

AQUINAS COLLEGE
THE
VOL. II, NO. 1

A PUBLICATION OF THE WRITE REASON CENTER
TORCH
SPRING 2013



Featuring Reviews by

Stephen Lanham
on *War and the Soul*
by Edward Tick

Shannon Martin
on *Behold the Heritage*
by Sister Matthew Marie Cummings, O.P. and Sister Elizabeth Anne Allen, O.P.

Sister Hannah Barnes, O.P.
on *Dante's Vision of Our Lady*
by Ralph McInerny

Pamela Strobel
on *Letters to a Young Catholic*
by George Weigel

Welcome to The Torch

We are pleased to offer the second issue of the new Aquinas Torch.

This issue explores the intersection of faith and cultural, ranging from high medieval Christendom to our own troubled current epoch. The reviews discuss the themes of war, education, Catholic culture, and Catholic education.

Stephen Lanham's review explores the terrible personal cost war inflicts upon veterans in the form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and how this wounding of the soul deeply impacts individuals and

communities. Shannon Martin's review explores Catholic and Dominican education, demonstrating the rich treasure of hope and wisdom this heritage offers to our current educational challenges. Sister Hannah Barnes, O.P. reviews the last book by the esteemed philosopher and noted Catholic intellectual Ralph McInerny on the subject of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Dante's poetry. Finally, Pamela Strobel's review discusses the manifestation of Catholic culture through the ages as chronicled by the noted Catholic author George Weigel.

The thoughtful reviews in this issue return again and again to the powerful connection between faith, spirituality, and the health of culture. To the extent that a culture embraces an openness to the transcendent and the Gospel of Christ, it can truly educate and form its members as whole persons, and can even find healing for its deepest wounds, such as the scars of war.

Aaron Urbanczyk, Ph.D.

Write Reason Plan Director
Dean, School of Arts & Sciences

The Soldier's Heart and Soul

BY STEPHEN LANHAM

A review of *War and the Soul: Healing our Nation's Veterans from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* by Edward Tick, Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2005. 289 pp.

In recent history, the United States of America has played a leading role on the stage of global war. American troops have spent forty-five of the last one-hundred years involved in combat operations abroad. Since World War I, over thirty-eight million American Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines have deployed for at least one of the seven major American wars. Of those deployed Americans, the Department of Defense accounts for nearly two-million casualties, both wounded and killed in action.¹ At first glance, these statistics may seem startling, but they are mere numbers. An attempt to quantify the destruction caused by the last hundred years of war is an exercise in reductionism, for human suffering is a reality that transcends mere statistics. Likewise, human suffering often transcends the scope of medical science. Undeniably, medical science is quite often necessary when treating the wounds of war. Yet, our warriors returning home regularly repatriate with unseen wounds. Today we know these invisible scars as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and despite the best efforts of our government officials and psychiatric doctors, many returning warriors carry the crushing burden of war from the battlefield to the grave.

To address this crisis, clinical psychologist Dr. Edward Tick recently published a book that may help reenergize the stagnated field of veterans' psychiatric therapy. *Tick's War and the Soul: Healing our Nation's Veterans from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder* (Quest Books, 2005) gives a thorough critique of the current mental health practices and cultural stigmas that all too often fail our returning veterans. Furthermore, Tick provides invaluable



treatment methods directed at the whole human person for traumatized survivors of all backgrounds. Drawing on the unique humanistic ideals of philosophers and great thinkers—including Aristotle, Homer, Heraclitus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Faulkner, Salinger, Conrad, and Orwell—Tick presents an idea of war's effect on the soul that can be traced through millennia of human history. Tick promotes his position on spiritual therapy with evenhanded reference to sacred cultural values that span multiple

sacred texts, multicultural rites of reconciliation, the writings of Saint Augustine of Hippo, and Native American traditions. As a result, *War and the Soul* has received high praise from prominent political leaders, scholars, and veterans alike.

Tick began working as a psychologist in the late 1970s, just after the Vietnam War came to a close. During his time as a clinical psychotherapist, Dr. Tick has treated PTSD in American war veterans, Jewish Holocaust survivors, and refugees of Bosnian War concentration camps. Through his vast experience treating psycho-spiritual trauma, Tick states his purpose for *War and the Soul*:

[T]he traumatic impact of war and violence inflicts wounds so deep we need to address them with extraordinary attention, resources, and methods. Conventional models of medical and psychological...therapeutics are not adequate to explain or treat such wounds. Veterans and their afflictions tell us so.

