

# THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT 2023

Volume 50, Issue 3





## FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

### St. Andrew the Apostle: A Model for Us

Excerpts from Dr. O'Reilly's Remarks to the  
Class of 2023 at the Annual President's Dinner

As you approach your graduation and your "return to the world," it will serve you well to have a good example to follow. Tonight, I want to propose to you to look to St. Andrew the Apostle as your guide. My thoughts have been formed by reading a sermon of Cardinal Newman and St. Thomas's commentaries on the Gospels of John and Matthew.

I am very much persuaded by Cardinal Newman's appreciation of Andrew's virtues and how they should inspire us. Cardinal Newman contends that the men most favored by God are not necessarily the most useful, nor those who make the most noise in the world, nor those who make their mark in history. On the contrary, "even when we are able to point to a certain number of men" as "real instruments" of "great blessings," he says, our relative estimation of them is "often very erroneous."

To quote the saint further: "If we would trace truly the hand of God in human affairs, and pursue His bounty as displayed in the world to its original sources, we must unlearn our admiration of the powerful and distinguished, our reliance on the opinion of society, our respect for the decisions of the learned or the multitude, and turn our eyes to private life."

That is the way of Providence, and you should not expect otherwise. We can be impressed with prestige and honor, but those who do the most good are "unknown to the world." Think about the good that mothers and fathers do in their families, in their parishes, and in their neighborhoods. That is likely what you are called to: a hidden life that can be productive of great good.

These words should be a great consolation to us. To all here present, your formation at TAC has given you, I think, something quite rare: a good beginning in the intellectual and spiritual life. You have acquired real talent, and I see that whenever I meet our alumni.

Despite the challenges you may encounter; despite the way the world will tug at you; and in light of your desire to do something worthwhile for God and neighbor, you should be comforted to know that the Apostle Andrew can be your guide.

Says Cardinal Newman: "Andrew is scarcely known except by name ... and is not God Himself, the author of all good, hid from mankind at large, partially manifested and poorly glorified, in a few scattered servants here and there?"

And that is our calling: to be God's servants, not to make a name for ourselves.

St. Andrew the Apostle, pray for us.



*"Despite the challenges you may encounter; despite the way the world will tug at you; and in light of your desire to do something worthwhile for God and neighbor, you should be comforted to know that the Apostle Andrew can be your guide."*

**ALL COLLEGE**

**From the Desk of the President..... 3**  
 St. Andrew the Apostle: A Model for Us

**Commencement 2023 ..... 6**  
 Humility, Gratitude, and the Wisdom of the Cross

**Occasions for Gratitude..... 8**  
 College Honors Friends and Benefactors

**Senior Portraits and Thesis Titles.... 22**

**Lives of Work and Wonder .....47**  
 What's Next for the Class of 2023

**In Memoriam .....50**  
 Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord

**Upcoming Events ..... 51**



6



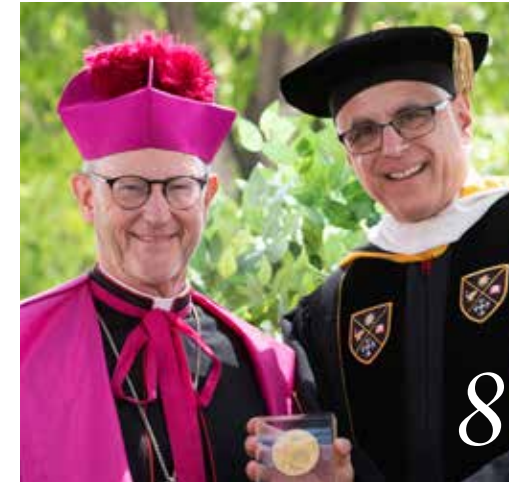
12



20



47



8



13

**NEW ENGLAND**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Commencement ..... 10**  
 The New England Class of 2023

**Prayers Answered!..... 12**  
 Fire-Damaged Chapel Restored in Time

**Addresses ..... 13**

- Baccalaureate Mass homily by Rev. Patrick Seo ('06)
- Senior Class Address by John Metilly ('23)
- Commencement Address by Daniel T. Flatley

**Senior Reflections ..... 18**  
 By Bernadette Mohun ('23) and Thomas Aldredge ('23)

**On Philanthropy, Business, and Catholic Education..... 20**  
 An Interview with Daniel T. Flatley

**CALIFORNIA**

**49<sup>th</sup> Annual Commencement..... 31**  
 The California Class of 2023

**Dedication ..... 33**  
 Remembering Margaret Therese-Marie Yanoschik ('23)

**Addresses ..... 34**

- Baccalaureate Mass homily by the Most Rev. James D. Conley, D.D., S.T.L.
- Senior Class Address by MaryGrace Brittain ('23)
- Commencement Address by Bishop Conley

**Senior Reflections ..... 42**  
 By Jonathan Phelan ('23) and Lauren Gramlich ('23)

**A Rediscovery of Perennial Truths .... 44**  
 An Interview with Bishop Conley



The Thomas Aquinas College Newsletter is published quarterly by the Office of Advancement, Thomas Aquinas College.

**President**  
 Paul J. O'Reilly, Ph.D.

**Vice President for Advancement**  
 James C. Link

**Executive Director of College Relations / Editor**  
 Chris Weinkopf

**Communications Manager**  
 Benjamin Trull

**Student Photographers**  
 Regina Terreri (CA'23)  
 Monica Weinkopf (CA'25)  
 Samuel Livingston (NE'26)

**Correspondence should be addressed to:**  
 Editor, College Newsletter  
 10,000 Ojai Road  
 Santa Paula, CA 93060  
 newsletter@thomasaquinas.edu

**Complimentary subscriptions:**  
 thomasaquinas.edu/subscribe



# Commencement 2023

Humility, Gratitude, and the Wisdom of the Cross



New England Commencement

For four years, the 102 members of the Thomas Aquinas College Class of 2023 not only completed the College's rigorous program of Catholic liberal education, they also sustained — and, on the New England campus, embedded — its unique intellectual, spiritual, and community culture, despite considerable challenges. Their joyful success in these endeavors made this year's two Commencement ceremonies, held on successive weekends in May, a time of great celebration and gratitude.

### From East ...

On May 13, friends and family gathered for the second-ever Commencement of Thomas Aquinas College, New England. As the first class to spend all four years on

the Northfield, Massachusetts, campus, the Class of 2023 helped to solidify the traditions that the previous class — whose members began as freshmen in California — either initiated or brought from the West Coast.

The experience of settling a new campus, like that of Catholic liberal education itself, can be transformative. Yet in his homily at that morning's Baccalaureate Mass of the Holy Spirit, alumnus priest Rev. Patrick Seo ('06) warned graduates against the sense of pride and self-satisfac-



tion that such accomplishments can engender.

"TAC changed my life, as I imagine it has changed yours," said the priest, vested in red and preaching from Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel's ambo. "It taught us how to think; it surrounded us with so many amazing role models intent on intelligence and honing their own holiness ... and therein lies the danger. Very easily, we can graduate and go back out into the world thinking that, and acting like, we are better than everyone else who never received what we got to receive. And that's when we

have lost the core of what TAC was trying to teach us."

At the ensuing Commencement ceremony in the century-old Moody Auditorium, Class Speaker John Metilly told his classmates that the key to preserving such

humility lies in pursuing the wisdom of the Cross. "Through the Cross we will lose our self-love and our pride," he observed. "We should, therefore, receive the Cross not only with resignation, but also with love and gratitude."

Echoing this theme of thankfulness, the year's Commencement Speaker called on the graduates to remember

*"TAC changed my life, as I imagine it has changed yours."*

— Rev. Patrick Seo ('06)

the blessings of their time at the College and the generous people who made those blessings possible. "Never forget this place," said Daniel T. Flatley, a trustee of one of the preeminent Catholic philanthropies in the Northeast, The Flatley Foundation. "The benefactors who have written checks for you to attend this fine college hope it does not end with you. Be productive, and don't forget those coming along after you."

### ... to West

One week later, the College celebrated its 49<sup>th</sup> Commencement in California, honoring students who, while not pioneers like their New England counterparts, faced



a similar challenge. The College's culture depends entirely on shared life in both classrooms and residence

halls — a shared life which pandemic restrictions, especially in California, threatened to undermine. But, along with last year's seniors, the Class of 2023 weathered the storm, carrying the College's culture alive and well to post-pandemic shores.

Thanks to their familiarity with facing difficulties, the graduates were primed for the homily that the Most Rev. James D. Conley, Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska, delivered at the Baccalaureate Mass in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. "Remember that Christ makes all things new, in and through the mystery of His cross,"



California Commencement

His Excellency remarked, sounding a theme from Mr. Metilly's address a week earlier. "When He is joined with His father after the Ascension and sends His holy spirit with all the gifts, with everything you need to bear your cross, the weight of glory, go forth with joy in your hearts."

After Mass, the graduates, members of the faculty, and friends and family members gathered on the academic quadrangle for the Commencement ceremony. Calling to mind Fr. Seo's homily in New England, California Class Speaker MaryGrace Brittain ('23) urged her classmates to humility and gratitude. "My friends, be humble," she advised. "Be humble, so that we may not be concerned with being elite but with being excellent; and be humble, so that we may never yield to the cancers of ingratitude and pride, but so that we may become truly wise."

In his Commencement Address, Bishop Conley reflected on the enduring value of the graduates' formation at the College, which they persevered to acquire in full. "The liberal arts education you have received here at TAC will be the source of your joy and will make your heart sing for decades to come, no matter to what vocation you are called," His Excellency said. "Keep reading and rereading the great and

good books you have come to know and love here at TAC."

At the end of both Commencements, the graduates partook in a final tradition before concluding their lives as students at Thomas Aquinas College, singing *Non nobis domine*, a custom which began at the first graduation in 1975. The graduates directed all praise for their achievements

*"Keep reading and rereading the great and good books you have come to know and love here at TAC."*

— Bishop Conley

— both academically, and as faithful trustees of the College's cherished culture — to God alone. Then at last, and with bittersweetness, the Class of 2023 departed the ceremonies to embrace an even more difficult, and even more rewarding, trusteeship: carrying faith in Christ to the wider world. ❖

# Occasions for Gratitude

## College Honors Friends and Benefactors at Commencement 2023

As Commencement offers an opportunity to reflect on graduates' growth over the last four years, it is also a fitting occasion for gratitude, to thank those whose efforts have made these erstwhile students' accomplishments possible. It is, likewise, a fortuitous moment to note — and honor — those who, through their faithful leadership, have provided a worthy example for the College's newest alumni to follow in the years and decades to come.

In this spirit of thanksgiving, Thomas Aquinas College takes time at each graduation to celebrate some of its most generous benefactors as well as stalwarts of the Catholic Church.

### Order of St. Albert

At its May 13 Commencement in New England, the College extended membership in the Order of St. Albert to one of its most outstanding partners in realizing its mission of Catholic liberal education on the East Coast: Daniel T. Flatley, a full-time trust-

ee of the Flatley Foundation, which his parents founded more than 40 years ago, and this year's Commencement Speaker.

Established in 1998 and named for the sainted teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Order recognizes those benefactors whose generosity to the College has been exceptional — for, just as St. Thomas would not have risen to his heights without the aid of St. Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas College could not accomplish the good that it achieves without the generosity of such friends. Members receive a cast bronze bust of St. Albert, and their names are engraved on the base of his statue, which occupies a corner of the California campus's academic quadrangle.

"Taking to heart Our Lord's declaration, 'To whom much is given, much will be expected,' Charlotte and Thomas Flatley became philanthropists," said College President Dr. Paul J. O'Reilly of Mr. Flatley's mother and father. "As a trustee of the foundation they established, Dan Flatley is continuing his parents' noble legacy. Both individually and through the Foundation, he has made numerous contributions to Catholic institutions throughout the country."

Dr. O'Reilly especially cited Mr. Flatley's support of the College's New En-



*Richard and Maria Grant*

gland campus. "When we approached Mr. Flatley, he asked serious and hard questions about our program and why we were worthy of support," the president recalled. "As a result of those conversations and Mr. Flatley's commitment to education and to the Catholic faith, the Foundation has given financial aid to 70 of our students."

The following week, the College extended the same honor to former Chairman of the Board of Governors Maria Grant and her late husband, Richard, at its California Commencement. Mr. and Mrs. Grant "have contributed generously to our financial aid program and to endowments to support that program," said current chairman Scott Turicchi. "In recent years, they decided to include the College in their estate plan to help secure its future well-being."

The Grants' contributions, however, were always more than financial. Mrs. Grant served on the Board of Governors for 20 years, and both she and Mr. Grant were keen to do all they could to "nurture the College's growth, development, and expansion to New England," said Mr. Turicchi. "For all that the Grants have given us, we are forever in their debt."

### Saint Thomas Aquinas Medallion

Also at the California ceremony, the College awarded the Saint Thomas Aquinas Medallion to the Most Rev. James D. Conley, Bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska, who served as this year's Commencement Speaker. The Medallion, established by the College's Board of Governors in 1975, recognizes those Catholics who have shown, through their lives and work, an extraordinary dedication to God and His holy church. Each recipient has demonstrated unflinching adherence to the Magisterium as well as influential leadership in advancing the teachings of the Church.

As a priest of nearly 40 years — and even more so as a successor to the Apostles, first in Denver and now in Lincoln — Bishop Conley has worked vigilantly to proclaim, support, and defend the teachings of the Church and to advance the mission of Christ on earth, particularly by proclaiming courageously the saving truth about marriage, the family, and the dignity of human life; by promoting devotion to the Holy Eucharist; by advancing the renewal of classical education; and by cultivating vocations to the priesthood and religious life. He has proven himself, in the words of Dr. O'Reilly, as "a faithful shepherd and a true teacher." ❖



*Mr. Turicchi presents the Saint Thomas Aquinas Medallion to the Most Rev. James D. Conley, Bishop of Lincoln, at California Commencement.*

## "The College Has Always Been Close to Us"

### Reflections upon Induction into the Order of St. Albert

by Maria O. Grant

*Note: Although Mrs. Grant was unable to attend Commencement, she penned the following words, which Chairman Scott Turicchi read on her behalf.*

I am honored, and Richard would be honored as well, to be inducted into the Order of St. Albert. Our whole married life has been bound up with Thomas Aquinas College.

