

# The Maritain Notebook

NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN MARITAIN ASSOCIATION / VOLUME 20, ISSUE 2 / FALL 2012



## The President's Letter

Dear Members & Friends,

I begin this letter with a heavy heart: Tony Simon, the beloved Secretary-Treasurer of the American Maritain Association from its creation in 1978 until 2004, passed into the loving arms of our Lord on Thursday, August 2<sup>nd</sup> after a lengthy illness. The American Maritain Association rests firmly in his debt; for over twenty years, Tony and his charming wife Judy, organized and essentially ran our long and proud history of annual conferences. In addition, Tony also founded our AMA book series, and he served with consummate skill as the series' first general editor. As an expression of our affection and sincere gratitude to him, the AMA twice honored him for his valued contributions, first with our "Humanitarian Service" award in 2001, and then again at last year's conference in Notre Dame, when we bestowed on him the association's highest honor, the "Lifetime Achievement" award. We will be forever in his debt, and he will be dearly missed.

On a brighter note, I am happy to report that we do have a slate of new officers who will be installed at this year's banquet. Since their candidacy was

uncontested, our new officers will be: Michael Torre, president, Ryan Gable, O.P., vice president, and Jim Hanink, secretary-treasurer. As Michael assumes the presidency, I also am happy to announce that the new General Editor of our book series will be Giuseppe Butera. Please congratulate and thank these new officers as they prepare to serve the AMA and keep our valuable organization growing.

Another big change concerns "The Maritain Notebook." After many years of dedicated service, Bill Haggerty is passing the torch to Joshua Schulz at DeSales University. Thank you Bill for doing such an outstanding job with the "Notebook" for all these years, and thank you Joshua for stepping up to ensure that this valuable publication will continue into the future!

Finally, I am excited to tell you that our 36<sup>th</sup> annual international conference will take place from Thursday, October 11 to Saturday, October 13, 2012, in Philadelphia, PA. Our conference theme is: "Art and Faith" which derives from Maritain's 1926 book of the same name. Our local conference chair, Cornelia Tsakiridou, has worked very hard to secure a lot of generous support from this

year's sponsor, La Salle University. The lineup of Plenary Speakers is again stellar: Rev. John Conley, S.J., (Loyola University of Maryland); Jude Dougherty (Catholic University of America); Msgr. Daniel Gallagher, S.J. (The Vatican, Rome); past AMA presidents Curtis Hancock (Rockhurst University) and Alice Ramos (St. John's University); and last year's recipient of our "Scholarly Excellence" medal, Kenneth Schmitz (University of Toronto).

We also have a good number of submitted papers covering a wide variety of stimulating topics for reflection and discussion. In addition, we also will present our medal for "Scholarly Excellence" to Msgr. John Wippel at the annual Awards Banquet. Full conference and registration details (including information about our great hotel, the Sheraton Society Hill) will be mailed to you by late August.

As always, the members of the program committee – Gavin Colvert, John Hittinger, and Cornelia Tsakiridou – join me in saying that we look forward to welcoming you to the "city of brotherly love," Philadelphia!

Yours truly,  
John G. Trapani, Jr.  
President,

The American Maritain Association

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### *The Maritain Notebook*

Published in the Fall, Winter and Spring. Please contact the editor regarding books for review, guest columns, or to pass on news and announcements.

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# Book Review

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## From *Art and Faith*

Jacques Maritain. *Art and Faith: Letters Between Jacques Maritain and Jean Cocteau*. Trans. John Coleman. New York: The Philosophical Library, 1948, pp. 97-8.

“Religion and poetry have their quarrels, yet these are quarrels among sisters. The artist has great trouble in making use, without hurting himself, of a creative virtue that is too hard for him as a man. But art itself goes spontaneously to God. To God not as man’s last end, not in the moral line. To God as the universal principle of all form and all clarity. From the moment it reaches in its own line a certain level of greatness and purity, art heralds without understanding them the invisible order and glory of which all beauty is but a sign; Chinese or Egyptian, it is already Christian, in hope and in symbol.

“God does not ask for ‘religious art’ or Catholic art.’ The art He wants for Himself is art. With all its teeth.”

And certainly *to paint the things of Christ one must live in Christ*, as Fra Angelico said. But one must first be a painter. An art which does not paint the things of Christ because it considers itself still unworthy of that, or for any other reason, but which snatches real pieces from Heaven and renders ‘the inimitable sound of the impact of intelligence upon beauty,’ is the art that from greater or lesser distance prepares for grace (for the time when grace will want to make use of it) the most worthy instrument.”

