



STRIKING A BALANCE

AN INTERVIEW WITH STUDENT LIFE LEADERS

*By Bridget Ruffing,
Class of 2022*

Thomas More College Seniors Declan McArdle and Zoe Becher took time out of their busy schedules recently to answer some questions about their experience at the College and their plans for the future. In addition to the rigors of completing their senior year at Thomas More College, each has taken on the responsibility of serving as Proctor of Student Life. According to the College Student Handbook, Proctors are “appointed by the Dean of Students to maintain safety, security, and good order on campus.” One female and one

male Proctor are selected each year from among the student body, and they work closely with the Resident Assistants (RAs) and the Dean of Students. This means that Declan and Zoe have each had to strike a delicate balance between meeting obligations as a student, as a friend, and as an authority figure, all while constructing a senior thesis and planning for life after graduation. Zoe and Declan have risen to the challenge with good will and determination, and have found that working on the Student Life team provides ample blessings to compensate for the occasional trials.

Thomas More College expects a great deal from its students, and it is not

simply a truism that the more one puts into the education provided here, the more one gets out of it. Zoe and Declan have both engaged with enthusiasm in all the college has to offer, from its rich spiritual life, to its tight-knit community and rigorous academics. Both proctors have found this engagement to be deeply rewarding: their experiences as students and leaders have provided them with a love of learning and a determination to maintain a healthy balance in their lives which will serve them in innumerable ways after graduation.

How did you find out about Thomas More College and why did you choose to come here?

Declan: I first heard about Thomas More College from my sister, who graduated from the school the year

Continued on page 6



THOMAS MORE COLLEGE SENIORS DECLAN McARDLE AND ZOE BECHER

THE HIGH CRAFT OF POETRY	3
CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS	4
A POET FOR ALL STUDENTS	9
RICHARD WILBUR	13
ETERNAL MEMORY	14
THE SOCIETY PAGE	15



COMMUNITAS

A COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Communitas is published by The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts thanks to the generous contributions of loyal supporters.

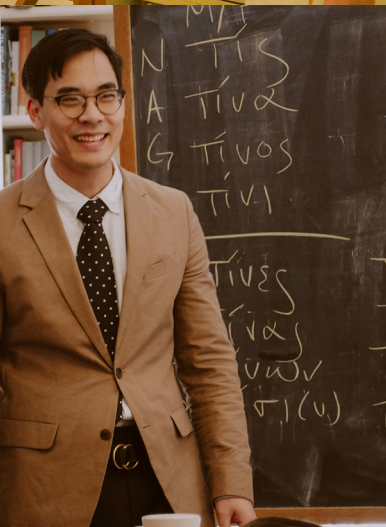
To support this publication go to:
www.ThomasMoreCollege.edu/Support

To subscribe:
www.ThomasMoreCollege.edu/Communitas

Editor
 Amy Fahey

Publisher
 William Fahey

Executive Editor
 Dominic Cassella



DANTE, T. S. ELIOT, AND THE HIGH CRAFT OF POETRY

By Dr. Robert Royal,
St. John Henry Newman Visiting Chair
in Catholic Studies

Dante Alighieri died in 1321, 700 years ago this September, but his work—especially the greatest poem ever written by a Christian, *The Divine Comedy*—is very much alive. Students all over the world, Christian and non-Christian alike, continue to read, study, and contemplate his vision passionately, even amidst the contrary winds of postmodern and post-Christian ideologies. (A personal aside: I announced that I'd be teaching an online course on *Inferno* this Spring and nearly 600 adults from all over America and several foreign countries enrolled within days.) Any work that can maintain such interest despite the passage of time, the rise and fall of nations and whole cultures,

and very unfavorable intellectual circumstances moves us to ask: Why? And there are good reasons, identifiable reasons, why this is so for Dante.

The very first and very large fact about the *Divine Comedy*, one that accounts for a lot about its appeal, is that it's about everything. Dante set out to write about the three realms of the afterlife—Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven—which is to say diabolical depravity, human striving towards the good, and celestial bliss. No other writer in the history of the world has even attempted such a bold undertaking—or succeeded in bringing it off with such imaginative genius.

He packed a lot into this poem, which is long but not in comparison with other works. There are 14,233 verses in the *Comedy*, a little longer than *Paradise Lost* but only about as long as three or four Shakespearean plays. Milton, too,

was ambitious in seeking “to justify the ways of God to man.” But whether he succeeded in that or not, his world is narrower than Dante's. Indeed, in the dramatic encounters that make up each of the 100 *canti* of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante's only real rival is the kind of human breadth that, among other writers, can only be found in Shakespeare.

T.S. Eliot, the great modern poet who borrowed considerably from Dante in his own remarkable poetic attainments, has expressed this memorably calling it “width of emotional range.” By that, he doesn't mean merely emotive writing. He means a great sensitivity—and fidelity—to the whole of reality:

Continued on page 10



LA DIVINA COMMEDIA DI DANTE, DOMENICO DI MICHELINO (1417-1491), FLORENCE CATHEDRAL (DUOMO)

CURRICULUM

Disputed Questio

By *Walter J. Thompson,*
Academic Dean

It is a sign of the poverty of our contemporary moral discourse that the word virtue seems to us both antiquated—even naïve—and technical. But for the Western intellectual tradition, virtue was an everyday, ordinary word, and one without which the human moral life was not intelligible. Heir and contributor to that tradition, Thomas Aquinas made the virtues central to his account of the Christian moral life in his *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*.