Anne Forsyth informs me that the first gift from the Dan Murphy Foundation was for \$1,000 in August of 1970, when the College did not even have a campus. In 1971, Richard went on the Foundation's board, and in 1972, two amazing events occurred: In January of that year, the Dan Murphy Foundation gave \$25,000 to TAC, then in its first year of operation, and in April, Richard and I were married. So the College has always been close to us.

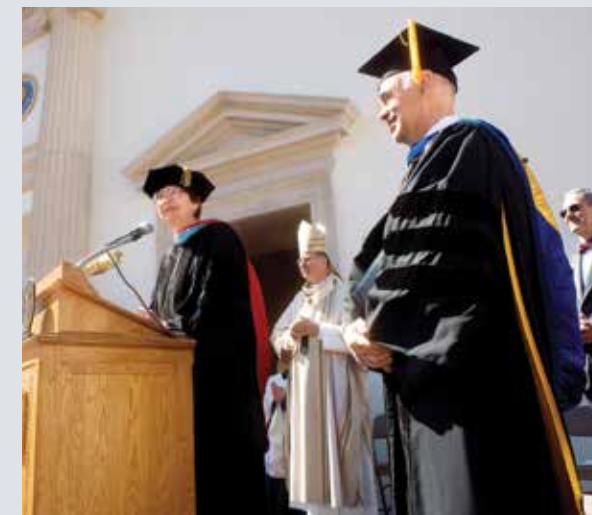
I first experienced the College at a Summer Seminar and joined the Board soon thereafter. I had the extraordinary privilege of working with President Tom Dillon during the years when we built Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel, and one of my favorite photos is of the Dedication day: Richard, Tom, Cardinal Mahony, and I were at the podium. I think all of us knew that having the Chapel built was a major milestone in the life of the College.

I always thought that finishing the campus would be the grand finale, and that we would live happily ever after, but along came Northfield. My hat is off to all those with the vision and grit to make that campus come to life and thrive.

The College has been blessed with the gifts of time, talent, and treasure: The time of all those who have worked tirelessly for the success of the California campus and now the New England campus; the talent and foresight of all the founders, Board members, and faculty who have charted the course for the College; and the incredible generosity of our benefactors, who have met our challenges at every turn.

I am sad not to be with you, but I thank you for the honor of our induction into the Order of St. Albert.

Thank you,  
Maria



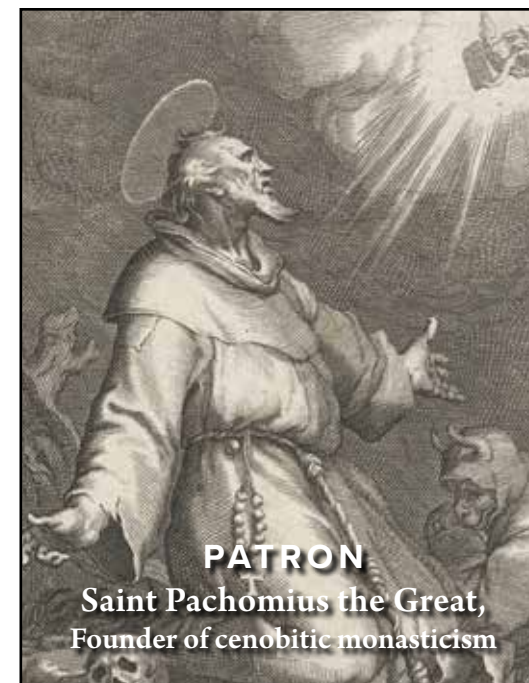
*From the 2009 Dedication of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel, left to right: Maria Grant, Cardinal Roger Mahony, Dr. Thomas E. Dillon, and Richard Grant*



# NEW ENGLAND COMMENCEMENT



# THE CLASS OF 2023



**PATRON**  
Saint Pachomius the Great,  
Founder of cenobitic monasticism

**QUOTATION**  
*The light shines in darkness,  
and the darkness  
has not overcome it.*  
— (John 1:5)

# Prayers Answered!

## Fire-Damaged Chapel Restored in Time for Commencement

When a small fire broke out in Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel on Easter morning, many worried that this year's Baccalaureate Mass of the Holy Spirit — the sacred event that begins Commencement Day — would be displaced. But by God's grace, and thanks to local firefighters, a chaplain's bravery, speedy contractors, and the zealous prayers of the College community, the second annual Commencement at Thomas Aquinas College, New England, unfolded as planned.

The fire that could have destroyed the Chapel began in the servers' sacristy in the early hours of April 9, stemming from the use of incense at the previous night's Easter Vigil. The embers smoldered for hours but gained new life when Head Chaplain Rev. Greg Markey opened the sacristy door to prepare for Easter morning Mass, thus flooding the room with fresh oxygen.



Easter morning: The fire-damaged servers' sacristy of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel

"An enormous wall of dense black smoke came billowing out," recalls Fr. Markey. "I grabbed the fire extinguisher and rushed into the room and went after the fire." After exhausting one extinguisher, the priest called 911, then found another and returned to the sacristy, keeping the flames at bay until firefighters arrived.

The College's students and faculty lost little time in adapting Olivia Music Hall for celebrating that day's Easter liturgy. Chapel Assistant Hélène (Augros '92) Froula assembled vestments for Fr. Markey in record time, and students fetched a print of the Chapel's

beloved icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help from the Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati Student Center. There was even a tabernacle on hand, recently received from a nearby shuttered convent.

Chapel repairs began almost immediately. Craftsmen added new layers of paint throughout and removed carbon that had accumulated on statues, candlesticks, and other liturgical articles. The floor received a new finish. Meanwhile, smoke-damaged vestments were carefully mended to restore their former brilliance. All in all, Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel was out of commission for a month.

But it was a long month, and the community was grateful and excited when — just two nights before Commencement — the Chapel was re-opened, and Our Lord restored to its tabernacle. On May 11, in the middle of finals week, many students set aside studying to convene outside Olivia Music Hall in



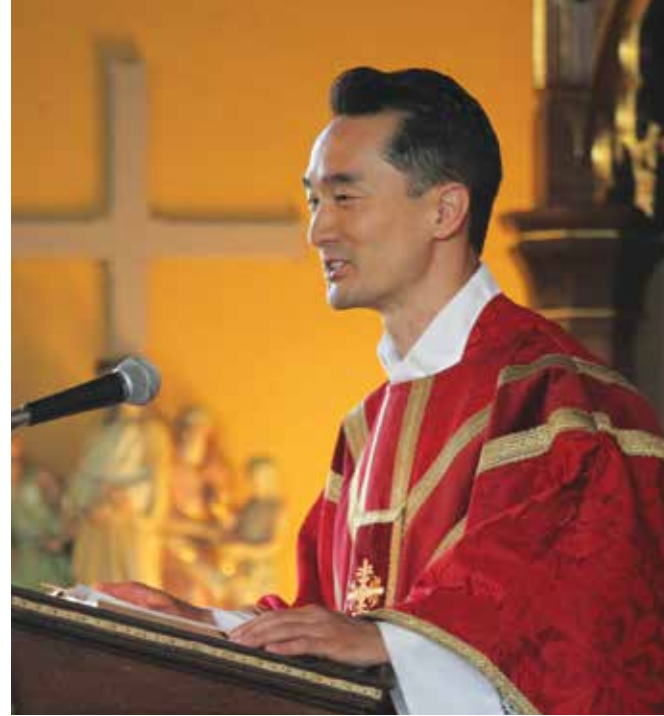
One month later: Fr. Markey leads a procession to return the Blessed Sacrament to the Chapel

the cool of the evening as Fr. Markey emerged with the ciborium and led a procession across campus.

Students sang Eucharistic hymns to accompany Our Lord's return, chant lilting above the quiet but constant chiming of bells throughout the journey to the renovated chapel. Once inside, Fr. Markey reposed the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle — just in time for Commencement 2023.

The overwhelming atmosphere on campus was one of relief — especially among the seniors. *Deo gratias!* ❖

*"I grabbed the fire extinguisher and rushed into the room and went after the fire."*



## "The Goal of Truth is not to be Right"

### Homily from the 2023 New England Baccalaureate Mass of the Holy Spirit

by Rev. Patrick Seo ('06)  
Parochial Vicar  
Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary and St. Michael's Church  
Elizabeth, New Jersey

Just as a way of introduction, my name is Fr. Patrick, Class of 2006 of TAC. And just to be completely honest, I have been avoiding coming back to TAC — mostly because there's too much blackmail material on me here! People just know too much about my past. But it is my great honor to be here with all of you today.

As some of you are able to tell, I am Asian — South Korean, to be exact. But I only *seem* Korean. Yes, math and science come to me more easily than the language arts; yes, I grew up playing piano and violin; and no, despite my appearance, I'm *not* actually 17 years old. I only *seem* Korean because, really, I am quite American. Yes, born and raised here in the States; yes, if you can fry it, I think it tastes better.

And yes, I exemplify the answer to the classic three-part question, "What is someone called who speaks three languages? Trilingual. Two languages? Bilingual. One language? American." I'm American! I don't speak Korean, my Latin at TAC was mediocre at best. And Greek from seminary? Well, it's still Greek to me.

But this past year, I moved from a predominantly English-speaking parish to a parish that is predominantly Hispanic. Ninety percent of everything I do is in Spanish, and the people there don't speak a lick of English. And it's amazing to see the effect a few Spanish words from the Korean-looking priest have. As soon as I say something even inane, like "Me gustan

tacos y tequila" — "I like tacos and tequila," just in case — my Hispanic parishioners immediately open their homes up to me. They feed me their food, they play me their music; the older *abuelitas*, the grandmas, dance a little salsa with me. They welcome me like family and share with me what they love, and that's when they open their hearts to me, to receive that which I hold most dear in my heart.

Today for this Commencement, we celebrate the Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, and at the end of the Gospel we are left with a cliff-hanger: "Now this He said about the Spirit, which those who believed in Him were to receive. For as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). Here Jesus points ahead

*"The point of TAC was not to foster students who always have to be right. It wasn't to build automatons who always have to win arguments. It was to form men and women to grow most especially in the love of friendship rooted in the Truth, Who is the person of Jesus Christ."*

to that quintessential Holy Spirit moment in the upper room, when the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles at Pentecost. God enters into His people; the Church is

born; we become, in a way unseen before, the Mystical Body of Christ. Incredible! What an amazing gift!

However, I don't know about any of you, but if I had just been united to God, filled with all the power of heaven and earth, what would I have done first? I probably would have gone outside and, just for kicks, I might have cast a mountain into the sea or flown around Ascension-style; I *definitely* would have changed a lot of water into a lot of *amazing* wine. But strangely enough, the disciples do none of these things. The first thing they do after being filled with God is go out and speak to the people in many languages.

TAC changed my life, as I imagine it has changed yours. It taught us how to think; it surrounded us with so many amazing role models intent on intelligence and honing their own holiness. We received so many gifts and graces through our time at TAC — and therein lies the danger. Very easily, we can graduate and go back out into the world thinking that, and acting like,

we are better than everyone else who never received what we got to receive. And that's when we have lost the core of what TAC was trying to teach us.

The truth *is* important, it *is* central, but the goal of truth is not to be *right*. We have all felt this in our seminar-style classes. Sometimes a conversation gets a little heated. Passions flare, our words become a little less considerate, and we leave the classroom not wanting to look that other person in the eye, who was so obviously in the wrong, and I so clearly in the right.

The point of TAC was not to foster students who always have to be right. It wasn't to build automatons who always have to win arguments. It was to form men and women to grow most especially in the love of friendship rooted in the Truth, Who is the person of Jesus Christ.

This is why Jesus will say in other parts of the Gospels (and I paraphrase), it's not about winning the court trial, it's about settling with your accuser beforehand. Because even if you win the court case, in the end you have lost, because then you have lost a brother, or a child, or a parent, or a grandparent, or a friend. It's not about me seeming righteous before God on the altar; it's about leaving the offering on the altar to go and reconcile with that other first. And that's when we are made ready to be united to the offering on the altar of Our Lord.

This is why Jesus, Who is Truth itself, goes to a trial among thieves and robbers; because He Who can never be wrong — His goal wasn't to be right. It wasn't to win the trial. His goal was to live one day in loving friendship and communion with us.

It's a crazy world out there, filled with

people living so far from the truth, filled with so much fear and hatred and division: left vs. right, black vs. white, family vs. family. And I imagine, there might be within some of you a little bit of that anxiety thinking about what your lives will be like after college out there. A normal and natural

---

***“Whatever language you speak, God calls us all to use that language to go out into the world, not to battle against other people with whom we disagree, but to enter into their world and love them.”***

---

response is to want to hide away from it all, to stay hidden behind the doors of TAC, like the disciples hid behind the locked doors of the upper room.

But here's the good news, brothers and sisters: After an Easter season, on Pentecost, the doors burst open and the once-frightened disciples flowed out those doors because the Holy Spirit flowed into them, and through them, and out of them into the world, like the flowing rivers of living water. The disciples no longer hid in fear, because they knew they were never alone again.

Jesus passed through the closed doors

of the upper room at the Resurrection. The Holy Spirit entered into the fearful hearts of the disciples at Pentecost. And at our baptisms, the Lord entered into us. He strengthened us in our confirmations, and at every Mass the Lord be-

comes more and more incarnated in us.