## Augustine: In His Own Words

William Harmless, S.J. *Augustine: In His Own Words*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010. Reviewed by Joseph Spencer

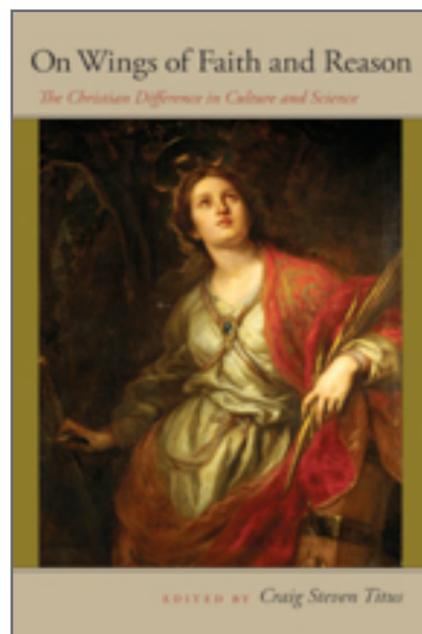
In this wonderful new collection of St. Augustine’s writings, Fr. William Harmless gives us a glimpse into the theological and philosophical impact that St. Augustine has provided for Christianity and western civilization as a whole. While there have been numerous collected works of St. Augustine throughout the years, none get to the heart of Augustine the man, the theologian, and the philosopher as Fr. Harmless’ book does. The selections in the work are bracketed off in such a way as to highlight the important contributions Augustine made for philosophy and theology, and so provides the new reader with a firm foundation for study of Augustine, while also allowing those who know his work already to have a new appreciation for Augustine’s work.

Reading through these selected examples of Augustine’s corpus, one finds that no matter what the specific topic was, Augustine had an amazing ability to deal with the issue at hand. It is refreshing to find a collection that treats of Augustine’s work as a whole, but instead of falling into endless pages of material that only the most knowledgeable scholar would find interesting, Harmless’ collection provides one of the best introductions to Augustine’s work in print today. Beginning with selections from the Confessions, the reader finds Augustine the man who even in his weakest and most difficult moments finds the love he has been searching for ever since he realized his heart without God. Taking Augustine the man along with Augustine the philosopher and theologian is an enormous strength of Harmless’ collection since it prevents the reader from compartmentalizing Augustine’s humanity away from his intellect.

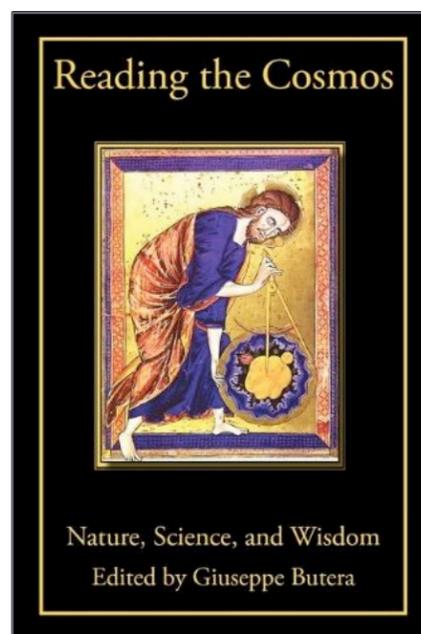
Taking on the idea of Augustine as a whole person is an important step for Harmless, but also for anyone schooled in scholasticism and neo-scholasticism, since it always remains a danger for philosophers and theologians to over-intellectualize great saints and thinkers, a problem Augustine overcame by emphasizing the importance of the heart. Throughout the collection, one thinks of the huge steps Augustine took to critique rigid Platonism, gnostic Manicheism, and many of the other heresies of his time, and takes away from his triumph a better grasp of how one can both defend the faith and right reason, and still have a fruitful dialogue with those who disagree with one’s views. Augustine, along with Aquinas, Bonaventure, Hildegard, and many of the other giants of pre-modern philosophy and theology, show all of us how to engage the world in dialogue, without fear or lukewarm faith; they are models for everyone from the common church goer to the most highly lettered academic.

The importance of these great thinkers was not lost on Maritain, who along with Gilson and many others, brought about the important revival in interest of these greats, all while not losing sight of the significant contemporary issues they faced. First and foremost, the importance of Augustine can be found in his idea that all truth is “God’s truth,” viz. if an idea is true, a Christian should never fear accepting and defending it; an idea that Maritain exemplified, and we would be wise to hold onto today.