On the traditional view, the virtue of a thing is that ensemble of qualities that make it good of its kind, by disposing it to do its proper work well. Because human beings are by nature rational, our proper work is to live according to reason. Because, being rational, we are free, our human lives consist of our deliberately chosen actions. To live well, then, we need those qualities of thought and character that enable us to discern and dispose us to choose what is reasonable to do, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

According to Aquinas (following Aristotle), we are apt by nature to acquire these virtues. We have by nature the seeds of their development—a certain natural knowledge of what is to be done and avoided and a certain natural inclination to live reasonably. But we do not by nature possess the virtues in their completion. Rather we must, by repeatedly choosing to do as we should, dispose ourselves to doing so readily, consistently, and with pleasure.

The human virtues, then, are those qualities of thought and character that make us the sort of persons who are ready to do as reason requires and so

to live well and happily, persons whose good lives are an expression of the good persons they have become.

But—Aquinas adds, beyond what was known to Aristotle—we are called to a happiness beyond that which we can attain by our natural capacities. We are called to share in God's own life, in the happiness proper to Him, a good that exceeds all proportion to our (and every other created) nature.

If we are to live such a life, God must raise us to a share in it—He must, by His grace, deify us, making us “partakers of the divine nature.” (2 Pet 1:4) And He must make us the sort of persons who are ready to do the work of those whom grace has made “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” (Eph 2:19) He must pour into our hearts those virtues by which we know the end to which we are called and what is to be done for it; by which we are confident that we can attain to it through our actions; and by which we cling to it in love, and order all that we do toward it. These are the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which perfect us not as men, but as adopted sons and heirs, called to share in the very life of God.

Principal among these is charity, by which we love God for Himself, and ourselves and our neighbors as loved by Him. Just as any good citizen must love the common good of his city and wish it for his fellow citizens, so we Christians must love God as our happiness and our neighbors as called, like us, to share in it. By the virtue of charity, the good Christian becomes a friend of God and all those whom God has called to share in His life, one who is disposed to seek in every action the glory of God and the salvation of men.

Even perfected by the theological virtues, however, we remain inadequate to bring ourselves to the end to which God has called us, which “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived—what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Cor 2:9) So beyond the theological virtues we need to receive those gifts that dispose us to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, Who alone can lead us through the trials of this life to our final end.

Hence, in Aquinas' vision of the Christian moral life, every mouth is closed to its own praise, and open only to the praise of the glories of God's grace.



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

HIGHLIGHTS

ns on the Virtues

By *Dominic V. Cassella*,
Class of 2018

In contemporary society, the average person seems to have only a vague notion of what it means to be virtuous. Virtue has been replaced by “virtue signaling,” in which performing a particular action is the “virtue,” and the character of the person performing the action does not matter. In fact, for the modern man, disposition and character seem to have lost almost all meaning. All that remains is to be “good” or “nice,” meaning one behaves in a manner acceptable to the reigning majority.

This is a far cry from the notion of virtue or goodness in Aristotle. For Aristotle, man is virtuous when he is disposed toward doing the good thing appropriate for a man—and the good thing is good because of the sort of thing that man is. The man who does the good thing despite his not willing it is not virtuous, he is self-restrained; and the man who does the bad thing but believes it to be good is vicious.

At its core, the Aristotelian notion of virtue is rooted in the nature of man. At the start of his *Ethics*, we read that “[e]very art and every inquiry, and similarly every action as well as choice, is held to aim at some good.” No one acts in any way unless he believes that he is acting for some perceived good. However, knowing what is actually good and what is bad must be rooted in the reality of the thing whose good is in question.

Take, for example, an apple tree. If an apple tree does not bear fruit—or bears rotten fruit—it is a bad apple tree. The tree would be failing to do what is proper to it. Likewise, if we find a dog that does not bark or wag its tail or do “dog things,” we say that something is wrong with the dog as a dog because it is failing to do what is proper to its

nature. It is because it belongs to apple trees to bear fruit and for dogs to bark that when they do not, we know that something is wrong. Another sign of a thing’s good being proportional to its nature is the fact that no one is suspicious of a turtle that doesn’t fly—this is because it does not belong to turtles to fly.

The same principle is true for men. Man has an attribute that no other creature has, and it is by this attribute that we can identify when he is doing the “man thing” well or poorly. This attribute is his rational soul, his intellect. Therefore, when we say that something is good for man, it must be good, first and foremost, in relation to his intellect. Consequently, the life lived in accord with reason is the virtuous life.

I used to think that living according to reason was all I had to do to be a Christian. Of course, prayer, the sacraments, and a life lived in fidelity to Christ’s Church were important, even integral, but I was not fully aware of why these things were important. In many ways, I was a modern-day

Pelagian! However, it was while reading Thomas Aquinas’ *Disputed Questions on the Virtues* as a senior at Thomas More College that I experienced one the greatest “ah-ha” moments I had ever had. The life in Christ is not proportional to our nature; it is wholly beyond it.

Now, grace builds upon nature; a thing must be a certain way to receive a certain gift. For example, there is no gizmo or gadget in the world that can grant a sea star sight—the sea star has no eyes, and to give it eyes would be to change what it is. However, there are gifts that can increase a creature’s sight far-beyond its inherent capability—just think of the telescope. In a similar manner, grace makes it so that man can live in Christ.