I love this quote from St. Francis de Sales, who said, talking about Mass and the Eucharist, “Even after so many Communion, Lord, I am surprised to see how much of *me* I still see in me.” Here at TAC you have had four years of preparation, following upon the years of life following your own baptisms, confirmations, and frequent reception of Holy Communion. And the goal of all that was not to be right.

The goal was to die to myself, to my pride, to my vanity, to my selfishness, so that the Holy Spirit could freely flow through us and out of us and into the world. The goal was for our Heavenly Father to dwell within us, and we in the Father. The goal was not to see so much of me still left in me, but to die to self, so that Christ, Who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, could shine through us. And when Christ shines through us, that's when we become our fullest selves.

And so as you go forth out the doors of TAC, as Jesus said at the Resurrection (here's a *little* bit of Greek), “*Chairete*,” sometimes translated, “Rejoice.” And why? Because you can never be alone again. God dwells within you right now. And what is greater than our God? What problem is too great for God to handle?

So do not fear. Instead, perhaps, don't be like Fr. Patrick: maybe learn another language. But whatever language you speak, God calls us all to use that language to go out into the world, *not* to battle against other people with whom we disagree, but to enter into their world and love them — just as Jesus entered into *our* world and loved *us*, most especially on the Cross — so that others might welcome us into their homes.

And through us, they might welcome into their lives what we have held most dear in our hearts, the Truth — that which we have received in the Sacraments, most especially in the Eucharist; that which is the heart of what we received here at TAC the life and love of Jesus Christ, flowing into us, and out of us into others, for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls. ❖

## CLASS SPEAKER

### “The Wisdom of the Cross”

by John Metilly ('23)

Paxton, Massachusetts

Dear faculty, chaplains, Board of Governors, staff, donors, parents, on behalf of the Class of 2023, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude for all you have done to give us this education. Thank you.

For myself, I would like to thank my dear father for raising me in the faith and in love of the good, true, and beautiful; and my dear mother, who educated me for years and prepared me for this education and a life of pursuing virtue.

Dear classmates, thank you for choosing me to speak here today; I am honored to be able to speak to a group of truly excellent people. Thank you for being my dear friends and helping me to learn in our classes at Thomas Aquinas College.

We have received a very ennobling and precious gift in our time at this college. Plutarch says that just “as that colour is more suitable to the eye whose freshness and pleasantness stimulates and strengthens the sight, so a man ought to apply his intellectual perception to such objects as, with the sense of delight, are

---

**“We have obtained a little of the most authoritative science: wisdom. For this great gift of liberal education — true education — we give thanks to the Lord, Who has deemed us worthy to receive such a gift. Praised be Jesus Christ.”**



*The Class of 2023 elected John Metilly as its Class Speaker ...*

apt to call it forth, and allure it to its own proper good and advantage.” Here in our classes at the College, we have pondered such objects: things most perfective of our most godlike capability: our reason. We have seen how the whole natural world is directed toward the Creator, and, what is more, we have seen how reason finds its perfection in being directed by faith. We have done the best thing with our best part.

We have also done it in the best way. Aristotle says, “We ascribe universal education to one who in his own individual person is thus critical in all or nearly all branches of knowledge, and not to one who has a like ability merely in some special subject.” This college has given us a good beginning in being discerning

in nearly all the sciences. The wise man, through coming to know the most general things, comes to know all things. We who have studied the principles of all the sciences in a way know all these sciences and have become able judges of how the sciences should be carried out. We have obtained a little of the most authoritative science: wisdom. For this great gift of liberal education — true education — we give thanks to the Lord, Who has deemed us worthy to receive such a gift. Praised be Jesus Christ.

Dear classmates, I would like to recommend to each of you a higher wisdom: the wisdom of the Cross, which seems like folly to men, but which contains the secret to obtaining Divine Wisdom Himself.

Every single one of us will bear cross-



es in this life — some more, some less. Fr. Garrigou Lagrange says that crosses “in Christian terminology (by analogy with the sufferings and death of our Divine Master) are the physical and moral sufferings of daily life which arise from our relationship to the exterior world and to those around us.” Christ gives us a share in the Cross in order to raise us to sanctity: the greater the saint, the heavier the cross. Through the cross we will lose our self-love and our pride. We should, therefore, receive the cross not only with resignation, but also with love and gratitude. We should have absolute faith that the crosses that we endure are sent from a loving Father Who knows exactly what we need to come closer to Him.

**“We have seen how the whole natural world is directed toward the Creator, and, what is more, we have seen how reason finds its perfection in being directed by faith.”**

We believe that God is all-powerful, meaning that He can control perfectly what happens to us. We also believe that He loves us perfectly. It follows, therefore, that every single thing that happens to us, is exactly what will make us saints.

So although we have a great responsibility to be great and invest our talents, have no fear. God will provide every circumstance necessary for our sanctity and happiness. If we want to carry our cross well for the rest of our lives, we must come to love the Divine will that provides these sweet crosses of our salvation. I will share with you this beautiful prayer written by Fr. Caussade:

“My God, I desire with all my heart to do Your holy will, I submit in all things and absolutely to Your good pleasure for time and eternity; and I wish to do this, Oh my



... Bernadette Mohun to sing the National Anthem...

God, for two reasons; first: because You are my Sovereign Lord and it is but just that Your will should be accomplished; secondly: because I am convinced by faith, and by experience that Your will is in all things as good and beneficent as it is just and adorable, while my own desires are always blind and corrupt; blind, because I know not what I ought to desire or to avoid; corrupt, because I nearly always long for what would do me harm. Therefore, from henceforth, I renounce my own will to follow Yours in all things; dispose of me, Oh my God, according to Your good will and pleasure.”

We do not know what is good for us and so we must surrender ourselves to the holy will of our savior. Our class’s



... and David Carey to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

patron saint, St. Pachomius, says: “Be ever more obedient to God, and He will save you.” On earth we are here not to do our own will but God’s will. Once we learn how to love God’s will, we will always have peace of soul; we will be undefeatable because we know that all things work for the good for those who love God.

As we leave this college, we are embarking on a great odyssey. Like the hero Odysseus, we must leave the island and turn our ships to the open ocean. There will be great storms and great adversity. The world will try its best to destroy our boats; now, more than ever, before the dark storm clouds conspire against us. But have no fear: All things work for the good for those who love God.

In this storm we need a guide; we need a beacon to reach our homeland. The Blessed Mother is this beacon. If a sailor cannot see the shore due to the dark and storm, he will take the lighthouse as his surest guide to home. And so every one of us must take Mary for our guide. If we aim for her, we will not stray from the course that leads to Christ. We must take Mary as our mother. If we do, we will also take St. Joseph as our father. St. Pachomius says: “Take as an example the wisdom of Joseph and his submission. Do battle in chastity and service until you make yourself a king.”

Amen. Thank you! ❖

## The New England 2023 Commencement Address

# “Never Forget this Place”

by Daniel T. Flatley  
Trustee, The Flatley Foundation



**“The best piece of advice I can imagine for you brilliant younger folks going forward: You have two perspectives to consider, your future and your past.”**

The only question I have is, “Is Fr. Markey going to sit for the firefighters’ exam?” Following on this, it was encouraging to hear how the College community pulled together with Fr. Markey to hold Mass in a makeshift chapel following that fire. Another encouraging development I have been informed of is the fact that at least six weddings between students or alumni will be held this summer in the school’s chapel.

On a sadder note, you have my deepest condolences on the passing of Dr. Nancy Ann Faller, or Nurse Nancy, this past October. She must have been a remarkable woman of complete and total commitment to this place.

There’s an old story told of the great doctor of the Church, Thomas Aquinas. I got it off Reddit, whatever that is — I’m no tech wizard.

Aquinas walks into a bar, and the bartender pours him a generous goblet of mead. The bartender asks him politely, “So, Thomas, how are you doing this fine day?”

Aquinas replies, “Oh, not so well. I’ve been hard at work on this major treatise for seminarians that basically explains all the major points of Catholicism. It could be the most important theological document of our time; I even thought of the perfect title, *Summa Theologiae*.”

Aquinas went on to say, “So I finished it, and proceeded to misplace it. I just cannot find it anywhere. I cannot begin to understand how God would inspire me to do this great thing, and then He would allow it to be taken away from me. What in the world do you think God is trying to tell me?”

The Bartender replies: “Well, you win *summa*, you lose *summa*.”

Just hoping a joke mentioning the guy

your school is named after might make me sound a little like an actual intellectual egghead! As one of your featured speakers here today, I am supposed to say something profound in the way of sage counsel to you, new graduates of this august institution of higher education. I honestly don’t know how well I will do, because I have a feeling I couldn’t gain admission here with my high school record. Well, here goes.

The best piece of advice I can imagine for you brilliant younger folks going forward: You have two perspectives to consider, your future and your past.

With regards to your future, try to keep in mind your future tax deductions: the children you might have someday. I wasn’t certain there would be a woman who would have me, or that I would ever wind up with the gifts the Good Lord gave me in our children, all three of whom turned out far better

than I could have imagined. In the life you lead running up to having the spouse and children the Good Lord might grant you, be the example for them that you will want them to become eventually. That takes true wisdom and real discipline.

With regards to your past, never forget this place and the men and women working here who are completely and totally dedicated to you — to your physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being, such as Nurse Nancy. Pay it forward. The benefactors who have written checks for you to attend this fine college hope it does not end with you. Be productive and don’t forget those coming along after you. Start right away, even if it’s only \$25 or \$50 each and every year. It’s not cheap to run one of these colleges. It is also the right thing to do.

I will close with a lovely poem written by a Dominican missionary priest, Thomas Heath, Boston College, Class of 1943, who was murdered in Kenya in 2005. It is titled “Proud Refrain.” In my mind’s eye, I see a Catholic chaplain bending over to minister to a wounded soldier from one of B.C.’s wartime classes, on a Navy ship in a misty light.

*What is it, soldier?  
What is it that you see?*

*A tall grey Gothic tower  
And a linden tree.*

*You speak so sadly, soldier,  
so sad and wistfully ...*

*I cannot hear the tower bell  
In the swirling sea.*

*What meaning has it, soldier,  
A tower, bell and tree?*

*Nothing, nothing — only once,  
It meant my life to me.*

Hopefully this place means as much to you. ❖

## “Why is There TAC, and not Nothing?”

by Bernadette Mohun ('23)

Caldwell, Idaho

“Why is there something and not nothing?”

According to Martin Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics*, this is the fundamental question of metaphysics. Mr. Heidegger was probably a Nazi, and definitely not the favorite philosopher of anyone in second-semester Senior Seminar. But the question did not originate with him, though his formulation is one of the more striking ones.

We ask this question about each component of the universe, typically from an early age. Why is there bedtime, and not nothing? Or why is there long division? Why are there mosquitos, supernovas, credit scores, Siamese cats, and not nothing? Why is there me, and not nothing?

This last one is an iteration which college is typically expected to answer. There is me because I have a 4.0 and I’m ready to go into nursing, or there is me because I have a 2.9 and I’m ready to start my career as a freelance subway violinist. Your relatives will typically find one of these answers more convincing than the other.

**“Thomas Aquinas College has given us the gift of deeply understanding our reason for living, in a way that no outside circumstances can disturb.”**

In one of the final readings of Senior Year at Thomas Aquinas College, the eponymous Thomas actually asks and addresses Heidegger’s question, teaching that the primary reason for creation is not any individual creature, but the order

of the universe — specifically under the aspect of the good, as a reflection of God’s own goodness and beauty. This answer can be nicely modified to suit the related question, “Why is there TAC, and not nothing?”

The beauty of the curriculum lies in its integration, not in any one class, author, or professor. The orientation of all the classes to each other — Heidegger in Seminar in dialogue with Thomas in Natural Science, Einstein in Mathematics with Aristotle in Philosophy — almost takes you by the hand and leads you to see the perfection of the order of the universe. Just as friendships and relationships bring meaning to individual lives, so do the relationships and dialogues among the authors and students form the soul of the integrated curriculum.

You can again apply this general answer to the problem of “why is there me,” and find that you exist because you are a unique creation necessary to the completeness of the order of the universe, for the purpose of reflecting God’s glory. This answer is already more satisfying than the GPA version or Heidegger’s proposal that we self-consciously contemplate our *Dasein* in a sort of infinite loop. But even the Thomistic answer, while inspiring, can seem a little indeterminate. Is this what you’re supposed to tell your Great-Aunt Joan when she asks why you chose a liberal arts degree?

The curriculum and day-to-day life of TAC work hand in hand to tackle the specificities and thorny practicalities hidden in St. Thomas’s answer. I am an individual taking part in a larger order for the sake of a greater good — what does this look like in action?

In class, students meet every day and



help the tutor order the discussion to produce the greater good of knowledge. How can the complete order be greater than the parts without detracting from their individual goodness? Participating in polyphonic singing every week provides a joyful example. My classmates and I understand that we are all pursuing the same ultimate vocation, although John Metilly is discerning the priesthood, Niamh McCann feels called to teach, and I am exploring the financial sector. We were never the sum of our GPAs, nor will we be reducible to titles and salaries.

Thomas Aquinas College has given us the gift of deeply understanding our reason for living, in a way that no outside circumstances can disturb. This includes the ever-evolving personal details of our individual goodnesses: I found that I exist because I love teaching violin, cooking more and more creative allergen-free meals, inhabiting an operatic role on-stage, helping my friends hide a cardboard cutout of the assistant dean around the girls’ dorm, writing awful spaghetti code, and being the one people go to when they run out of obscure folk music to sing around the campfire.

This list will never stop changing, but what will remain constant for all of us — and what I consider the central accomplishment of each student at TAC — is knowing how, or at least how to begin, to order all these little goodnesses to the better reflection and contemplation of the great Good, the answer. ❖

## The First Freshman, Four Years Later

by Thomas Aldredge ('23)

Putnam, Connecticut

The simplest way to explain how I came to Thomas Aquinas College is to say that God led me into the woods of Massachusetts to help Him start a new school. The long form is a bit more complicated.

