

ARGUMENT

For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his saints.

—*Wisdom 2:6-8*

On Christmas Day 1886, in no less a church than the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, while a choir of children sang the Magnificat during Vespers, the French poet-statesman Paul Claudel—by then a convinced atheist—came to believe in God. He writes,

In an instant my heart was touched, and I believed. I believed with such force of adhesion, with the assent of my entire being, with a conviction so powerful, with a certitude which left no room for any doubt, that, since then, all the books, all the arguments, all the coincidences of a restless life, could not shake my faith—nor, truly, could they even touch it. (*Contacts et circonstances*, 1940)

Grace struck Claudel. In that instance God moved his mind to intellectually believe and his heart to assent that God exists. The poetry of Paul Verlaine, Charles Baudelaire, and most of all Arthur Rimbaud helped Claudel to see beyond the constricting materialism of his age. The transcendence of Romanticism led

Claudel to embrace the conviction that providence and love order the universe, imbuing the world with meaning beyond that which is quantifiable or empirically sensible.

The challenge presented by reductionistic, scientific materialism continues, more than a century after Claudel's moment of conversion, in our own age. To speak convincingly to an audience at best apathetic about—at worst hostile toward—the ancient and everlasting truths about the heart and destiny of man demands a certain artistic sensibility, an intellectual agility and spiritual authenticity. The contributions of these pages present an ample sampling of all three, fortified by the dynamism of the lived experience of the authors' own religious lives.

Evangelization is done on one's knees! ... Let us cultivate the contemplative dimension, even amid the whirlwind of more urgent and pressing duties." The Holy Father, Pope Francis, continues, "And the more the mission calls you to go out to the margins of existence, let your heart be the more closely united with Christ's heart, full of mercy and love." These words, addressed to seminarians, novices, and young people discerning religious vocations, continue to echo, as Pope Francis has inaugurated 2015, *the Year of Consecrated Life*. Beginning with the first Sunday of Advent, the Church will consider with particular attention the breadth and the depth of what consecrated life means.

This present issue therefore attends to the topic of consecrated life. Read the debate about the necessity of religious life between Brs. Philip Neri Reese, O.P., and Louis Bertrand Lemoine, O.P., and see how consecrated life belongs at the very heart of the Church's life and holiness. Delve into a fine specimen of seventeenth-century French preaching by reading the homily preached on the occasion of a religious profession by Fr. Charles-René Billuart, O.P., translated by Br. John Sica, O.P. Finally, enjoy the thoughtful consideration of consecrated life presented in an interview by Br.

Jacob Bertrand Janczyk, O.P., with Archbishop Anthony Fisher, O.P., archbishop of Sydney, Australia.

In keeping with the tradition of this publication, we aim to compose pieces that will be of interest to all men and women of faith, but particularly those of Dominican sympathies. Marked as the Order of Preachers is by our charism of study, it is our fervent hope that this issue will impart a modicum of the fruit of these labors. May the words herein raise hearts and minds to the One, the True, and the Good, and contribute to the salvation of souls.

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