How else could we respond to the command, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”? (Matt 5:46) To be with God is a gift wholly disproportional to our nature as human beings. It is the end of man—not by virtue of what he is, but by virtue of what God has planned for him.



DOMINIC V. CASSELLA (LEFT) AND DEAN WALTER J. THOMPSON (RIGHT)

STRIKING A BALANCE

Continued from page 1

before I came as a freshman. From the beginning, this place sounded so unique; it was clear, from my sister's account of the many traditions surrounding the school, that this place was something special. In 2016, I went to a summer program, during which I had a taste of the curriculum. We read books similar to those I was reading in my high school classes at the time; the difference at the program was that I felt I was really getting something out of them. I had always known that the Great Books had something invaluable to offer, but reading them in high school had only left me wanting more. At the end of the day, I was confident that TMC would be where I would thrive the most, because it would teach me real truth, both in and out of the classroom.

Zoe: I first found out about Thomas More College through a family friend. I did not pay particular attention to it at the time, as I was attending another liberal arts school, Thomas Aquinas College, but I stored it away in the back of my mind. After completing a year at TAC, it became apparent to me that the teaching method that institution had adopted was not fulfilling me academically or pushing me to be greater in the areas in which I needed it. Thomas More College came to my attention again as I looked for other great books schools to transfer to. The guild program immediately caught my interest, set the school apart from the others I was researching, and spurred me on to give this school a closer look.

I have been a member of several guilds over my time at Thomas More: the Folk Music, Homesteading, and Woodworking guilds, all of which I greatly enjoyed participating in. The one I enjoyed most was the Homesteading guild, which I joined because I have a great love for physical work in the outdoors. This guild gave



me the opportunity to take a break from studying and exercising my brain to focus on being outside in the New Hampshire climate, which is something novel for a Californian!

Thomas More College places great value on developing the full person through the academic, spiritual, and social life provided. The value placed on these three core aspects of the Thomas More College experience cultivates and encourages the growth of the person as a whole, and was the factor which confirmed my decision to attend the school, a decision I have never once regretted.

What, in your view, makes the College unique? What do you love most about the school?

Declan: In my view, Thomas More College is particularly loyal to its curriculum in one main way: life on campus offers to teach as much as is taught in the classrooms and the books we read. I see a life at Thomas More that attempts to really bring about what we're learning here. This is essential to a liberal arts education, if anyone is to benefit from it. We aren't just here to know the highest things for their own sake, but also to live them out.

Above all, I love the people here. What I see most in my fellow students is joy, something which is becoming increasingly rare in the world. While the books we read are the reason we are all here, we know that we could read these same books anywhere else. Someone who chooses this college is choosing more than a bookshelf full of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Chesterton: he is choosing to read those books in the best possible environment. We don't just talk about Aristotle's *Ethics* here; we practice it. Best of all, our Christianity is not hidden: every day, I see students striving to live with charity, attending daily Mass, improving their prayer lives, and discussing the Truth with one another at the lunch table.

Zoe: I believe Thomas More College is unique among great books schools in that it recognizes that a thriving, happy, and healthy individual needs to live a balanced life. This recognition comes out in the three aspects I mentioned earlier. The college has a rigorous academic life, but it also presents plenty of opportunities for growth in the spiritual life as well as events and campus-wide celebrations to draw the community closer together.

It sounds cliché, but the studies are what I love most. The faculty are highly invested in the students and dedicate a lot of time and energy to ensure the students are learning well. All of the



courses work together and build upon each other. I also love that the college requires its students to spend a semester abroad in Rome. I found the time spent studying abroad allowed for the development and growth of my own person through immersion in a people and culture so different from my own.

What is community life like on campus?

Declan: What stands out the most about our community is its unique size, along with everything that comes with that. After one semester, a freshman knows almost every name on campus. You don't run into too many strangers here, once you've joined the community. This familiarity among students sets the tone for all campus events, from daily meals, to *Traditio*, to our many banquets. Everyone knows everyone; we are a kind of family. Each class is small enough to

have an identity of its own, whereby it adds something special to the life here and builds on the traditions that will continue after it has graduated.

Zoe: The community on campus is very tightly knit. Everyone knows each other by name, students and faculty alike, and you see everyone on a daily basis. It is a bit like a second family at times. If I had to describe the community life on campus in one word, "vibrant" comes to mind. There is an atmosphere of living life joyfully and to the full.

What is the Faith life like on campus?

Declan: It is strong but not overbearing. I think both those qualities are important for growing young Catholics into true soldiers of the Faith. Since my first year, a sizable group of students has always said at least two hours of the Divine Office each day, and we have daily Mass and confession. In the last year, especially, with the many trials due to the coronavirus, I have seen some real religious courage in my teachers and fellow students. They have shown themselves to be truly dedicated to what we do here.

Zoe: It is very active. You can see it all throughout the day: saying grace in common before meals, prayers at the beginning of class, daily Mass, confession and rosary, not to mention lauds and compline prayed in the chapel on a daily basis. There are many opportunities for spiritual growth on campus. For example, one of our teachers, Professor Fred Fraser, leads a group of students each year through the *33 Days to Morning Glory*, a personal retreat in preparation for a Marian consecration. This has become a favorite devotion of mine ever since I was first introduced to it here at the College.