Tick further articulates his intentions in writing *War and the Soul*: "[W]e can regrow the war-wounded soul in both individuals and cultures [through nurturing a positive identity] that surrounds the war experience with love, compassion, meaning, and forgiveness." *War and the Soul* extensively defends a therapeutic approach for the whole

Continued on page 5

¹ Data compiled from the Public Broadcasting Service [http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html] and the Department of Defense [<http://www.defense.gov/news/casualty.pdf>]

History and Heritage: The Catholic and Dominican Approach to Education

BY SHANNON MARTIN

A review of *Behold the Heritage: Foundations of Education in the Dominican Tradition*, Edited by Sr. Matthew Marie Cummings, O.P. and Sr. Elizabeth Anne Allen, O.P., Angelico Press, 2012. 292 pp.

In his last will and testament, Saint Dominic de Guzman, the prolific preacher, teacher, and evangelizer bequeathed the following to his brethren in the fledgling Dominican Order: “Behold, my children, the heritage I leave. Have charity for one another, guard humility, make your treasure out of voluntary poverty.” During his relatively brief life (1170-1221), Saint Dominic preached the Gospel throughout Europe. His task was formidable. Rapid urbanization was spreading across the continent; moral laxity had become the norm and people were leaving the Church in increasing numbers. Several ancient heresies had resurfaced to threaten the Church’s spiritual primacy. Saint Dominic was convinced that the Church would be renewed by an earnest return to apostolic principles. Through contemplative prayer, constant study, and preaching rooted in love, Saint Dominic

helped restore the authority of the medieval Church and founded a religious order that would influence Christian education for nearly 800 years.

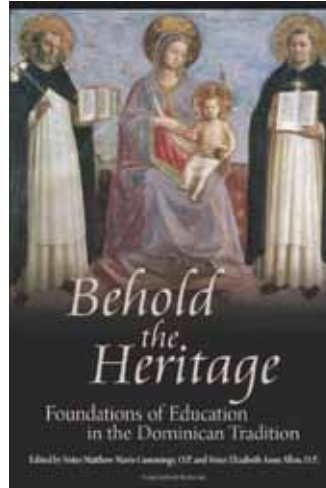
The Church today faces many obstacles in its effort to proclaim the Gospel. Pope Paul VI characterized the Church’s challenge as “the split between the Gospel and culture,” rightly identifying this split “as the drama of our time, just as it was of other times.” Paul VI and Saint Dominic both focus on the same solution—a full evangelization of the culture. The purpose of evangelization is to fully educate man about the truth of Christ’s Gospel.

This is an arduous task and there are no shortcuts. Bearing in mind Pope Benedict’s

XVI counsel that “words are the main roads in educating the mind,” Sisters Matthew Marie Cummings, O.P. and Elizabeth Anne Allen, O.P. explore the rich treasury of the Church’s words on education in their anthology *Behold the Heritage: Foundations of Education in the Dominican Tradition*. In one volume *Behold the Heritage* presents nine essential Church documents on Christian education. It

is a profoundly relevant work and marks yet another Dominican contribution toward

Continued on page 7

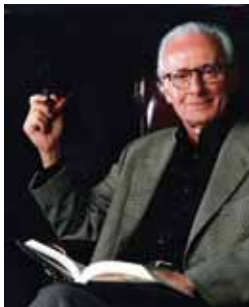


Dante’s Vision of Our Lady

BY SISTER HANNAH BARNES, O.P.

A review of *Dante and the Blessed Virgin* by Ralph McInerny, University of Notre Dame Press, 2010. 192 pp.

According to Ralph Matthew McInerny, Dante Alighieri’s *The Commedia* is “the most magnificent poem ever written,” yet “[t]he sheer bulk of Dante’s studies make it impossible for anyone to profit from more



Ralph McInerny

than a fraction of them” (McInerny 11). To make Dante more accessible, the late Ralph McInerny, an accomplished philosopher who specialized in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas, published *Dante and the Blessed Virgin* in January of 2010, just two weeks before his death. *Dante and the Blessed Virgin* is a work of literary criticism in which McInerny systematically traces the role of the Blessed Virgin through Dante’s major works – *The Vita Nuova*, *The Convivio* and *The Commedia*, with particular emphasis on *The Commedia*. McInerny asserts the thesis that understanding the role of Mary is the key to discovering the full significance of Dante’s

poetry. Drawing upon McInerny’s extensive knowledge of medieval thought and culture, *Dante and the Blessed Virgin* provides an in-depth analysis of Dante’s poetry as well as an introduction to the literary legacy of a master teacher.