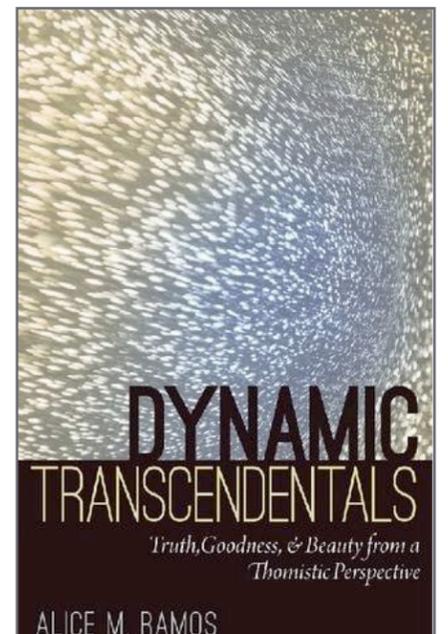
## New Books For Review



*On Wings of Faith and Reason: The Christian Difference in Culture and Science*. Ed. Craig Steven Titus. Arlington, Virginia: The Institute for Psychological Sciences Press, 2008.



*Reading the Cosmos: Nature, Science and Wisdom*. Ed. Giuseppe Butera. Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2011.



Alice Ramos. *Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective*. Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2012.

# Books, News & More

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## Dante & the Blessed Virgin

**McInerny, Ralph.** *Dante and the Blessed Virgin.* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010. Pp. xvii + 164. \$27.00. Reviewed by Curtis L. Hancock, Rockhurst University.

Ralph McInerny begins this book with a declarative sentence: "The Blessed Virgin Mary is the key to Dante" (p. 1). He recognizes that she is "behind the scenes" at the poem's beginning, as she observes that Dante's soul has fallen into peril. Her prayer initiates his pilgrimage, hoping that an excursus through Hell will awaken him to his sinfulness and make him God-fearing. Her strategy succeeds. With the help of Virgil, Dante is able to ascend the Seven Storey Mountain of Purgatory. With the aid of his old flame Beatrice, St. Lucy, and St. Bernard, he is able to journey through the gate of heaven. The Blessed Virgin is present in the closing cantos of the *Paradiso* as she prays that God grace Dante with a glimpse of Beatific Vision—a gift that could not happen without her intercession. McInerny focuses on how at the beginning, end, and in-between, Mary defines the central message of the *Divine Comedy*: our happiness requires that we become God-like.

It is never a surprise to discover that someone who is dedicated to the work of St. Thomas also has a strong interest in the writings of Dante. Etienne Gilson's 1949 publication, *Dante and Philosophy*, is a notable example of such interest. Like Gilson's, Ralph McInerny's lifetime commitment to understand medieval philosophy and culture was bound to attract him to the influence of St. Thomas on the great Florentine poet. His reflections on this relationship impelled him to find in Dante comprehensive principles that accord with St. Thomas' task as a Christian thinker. These principles include both philosophy and theology. Dante especially needs these principles (1) for the moral philosophy implicit in the *Divine Comedy* and (2) for the description of heaven and Mary's role in Dante's march to redemption.

Placed between a Prologue and an Epilogue, the book contains four chapters.

The first chapter, "A New Life Begins," discusses how Dante's earlier writings prefigure but do not compare with the *Divine Comedy*. The remaining chapters disclose a strategy on McInerny's part: he employs his expertise as moral philosopher to explicate methodically the substance of Dante's story. Chapters two and three, respectively titled "In the Midst of My Days," and "The Seven Storey Mountain," provide the occasion to comment on philosophical morality as partly constitutive of Dante's allegorical account of personal development. The *Divine Comedy* is an adventure about how grace perfects nature, but nature must first have its due. McInerny devotes several engaging pages explaining how Dante's vision of human perfection first rests on St.

Thomas' (and Aristotle's) philosophy of the human person. Human beings seek their happiness, which means all our actions are under the disposition of will. The will cannot help but desire its comprehensive good. But will is not the sole faculty that makes for moral life. Intellectual judgment is also involved. For that reason, moral life is difficult. While the will desires our comprehensive good, a problem arises in determining whether a given particular good contributes to that comprehensive pursuit. Something can appear good to the intellect when it really is not. With a little showboating Ralph sums up the relationship of will to our distinctively human choices: "Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly"—these exemplify what is meant by natural love or desire, but 'I gotta love one man till I die' does not" (p. 39). With this discussion in place, McInerny shows how a Thomistic philosophy of the human person and of virtue ethics is constitutive of Dante's narration. In this connection, his discussion of the beatitudes is profound (pp. 49-54).

The last chapter explains how theological morality must complete natural morality, since our ultimate happiness—union with God—cannot be achieved without grace. The Blessed Virgin, as the most morally perfect creature, is the paragon of natural and supernatural moral excellence. Her charity prevents her from hoarding grace. She wants to communicate it to others. Her role in the *Divine Comedy* is to be an agent of grace so that sinners, like Dante, can nonetheless find their way to blessedness. Through Mary's assistance, the virtues of faith, hope, and charity can edify the soul and make one worthy to enjoy God's eternal company. As Dante ascends to heaven, he sees this clearly. He is

examined—scholastic style—by St. Peter (on faith), St. James (on hope), and St. John (on charity) to verify that he understands these virtues and lives by them. He has no privilege to inhabit heaven without them. McInerny's analysis of these later cantos (*Paradiso* 24-26; pp. 108-120) is highly instructive, illuminating the Apostles' examination of Dante by relying on St. Thomas' writings on faith, hope, and charity.