What are your favorite courses or readings thus far?

Declan: One of my favorite courses here was an Upper Tutorial offered on Friedrich Nietzsche. This is one of many examples of a class wherein we are taught the philosophy of someone who is mostly wrong—or, in this case, partially insane. Someone might ask why we would teach something that is wrong. The simple answer is that we can see where the greatest minds fell, who could have stood so firm on our own turf—the Catholic Faith. Nietzsche's philosophy is so fascinating because it turns our traditional way of thinking on its head: he tries with all his might to prove that good and evil are just social constructs designed to bring power to people. He also doesn't believe in a stable, universal nature of the human being. This was all very clarifying to learn about, but it didn't take long for me to miss my beloved Aquinas and Aristotle.

Zoe: Some of my favorite courses have been Art and Architecture (taken in Rome), the Humanities sequence as a whole, and an Upper Tutorial on Dialectic, Rhetoric and Sophistic.

Are there any aspects to serving on the Student Life team that you find particularly challenging? What, in your view, are some of the most important benefits the Student Life team gives to the college community?

Declan: For a student, Student Life work is a juggling act. We are asked to protect the wellbeing of every student and to enforce the college rules. It took me almost two full semesters to find the balance between coldly "laying down the law" and being a pushover. You can't make any compromises, and yet you don't want any enemies. The key, I think, is simply to be understanding. Giving people time and attention provides them with the assurance that you're looking out for their good just as much as for the good of everyone else.

For me and my teammates, it's both a challenge to offer ourselves for the life of a community, and a huge opportunity

Continued on page 8

STRIKING A BALANCE

Continued from page 7

to grow. It's difficult, even frustrating at times, but worth it. Among the many ways the Student Life team benefits the whole college is by creating a link between the faculty and staff and the student body. Without that link, our community would not be as whole as it is, and its unique familial atmosphere would not be as strong.

Zoe: I would say finding the balance between being a peer and an authority figure is particularly challenging. It takes some time to get used to, and honestly, I am not sure that I have quite found the right balance myself, but it gets easier with time.

I believe the role as a mediator between the students and administrative authorities is the Proctor's chief benefit to the community. Declan and I know from our own experience what it is like to be a student, and so we both more readily understand the situations of the student body and have an accurate view of the community on campus.

Have you begun working on your Senior Thesis? Can you provide a few words about your topic and some of the works you are drawing from to defend your Thesis?

Declan: My thesis is on Farming and Family Life. Last summer, I worked at a friend's family farm for five months, and I have been in love with agriculture ever since. I am convinced that farm life offers the Catholic family something special that no other occupation does. In a word, farming is the original work given to man by God. Because of this, man is most fit to be a steward of the earth, and the family has its best life on the land. The rise of industry and government-subsidized agriculture has crushed private farming almost to oblivion, and this is a tragedy that we have disguised as a blessing. In my thesis, I intend to propose a solution to this problem. Right now, my primary texts are Fr. George H. Speltz's *The Importance of the Rural Life According to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, and *Leisure: the Basis of Culture*, by Josef Pieper.

Zoe: I have done a great deal of reading and compiling notes which will start to form the written work very soon! The topic for my thesis is the vocation of the Catholic laity, and how they are to attain holiness. I chose to focus specifically on the role and virtues belonging to women. There is a strong influence of the feminist movement in society today that is doing a lot more harm than the good they declare they

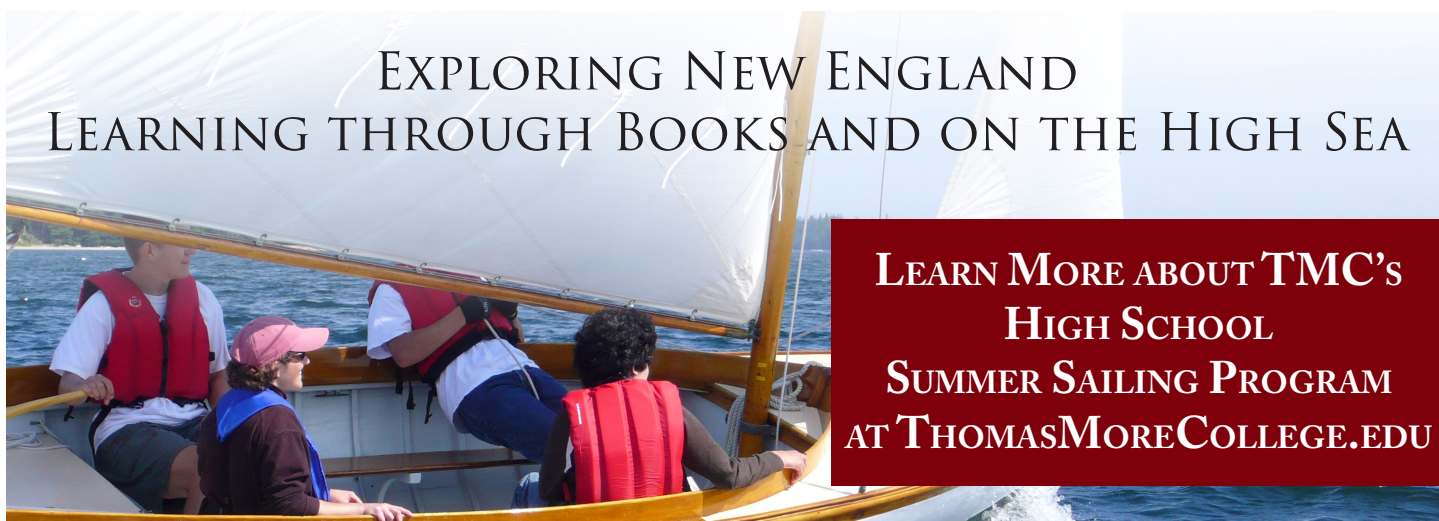
are accomplishing. I am arguing that the feminist view of women does not cultivate what is genuinely feminine but is actually a perversion of what women are called to be.