Born February 24, 1929 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Ralph McInerny was considered by many academics to be among the premier Thomists of the 21st century. McInerny taught philosophy for over fifty years at the University of Notre Dame, presiding from 1978 to 2008 as the Michael P. Grace Professor of Medieval Studies. McInerny left an extensive legacy of literary works, including seven books on St. Thomas Aquinas, over ninety fictional novels, translated selections of the writings of St. Thomas, and *Crisis* magazine (which he cofounded). He received both national and international honors for his scholarship. In 1987, McInerny was elected as a fellow of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. In 1999, McInerny delivered the Gifford lectures at the University of Glasgow, in Scotland, an invitation considered to be “the

highest honor in a philosopher’s career.”¹ In 2001, President George W. Bush invited McInerny to serve on his administration’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. And on January 29, 2010, at the age of eighty, Ralph Matthew McInerny died peacefully in Mishawaka, Indiana. McInerny was truly a renaissance man, such that one of his former graduate students affectionately observed “[Ralph’s] middle name was Matthew, but it might as well have been *Magis*, Latin for “more.”² Yet McInerny did not simply produce his own scholarship, he also led many of his students to become scholars in their own right, and to share in his vocation of teaching.

McInerny’s last published book, *Dante and the Blessed Virgin*, affords the Catholic scholar a window into the popular undergraduate philosophy course entitled “Dante and Aquinas” he offered at Notre Dame. Professor McInerny unpacked the theological significance of *The Commedia* using *The Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas. After his prologue to *Dante and the Blessed Virgin*,

¹ <http://www.giffordlectures.org/online.asp>

² <http://magazine.nd.edu/news/17886-and-what-s-more/>

Continued on page 6

A Vision of Catholic Culture

BY PAMELA STROBEL

A review of *Letters to a Young Catholic* by George Weigel, New York: Basic Books, 2005. 272 pp.

Letters to a Young Catholic, by the prolific Catholic author George Weigel, is a compilation of “letters” underscoring different places around the world important to young Catholics everywhere. These letters are really first person narrative sketches by Weigel which, like the Church itself, transcend time, people and places. While some of these places may seem to have little significance at first glance (who would consider Milledgeville, Georgia a place of rich Catholic culture?), Weigel helps the young Catholic experience another layer of the cultural fabric that is the Catholic Church through his letters. He seeks to help the young Catholic come to accept his place in the world as something more than mere coincidence or fate. He opens by discussing what he calls the “Catholic optic” through which, he asserts, we come to see the realities of the world and set ourselves apart from the modern “isms” that infect the world today. Weigel adjusts our lenses to see through the eyes of Catholicism and introduces us the ways the Church defies the logic of the modern world.

Weigel starts his journey in the United States, in Baltimore, Maryland and Milledgeville, Georgia. In so doing he underscores what it means to be Catholic, and to be set apart as one. He describes Baltimore in the 1950s and 1960s as being “one of the most Catholic cities in the country” and remembers his Catholic upbringing as something that set him apart from his Protestant friends in many ways. Weigel tells us about the uniforms he wore, the Baltimore Catechism he memorized, and the holy days when he and his classmates were off from school. He recounts these experiences to connect himself and all of us to the wider Catholic culture: “Whether we knew it or not...this ‘Catholic difference’ wasn’t only a matter of how we described ourselves, how we talked, what we wore and ate, where we went to school, and who taught us. The real

‘Catholic difference’...was, at bottom, a way of seeing the world.”



George Weigel

In the same chapter, Weigel takes another look at the “Catholic difference” by heading south to discuss the stories of Catholic author Flannery O’Connor. He reveals the author as someone who saw the distortions of humanity that modern man views as natural, and who sought to hold up a mirror to these distortions. He uses her life and stories as a means of critiquing the “debonair nihilism” and egocentrism of modern times that have left us all blinded. It is when he identifies our blindness that he can produce the antidote, and at the end of his first chapter, this is precisely what he does. Using O’Connor’s own idiom, Weigel succinctly lays out the purpose of his book: “That’s the habit I hope this correspondence and our tour of the Catholic world helps you acquire: the habit of being, the habit of seeing things in depth, as they are and for what they are.”

What better way to help us acquire this habit than through the stories of St. Peter, the foundation upon which Christ built His Church? St. Peter was not the perfect human, and as the Bible describes, before becoming a saint, Peter betrayed the Lord in his act of denial. But, as Weigel explains in his letter from St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, Peter’s story “tells us that weakness and failure have been part of the Catholic reality *from the beginning*,” and we do not have to remain in that failure. In fact, “love is the final word.” By helping us gaze at our shortcomings through the eyes of faith, Weigel helps us come to terms with the fact that we all struggle, but in the struggle, we can come to find salvific redemption.