I am now 21. When I was 17, in my junior year at a private Catholic high school in Worcester, I found myself somewhat isolated. Sure, I had friends; people were kind. I was a strong member of the school’s theater and chorus departments, and I helped in the school’s pro-life group’s Rosary rallies at the local Planned Parenthood.

**“When we were founding this campus, it didn’t feel like we were special. Visiting lecturers compared us to Homer and the Romans, as founders of the West. But it didn’t seem that way.”**

Still, I was isolated. Few of my friends were Catholic or shared my love of the Faith. I was often on the backfoot at lunch-table debates over abortion or religious belief. Over the course of the year, I became desperate for a place where I could escape.

That escape came, in part, in the form of good literature. Principally, I read monastic literature and the Church Fathers, but also some excellent novels. In a novel called *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, I found the following passage: “It was inevitable that the race succumb again to the old maladies on new worlds, even as on Earth before ... Versicles by Adam, Rejoinders by the Crucified.” Even if life was

falling apart (or so it felt), I had a duty to myself and to my parents to keep going. This passage stuck with me, and I began to accept the idea of just getting through my senior year with gritted teeth.

At the same time, my mom had discovered TAC while exploring Catholic colleges. That spring, we drove up to the first open house at the new campus of a college about which I knew barely anything. That visit, in turn, led me to attend the High School Summer Program, and I loved the whole experience.

Everyone was happy and excited about the College, which had just opened its doors in New England. I was fortunate enough to be one of three summer programmers to demonstrate the very first proposition from Euclid’s *Elements*. The river day I spent canoeing down the Connecticut with fellow programmers holds a special place in my heart. I also met my classmate and future wife, Anna Mae, that summer, though neither of us knew it at the time. We danced together a few times, and she called me out when I said something foolish at a lunch table.

Over the next four years I would come to love her dearly, more than my own flesh (Eph. 5).

At the conclusion of the program, the College’s director of admissions suggested that I apply ahead of my senior year. Five essays, a hastily scribbled note to my choir director and my school principal, and two weeks later, I signed my name in the register as the first freshman at Thomas Aquinas College, New England. I had no idea that the journey I was embarking on would change my life, those of the people I loved, and even those of people whom I did not yet know and love.



Four years later, I write this reflection. My friends and I have graduated. We did our part to bring the new campus to life.

When we were founding this campus, it didn’t feel like we were special. Visiting lecturers compared us to Homer and the Romans, as founders of the West. But it didn’t seem that way, at least not with our aged buildings and heating system. Day by day, though, we began to build a little culture: In our first year, we held the Homeric Games (of California origin) and began our tradition of the beloved Rose Dinner, at which the men honor the women of campus.

By my junior year, new freshmen and sophomores were asking for help in their spiritual lives, or if they needed a hand with props or a paper. Thanks to my own great mentors at the College and at home, I found that I had the maturity and the gentleness to help them. It was at this time, when our young colleagues looked up to us for guidance, that I realized we were doing something important and special after all.

In all of this, I hope we have made our parents, our tutors, and friends proud. I pray we are all the better for it. I often wonder if I learned what God wanted to teach me. I think I did. He taught me that only His wisdom can direct the course of my life (as *A Canticle for Leibowitz* shows), and that my plans are diversions in the face of that infinite wisdom. May God bless you. ❖

# On Philanthropy, Business, and Catholic Education

## An Interview with Daniel T. Flatley

As a layman and a philanthropist, Daniel T. Flatley sustains many of the institutions and apostolates that are vital to the Church in carrying out her good works — both the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Mr. Flatley oversees one of the most prominent Catholic foundations in the Northeast, the Flatley Foundation, established in 1982 by his parents, Charlotte and Thomas Flatley, an Irish immigrant who came to the United States with \$32 in his pocket. Thomas went on to build a highly successful commercial real-estate portfolio that included malls, shopping centers, office buildings, hotels, nursing homes, and apartment complexes.

As a trustee of the foundation they established, Mr. Flatley is

continuing his parents' commitment to the public good and Catholic education. He has contributed generously, as has his foundation, to many Catholic schools at all levels, from K-12 through college, including to Thomas Aquinas College, where his extraordinary leadership and support have helped to bring the College's Northfield, Massachusetts, campus to life.

Mr. Flatley earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Vermont and a master's from Boston College. He has served on the boards of Saint Anselm College, the Wentworth Institute of Technology, and Clergy Trust. He offered the following reflections shortly after coming to the New England campus to serve as its 2023 Commencement Speaker.

### Tell us about your parents, how they got into philanthropy, and how you followed their lead.

My father came to Boston in 1950 with very little. He got his plumber's and electrician's licenses, was in the Army Signal Corps, and got into real estate development in the late 1950s, building apartment complexes and nursing homes, originally, and eventually shopping centers, industrial parks, and hotels. He did very well. He began the process of liquidating the properties and cashing out, portfolio by portfolio, in the late 1990s, and he created the Flatley Foundation in 1982.

Toward the end of his life, he started introducing my sisters, my brother, and me to his contacts in the non-profit world, most of which involved the Church in one way or another — not all, because he was a believer in ecumenism, so he also gave to other causes, such as the Salvation Army. We got involved toward the end of his life and took over the Foundation. Catholic education is a big focus for our foundation, among other concerns.



*“Why would schools or businesses compromise their missions with a destructive agenda? I don't see how any of that makes sense.”*

### What percentage of your efforts are directed toward Catholic education?

About 30 to 40 percent. We give pretty heavily. Catholic education is our primary focus, and we tend not to give to non-Catholic schools. We don't give to Harvard or any of those very prestigious institutions,

for example. They have their donors; what do we need to get in there for?

### Have you seen a notable decline in the 20 years or so that you have been involved in Catholic education?

No doubt about it. Thank God for the involvement of the bishops in K-12 schools who have been trying to keep the kids safe and Catholic, but at the college level, the damage has been tremendous. Many of the Catholic colleges, to some extent, have walked away from Catholicism, either in the hopes of raising more money or attracting a wider variety of students. Their administrators have stopped even trying to maintain an authentically Catholic school.

### What can Catholic schools, at all levels, do to remain competitive?

The biggest thing that Catholic schools can do is stand out academically. That's something this college does well, maintaining a level of academic excellence that will

make it attractive to many. There are some great schools out there, but they need to keep improving.

I also see a need for solid Catholic business education with a strong liberal arts background. Educate kids in ethical business practices, how to do it right, in a moral fashion and with Catholic values in mind. When I see the decisions that businesses are making these days — decisions that are not only morally offensive, but which also alienate half the market — it becomes clear that most business schools aren't getting the job done.

### What's going on? How do you explain the number of successful corporations that are embracing destructive ideologies and undermining their own bottom lines?

None of it makes any sense. We want our businesspeople to be ethical, that's good! But what we are seeing now is not ethical, it's cynical, and that makes for bad business decisions. I think you need to keep stronger and more rational values in mind.

My father was a simple guy in a lot of ways, and I remember a TV show from back in the day in which this CEO would launch personal vendettas against his personal enemies. I remember asking my father if this was how businessmen really were, and he said, “No, that's Hollywood. Hollywood doesn't understand business. Businessmen don't let emotion interfere in their deals. When you lose on a deal, you lose on a deal. I try to make my business deals fair so I can deal with the guy again later. I'm in it to be fair.” My father wasn't in business to push an agenda or play politics. He wanted to build a building so he could afford it and make money off it going forward. He wanted it to work. That's not emotional decision-making.

We need better decision-makers. The reasons these companies cite for making these decisions aren't the right ones. Just stick to the business piece, you don't need to worry about anything beyond that. If you're getting pressure from some advocacy group,



President Paul J. O'Reilly presents Daniel T. Flatley with a gift at a dinner held in his honor on the eve of Commencement.

just deal with it. Say, “This isn't good for my business. I don't want to get involved on one side or the other.” Make the best business decisions you can. None of this other stuff should matter.

### How does that principle apply to education? Schools these days are also under great pressure to push a particular agenda or politics, losing sight of their educational mission.

You guys are doing a lot of things right at Thomas Aquinas College, not letting that interfere. You live by your values at TAC, and you turn out some pretty good human assets. That's what matters in the end — the quality of the people you turn out.

You need to start from a place of character and a strong backbone, and I don't see that in too many circumstances anymore. Why would schools or businesses compromise their missions with a destructive agenda? I don't see how any of that makes sense.

### What's the solution?

For starters, a stronger prayer life, a stronger family life where proper values are instilled in our children. Those are the things that matter, but I don't know what can be done beyond that. During the 1980s we valued the entrepreneur and the risk taker, who often became the philanthropist. We valued all that, and it seemed to make a lot of sense. The idea now seems to be that government should be in charge of all of it.

Isn't this where your foundation comes into play? You see the troubles of the world, and you do your part to fight against them.

We're doing the best we can. We keep our lights on out there, shining on Catholic schools and institutions in our endeavors to improve things and bring them back to where they should be. But it's a struggle, there's no doubt about it.

### What's the most important thing Catholic education can

do and accomplish in our world today?

Turn out people with good and proper values who don't forget about those coming after them. However well you do in life, it's not about money, but these places need money to succeed. It's your responsibility as alumni of these places to make sure that they do.

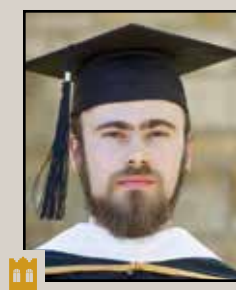
Tom Carroll, the superintendent of Boston Catholic Schools, swears by TAC graduates, and I have a lot of respect for him. He's a great asset, and he sees great things coming out of Thomas Aquinas College. TAC turns out some fantastic teachers, and somebody as smart as Tom wouldn't be out recruiting on your campuses if he didn't really believe in the place. He's had nothing but great things to say about TAC because it is a great school and it's turned out some great alumni.

### Some 30 percent of the College's alumni become teachers. What advice would you give to a young teacher today?

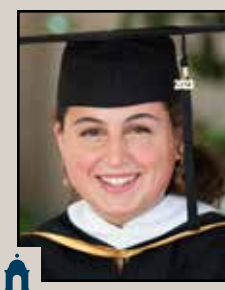
It's a tough world out there, and it's getting tougher. You have got to be a strong witness for Christ as a teacher. Keep in mind your values, which have been fostered by TAC, and your families, too, because they taught you those values in the first place. Live that kind of life because you need to be an example for these kids. You will succeed as teachers with those ideals in mind. ❖



CLASS OF  
2023  
AND SENIOR THESIS TITLES



Beyond Algebra  
THOMAS HORATIO ALDREDGE  
Putnam, Connecticut



“My Heart and My Flesh Have Rejoiced  
in the Living God”: An Analysis of  
Christianity’s Understanding of Joy  
ELISE MARIE ASAN  
Modesto, California



“Abide in Me and I in You”:  
An Argument That the New Law  
Is Friendship with God  
ISABEL MARIE BAER  
Santa Paula, California



Woman, Behold Your Son;  
Son, Behold Your Mother!  
JOHNPAUL ALAN BECKMAN  
Seadrift, Texas



Charity: The Secret to Happiness  
ANNE BERNADETTE BERQUIST  
Williamsburg, Virginia



“What Shall They Not See?”  
Human Knowledge and the Beatific Vision  
JOHN BENJAMIN SIMONEAU  
BERRY  
Irving, Texas



The Limitations of Natural Forms:  
An Aristotelian-Thomistic  
Account of Chance  
MICHAEL ALVARO BISHOP  
Ruston, Louisiana



“Optima Dies . . . Prima Fugit”:  
How *My Antonia* Teaches Us  
about Happiness  
PAULINE MARIE BLAIN  
Albuquerque, New Mexico



With Mary to God:  
A Response to Protestant Objections  
to Mary’s Role in Our Salvation  
NICHOLAS ANDREW BLEWETT  
Santa Paula, California



“It Was for This Hour She Had Striven  
and Laboured for All These Years”:  
An Analysis of Revenge and Love  
in *Gunnar’s Daughter*  
MARYGRACE ELIZABETH  
BRITTAIN  
Phoenix, Arizona



In the World, but Not of It:  
The Catholic Person’s Role in  
an Anti-Catholic Society  
MITCHELL CASTLETON BROST  
Canby, Oregon



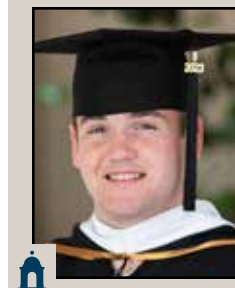
“Of One That Loved Not Wisely,  
but Too Well”: Shakespeare’s *Othello*  
and the Necessity of Proper Self-Love  
in Order to Love God  
HANNAH QUINN BROWN  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada



“That I May Be for Him an Additional  
Humanity”: An Argument for the  
Necessity of Suffering in Reparation  
MARGARET ANNE BURNS  
Woodbury, Minnesota



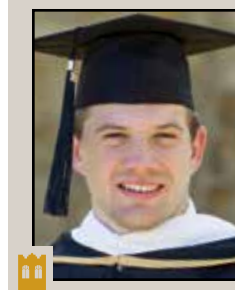
Divine Love in Death:  
An Examination of Prince Andrei’s Death  
in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*  
ABIGAIL BARBARA CAIN  
Poway, California



An Investigation of the Government’s  
Role in the Moral Formation of Citizens  
in the United States of America  
PETER ANDREW CAIN  
Northfield, Massachusetts



The Superiority of Charity over  
Wisdom in Our Earthly Life  
LUCIA MARIE CAMMAROTA  
Fair Oaks, California



The Necessity of Hardship  
for Man to Be Virtuous  
DAVID ANTHONY CAREY  
Wilton, California