I am drawing from Church writings such as *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Pope John Paul II's *Letter to Women*, as well as other related works such as *Women in Christ* and *Love and Responsibility*, and more.

What are you hoping to do after you graduate?

Declan: I am well on my way to begin training to be an airline pilot. A few weeks after I graduate, I will drive down to Florida, where I will spend three months acquiring my Private Pilot Licence. Later on, I hope to start a homestead, growing food for my family at home.

Zoe: After graduation I have my sights set on becoming a doula, or a midwife's assistant. In the interim, I will be returning to my home state of California to continue working at Associates Insectary, where I have held an internship over the past two summers, and to complete my doula training.



EXPLORING NEW ENGLAND
LEARNING THROUGH BOOKS AND ON THE HIGH SEA

LEARN MORE ABOUT TMC'S
HIGH SCHOOL
SUMMER SAILING PROGRAM
AT THOMASMORECOLLEGE.EDU

A POET FOR ALL STUDENTS: FOR R.W.

CELEBRATING THE CENTENARY OF RICHARD WILBUR'S BIRTH

*By Paul Connell,
Academic Director of Rome Program*

Richard Wilbur's poetry has always had a sense of the commemorative and the occasional, with such poems as "For K.R. on her Sixtieth Birthday" (Kathleen Raine is a noted William Blake literary critic); "Seed Leaves" dedicated to R.F. (Robert Frost); "A Wedding Toast" to his son and daughter-in-law; "For C" to his wife, Charlee; and "Potato" to André du Bouchet, a French poet and friend from Harvard days, who I assume liked potatoes. Combined with this has been an interest in the ceremonial, with one of his volumes of poetry called "Ceremony and Other Poems" and an essay which engages the subject entitled "A Speech at a Ceremony," originally delivered as a Commencement Address at Washington University. In light of this, it seems only fitting to give a modest tribute to

Richard Wilbur on this year's centenary of his birth on March 1, 1921.

The connection of Richard Wilbur with Thomas More College is a longstanding one, beginning in the early years of the Rome program with the students assigned a selection of poems (known as Wilbur's Rome poems) and then expanding by student interest and urging into a broader study. By now it has become something of a College tradition to have a familiarity with his poetry, all thanks to the initiative and response of the students.

Perhaps what the students intuited was that reading Richard Wilbur not only complemented the mission of the College, but engendered a liberal education in miniature, with Wilbur giving his readers signposts along the way.

Those who have some familiarity with his work might think of it not as a

"Great Books" program but as a "Great Words" program. (Or, even better, a "Used Words" program.) Wilbur often finds a world in a word. But it is not the words exactly, but the things that the words carry with them, all of their ironies, juxtapositions, rhythms, puns, connotations, denotations and echoes of the tradition, what John Ciardi, poet, translator of Dante, and longtime friend of Wilbur calls "word complexes."

Wilbur's poetry, then, stimulates in the reader a sense of wonder and desire to learn more; in fact, one does not so much read Wilbur's poetry as re-read it, discovering, with some effort, in successive stages, a world to which the poet has access. In such a labor of understanding, the reader participates in the creative work of the poet himself.

What then is this world? What is that terrain? To answer that question, one

Continued on page 12



THE HIGH CRAFT OF POETRY

Continued from page 3



T.S. ELIOT

The great poet should not only perceive and distinguish more clearly than other men, the colours or sounds within the range of ordinary vision or hearing; he should perceive vibrations beyond the range of ordinary men, and be able to make men see and hear more at each end than they could ever see without his help. We have for instance in English literature great religious poets, but they are, by comparison with Dante, specialists. That is all they can do. And Dante, because he could do everything else, is for that reason the greatest “religious” poet, though to call him a “religious poet” would be to abate his universality. *The Divine Comedy* expresses everything in the way of emotion, between depravity’s despair and the beatific vision, that man is capable of experiencing.

And for Eliot, Dante does more than carry out this mission solely in the service of literary ends. The modern prejudice that religious literature must of necessity be inferior because it seeks to impart moral or spiritual truths—and therefore “narrows” vision—is soundly refuted by Dante’s achievement.

Dante writes in his letter to Can Grande della Scala, his patron, that the purpose of the whole work is “to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and to lead them to the state of bliss.” The imaginative power with which his poem offers the choice of damnation or happiness expands our usual ideas about what poetry can do.