Weigel revisits the theme of suffering and redemption, particularly in his letters from the Polish cities of Warsaw and Krakow, toward the end of the book. He does not mince words, nor does he try to hide the fact that at times, being Catholic

means staring ugly things in the face. What he does do is show us how to look at the ugly aspects of our lives and approach them from a Catholic perspective. Through the vocation stories of St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, Blessed Pope John Paul II, Father Jerzy Popieluszko, and countless other witnesses to the faith, he reminds us of the deeper meaning of life: eternal salvation and life in the presence of God. Through these stories, he also reminds us of our reality that we are given sufferings and crosses that we must carry, but we can choose to carry suffering with the ultimate love.

Weigel finishes his book with an invitation to World Youth Day. His invitation summarizes his entire message by urging us to attend an event which melds our world together. It helps us to see we are not alone in our search for the living God. World Youth Day reminds us of our intimate connection to God through the Mass. It does so while helping us see the millions of other people who are connected to Him in the same way. Weigel ends his book with such an invitation because he wants us to be able to see the tangible reality of which he has spoken through his letters.

Weigel’s book is a source of courage and inspiration for those who are willing to open their hearts and minds to hear what he has to say. There is a reorientation of the soul’s eye that must occur in order to receive his words, but whoever accepts the challenge and opens this book will not be disappointed. There is great hope in his words as he reminds us who we are as Catholics. *Letters To A Young Catholic* helps clear our minds and focus our vision on the truths of faith and realities of life. ☩

Pamela Strobel is a native of Nashville and graduate of Southern Catholic College in Dawsonville, Georgia, where she received a B.A. in English with a minor in Theology. She is pursuing a Master of Arts in Teaching (7–12) at Aquinas and works as a Resident Assistant in Seton Lodge and as a Student Affairs Assistant. When finished, she hopes to teach English Literature to middle and high school students.

THE SOLDIER'S HEART AND SOUL

(continued from page 2)

human person, both individually and in communities. Within Tick's broad research, four elements of his thesis seem especially noteworthy: Tick's interpretation of "soul," the peculiar importance of war mythology in recognizing war's effects on the human person, the gradual degradation of war's status in society, and the steps our society can take to help heal the veteran's wounded soul.

War and the Soul begins with a far-reaching definition of "soul" derived from various classical and common conceptions. Tick clarifies his view by way of Heraclitus: "[the soul] is the vaporization out of which everything derives." He further cites Aristotle's definition of "soul" as the "originate principle." Drawing from Ancient Greek literature, Tick observes the original Greek meaning of *psyche* as "soul," and further asserts that "our modern scientific thinking...[limits] the word [psyche] to its psychological dimension alone...thus reducing its resonance and depth." From this point, Tick presents his interpretation of the soul as "the drive to create and preserve life...as we participate in the endless creativity of the universe." Furthermore, Tick states that the soul is "the inner breath that shouts 'Yes!' to life, no matter what." Tick recognizes that to kill one's fellow man is contrary to the nature of the human soul, and given that armed conflict seems to be a prominent feature of human culture, the resulting damage to the soul is almost inevitable. Thus, the damage to the soul should be treated as such, and not as a mere psychological imbalance.

Tick moves forward with an interesting position on ancient myths and their potential to elucidate some of war's lasting effects on the human person. Tick defines "myths" as "the universal stories that convey the deepest truths of human experience and repeat themselves in every generation and every individual." Tick posits that his exploration of mythology related to war shows that "war's mythic power has *always* affected the psyche," as evidenced in classical texts such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Homer portrays some of the most horrific effects of war on the human person through

the rage of Achilles and presents an illuminating metaphor of the long road home from battle through Odysseus' perilous return from Troy. In these great Greek epics, one also finds that divine intervention is a recurring theme on the ancient mythical battlefield. Tick states, "[i]n every war, up to and including the present [conflict], politicians and military leaders have sought to mobilize their people by reminding them that they are engaging in war under divine order and protection." For, as Tick states, without this aspect of divine charge, the sacrifices made in war would not seem worthy. Thus, Tick begins to examine modern American culture and the problems our ideals present to the warrior culture.