“The Heart of Man Is Always  
Attracted by Love”: Awareness of Being  
Loved as a Chief Cause of Love  
CECILIA MARIA CAUGHRON  
Kansas City, Missouri



Frenemies: Whether Friendship  
is Possible between the Christian  
and His Enemy  
XAVIER SAWABI COCCIA  
Randolph, New Jersey



Whether the Transcendental  
Schemata Can Be Incorporated into  
the Aristotelian Account of the Soul  
IAN JACOB COCHIOLO  
Clovis, California



For from the Greatness and Beauty of Created Things Comes a Corresponding Perception of Their Creator: How God the Creator Leads All Men to an Understanding of Himself through a Proper Love of Beauty

IRENE ANNE COLLINS  
Ojai, California



Hume: A Rebel without a Cause

THOMAS COSTA  
Greenville, South Carolina



“Am I My Brother’s Keeper?”  
A Defense of the Appearance of Scandal as a Sin

JOSEPHINE MARIANNE DRAGOO  
Santa Paula, California



An Analysis of the Declaration of Independence: Whether and to What Extent the Rights to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness As Understood by the Founding Fathers Are Good and Virtuous according to Aristotle and St. Thomas

JOHN RYAN ESSER  
Chino Hills, California



“Like a Lamb Led to the Slaughter, He Was Silent and Uttered Not a Word”: An Exploration of Christ’s Silence in His Passion, according to the Prophet Isaiah and Man’s Experience of Silence

MARIUS BEDE COVINGTON  
Liberty, South Carolina



Grisly Grace:  
Why Flannery O’Connor Uses the Grotesque in Her Stories

MARY THERESE CRIMMINS  
Post Falls, Idaho



God, Man, and Nature:  
A Consideration of the Proper Use and Enjoyment of Nature for a Christian

ANASTASIA ELIZABETH EVICH  
Cedar, Michigan



“Labore Est Orare”:  
Farming As Perfective of Human Nature

SOPHIA MARIE FERRI  
Thompson’s Station, Tennessee



“I Know My Own”: God’s Particular Knowledge of Faithful Souls

SOPHIE CECELIA CUMMINGS  
Bronxville, New York



On Whether the Trinity Implies a Contradiction in Reason

ALEXANDER JEROME DETAR  
Liberty Lake, Washington



The Logos within Us:  
How There Is a True Meaning in Words Taken from the Forms in Things

KIERA MAIRI GARNEAU  
Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada



The Life of Wisdom and Charity:  
Man’s Natural and Supernatural Ends

ZOËANNA GIBSON  
Sherrills Ford, North Carolina



“Jesus Wept”: On the Proper Christian Treatment of Death Once It Has Been Conquered by Christ

SEAN DANIEL DILLON  
Lunenburg, Massachusetts



True Freedom: Bound to the Good

PAUL AUGUSTINE DINAN  
Ave Maria, Florida



Applying Aristotle’s *Ethics* to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in Order to Determine the Blameworthiness of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth

CATHERINE CELESTE GISLA  
Fair Oaks, California



A Critique of Aristotelian Magnificence according to Christian Morality

ANGELA MARIE GOYETTE  
Sterling, Virginia



Humor: *Ancilla Veritatis*

BENJAMIN OSCAR DOMNARSKI  
Palmer, Massachusetts



*Paradiso* on Earth:  
How Dante’s Manner of Assigning the Spheres of Heaven Manifests the Positive Earthly Journey of Man towards God

ALLANNA MAUREEN DONNELLY  
Omaha, Nebraska



Augustine, the New Aeneas:  
A Literary Comparison of St. Augustine’s and Aeneas’ Journeys toward Glory in the *Confessions* and in the *Aeneid*

LAUREN ELIZABETH GRAMLICH  
Largo, Florida



Numa Pompilius on Religion as a Part of Government

MICHAEL XAVIER GUINEE  
North Andover, Massachusetts



“Something More than a Mortal”: A Vindication of Christian Heroic Virtue Contrasted with That of Classical Paganism

KATHERINE ANNE DOYLEND  
Savannah, Missouri



Experiencing the Human Condition in Sophocles’ *Antigone*

CLAIRE MARIE ELISABETH DRAGOO  
Santa Paula, California



Earth Thy Footstool and Heaven Thy Throne: Rediscovering Geocentrism in a Post-Galilean World

DANIEL CAMERON GUSTILO HAMAR  
Sandy Hook, Connecticut



With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility: An Inquiry into How Authority among Men Is Not Just a Result of the Fall from Grace

PATRICK JAMES HEAL  
Tucson, Arizona



“To Be or Not to Be”  
an Aristotelian Tragedy?  
Why It Is Not Right to Call *Hamlet*  
a Tragedy according to  
Aristotle’s Definition of a Tragedy

LUKE MAXIMILIAN  
HERNANDEZ  
Sacramento, California

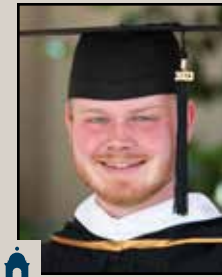


An Ancient in Modern Costume  
SYDNEY CLARE HILLEGAS  
Montclair, Virginia



“If Anyone Says, ‘I Love God,’  
and Hates His Brother, He Is a Liar;  
for He Who Does Not Love His Brother  
Whom He Has Seen, Cannot Love God  
Whom He Has Not Seen” (1 John 4:21):  
Understanding Leo Tolstoy’s  
Portrayal of Divine Love in the Novel  
*War and Peace*

MAGDALENA JACINTA  
GUADALUPE TERESA HUCKINS  
Auburn, California



*Ex Notioribus:*  
A Consideration of the Order  
of Art to Wisdom  
NATHANIEL PATRICK  
HUDSON  
Richardson, Texas



On the Definitions of Number:  
Whether Mathematical Numbers  
May Be Said Univocally  
according to Composition

DANIEL PATRICK JOHNSON  
Corona, California



A Moderate Interpretation  
of Precedent As Seen in  
*Dobbs v. Jackson*  
*Women’s Health Organization*

THOMAS KELSEY  
South Bend, Indiana



“The Innocent Sufferer”:  
A Solution to Nietzsche’s World  
of Meaningless Suffering

JOSHUA TRENT KINNEY  
Trabuco Canyon, California



“Abide in Me”: The Cross as  
Our Means to Abiding in the Vine

CASEY JOSEPH KIRK  
Rockville, Maryland



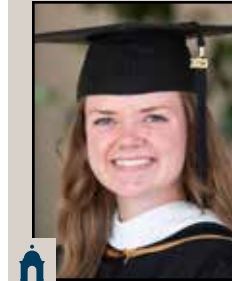
“Declare His Wonders  
among All People”:  
A Definition and Defense  
of Miracles

STEVEN MICHAEL KIRK  
Cumming, Georgia



The Role of Distraction  
and Concentration in  
Augustine’s *Confessions*

TIMOTEO KUHN  
Santa Rosa, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil



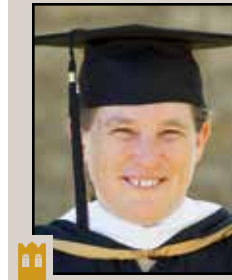
Moderation and the Media:  
An Inquiry into Virtuous Engagement  
with Digital Technology

MARGARET LUCILE LAFAVE  
Butte, Montana



“It Takes a Village”:  
Whether a Good Village Life  
Is Necessary for a Good City Life

MARK ANDREW GERARD  
LANGLEY  
Peyton, Colorado



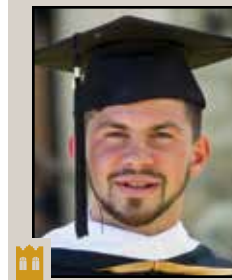
What’s the Matter with Evolution?

SARA LANGSETH  
Warwick, Rhode Island



Among the Saints None Is Naked

MICHAELA ROSE LESSARD  
Pasadena, California



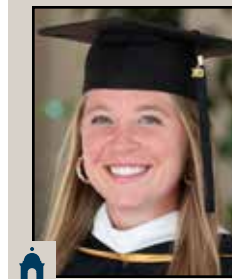
Whether the Soul Separated  
from the Body Can Come  
to Knowledge of Things

PATRICK ANTHONY LOEW  
Saint Marys, Kansas



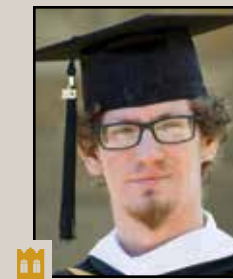
Mathematics: A Bridge to Knowing God

ABIGAIL WAITS LOVOLD  
Long Beach, California



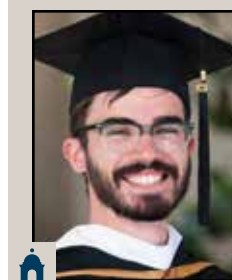
The Word Became Flesh and  
Picked Up a Hammer:  
Why Work Is a Necessary Part of  
Man’s Complete Education

CLARE LAVONE MANGIN  
Dubois, Indiana



“Let Everyone Stand Aside...  
if He Likes in a Comedy Nothing but  
Riot and Meaningless Harlequinade”:  
The Development of Comedy from  
*The Birds* to *La Divina Commedia*

PETER DANIEL MARICH  
Whitewood, South Dakota



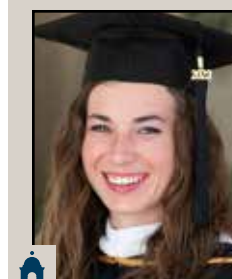
Inherence: Distinguishing  
Imagination and Intellect

ISAIAH ALEXANDER MARTINEZ  
Longmont, Colorado



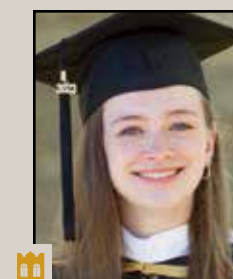
Conflict Resolution in *Njáls Saga*

PATRICK MICHAEL AUGUSTINE  
MAZZA  
Brookfield, Wisconsin



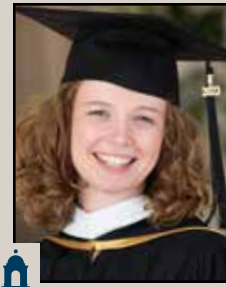
“My Soul Thirsts for the Living God”:  
Mary Magdalen’s Encounter  
with the Risen Lord

BRIGIT MAIRI MCNEIL  
Reno, Nevada



*Ars Imitatur Naturam*:  
An Explication of Imitation as  
the Genus of the Fine Arts

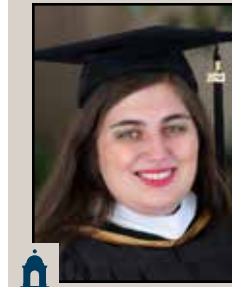
NIAMH CECILIA MCCANN  
Shirley, Massachusetts



A Critique of Newton:  
An Evaluation of His Method  
and His Claim of Universality  
**SOPHIA ROSE MCNIFF**  
Broad Run, Virginia



Friendship with God  
**JOHN JOSEPH DE BREBEUF  
METILLY**  
Paxton, Massachusetts



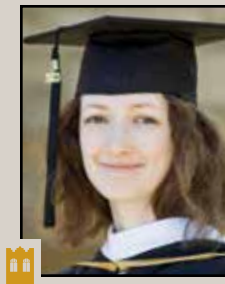
If Truth Is First in an Intellect,  
It Is Not First in the Mind of Man  
**LAURA MARIE PARRILLO**  
North Hollywood, California



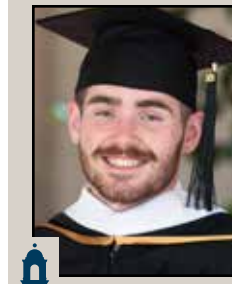
Bernini versus Pollock: The Purpose and  
Importance of Beauty in the Fine Arts  
**KATHLEEN MARY CECILIA  
PFEIFFER**  
Waterford, Wisconsin



Hellenic Attunement to  
Customs in Herodotus  
**ASHLEIGH ROSE MEYERS**  
Bakersfield, California



*"Cantare Amantis Est":*  
The Liberality of Music Performance  
in Education  
**BERNADETTE MARIE MOHUN**  
Caldwell, Idaho



"Happy Are Those Who Mourn":  
An Explication of the Supremacy of  
Christianity over Stoicism as a  
Path to Achieve Happiness  
**JONATHAN PAUL PHELAN**  
Mesa, Arizona



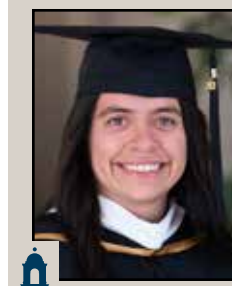
"Dixit Deus ad Moysen:  
Ego Sum Qui Sum": Considering the  
Propriety of This Name for God  
**ELAYNE ROSE PIQUETTE**  
Camarillo, California



"The Wages of Sin Is Death":  
A Reconciliation of Macbeth's  
Depraved Character with the  
Aristotelian Account of Tragedy  
**FIONA ROSE MOHUN**  
Fillmore, California



On the Nature of Sacred Music  
**SUZANNA ROSE MONTANARO**  
Fillmore, California



Dante on the Importance of Humility  
in the Spiritual Life  
**PALOMA MARIA PLATAS**  
Fresno, California



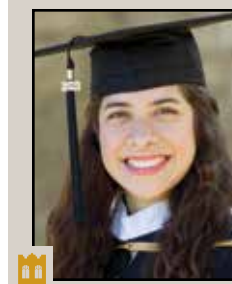
On the Importance of Sensible  
Objects for the Spiritual Life  
**VINCENZO STEVEN PUCCIO**  
Santa Ana, California