Dante provides other lessons as well to poets about “the obligation to explore, to find words for the inarticulate, to capture those feelings which people can hardly even feel, because they have no words for them; and at the same time, a reminder that the explorer beyond the frontiers

of ordinary consciousness will only be able to return and report to his fellow-citizens, if he has all the time a firm grasp upon the realities with which they are already acquainted.” (Eliot)

Few people who study Dante know his minor works, which have a firm hold on those realities and also helped to lay the foundations for the *Comedy*. Readers sometimes look into *The New Life*, a Boethian medley of autobiographical poetry and prose, in which Dante describes his meeting as a young man with Beatrice, his heavenly muse. Toward the end of that work, after Beatrice has died, he records what many readers take to be the original vision that led later to the *Comedy*:

After writing this sonnet a marvelous vision appeared to me, in which I saw things that made me decide not to say anything more about this blessed lady until I was capable of writing about her more worthily. To achieve this I am doing all that I can, as surely she knows. So that, if it be pleasing to Him who is that for which all things live, and if my life is long enough, I hope to say things about her that have never been said about any woman.

But besides these musing of a young poet, some of which found expression in highly philosophical *canzoni* or songs, Dante also wrote a number of highly significant prose works, which also prepared him for the effort to say things never said about any woman. Perhaps the most significant is his treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, on the Italian vernacular. Italian was just coming into its classical form in Dante’s time and his efforts here to sort out the gold from the dross were instrumental in moving the vernacular into a condition suitable for the highest purposes. Eliot observes, “of the very few poets of similar stature there is none,

not even Virgil, who had been a more attentive student to the art of poetry, or a more scrupulous, painstaking and conscious practitioner of the craft.” Dante gives very close readings in this work of the vernacular poets who preceded him—French troubadours as well as his Italian contemporaries—in order not only to identify the best style and aspects of craft, but also the most noble subjects:

These three things, well-being, love, and virtue, appear to be those most important subjects that are to be treated in the loftiest style; or at least this is true of the themes most closely associated with them, prowess in arms, ardour in love, and control of one’s own will (*armorum probitas, amoris accensio et directio voluntatis*). DVQ II, ii. Another way to state this noble group of three is: courage against evils, *caritas*, and moral virtue.

Dante writes about these with great inventiveness, but also precision. As Eliot learned trying to imitate him; “the language has to be very direct; the line, and the single word, must be completely disciplined to the purpose of the whole.”

In the midst of high considerations like these, we forget that the *Comedy* is a poem of exile, exile from Florence (Dante’s native city) and exile from the heavenly homeland, which Dante came to realize he had to ascend to from a dark wood. When he was very close to the end of his exile, he wrote in a moving passage about *il poema sacro*:

Should it ever come to pass that this sacred poem,
to which both Heaven and earth
have set their hand
so that it has made me lean for many
years,
should overcome the cruelty that locks
me out
of the fair sheepfold where I slept as
a lamb,
foe of the wolves at war with it,
with another voice then, with another
fleece,
shall I return a poet and, at the font

where I was baptized, take the laurel
crown.

For there I came into the faith
that recommends the soul to God. . .

He never returned in this life to
Florence. But the whole world has
crowned him with laurel in recognition
of the action of heaven and earth in his
Divine Comedy.



A POET FOR ALL STUDENTS

Continued from page 9

might look at a short poem that provides a key to the whole of his work:

On Having Mis-identified a Wild Flower

A thrush, because I'd been wrong
Burst rightly into song
In a world not vague, not lonely,
Not governed by me only.

On one level, the world that is discovered is precise and communal, which the thrush affirms in song. But reflecting on it, you realize that you may have read past something too quickly. Thinking about the place of the thrush in the poetic tradition, most notably in Thomas Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush," the reader is drawn deeper into Wilbur's terrain. And like Keats's nightingale, the thrush becomes more than a bird in the context of the poem. An older name for the mistle thrush is the stormcock, known for singing through bad weather in exposed branches in the upper perches. Its song is lusty, defiant, melancholy, and hesitant, as if the bird forgets the words and then continues and corrects his song. The reader comes to see that the thrush's song is the heart of the poem, the lyrical corrective and affirmation, the vehicle for the grace of an insight. The thrush, therefore, points toward a truth about poetry as a whole.

These truths in poetry embody an intangible set of values, something of what Russell Kirk refers to in his apt phrase, "the unbought grace of life." What he means by this are "those intricate and subtle and delicate elements in the culture of the mind and in the constitution of society which are produced by a continuing tradition of prescriptive establishments, reflective leisure, and political order."

Further, John Crowe Ransom, the noted Southern poet and literary critic, expressed this well in his Introduction to *I'll Take My Stand*, published in 1930, a series of essays that sought to defend an

inherited way of life against the social consequences of industrialization and a business-oriented society. The term Ransom uses to describe these values under threat are the "amenities" of life:

The amenities of life also suffer under the curse of a strictly business or industrial civilization. They consist in such practices as manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love—in the social exchanges which reveal and develop sensibility in human affairs. If religion and the arts are founded on right relations of man-to-nature, these are founded on right relations of man-to-man.

These practices—barely recognized in a purely "quantitative" society—are absolutely essential for a civic life to thrive.

What Wilbur's poetry points us toward in these amenities is a full and gracious life, rich in subtleties of meaning, irony, courtesy, taste, and an elevated language. These are the intangibles, moral and spiritual values that ride on the back of the information being taught, pointing ultimately to what Allen Tate calls "the supratemporal destiny of man."

My students will have heard me speak about poetry as one of the "accoutrements" in life. By this, I do not mean something extra, a nice accessory, but rather as something essential, such as the thread that sews and holds everything together as in a garment. (Accoutrement is originally derived from Latin, meaning "to bind or to sew.")

To follow the metaphor, without these things of which I am speaking any society will simply unravel.

