  
that was my grandmother's before she died.  
I have not cried through all these years  
for them or any other sorrow. If I did,  
my brothers would have laughed at me,  
or spit at me inside. I never cried  
not even when my little grandma died.

Since then, I've loved so many years of people  
passionately: never told them, never showed them,  
so they never knew. How I am true to the long ago  
of each of them: (today I prayed for a blond boy who  
is bald.) I always knew I would be stuck  
to them forever. Maybe never skin to skin,  
but like shadows bleeding into one another  
on the ground when it's the autumn  
and the moonlight's white and round and colder  
than the one I'm groping out to find.

I must be blind. I had to be. The long ago  
is somehow here for me. The friends I've found  
have warmer hearts than I, who was the girl inside,  
who tired to fly, and finally made it in a different way.  
it's now today, and what I wished for quiet  
all those years is here. I don't believe it; yes I do.  
What did I want, and was it you? The long ago is here,  
but I don't love it: it's too small, so ordinary.  
After all these years of longing, it just isn't fair  
that you show up and leave my heart to spare.



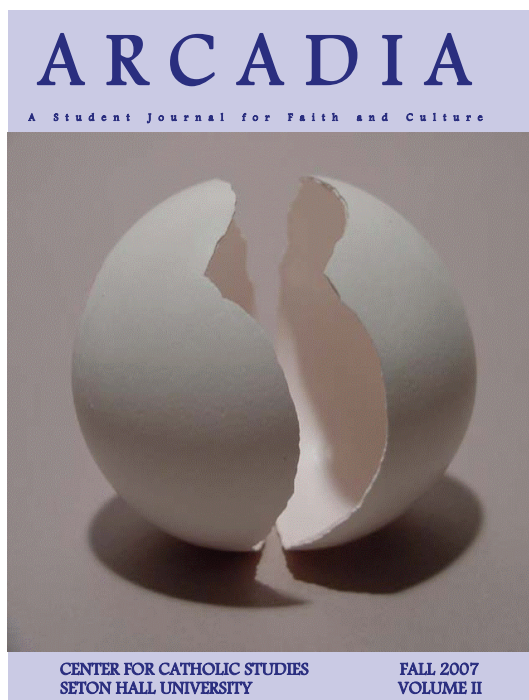
Elliot Guerra. "Election Season."  
Photograph.



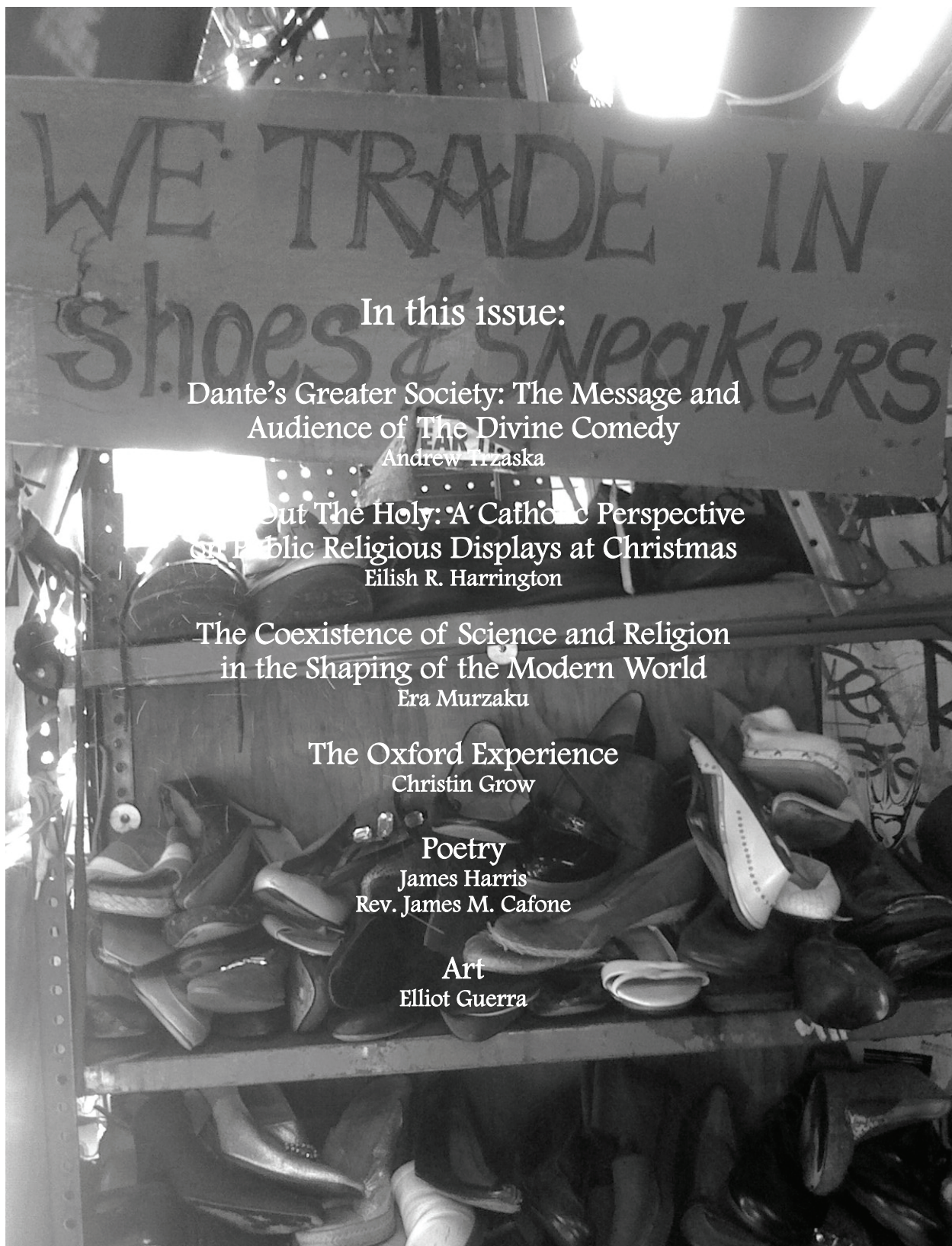


## Call for Submissions!

All student papers, poems, and journals that engage with Catholic ideas are welcome for submission. (Limit of three works per author) Please submit all pieces in hard copy to Fahy Hall 318 or as an attached MSWord Document to [nourseda@shu.edu](mailto:nourseda@shu.edu) by March 1, 2009.



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