*Respice Finem: Leo Tolstoy's  
The Death of Ivan Ilyich*  
and the Fear of Death  
**CECILIA THERESE MORLINO**  
Danbury, Connecticut



The Ultimate Beatitude of Man:  
The Limit of Human Reason  
**JOSEPH DOMINIC O'HARA**  
Sacramento, California



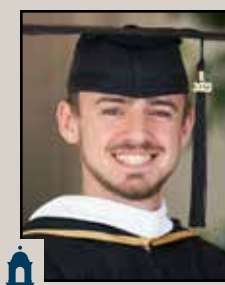
"Late Have I Loved Thee, O Beauty  
Ever Ancient Ever New": The Necessity  
of Temperance to See Beauty  
**CLARA MARIA RAMOS  
GHIGLIOTTI**  
Ponce, Puerto Rico



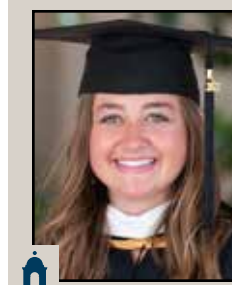
Man Was Made to Move:  
A Defense of Physical Exertion  
as a Necessary Component in the  
Development and Maintenance  
of a Well-Formed Human Person  
**JAMES LEE REA III**  
Ventura, California



Straight Lines Do Not Bend  
**KATHLEEN ROSE O'HARA**  
Sacramento, California



An Inquiry into the Causes  
at Work in Geometry  
**THOMAS WOLF OLESON**  
Santa Paula, California



Willful Ignorance:  
A Critique of Daniel Merton Wegner's  
Theory of the Will  
**NANCY ELIZABETH REICHERT**  
Golden, Colorado



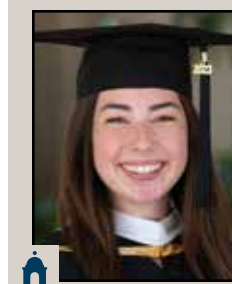
Descartes and Desdemona:  
Shakespeare's *Othello* as a Parable  
of Cartesian Doubt  
**ESTHER OPLE RUEHLE**  
Fort Worth, Texas



*De Domu: A Case for the  
Home Necessarily Belonging in a City*  
**SERAFIN CORLEY OLGUIN**  
Carmichael, California



Unhappily Ever After: An Exploration  
of the Power and Purpose of Aristotelian  
Tragedies in the Christian Life  
**KATIE MARIE PARRILLO**  
North Hollywood, California



Not Just a Pretty Face:  
A Thesis on the Significance of  
Sensible Beauty in a Christian Life  
**ISABELLA MARIE SANCHEZ**  
La Mesa, California



My Heart and My Flesh Cry Out  
to the Living God: Music as the Voice  
of the Heart Compared to Language  
as the Voice of the Mind  
**REBECCA ANNE CECILIA  
SCHEURER**  
Templeton, Massachusetts



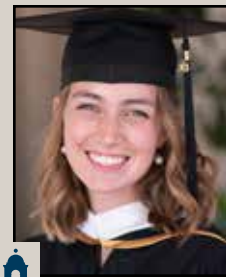
# CALIFORNIA COMMENCEMENT



Whether Human Law is Sufficient  
to Make Man Good  
**TANNER BROOKS SHEFFIELD**  
Yuba City, California



*Principia Vis Militaris in Politica  
Communitate: The Principles of a  
Political Community's Strength*  
**JOSEPH CHRISTIAN SEDLER**  
Oxnard, California



"Beyond the Beauty of the Morning Star":  
How Contemplation Leads  
to the Perfection of Moral Virtue  
**GEORGIA MAE SNETHUN**  
Clive, Alberta, Canada



Greek Mythology:  
The Bane of Classical Education  
or Its Savior?  
**LAUREN MARIE STANLEY**  
Santa Maria, California



"Do Not Let the Sun Go Down on Your  
Anger": On the Unfittingness  
of Anger after Forgiveness  
**BRIDGET KATHERINE STOUTZ**  
Steubenville, Ohio



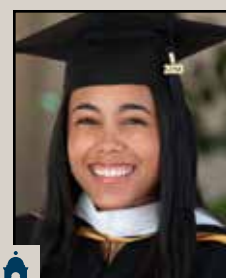
Pascal's Diversion as a  
Natural Means to Happiness  
**CATHARINE MARIE SWEENEY**  
Lander, Wyoming



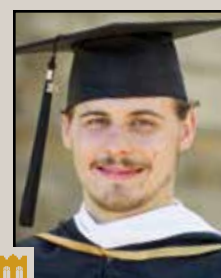
"No Man Is an Island": A Critique of  
Aristotle's Account of Human Happiness  
**REGINA MARIE TERRERI**  
Hillsboro, Virginia



A Contemplation of the Practical:  
Whether Work Is Intrinsically Worthwhile  
or Simply Servile As Compared  
to the Contemplative Life  
**MARIE MADELEINE TITTMAN**  
Pasadena, California



Dying to Come Home:  
A Thesis on the Concept of a  
Homeric Homecoming and How  
Odysseus Obtains This  
**KRISTINA TURICCHI**  
Pasadena, California



The Active Life: The Solution to the  
Inadequacies of the Contemplative Life  
for Man's Natural Happiness  
**MATTHEW THEODORE  
WITZANEY**  
Denzil, Saskatchewan, Canada



Nothing but the Lessons of Her Past Folly  
Might Teach Her Humility: An Illustration  
of Humility in Jane Austen's *Emma* and  
How It Is Compatible with Aquinas',  
Dante's, and Augustine's Idea of Humility  
**ALYSSA LEE WORKMAN**  
Richland, Washington



Imagine Dragons: A Thesis on Aristotle's  
Definition of Literature  
**RACHEL MARIA WROBLESKI**  
Plains, Montana







## THE CLASS OF 2023



## IN MEMORIAM

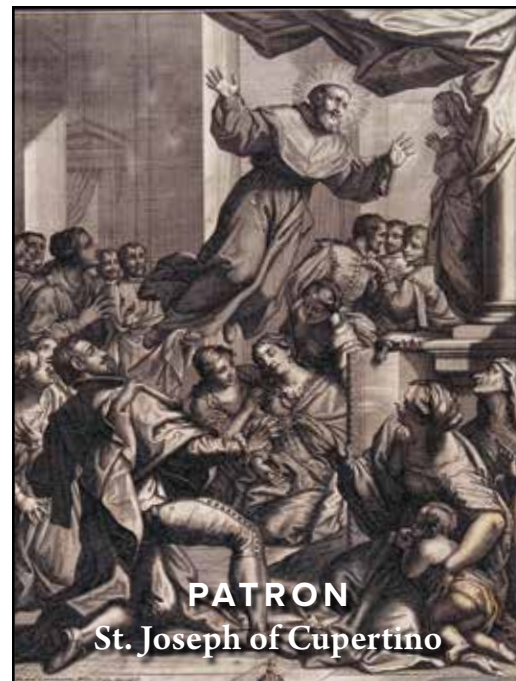
Members of the California Class of 2023 dedicated their Commencement ceremony to friend and classmate



*Margaret Therese-Marie Yanoschik ('23)*

June 25, 2001 – March 24, 2021

“For if we meet the world the way that Maggie met us — with a humble soul and love in her heart — then how could we fail?”



**PATRON**  
St. Joseph of Cupertino

### QUOTATION

And even though we may be involved with the most important affairs, achieve distinction, or fall into some great misfortune, all the same let us never forget how good we once felt here all together united by such good and kind feelings as made us, too, perhaps better than we actually are.

— Fyodor Dostoevsky  
*Brothers Karamazov*

# “You Go Forth with Everything You Need”

## Homily from the 2023 California Baccalaureate Mass of the Holy Spirit

by the Most Rev. James D. Conley, D.D., S.T.L.  
Bishop of Lincoln

Greetings and welcome, everyone, to this Baccalaureate Mass of the 2023 graduating class of Thomas Aquinas College. My name is Bishop James D. Conley, the bishop of the Diocese of Lincoln. It’s a great joy to be here with you this weekend to celebrate this Baccalaureate Mass of thanksgiving, as well as to be here for the Commencement immediately following.

We are offering a Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, invoking the grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to come down upon these 74 graduates, who are seated up here in the front of this church, as they complete their undergraduate years here at Thomas Aquinas College and are sent out into the world to make their way.



Liturgically, we have come to the close of Paschaltide, a season of grace, a season of great joy in the Resurrection of the Lord. And Our Lord is ascending to His father in heaven, returning to His right hand. And we notice that the disciples are worried and anxious about His departure: What will they do without Him at their side? What will they do, going forward? They have been with Him all this time, and now they are preparing to be on their own. I’m sure that some were saying, “Don’t go, Lord! Don’t leave us! Stay with us, Lord!”

But Jesus reassures them, and says, “I will not leave you orphans. I am with you always, but I must return to the Father. If I don’t go, I can’t send the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will make all things new again; the Holy Spirit will fill you with everything you need to go out into the world and to tell the story of what you have seen here, and what you have heard, and what you have touched, and what you have felt with your own eyes and your own hands.”

And as the Lord prepares His disciples to go out and to be on their own, so the Lord is preparing all of you to leave this place — which has meant so much to you over these past four years — to go out and to make your way.

As the Lord prepares His disciples and as He prepares each one of you 74 graduates, and as He prepares to return to the right hand of His father, He is returning differently than when He was sent. He is returning



*“May the fruit of the joy of this day, your graduation day, flow through you like rivers of joy, welling up within your heart to be your strength.”*

to the Father with His glorified humanity: the humanity that suffered for us, the humanity that was nailed to the Cross and died, the humanity that rose on the third day, the humanity that exists in the glorified body that still bears the wounds of His redeeming love. With the Ascension, He is taking each one of us back to the Father. We are in that glorified humanity through our baptism and our confirmation and the Holy Eucharist, and He’s taking us with Him to His father, redeemed and glorified.

There’s a great scene in Mel Gibson’s

movie *The Passion of the Christ* where Our Lord meets His mother, Mary, on the way to Calvary — the Fourth Station of the Cross. And Our Lord is almost unrecognizable to His mother: scourged, beaten, swollen, bleeding, and crowned with thorns, fallen on the ground under the weight of the Cross. And Mel Gibson takes some poetic license and lifts the words from the Book of Revelation, chapter 21, verse 5, and places them on the lips of the Lord. He looks at Mary and He says, “Behold, don’t you see, mother? I make all things new.”

Now, if we put ourselves in the place of Mary, those words probably didn’t resonate with her. How can this be? There’s nothing new about this; this experience is horrifying. But in some very mysterious way, it is in and through our suffering, our weakness, our vulnerability, our shortcomings, our failures, our setbacks, that Christ comes in, that He sweeps in and makes everything new again. He heals us and He makes us whole. This is what Isaiah, I believe, is saying in our first

*“You give us hope, because we need you. We need the joy of your heart, the formation you received here, the gift that you carry with you. The world needs this very much now.”*

reading: “A bruised reed he shall not break, a smoldering wick he shall not quench” (Isaiah 42:1–3).

Caryll Houselander, in her classic little work, *The Reed of God*, tells how Mary absorbs this truth into her very being: by not running away from suffering, by not fleeing when things get hard, by not trying to escape the difficulties that face us, but rather leaning into it and allowing Jesus to make us new again, in and through our suffering.

So, Class of 2023, don’t run away from suffering, the suffering that may come your way, which will indeed come your way. Because remember that Christ makes all things new, in and through the mystery of His cross. And when He is joined with His father after the Ascension and sends His Holy Spirit with all the gifts, with everything you need to bear your cross, the weight of glory, then go forth with joy — with joy in your hearts, because that’s a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

So don’t be afraid as you prepare to leave this campus. Go forth with great confidence and determination: The confidence and determination that doesn’t come from yourself or your talents or your gifts or your academic achievements, but from the Holy Spirit — the Holy Spirit that is the personified life and love that exists between the Father and

the Son. This will become for you, Class of 2023, those rivers of living water that flow within you, that Jesus speaks about in our Gospel that we just heard; those rivers of living water that flow within you (Jn. 7:37–39). He was speaking about the promised Holy Spirit, because He says that those who came to believe in Him were to receive this same spirit.

May the fruit of the joy of this day, your graduation day, flow through you like rivers of joy, welling up within your heart to be your strength, so that nothing can take that joy away; so you can say, with the Psalmist, *non nobis, Domine*, “not to us Lord, but to you we give glory” (Ps. 115:1).

Be assured of our prayers and be assured of our support and encouragement, especially your families that are here, your parents, your siblings, maybe your grandparents, your teachers. All the family community here at Thomas Aquinas College goes with you, as well.

You give us hope, because we need you. We need the joy of your heart, the formation you received here, the gift that you carry with you. The world needs this very much now. But don’t be afraid of that responsibility. Know that you go forth with everything you need: the glorified, risen Lord, living in your hearts, flowing through your veins, and giving you that strength and joy to go forth.

God bless you. ❖



## “Think so that You May Live”

by MaryGrace Brittain ('23)

Phoenix, Arizona



The Class of 2023 elected MaryGrace Brittain as its Class Speaker ...

We are a small group, but a mighty one. And now, for the 74 of us, this journey has finally come to an end. It has brought along with it lasting friendships, formation in the life of the mind and, more importantly, in the life of the Faith. And the College has chosen to crown our days as students with this joyous celebration. But the greatest thing worth celebrating today is not the glory of our own merits, but the priceless gift we have been given.

### Gratitude

Having received this gift, we must not neglect our present and most urgent duty to give thanks to God, our maker, who deigned to make us partakers in this little piece of earthly heaven, our alma mater; and to give thanks to everyone else who has graciously made this day possible.

To begin, we would like to thank the men whose service to the cause of Catholic liberal education has been invaluable. Firstly, Mr. DeLuca: Thank you for being here today. And posthumously, Dr.