In our own time, upon the centenary of Richard Wilbur's birth, we would do well to remember the indispensable role that a poetic sensibility plays in society, particularly of an American poet who



embodied the highest aspirations of the craft. The best tribute we can give to him, then, is not merely to remember him, but to read him—or rather to re-read him.

RICHARD WILBUR

AND THE LANGUAGE OF PRAISE



By Lydia Smith, Class of 2022

We have all known the anguish of longing to say something without knowing how to say it. This feeling is never so strong as when we try to speak of beauty, which may sometimes be transmitted to the hearer effectively, but is always diminished in the telling. Awe is naturally silent. But when the force of that beauty constrains us to speak, what words are we to use; how communicate the nearly incommunicable and have our audience receive it as we intend? This is a perpetual problem for anyone who would speak or write about true and beautiful things. It is especially the burden of the poet. He does not have the luxury of the prose writer to provide

pages of context, nor to craft a scene and mood into which the beautiful thing may enter as onto a set, not failing to stir the reader's emotions as the author intends. The poet is not modeling the world to produce pathos at the right pitch—he is catching the pathos that is already in the world, and trying to set it down before it flees.

Richard Wilbur examines this dilemma and its possible solution in his sonnet "Praise in Summer". "Obscurely yet most surely called to praise," he is almost commanded, by the sheer beauty of the world, to give tongue. If the faculty of speech is, as Aristotle says, the mark of a rational creature, and if that faculty was given to man—and man only—by a benevolent God, then the act of praise is the most proper use of speech. Though Wilbur associates himself only loosely with established religion, he knows there is a God to whom he owes praise: praise for his perception and his intellect; praise for the created world that he is able to perceive; and praise for the faculties which allow him to render that praise in speech and verse as no other beast can do. And the first form praise takes—after the unpremeditated exclamation of awe—is metaphor. To praise a thing, we promptly compare it to something else. This seems a "perversion"; an "uncreation"; the poet wonders if it "should . . . not be enough of fresh and strange / That trees grow green, and moles can course in clay / And sparrows sweep the ceiling of our day?" Wilbur's own vocabulary hints at an answer.

"Perversion," taken in its etymological sense, is a turning back; "derange" is simply dis-arrangement; and "uncreation" is an un-making more than an annihilation. Metaphor, seen in these lights, is not so far from Wilbur's conception of beauty, and certainly shares beauty's work: "Wishing ever to sunder / Things and things' selves for a second finding, to lose / For a moment

all that it touches back to wonder." It does what Caedmon, that first English poet, did when, constrained to offer praise, he asked, "What shall I sing?" And the angel of the Lord replied, "Sing me the First Making." So he sang:

Praise now the keeper of the *kingdom*
of *heaven*
. . . who fashioned the beginning
of every wonder, the eternal Lord.
For the children of men he made
first
heaven *as a roof*, the holy creator.
(emp. added)

Caedmon's song is considered the first English poem; and there, from the first, are metaphors: un-makings in the midst of creation. Hence Wilbur's refrain in his sonnet, "I said . . . I said," which echoes familiarly in our minds with the beginning of Genesis: "And God said . . . and so it happened." Discrete things are taken out of their own places and put into others'; they are blended and changed, and the whole of creation is turned back, *per-vertebatur*, into an harmonious whole. Thus did Christ say, "I am the good shepherd": not a shepherd in sensible attributes, but a shepherd in truth. Metaphor is free to take the world as connotative; a shepherd may be used for comparison not only in his sensible attributes, but in all that being a shepherd means; and here the connotations of shepherd redound in a deeper truth about Christ. This holds for sensible attributes, as well: it is not that trees are unremarkable in being green, but that they are made the greener by comparison: "As a mantis, arranged / On a green leaf, grows / Into it, makes the leaf leafier, and proves / Any greenness is deeper than anyone knows." ("The Beautiful Changes") By severing "things and things' selves", the poet is able to show beauty in both its aspects: the transcendent beneath the sensible, and a truth deeper than appearances.

ETERNAL MEMORY

COLLEGE MOURNS THE LOSS OF BELOVED PRIEST AND ABBOT

It is with profound sadness that the College announces the passing of two great friends: Abbot Xavier Connelly (October 23rd, 1954 – April 8th, 2021) and Fr. Theophan Leonarczyk (February 15th, 1956 – April 17th, 2021).

Abbot Xavier was the guiding light of St. Benedict's Abbey (Still River, Massachusetts) from his election as abbot in June of 2010, until his very recent retirement this March after being diagnosed with advanced ALS.

St. Benedict's Abbey has been associated with Thomas More College since nearly the founding of the College, but Abbot Xavier took an especial interest in our students and faculty shortly after his election. The abbey hosted frequent retreats and workshops,

and monks from the abbey have served as chaplains and spiritual directors for students and staff at the College. Abbot Xavier's biography can be read on the monastery website.