On a final note, this is a delightful volume that the reader will want to return to again and again. It can be read for many reasons, including as an insight into its author's deep faith. A bittersweet read as one is reminded of our loss of Ralph McInerny.



### News and Events

#### 36th Annual AMA Conference: "Art and Faith"

The 36th annual AMA conference will be held in Philadelphia, PA, from Thursday evening, October 11th to the close of the awards banquet on Saturday, October 13th. Sponsored by LaSalle University, the theme of the conference derives from Maritain's 1926 book of the same name, "Art and Faith."

#### Congratulations

To Dr. Lawrence Feingold! He was Assistant Professor of Theology at Ave Maria University, and is now Associate Professor of Philosophy and Theology at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis.

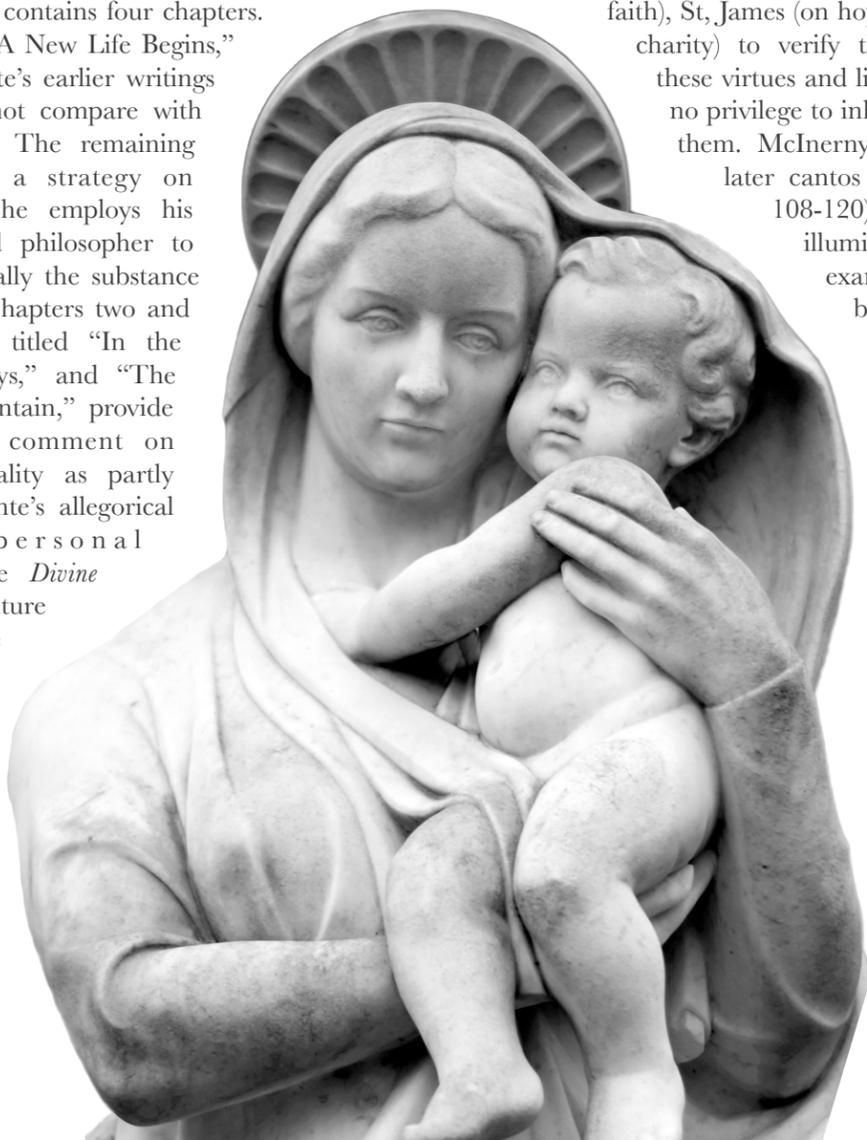
#### Upcoming Events

The Canadian Jacques Maritain Association will hold its annual Symposium on October 26-27, at St. Paul University and the Dominican College of Philosophy and Theology, in Ottawa. The theme of the conference is "Religion, Politics and the Arts."

The 2012 meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association will occur on November 2-4 in Los Angeles. The theme for this year's meeting is "Philosophy in the Abrahamic Traditions."

#### Recent Publications? Please let us know!

The editor of the *Notebook* would like to list the recent publications of AMA members (e.g., books, journal articles, and book reviews) in future newsletters. Please forward the relevant publication information to the *Notebook* via e-mail.



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