Tick then explores the manner in which society has inadvertently degraded the warrior's cultural status, with particular emphasis on the changes since the American Civil War and World War I. For example, Civil War veterans were often informally diagnosed with "Soldier's Heart," a term that Tick considers more accurate than PTSD, as "the heart," Tick writes, "has been changed by war." In addition, Tick points out the significance of the seemingly slight changes in terminology that the United States has implemented since World War I. The "War Department," as it was known during the two World Wars, is now officially "The Department of Defense," and "Armistice Day," a day once held to honor the end of World War I, is now "Veterans' Day," and consequently seems to have been stripped of its original meaning. Though these changes may seem minor, Tick sees them as potentially damaging to the relationship between warrior and community, and some veterans endorse Tick's opinion. A veteran of the Normandy Invasion states, "Armistice Day is when World War I was declared over. Veteran's day is just an excuse for a parade." Another veteran is quoted as saying that PTSD is "a name drained of both poetry and blame." This dilution of war's cultural significance separates the warrior from the community, and often causes a veteran to feel that "devotion and service no longer hold meaning. The cause [of war] is no longer worth our sacrifice, and the senselessness of it all leaves [warriors] deeply angry."

Tick begins his critique of our modern culture's inadvertent neglect of the veteran with a direct address to the American people:

Our veterans' terror is real. They come home stumbling out of hell. But we don't see them as they have become. Instead, we offer them beer and turkey dinners, debriefing and an occasional parade, and a return to routine jobs and weekends in the shopping malls.

Tick suggests that, on Veterans' Day, America should "close the shopping malls and open our churches, synagogues, and mosques...Institute national rituals...to guide us into our collective...grief, fear, and hunger for hope." He explains:

Our society must accept the responsibility for its war making. To the returning veteran, our leaders and people must say, "You did this in our name and because you were subject to our orders. We lift the burden of your actions from you and take it onto our shoulders. We are responsible for you, for what you did, and for the consequences."

A job offer is not enough to reintegrate the retuning warrior into society. Society must be ready and willing to accept that warrior for what he is, what he has done, and what he has become.

Tick's *War and the Soul* is an illuminating psychoanalytical work that may help both veterans and non-veterans alike understand the far-reaching effects of war and the ways our communities can help make positive changes in our veterans' lives. With a simple recognition and basic understanding of the human soul, the perennial effects of war on the human person, and the responsibility that all citizens bear in war, our great nation's veterans can be healed, mentally, physically, and spiritually. ♣

Stephen Lanham is a native of New Egypt, New Jersey, and is working toward his B.A. in English with a minor in Philosophy at Aquinas College. When he completes his degree he intends to pursue a career in secondary education while working toward a graduate degree. He and his wife Jennifer have one daughter, Sophia, and live in Mount Juliet.

DANTE'S VISION OF OUR LADY

(continued from page 3)

McInerny wrote a "Note on Translations, Editions, and Abbreviations" where he describes his classroom and his method of tutoring his undergraduate students in Latin and Italian so that they could encounter Aquinas and Dante in their original languages. Thus even before the book officially begins, the reader profits from a description of the classroom of a master teacher and experiences a taste of his pedagogy.

Dante and the Blessed Virgin is a work of literary criticism, philosophy, moral theology and Mariology, yet it is succinct and accessible. In four concise chapters, McInerny traces the role of the Blessed Virgin through Dante's major works: *The Vita Nuova*, *The Convivio* and *The Commedia*, with particular emphasis on *The Commedia*. McInerny asserts the thesis that understanding the role of Mary is the key to discovering the full significance of Dante's poetry.

In the first chapter, McInerny describes the historical context of Dante's life and his evolution from secular to sacred poet. The three subsequent chapters correspond with the three books of *The Commedia*: Chapter Two "In the Midst of My Days" interprets the *Inferno*; Chapter Three "Seven Storey Mountain" interprets the *Purgatorio*; and Chapter Four "Queen of Heaven" interprets the *Paradiso*. Chapter One, "A New Life Begins," or *Incipit Vita Nova* in Latin, recounts the major event of Dante's life – meeting and falling in love with Beatrice Portinari.

McInerny begins his analysis of Dante by interpreting the character of Beatrice, who can be a controversial figure in any Dante analysis. Many scholars assert Dante's relationship with Beatrice is merely an obsession. McInerny promotes the opposing view: "When Dante turns to God, Beatrice remains. She is not an impediment; she is the facilitator of his salvation." In fact, it is Beatrice who leads Dante to deepen his devotion to the Blessed Mother. Dante associates Beatrice so closely with Mary that he proceeds to use her to write of the Blessed Mother: "Thus, without in any way calling into questions the historical reality of Beatrice, we find in *The Vita Nuova* a progressive understanding of the role she plays for Dante. Things said about her make it clear that she is a figure both of Christ and Mary." McInerny makes it clear that Dante's love for Beatrice is quite mature and focused because he believes Beatrice will lead him to God.