**“If our efforts here have induced us to pride and not humility, then, my friends, I believe we have severely missed the point.”**

McArthur, Dr. Dillon, Mr. Berquist, and Dr. Neumayr. Second only to God, these men are the greatest cause of today’s celebration. We pray that this year’s 49<sup>th</sup> graduating class of their college has made them proud and has played its part in fulfilling

their noble mission.

We thank our Board of Governors. Your service

to the College has allowed it to continue to flourish by guiding us with your wisdom, your love, and your prayers. And we thank our benefactors. Your generosity has built our college, and it has built this unique community by enabling students to attend who would otherwise be unable.

We thank our priests. Fr. Marczewski, Fr. Chung, and Fr. Lopez. By mere appearance our college is surely beautiful, but you make it miraculous by bringing forth the holy hush of our chapel and bringing God to us through the sacraments. You make Thomas Aquinas College truly Catholic, and for this, we are eternally grateful.

We thank our tutors. You have been shining examples of what it means to pursue wisdom as a Catholic, reminding us always that we are to love with our hearts even more than we are to think with our minds. You are the day-to-day heroes of this campus, and you have become people we love and wish to emulate because of your dedication to the truth and to the one true faith.

In particular, we would like to thank Mr. Shields. He was with us when we began this journey four years ago, and he is with us now as we carry him in our hearts. We thank him for his willingness to ask the tough questions, never allowing us to become idle or complacent, but forcing us always to strive to be more diligent and more dedicated. We are honored to have been part of his legacy and we will remember him always as our beloved tutor, who was so much more.

Lastly, we thank our parents. Your love for us and your constant support began

far before we came here. Thank you for bringing us into this world and thank you for bringing us into the Church. Your guidance and your steadfast love have allowed our faith to truly become our own, so that your prayers now fall from our lips, your creed is now our creed, and the God Whom we first adored out of obedience to you we adore now out of love for Him. Leaving the charming cradle of our childhood to find this new home of human wisdom would have been much easier if it did not also mean leaving you.

In my own case, I thank my father, Tommy Brittain ('96). Your courage led you to start this course 31 years ago, and now 10 of your children have followed your lead. Thank you for the example that you have been to me for my whole life. And I thank my beautiful mother, Melissa Brittain. You are my very best friend and the fiercest defender of those you love. I would be very well off if I grew to become just half the woman that you are.

### The Freedom to Love

My fellow graduates, we have officially completed a demanding course of study which has truly enlightened our minds. And although this magnificent immersion into the wonder of the Great Books has come to an end, be assured that the whisper of truth which echoes in these halls will resound in our hearts forever. We have acquired by our studies the good of knowledge, which has thereby freed us.

If our patron is right in asserting that the perfection of the Christian life consists simply in charity, then we must know how

to love and we must succeed in trying. How are we to love? Although my answer is insufficient, I would like to offer a place where we may start.

If the freedom to love is the best kind, then I believe we are most free when we have reached the heights of humility. For in the words of St. Augustine, “You cannot attain to charity except through humility.” Love will pour from our hearts the more we realize our own unworthiness and thereby understand just how graciously God pours His love upon us.

If humility is our way to love, then humble we must be. Although I am no expert, I think that true humility lies in treating your gifts and talents just as they are, no more, no less — knowing that your gifts are yours solely by the grace of God, and



... Michaela Lessard to sing the National Anthem ...

then choosing to champion them for Him. To treat them any more would give way to pride, but to treat them any less would be an injustice to the Giver.

And the truth we now carry in our hearts, although the fruit of much labor, is one of these same gifts. We must thank God for this gift and choose to use it, along with each of our unique gifts of soul, to build Christ’s church on earth. For true evangelization cannot be taught but must be personally accomplished by humble servants with loving hearts, willing to give all that they are to the world.

So, Margaret Burns and Ian Cochiolo, intellectually you two are the most fit to teach, but your greatest gift lies not in your mind but in your willingness to serve others. Continue to build Christ’s church by being to the world the same humble servants that you have always been to us. Jonathan Phelan, my oldest friend, your courage and your discipline make you the most equipped to lead others because

these two gifts make those who know you want to follow you to greatness. Be a humble leader to the world, the way you have always humbly led the rest of us. Sophie Cummings and Brigit McNeil, you are two of the kindest people I have ever known. Continue to be to the world the same humble and gentle souls that make all who know you want to be your friend.

And to the rest of my classmates, your gifts are just as important and just as strong. Humbly serve the world by being faithfully true to the person God made you. And remember the words of St. Teresa of Avila: “There is more value in a little study of humility and in a single act of it than in all the knowledge in the world.” Our knowledge will become a hindrance, and not a handmaiden, to the good life if we allow it to be welcomed into a proud and arrogant soul. If our efforts here have induced us to pride and not humility, then, my friends, I believe we have severely missed the point.

### Be Excellent and Be Humble

For the truly wise man knows how small he is, but he simultaneously rejoices because smallness in the Lord is glory the size of a giant. Our witness in the world will likely not be from high seats of honor or positions of authority, but our humble witness will be enough, because humility will lead us to the only glory which matters, the glory which lasts forever.

And though we may find ourselves in the crucible of trials as we try to plant the glorious cross on pagan shores, remember that salvation was won on Calvary because



... and Jonathan Phelan to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

one man had enough humility to take up His cross — and enough love to move Him onward, though His destination would crucify Him.

So, I exhort the class of 2023: Take up

your cross with humility and carry it with love. And though the threats against our faith may be legion, remember the words of St. Vincent de Paul: “The most powerful weapon to conquer the devil is humility. For, as he does not know how to employ it, neither does he know how to defend himself from it.”

Lastly, I would like to commend one young woman’s example as we go: our beloved Maggie Yanoschik. With her example before us, I believe our witness has a sure chance of succeeding. For if we meet the world the way that Maggie met us — with a humble soul and love in her heart — then how could we fail? And although we wish she were still here with us, partaking in this celebration, we pray that she is partaking in one far greater. May our beloved friend and classmate rest in eternal peace, and may we all rejoice that our wonderful Maggie makes our class 75 strong.

Now it is time for me to say farewell. My class, I address you not so much as your Class Speaker, but as your friend. Goodbyes are never easy, and it is because sadness tends to sit right next to love. But better for love to have such a companion than to not be at all. Thank God for Thomas Aquinas College, the place that makes love so great, goodbyes so hard, and forgetting impossible. And my friends, be humble. Be humble, so that we may not be concerned with being elite but with being excellent; and be humble, so that we may never yield to the cancers of ingratitude and pride, but so that we may become truly wise.

Fr. Marczewski once said to me, “Time is like our Blessed Mother: pregnant with God.” Our Lord is found at every moment, waiting to be known and waiting to be loved by us. So, remember that the best part about you and the life that you lead is your ability to love that which you know. Pursue wisdom, so that we may employ our hearts and not neglect them; so as to perfect our humanity, and not lose it. Do not live your life to think, but think so that you may live.

God bless you. Thank you. ❖

# Only the Lover Sings

by the Most Rev. James D. Conley, D.D., S.T.L.  
Bishop of Lincoln



*“The liberal arts education you have received here at TAC will be the source of your joy and will make your heart sing for decades to come, no matter to what vocation you are called.”*

First of all, I would like to thank President Paul O’Reilly for his kind invitation to deliver this year’s Commencement Address for the Thomas Aquinas College graduating Class of 2023 and to receive the St. Thomas Medallion. I am truly humbled and honored, particularly after reading the list of recipients who have received this award in the past.

And to the graduating Class of 2023, and to your parents and family members, congratulations and salutations on this great achievement. Today is a day of great joy for you and for the Church.

And I use the word *joy* intentionally. The title I have chosen for this Commencement Address is taken from St. Augustine, *Cantare amantis est*, loosely translated, “Only the Lover Sings.”

The great German philosopher Josef Pieper wrote a little book in 1988 on the subject of “Art and Contemplation,” with the same title, “Only the Lover Sings” — so my reflections today are not entirely original, by any means!

I noticed that at least one of this year’s graduates wrote her thesis on the subject of “joy,” so I hope these thoughts will resonate with you in some small way as you celebrate the joy of your graduation day.

I would like to begin my remarks by taking us back in history to the origins of this college, which opened its doors for the first time in the fall of 1971. This date should go down in history as a significant benchmark in the renewal of Catholic education in the modern West. What the first founders of this college envisioned, when they began this bold educational project, is now bearing tremendous fruit in schools, colleges, and educational endeavors across this country and beyond.

I first heard about Thomas Aquinas College when I was an undergraduate at the University of Kansas in the early 1970s and a student of what was then called the Pearson Integrated Humanities

Program. I graduated from high school in 1973, and in a few weeks from now, I will be attending my 50-year high school reunion in the suburbs of Kansas City, where I grew up. I was not yet a Catholic when I showed up as a freshman at KU. My main interests at the time were basketball and the Grateful Dead, and KU had them both! But God had other designs.

Provisionally, I enrolled in the Integrated Humanities Program as a freshman. By the middle of my junior year, I was baptized and received into the Catholic Church. If I were to distill it down to one thing, in addition to the power of supernatural grace, what converted me to the Catholic Church was a “great books” liberal arts education.

The IHP, as it came to be known, was taught by three remarkable professors: Dennis Quinn, Franklyn Nelick, and John Senior. It is interesting to note that the IHP also opened its doors at the Uni-

versity of Kansas in the fall semester of 1971 as a college within the college.

As it turned out, the third of these three professors, John Senior, who eventually became my godfather, was a dear friend and colleague of Dr. Ronald McArthur, the founding president of Thomas Aquinas College. In the ’70s I remember Dr. Senior mentioning a new upstart college in California, a new college devoted to the renewal of the great traditions of philosophy and Western liberal education.

In preparing my remarks for this address, I was able to obtain a treasure trove of letters from the TAC archives between John Senior and Ronald McArthur and several of the other founders of TAC — names like Mark Berquist and Jack Neumayr — dating back to 1968. In this cache of letters, one discovers the early fermentation process of what would one day become the vintage wine of Thomas Aquinas College and the Pearson Integrated Humanities Program.

They are pure gold. These fellow co-conspirators were engaged in a bold project that would have a lasting impact on the renewal of the liberal arts in the West.

The one and only visit I ever made to TAC before now was for a wedding of the daughter of one of my KU classmates in June of 2009. I believe it was the very first wedding celebrated in the new Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. I told my buddy I would do the wedding under one condition: that he would arrange for me to meet Ronald McArthur, who at the time was 85 years old and still teaching seminars! Born within a year of each other in the mid-1920s, John Senior and Ronald McArthur were contemporaries. Senior died in 1998, and McArthur passed away in 2013.

Well, my friend made good on the deal, and late in the evening, the night before his daughter’s wedding, the two of us sat down at the outdoor patio on campus with Dr. McArthur and a bottle of wine and listened to the wisdom of this giant of a man — and he was literally a giant at 6’5”. We sat up until 1:00 a.m. listening to Dr. McArthur tell us story after story about our old professor and his dear friend and colleague! Truly the stuff of legends, and I shall never forget the conversation we had that night out under the stars.

As you might imagine, these great men and profound thinkers didn’t always see eye to eye on what is wrong with modern higher education. Dr. McArthur would argue that the problem with higher education is a “crisis of reason.” He would say that young college students don’t know how to think logically anymore. They need to be immersed in the perennial philosophy of the ages. They need to learn the wisdom of St. Thomas.

John Senior, who had great love for St. Thomas and was steeped in Thomistic philosophy, would respond, “Well, Ron, I don’t disagree with you. We are certainly living in an age that suffers from a crisis of reason. Objective truth is no longer being taught in our colleges. But more than a ‘crisis of reason,’ we are suffering from a ‘crisis of imagination.’ Young people today have lost the sense of wonder. They don’t have any poetry in their souls.”

And, thus, the argument would go. But because they were such good friends and because they loved each other dearly, they could have these debates about serious subjects and still remain close



*“What the first founders of this college envisioned, when they began this bold educational project, is now bearing tremendous fruit in schools, colleges, and educational endeavors across this country and beyond.”*

friends. To listen to Dr. McArthur speak about his good friend and close colleague and the conversations they would have about the permanent things, with a sparkle in his eye and a smile on his face, brought us to tears not a few times that evening.

But in the end, like all things Catholic, it’s never an “either/or” argument, but a “both/and” situation. Yes, we do have a crisis of reason today and, yes, we do have a crisis of the imagination.

But John Senior’s strong conviction always centered on the idea that one precedes the other, that before one can begin to engage in the arduous task of philosophy, one must first be “reborn in wonder.” In fact, when the three KU professors chose a motto for the Integrated Humanities Program, they chose a Latin phrase, *Nascantur in Admiratione* — “Let Them Be Born in Wonder.”

In a letter to Ron McArthur dated January 9, 1969, John Senior wrote these words: “Liberal education, then, begins in wonder and aims at wisdom. But music, in the ancient sense, begins in delight and ends in wonder; while gymnastic (in the Greek sense of the word) begins in the sensible experience and ends in delight. Since students entering college are in a state neither of wonder nor delight, they need ‘pre-liberal’ education.”

The point that Senior was making was that the cultivation of the imagination, in some mysterious way, precedes the cultivation of reason.

In that same 1969 letter, John Senior went on to write, “The discipline traditionally assigned the task of training the soul to the condition of wonder is ‘music,’ in the wide and ancient sense of those activities governed by the nine Muses — daughters of memo-

ry, without which intelligence and will have no material from which to work.”

The IHP professors would often talk about “education by the muses.” This was why learning and memorizing poetry was so important to the Integrated Humanities Program. In a very Thomistic sense, Senior would posit that “no intellectual knowledge is possible without the prior work of the imagination, and the imagination cannot work without sensation. The muses, then, between delight and wonder, preside over the virtue of ‘acuity;’ they sharpen the imagination, so it sees things distinctly.”

