About the Cover

This issue features four distinct essays, which examine the Church in the modern world. Each of these essays, in its own way, tackles a particular aspect of life in the modern church. These include social media, economics, feminism and charity. Each of these topics, though seemingly far removed from the time of Jesus, play a huge role in the formation and faith experience of Christians today.

In reflecting upon the struggle to balance faith and other aspects of modern living, I was reminded of this painting by Dutch artist, Jan Vermeer van Delft, titled “Christ in the House of Martha and Mary.” In the painting, Jesus, Mary and Martha appear to be in deep conversation. However, this is not generally the tone understood in the reading of Luke 10, from which this scene is taken. Jesus had come to visit Martha and Mary in their home, and, as soon as he arrived, Mary dropped everything to sit at his feet, while Martha continued to do her housework. Jesus resolved the conflict by encouraging Martha to put down the things that were distracting her, to take a seat with her sister and to focus on what is most important.

This story resonates deeply with themes throughout these four papers. In Magdalena Poweska’s paper, Facebook and other forms of social media take the place of Martha’s “work” and are representative of all that distracts us. Contrastingly, in Alexandra Potamianos’ paper, she reveals the deep, but problematic connection between the Christian faith and women, displayed so acutely in Mary and Martha, women who love and serve Jesus in different, conflicting ways. In Patrick Nolin’s piece, the idea becomes more abstract with a discussion of the ways that economics and politics fit into the Christian life, perhaps creating a hybrid of Martha and Mary in the economic sphere. Finally, in Emma Graham’s paper, the notion that we must be at the foot of the Lord and become his hands and feet on earth rings true through the theories of St. Teresa of Calcutta.

This image of Jesus in quiet discussion with Mary and Martha remains a strong reminder of the struggles of living the Christian life in Jesus’ time, but also in our own present experience. In order to move forward in this modern world perhaps we must consider a complex negotiation of the devotion, hard work and conflict of these disciples, a task that each of these authors enter into through their work.

Emma Graham
Associate Editor

From the Editor’s Desk

The theme for this issue of Saeculum is “Christianity in the Modern World.” Christianity, as a religion and as an institution, has exerted influence over the social, economic, and political spheres, and continues to do so in the modern world. It has encouraged ways of viewing and living in the world that are in accordance with the teachings that it has held since its inception. However, Christianity, and more specifically, the Catholic Church, has also been critiqued for holding onto longstanding traditions that stand in tension with secular feminism and other contemporary social movements. Nonetheless, the Church continues to have an impact on
alleviating suffering and addressing issues of inequality and injustice. Saeculum presents four essays that explore these themes.

Our first essay, “The Capital Market and Catholic Social Thought” by Patrick Nolin explores the Catholic Church’s perception and understanding of the economic market. He argues that the Church calls for the creation of a fair and just democratic capitalist economy. This would have political regulations, which are bound by the Church’s social criticism and teaching, that would protect and value its participants’ rights and well-being. This economy would also have ethical and moral regulations, using religious tradition as its foundation. These regulations would govern the impacts that the system would have on its participants and the environment, among others. Nolin’s argument also examines the impacts of the “idolatry of money.” This essay serves as a guide in establishing an economic system that can lead to prosperity for its participants and respect towards their rights, well-being and towards the environment.

Nolin’s paper seeks the integration of the Church’s teaching within an already established system, and our next essay, by Emma Graham, examines what this integration could look like. In “Is a Mission of Charity also a Mission of Freedom?” Graham examines Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity in India in light of Amartya Sen’s Development as Freedom. Graham argues that Teresa’s model, which focused on alleviating an immediate need, does not completely fit with Sen’s model, which focused on a larger scale. Sen believed in political reform, while Teresa worked within an already established system. Nonetheless, they can still agree on the importance of human dignity and the work needed to allow each person to live a life she or he values. Graham advances the claim that both Mother Teresa and Amartya Sen seek to bring freedom in the world, albeit through different means.

Our third paper, rather than using the Church and its teachings as lens to critique and serve society, instead turns its critique on the Church. “The Agency of Women in the Catholic Church” by Alexandra Potamianos examines three feminist issues – the role of women in the Church, reproductive rights, and women’s ordination – to illustrate that each plays a part in the broader task of empowering women. Feminist theologians, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rita Gross, argue that the Church’s teachings have led to the oppression of women within the Church, due largely to the influence early Biblical interpretations and theological interpretations by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Potamianos then explores the writings of John Paul II, who argues that women have a role in the public realm. He, nonetheless, does not advocate for women’s agency over reproductive rights or female ordination, beliefs which Potamianos critiques through the works of Ruether and Gross and through the actions of such organizations as Womenpriests and Women Church. Overall, Potamianos argues that the issues of female agency cannot be reduced to a single issue, but instead has different causes.

Our final paper is “Facebook: An Authentic Tool for Social Communication or a Dangerous Medium of Isolation,” by Magdalena Poweska. This article examines the role of social media today. Poweska argues that Facebook and other forms of social media can lead to human communication and deeper relationships. However, social media also encourages self-gratification and can lead to addiction. Poweska argues that overly emphasizing this aspect can lead to isolation and alienation. This thus neglects the Church’s teaching on media, which calls for its contribution to human development. Poweska examines both sides of the argument before
ultimately concluding that one’s use of social media needs to be critically examined. Her paper reminds us of the prevalence of social media in today’s world.

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Andrea Nicole Carandang
Editor-in-Chief