The Vita Nuova affords Dante the op-

portunity to express his love for Beatrice, but it also ignites the desire to create a more exalted work for his beloved. Yet the poet proceeds to make a seemingly tangential decision to study theology in Florence. After over two years of spiritual study, Dante begins to write *The Convivio*. McInerny remarks, "Dante in the *Convivio* had set himself the task of putting into the vernacular language the Latin learning he had acquired in the schools of philosophy and theology, to make it accessible to non-scholars, both in prose and poetry. We notice he assumes the role of mediator between the learned and the simple." Dante leaves *The Convivio* unfinished, and in *The Commedia* he finds the way to reconcile the desire to write of Beatrice with the desire to impart the theological knowledge he acquired: he will write a sacred epic love poem.

In the second chapter, "In the Midst of My Days," McInerny explains the complexity of engaging in literary criticism of Dante's sacred poetry. Because the poetry is a work of literature whose subject is an allegory of the soul's journey to Christ, its layers of meaning are literal, figurative and spiritual. Generally literary criticism addresses the literal and figurative meanings of a text, while Biblical criticism explores the literal and the spiritual meanings (the "spiritual" meanings of Scripture include the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses of a Biblical passage). The distinguishing characteristic between literary criticism and Biblical criticism is authorship. The primary meaning of literature is limited to the capacities of its human authors, whereas Sacred Scripture's meaning is inexhaustible because the Holy Spirit is its author. In reference to the various layers of meaning in the Bible, McInerny concludes, "[t]hat the literal sense should be pregnant with these various spiritual senses is attributed to God, who is the author of Sacred Scripture. So what has all this to do with Dante?" In a letter to his patron Can Grande della Scala, Dante refers to *The Commedia* as "polysemous: possessing several layers of meaning." Thus Dante boldly proposes that the technique of Biblical interpretation should be applied to his own literary work. McInerny acquiesces to Dante's request and explores the spiritual senses of Dante's sacred poetry to reveal the fullness of its meaning.

In chapter three McInerny provides a crash course in moral theology to explain the role of Mary in *The Commedia*. Now we arrive at the thesis of book: Mary is the key to understanding Dante. *The Commedia* is

the story of Dante's conversion. It provides the account of a fictional journey as an allegory to Dante's spiritual journey. According to Dante, the soul's pilgrimage consists of the purification of love, or the acquisition of the virtues that enable one to love more earnestly. McInerny applies moral theology to Dante's allegory to reveal how Dante's characters symbolize the virtues. The pagan poets represent the natural virtues and "... the Blessed Virgin is the exemplar of the virtues opposed to the capital sins." This observation stimulates further discussion on how St. Thomas links the beatitudes to virtues. According to McInerny, "[t]he seven levels of Mount Purgatory represent the seven capital sins, from the effects of which souls must be purged before they are ready to enter paradise. For each of the capital sins there is an opposite virtue, and as we ascend the mountain we find that some event in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary is recalled in order to illustrate each of those virtues." McInerny does not rely solely on St. Thomas; he also incorporates the insights of St. Bonaventure. In his work entitled *Speculum Beatae Mariae Virginis*, St. Bonaventure traces how, in his own words, "Mary is blessed with the seven virtues opposed to the capital vices." St. Bonaventure uses the Old Testament types – the holy Hebrew women of extraordinary virtue – to identify Mary's virtues. Although similar in his approach, Dante departs from this Bonaventurian model by using New Testament images of the life of the Blessed Virgin, thus demonstrating how she is the fullness of the grace. Thus McInerny's tutorial of moral theology provides the understanding of love and vocation which illumine the profound parallel of Mary's role in *The Commedia* to her role in the larger context of the Catholic faith.

Mary leads Christians to Christ. In *Inferno* she lovingly intercedes for Dante by dispatching the saints (and the pagan poet Virgil) who guide Dante to *Purgatorio* and ultimately to the beatific vision in *Paradiso*. In *The Commedia*, Dante provides a vision of the life of Christian perfection, and the central figure in this journey, besides Dante himself, is the Blessed Mother. Therefore Mary is not only the key to understanding Dante, but the image of virtue and Christian perfection. In the last days of his own life, Professor McInerny chose to magnify the Blessed Mother's role in Dante's life and work. Why did he do this?

Ralph McInerny begins *Dante and the*

Continued on the next page...