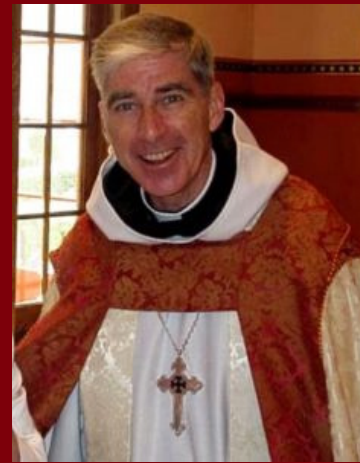
Fr. Theophan (Paul Joseph) Leonarczyk was the Chancellor of the Eparchy of Newton (The Greek Melkite Catholic Church) and a priest at Our Lady of Cedars parish (Manchester, New Hampshire). He made tremendous sacrifices to assist and support our chaplaincy at the College. Father was known for his vast reading in literature, his wonderful ability to weave insights from the Eastern Fathers into his sermons, and his charitable exhortations concerning contemporary issues besetting the Church and American

society. He had just celebrated the fifth anniversary on his ordination to the priesthood the day before his death.

Both of these men were marked by good humor, courage, and remarkable kindness to young Catholics and all souls seeking the truth. They will be greatly missed. Their passing is a prompt to praise almighty God for the gift of strong priests and good shepherds. May He call forth more men like Abbot Xavier and Fr. Theophan to work the harvest in New England and throughout our country.



FR. THEOPHAN LEONARCZYK

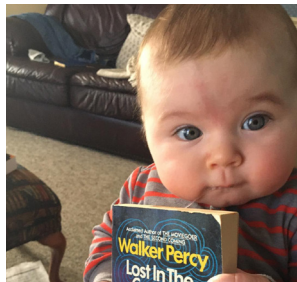


ABBOT XAVIER

TRADITIONAL BENEDICTINE COMMEMORATION OF THE DEAD

O God, Who grants forgiveness and desires the salvation of mankind, we beseech Thee in Thy mercy to grant that Xavier and Theophan, who have passed out of this life, may partake of everlasting bliss by the intercession of Blessed Mary ever Virgin, and of all Thy saints.

THE SOCIETY PAGE



“The glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of man is the vision of God.”—St. Irenaeus

Left to right, top to bottom:

WEDDINGS: Dominic Six '18 and Isabella Darakjy '18; Jesse Brandow '10 and Juanita Pascual

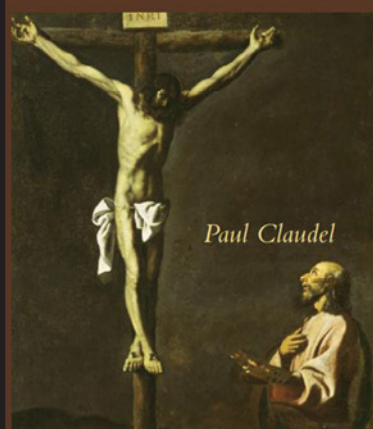
BIRTHS: George Augustus Goss V, son of George '05 and Kathleen Goss; Beatrice Noel Davis, daughter of Michael Davis and Helena (née Fahey) '18; Thomas Blaise Chichester, son of Luke Chichester '10 and Britni (née Donaghue) '10; James Ambrose Yost, son of Michael Yost '18 and MaryGrace (née Greer) '17; Nikolas Maximilian Kitzinger, son of Drs. Denis and Sara Kitzinger; Symphorosa Marie Folley, daughter of John and Deirdre Folley; Rose Smith daughter of Joseph and Katie Smith (née Looby) '20

To share your alumni news and pictures in the next *Communitas* visit:
<https://thomasmorecollege.edu/alumni/communitas-submissions>



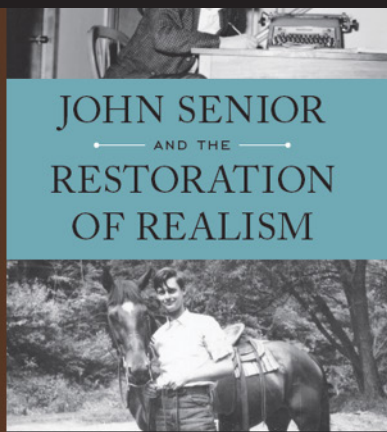
THOMAS MORE COLLEGE
of LIBERAL ARTS
Six Manchester Street
Merrimack, NH 03054

A POET BEFORE THE CROSS



Paul Claudel

JOHN SENIOR
— AND THE —
RESTORATION
OF REALISM



FATHER FRANCIS BETHEL, O.S.B.
a monk of Clear Creek Abbey

The Conversion of Augustine



Romano Guardini



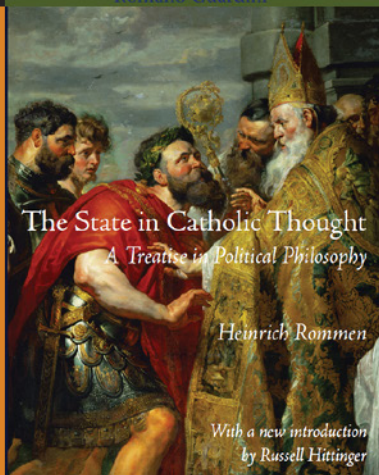
St. Thomas
Aquinas
and the
Mendicant
Controversies:

Three Translations



The Satirical Letters
of
SAINT JEROME

The State in Catholic Thought
A Treatise in Political Philosophy



Heinrich Rommen

With a new introduction
by Russell Hittinger

“FOR THOSE WHO STILL SEEK
THE TRUE, THE GOOD, AND
THE BEAUTIFUL THROUGH THE
PRINTING OF NEW AND NEWLY
REDISCOVERED WORKS.”

WWW.PRESS.THOMASMORECOLLEGE.EDU

SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS