

## *Editor's Note*

In his fine introductory essay Ralph McNerny tells us that aesthetics for Maritain was not accidental to his philosophy but rather essential to it. Both Maritain and the Scholastics knew that beauty is not a social construct or a purely subjective experience, as some would have it today, but that beauty is intrinsic to things themselves. Beauty has been called the "splendor of the form," its radiance; we are captivated by that radiance, and we thirst for it. The aesthetic experience is thus similar to the philosophical experience. As we desire to know, to be united to the truth, we also desire to be united with beauty. Our desire for happiness is often expressed in aesthetic terms: contemplation, with enjoyment, of the ultimately Intelligible and Beautiful. The aesthetic experience calls us beyond the self, beyond what we see and touch. As Michelangelo once wrote: "The soul of man winging its way towards the heavens whence it descended cannot rest in the contemplation of the fragile and deceptive beauty which allures the bodily senses, but in its sublime flight it seeks to attain to the universal principle of beauty."

The essays in this volume recognize in the beautiful a call to the transcendent, to an order not of man's making, as they also recognize in the arts the power to elevate man or degrade him, to dispose him toward the good or to alienate him from the good. Thus, although Maritain distinguishes, as Aquinas had done before him, artistic from moral excellence, art from prudence, he also clearly sees that the artist as a man has a responsibility toward the truth and his fellowmen. A study of the arts brings us then to ethical and political considerations, for the good lawgiver, if called to act in artistic matters, will want to promote virtue and the common good. The arts which uplift man and enable him to live a good and virtuous life will become, as it were, a window onto the transcendent. Seen in this way, the arts and beauty cannot but have an essential role in the life of the human person and in the *polis*. And so, this volume has an important contribution to make in discussions of art and beauty.

The essays herein have been arranged in three parts. Those in the first part

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provide us with the metaphysical and epistemological foundations for a consideration of beauty in art, as well as in nature, and of creative activity, both human and divine. The second part deals specifically with different forms of art and interpretations of the artist and his work; the “usefulness” of art and beauty in, for example, religious experience and liturgy, is but one of the ways in which art is shown here to serve human life. The third and final section of the volume presents us with moral and political questions concerning the arts, such as censorship, public funding and the educational role of the arts. This last part also paves the way for a broad understanding of aesthetic principles and their application to the well-being of the human person and of life in society.

Throughout the editing process of this volume, I have received encouragement and advice from many friends and colleagues. I would like first of all to thank Curtis Hancock, President of the American Maritain Association, along with Anthony O. Simon and Peter Redpath, both dedicated members of the Executive Committee of the Association, for their moral support. A special thanks goes to Willard Gingerich, Provost of Research at St. John's University, and to Salvatore Spizzirri, Associate Dean of St. John's College, for their help in securing intramural funds for the publication of this volume. Dr. Gingerich was not only supportive of the project, but also enthusiastic about previous volumes published under the auspices of the American Maritain Association. I hope that he will be equally pleased with the outcome of this present volume. I also wish to thank Jamie Manson for her help in the initial formatting of the essays, and Grace Wu, as well as Katherine Osenga, for their suggestions on the design of the cover. Last but not least, I would like to thank all the contributors for their insightful work; I am very appreciative to Ralph McInerny for agreeing to write the introductory essay. I could think of no one more qualified than he—a Thomist, Maritainian scholar, and author of the well-known Father Dowling books—to write the introduction to this volume.

Finally, I would like to say a word about the cover. I chose Rodin's *Pensée—Thought*—not only for its beauty, but also as a reminder of what Thomas Aquinas knew only too well: that beauty is essentially found in the contemplative life, in the act of reason. I hope that the reader of this volume will experience something of the beautiful in the thoughts expressed by the contributors, and that their reflections may serve some of us who by profession engage in the contemplative life to journey along with Aquinas, Maritain, and others in the elaboration of an aesthetics, so necessary for the perfection of human life.