DANTE'S VISION OF OUR LADY

(continued from page 6)

Blessed Virgin with a reference to St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort to explain the reason why he wrote the book: "In the seventeenth-century, St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort wrote that the role of Mary in the life of the Church would become ever more pronounced in what he called 'these last days.'" Dante chose the soul's pilgrimage to heaven as the subject of his epic poem to express in art the insights he had discovered during his theological study in Florence. McNerny chose to critique Dante's art to share the philosophical insights he had acquired from a life of

Thomistic scholarship. Yet because Ralph McNerny was a master teacher, his work not only enables readers to discover the fullness of the truth contained in Dante's art, it enables the Catholic reader to discover the fullness of the faith contained in Mary's life. McNerny leads readers from Dante to his guide Mary, and from Mary to the true teacher, her son, Jesus Christ. Therefore McNerny's contribution to literary criticism in *Dante and the Blessed Virgin* is truly exceptional because he does not merely show the reader the symbolism of "the most magnificent poem ever written," he shows the reader the Blessed Mother's unique role in the work of salvation. As

McNerny ably puts it, "[Dante] wanted to move us from the misery of sin to eternal happiness. And he shows us the inescapable centrality of the Blessed Virgin Mary in that conversion" (McNerny 144). ☩

Sister Hannah Barnes, O.P., a Nashville native, made her first profession of vows as a Dominican Sister of St. Cecilia in July of 2011. She graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 2005 with a B.A. in Philosophy. Sister is currently working towards a Master of Arts in Teaching, to be certified to teach secondary English and French. Her mother, Marilyn Barnes, recently made her promises as a lay member of the Dominican Order.

HISTORY & HERITAGE

(continued from page 3)

the Church's mission to form the human person in the image of Jesus Christ.

Why does a Catholic education matter? Attempting to answer this question too often devolves into strictly quantitative considerations: the number of Catholic schools closed, the declining number of consecrated religious teaching in schools, the rising cost of tuition, and fluctuations in test scores. These issues are certainly important. Like Martha in Saint Luke's Gospel, Catholic educators are "careful and troubled about many things" (10:41). External pressures and challenges often obscure the true purpose of their vocation as educators. Mary, the reflective counterpart to Martha, demonstrated a focused discipleship. Amidst pressing temporal concerns, Mary gave humble witness to the truth of Revelation. All the documents in *Behold the Heritage* call educators to concentrate their efforts, like Mary, upon the real foundation of a Catholic education: witness and truth.

In the document *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (1975), Pope Paul VI masterfully articulated the role of the witness as a potent tool for conversion: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." The Pontiff posed simple yet forceful questions: "Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live?" Witness is powerful. We yearn for authenticity, search relentlessly for it in others, and are deflated when we discover that the one we thought was a witness was an inauthentic ruse. The school is only as effective as the genuine witness upon which it rests. Teachers are able "to motivate the young to a

complete formation" when their own lives are properly ordered. Only when teachers are themselves convicted by and committed to their principles can they offer "a serious and credible witness" to their students (*Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful*, 2007).

The relationship between witness and truth is so sacrosanct that the Lord bound them inextricably as a commandment from Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:16). Witness without truth is an irreconcilable violation of the human person. The tragic fissure of these two has produced generations of young people afflicted with "identity crisis, loss of trust in social structures...loss of any personal convictions, the contagion of a progressive secularization of society, loss of the proper concept of authority and lack of a proper use of freedom" (*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith*, 1982). This is the condition of many students arriving at the steps of our schools. In acknowledging this dismal state, we are then challenged to adopt the only valid response to the crisis: an ardent defense of truth. No one defended the truth with both élan and gravitas like Blessed John Paul II. Only he could distill an institution of the highest erudition and complexity, the university, to its basic objective: "It is the honor and responsibility of a Catholic University to consecrate itself without reserve to *the cause of truth*." He reminds us of the Christian's privileged advantage in the pursuit of knowledge, namely his "search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth" (*On Catholic Universities*, 1990).

When witness and truth predominate in the Catholic school, academic success follows, for rigorous intellectual inquiry is the logical application of these. Further,

the Church expects professional excellence from her teachers, urging them always to respect "the autonomy and the methods proper to human knowledge," and to practice thoroughly the pedagogical approaches specific to each area of study (*The Religious Dimensions of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal*, 1988). But Catholic schools and universities were built first upon an unwavering faith that laid the foundation for academic excellence. This remarkable development didn't happen in reverse order. The Church's best institutions demonstrate the vital interdependence of faith and reason. Blessed John Paul II spent much of his papacy defending this inviolable relationship and its liberating potential for modern man. As he declared unequivocally in his treatise *On Catholic Universities*, "the cause of the human person will only be served if knowledge is joined to conscience"

Witness and truth united form the moral bedrock of education and ultimately serve the theological virtue of love. Therefore, any initiative willfully promoted at their expense bears what Pope Paul VI called "the germ of its own negation" (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*). When witness and truth are absent, love cannot exist, and everything, no matter how well intentioned, will fail. Christian educators ignore this principle to their great peril. Saint Paul elucidates this point in his first letter to the Corinthians (13:1-3). To paraphrase his admonition, if we have extensive after-school programs and champion athletic teams, but do not have love grounded in truth, we become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If we have the gift of donors and stellar facilities and tutoring so as to remove all sub-par student achievement, but do not have a

Continued on the next page...

BEHOLD THE HERITAGE

(continued from page 7)

loving witness to the truth, we are nothing. And if we give all our time to developing common-core state standards and measurable outcomes, but do not have love, it profits us nothing.

The Church expends much solicitude on the proper formation of her schools because they are virtually peerless in transmitting Christian faith and culture. To those detractors who deny the legitimacy of the Catholic School as a repository of faith, the Church presciently asserted in 1977 (*The Catholic School*) that in addition to “the individual witness of her members, the Church also may offer witness by means of her institutions.” Catholic schools are an indispensable ecclesial extension of the Church. Any effort to stifle their full religious expression is an attack against the Church herself.

Thus the Catholic School serves on the frontlines of evangelization. Effective Catholic schools deftly weave catechesis into the fabric of the school day. The curriculum is continually fortified by a thoroughly Christian worldview, helping to form the next generation of Christian witnesses. Yet the Church in her wisdom knows that “it would be wrong to consider subjects as mere adjuncts to faith or as useful means of teaching apologetics” (*The Catholic School*). It is detrimental to students to fill them with the false notion that everything is religious. The faithful must know how to live in a secular world and function as effective members of society. This knowledge and ability is wholly consistent with the Church, who stands ready to “embrace everything in human culture which is compatible with Revelation” (*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith*). This principle compels Catholics to respect secular viewpoints provided they do not contradict the Gospel.

The document *Consecrated Persons and*

Their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines (2002) exhorts us to celebrate the unique creation of our own Catholic institutions and the religious orders that founded them. We owe our gratitude and loyalty to these men and women because

...their special consecration, their particular experience of the gifts of the Spirit, their constant listening to the Word of God, their practice of discernment, their rich heritage of pedagogical traditions built up since the establishment of their institute, and their profound grasp of spiritual truth, consecrated persons are able to be especially effective in educational activities and to offer a specific contribution to the work of other educators.

This document joyfully brings to mind the black and white clad sisters visibly present upon the landscape of Nashville’s Dominican Campus, the home of Aquinas College, Saint Cecilia preparatory girls school, and Overbrook grade school (which are all owned and operated by the Dominican Congregation of Saint Cecilia). These faithful Dominican sisters are the reason these excellent schools and *Behold the Heritage* exist. Much fruit has been borne of their 153-year educational apostolate. In addition to their schools on the Nashville Dominican Campus, the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia teach in 38 schools in 22 dioceses in the United States and abroad, and they are one of the fastest growing religious congregations in the Church.

Dominicans are intensely loyal to their patron’s salvific vision, and to this end *Behold the Heritage* concludes with three beautiful expositions from Dominicans in the field. The Dominican four-pillar approach of prayer, study, community and preaching (teaching) is on full display in these essays and reveals why Dominicans have been so effective in producing pas-

sionate teachers, engaged students, and vibrant organizations. In his essay “A Dominican Philosophy of Education,” Father Philip A. Smith, O.P. crystallizes the necessity of the teacher’s calling in quoting the Senegalese poet Baba Dioun:

In the end

We will conserve only what we love

We will love only what we understand

And we will understand only what we have been taught.

“The school is more necessary than the Church,” John J. Hughes, New York’s first archbishop, bluntly asserted. In a fashion similar to Archbishop Hughes, the Nashville Dominicans know the urgent need for exemplary Catholic education. This is why they have remained in the classroom long after many religious orders have packed up and left. It drives them into more classrooms each year, challenges them to create new teacher education programs, and inspires them to produce landmark scholarly resources like *Behold the Heritage*.

As superbly noted in the document *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997), “teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of man’s most excellent and creative activities, for the teacher does not write on inanimate material, but on the very spirits of human beings.” The moral depth of the teaching vocation is lovingly exalted in *Behold the Heritage*. Those who carefully study its pages will be generously rewarded for their effort; it will refine their sensibilities as educators and as Christians as well. ✪

Shannon Martin is currently enrolled in Graduate Studies in Education at Aquinas College. She has a Master’s Degree in Sociology from the University of Missouri and is a certified ESL teacher. She has a daughter in kindergarten at Overbrook School.

The new Torch is brought to you by the Aquinas College Write Reason Plan. The Write Reason Plan is a College-wide initiative seeking to cultivate writing and critical thinking habits among Aquinas students through an emphasis upon the Trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

For more information, please visit

<http://www.aquinascollege.edu/academics/write-reason-center/>