Senior went on to write in another letter to McArthur: “The seven liberal arts are a rational examination of the causes of what music presents, which is another way of saying that wonder is a condition of science.” I would add that this is what St. Augustine is getting at in his little phrase, “only the lover sings.”



***“My conversion to the Catholic Church, as I recall it now, it came about primarily through the love and friendship of my classmates and our mutual love and desire for truth, goodness, and beauty through what we were studying.”***

My conversion to the Catholic Church, as I recall it now, it came about primarily through the love and friendship of my classmates and our mutual love and desire for truth, goodness, and beauty through what we were studying: poetry, history, music, philosophy, theology, art, architecture, and dance. This was what the professors meant when they spoke about “education by the muses.”

When I discovered truth, goodness, and beauty in the Great Books, “the best which has been thought and said” (in the words of Matthew Arnold), my heart began to sing for joy at this discovery. Music and poetry train the memory and they give the soul a direct experience of the joy of the thing itself. This joy is what caused my heart to sing — *only the lover sings* — in the words of St. Augustine.

Actually, I was tempted to entitle my talk today: *extra poesi-am, nulla salus* — “there is no salvation outside of poetry!” But I refrained.

The great 19<sup>th</sup> century English convert to the Catholic Church, St. John Henry Newman, who was a huge influence on me and still is, wrote a lot about liberal education and how we come to know things. In a famous debate which took place through letters in the *Times* of London in 1849 — between Newman and a member of the British parliament, Sir Robert Peel — Newman argues that the liberal arts are necessary for a healthy and civilized culture. Peel was arguing for a hyper-utilitarian, career oriented, and science-based educational system to feed the progress of the industrial revolution. Peel argued that the liberal arts were no longer necessary in an industrial age.

In his exchange with Sir Robert Peel, which began a series of lengthy letters known as the Tamworth Reading Room Letters, Newman posits a very startling argument. He writes:

After all, man is not a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal. He is influenced by what is direct and precise. It is very well to freshen our impressions and convictions from physics, but to create them we must go elsewhere.

Then Newman goes on to say, and this has become a famous quote:

The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion.

A true experience of a liberal arts education, precisely the kind of education each one of you has received here at Thomas Aquinas College, should be like “a birth of the human spirit, an entry into a new world that excites interest because it is seen in the light of wonder. The passion of wonder itself arises from a consciousness of our ignorance before the mystery of being, and from that passion begins the lifelong pursuit of wisdom” (Dennis Quinn, “Essay on the Muses as Pedagogues of the Liberal Arts”).

I would go further and say that the liberal arts education you have received here at TAC will be the source of your joy and will make your heart sing for decades to come, no matter to what vocation you are called.

And ultimately, like St. Thomas discovered, this wonder and wisdom lead to contemplation. We know that, at the end of his life, St. Thomas occupied his time composing poetry, which ultimately was turned into music. Again, “only the lover sings” — a lover of wisdom.

And I would go so far as to say, my dear graduates, you must hold on to this in the years and decades ahead for the sake of your own sanity and mental health.

As some of you may know, back in 2019 and 2020, I had to take a leave of absence from my duties as bishop to tend to my own mental health as I was struggling with anxiety and depression. I fell into the trap of a kind of “ungodly self-reliance” and lost the sense of joy and wonder in my life. The burdens of leadership became overwhelming for me. Thanks be to God, I reached out to people who could help, family, friends, and professionals in the mental-health field, and now I am back healthier and happier than I have ever been. So never hesitate to reach out for help if you are struggling. There are people who love you and people who can help.

If I can give you a bit of advice, as you graduate today and leave this college, it is this: Keep reading and rereading the great and good books you have come to know and love here at TAC. Each day, read a few verses of poetry. And each day, listen to a little bit of good music. (Right now I am really into the Avett Brothers, but I love all kinds of music, even the Grateful Dead!) And each night, if you can, take the time to look up at the stars. And always remember, “only the lover sings.”

As I mentioned at the beginning of this talk, programs like the one here at TAC and the IHP at KU have started a revolution that is beginning to explode across the country. Classical academies, the



***“I hope that some of you go into education and become teachers. You have so much to offer because you have received such a wonderful education here at TAC.”***

homeschool movement, charter schools, Catholic diocesan schools are all part of this renewal of Catholic liberal arts education — and putting the joy back in learning and teaching!

I am privileged to be a board member of the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education, which is rapidly expanding across the country and renewing the liberal arts. It was founded by two TAC graduates, Michael Van Hecke ('86) and Andrew Seeley ('87). I hope that some of you go into education and become teachers. You have so much to offer because you have received such a wonderful



education here at TAC.

Let me conclude with something I recently heard from my good friend Dale Ahlquist, who is the president of the G.K. Chesterton Society and the founder of the Chesterton High School Academies. The 45<sup>th</sup> Chesterton Academy opened this year, and next year 15 new academies will open across the country. If you are looking for a job, I would venture to say that, with a TAC degree, you would be hired in a “New York minute!”

When Dale Ahlquist was asked, why do we read the great and good books, he answered this way:

We read the Iliad because all of life is a battle.

We read the Odyssey because all of life is a journey.

We read the Book of Job because all of life is a riddle.

We read Canterbury Tales because all of life is a pilgrimage.

We read Don Quixote because all of life is knight errantry.

We read Shakespeare because all the world's a stage.

We read Dickens because all of life is a great expectation.

We read Dostoevsky because we are all part of a family, and every soul is a battleground between heaven and hell.

And we read Dante because all of life is a Divine Comedy.

And we read Chesterton ... because all of life is a paradox.

Dear graduates of the Class of 2023, may the song of truth, goodness, and beauty always be in your hearts and may the love, joy, and wonder of learning be ever with you.

Congratulations and God bless you! ❖

## Answering the Call

by Jonathan Phelan ('23)

Mesa, Arizona

Good afternoon. I am honored to speak to you all about my experience here as a student these past four years. I know that you all do so much for the community of Thomas Aquinas College, and I hope that my words may in some small way assure you of the student body's gratitude and of my own, in particular.

Four years ago, as I looked at possible college options, Thomas Aquinas was not my first choice. I attended a high school with a strong Great Books curriculum, and the thought of studying many of the same books I had read in high school was not the most appealing proposition.

After visiting my brother, who was then a freshman at TAC, though, I started to see just what a wonderful place this really was. I was greatly affected by the overwhelming sense of peace I experienced while visiting. I once heard Rev. Sebastian Walshe, O.Praem. ('94) — an alumnus of the College — describe this campus as a place that “exudes peace,” and that was the experience that I had when I first visited. I remember telling myself that this is a place where I could

**“I quickly formed strong bonds of friendship with many students in multiple classes — not friendships built on temporary, weak foundations, but ones built on the solid foundation of the common pursuit of the truth.”**

come and think. Just sit and think in peace.

Well, I think my first intuition that the College was a place of peace was correct, and I have never been given cause to believe otherwise. But even in my first couple of weeks here, I realized that I was not going to be doing as much individual sitting and thinking as I had originally thought.

This was primarily due to the fact that I quickly fell in love with the community. I found myself sitting and thinking at times, yes, but also playing sports, talking, laughing, and discussing with all the wonderful people at the College. I quickly formed strong bonds of friendship with many students in multiple classes — not friendships built on temporary, weak foundations, but ones built on the solid foundation of the common pursuit of the truth.

Soon after I began my studies here, I also came to realize that this common pursuit of truth was by no means blind. The founders of Thomas Aquinas College knew well that the pursuit of knowledge, if not based in the teachings of the Catholic faith, is straw. Although I was born and raised in a very strong Catholic family, I did not come to accept the Faith as fully my own until I came to TAC and experienced the love of God and the truth of His church as a student. One of, if not, the greatest blessings I have received as a student here is the ready availability of the sacraments and their graces. This blessing has allowed me to fall more in love with the Faith than I ever have before.

These experiences give just a small glimpse of how much Thomas Aquinas



College has changed my life. I truly believe that the combination of all these gifts will serve me well in the future. The College has given me an intellectual foundation on which I can continue to build for the rest of my life. It has given me the gift of deep friendships that have changed my life for the better and, most importantly, it has given me a deep appreciation for my faith and for the truth, beauty, and goodness it contains.

All these gifts are the main reason that I plan on pursuing the priesthood after graduation. I will take at least a year to work and continue to discern exactly where the Lord is calling me to go, but my time here has revealed to me the beauty of the vocation of the priesthood, and I plan on pursuing the call to become — eventually, and God willing — a minister at God's altar.

Thank you all so much for what you do for this wonderfully unique and somewhat strange place. I know that it is because of your hard work that the College continues to thrive. In particular, I would like to thank you for doing everything that you did to keep the College running during the Covid pandemic. I know you all have made sacrifices to sit on the Board of this wonderful institution, and I am extremely grateful for your willingness to serve the College in this way.

Thank you, again, and God bless you all! ❖

## “The Person I Want to Be”

by Lauren Gramlich ('23)

Largo, Florida

I grew up in Florida in a family that knew practically nothing about the liberal arts. Both my parents attended public universities, and neither had ever heard of Thomas Aquinas College. Thus, it was a grace from God that one of my high school teachers was a graduate of the College, and he was the first to recognize my desire for truth and point me toward TAC.

Now, I am a bit of a dreamer (and a woman for good measure), so of course I always wondered what it would be like to experience “love at first sight.”

**“By listening, I have realized that goodness and truth are incipient in every person's ideas, and one must only see the good in another's position to enter a communion of trust with them — which can in turn lead them to Christ.”**

But when I set foot on this campus as a visitor, I realized *this* was “love at first sight!” The curriculum, the culture, the faith, faculty, and friendships that I witnessed captured my heart, because all these parts were quickened with the life of our Catholic faith. Further, all the parts had the same end — to reach God by living in accord with virtue, which Aristotle properly calls, “the happy life.”

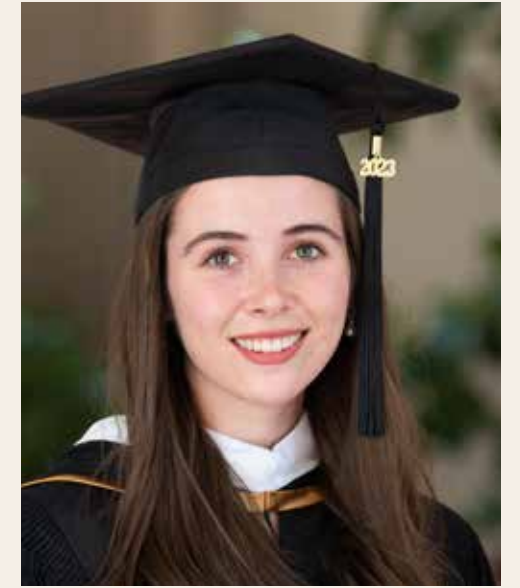
Thus, unlike many loves at first sight which often focus on one aspect of the beloved, my love for TAC was a love of

the whole. This rosy vision affected me so powerfully that I told my dad later, “Dad, what I saw here portrays the person I want to be.”

Now, after living here for four years, I can confidently say that my TAC experience has both exceeded and surprised my expectations! Due to its reputation for intellectual rigor, I came to the College expecting to meet a group of devoutly Catholic and very studious, serious people, and I certainly got the devoutly Catholic part. As for the studious part, I will say that I was at first surprised, and then pleased, to see that although the students and tutors took the intellectual life seriously, they also knew how to have fun!

By means of many fun and joyful experiences, TAC has changed me and formed me into the person I am today. This formation has occurred not only through the classes and the Great Books themselves, which have opened my mind to new perspectives, but also through my classmates and tutors, who have challenged me to discard my prejudices and listen to others as Christ listens to us. By listening, I have realized that goodness and truth are incipient in every person's ideas, and one must only see the good in another's position to enter a communion of trust with them — which can in turn lead them to Christ.

When I wrote my entrance essays to the college, I wrote with a thirst to experience these moments of self-gift. In one of my essays, I remember expressing my desire to seize the benefits of this curriculum and culture for myself in order to have more to pour out upon



others. I have always been convinced that my life is a gift from God, and by coming to this college and receiving such an excellent education, I am now empowered to be a greater gift to the world and pursue the call to a New Evangelization.

My post-graduation plans are highly affected by this desire to be a gift. Next year, I will teach middle school and high school students about the Faith and about our country, instilling in them the truths that I have learned here at TAC. I also plan on furthering my education in graduate school, that God might use me to reach many different kinds of people and ignite the fire for Catholic liberal education in our world.

I would like to offer my heartfelt gratitude to you, our Board of Governors at the College. In your great wisdom, you have guided and formed this college for many years, and under your protection and strength it has stayed true to its essential and original principles, which cannot be said of many institutions in this world. I assure each one of you of my personal prayers, that you may persevere in your faithfulness, guiding the life of Thomas Aquinas College toward Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. ❖

*Note: The above essays are adapted from remarks made to the Thomas Aquinas College Board of Governors on May 19, 2023.*

# “A Rediscovery of Perennial Truths”

An Interview with the  
Most Rev. James D. Conley, D.D., S.T.L.



## Did you discern your vocation there?

No, when I graduated, I had no inkling at all for any religious vocation. I had only been Catholic for a year and a half. But I loved to travel, and I had a motorcycle at the time, so I rode it across the country. A few of my friends had ended up at this Benedictine monastery in France, which became a gathering place for guys discerning vocations. You could stay there for free as long as you worked, so that was my motive. I wasn't even thinking about a monastic vocation; I was just trying to wrap my head around being Catholic. I arrived in December of 1977 and, a couple months into it, I started thinking, “Hmm, maybe God is calling me to monastic life.”

In the meantime, another friend, a fellow convert, had inherited his grandmother's farm and was raising horses. He just got married and needed help, and I needed a job, so I moved out to north-central Kansas after returning from the monastery in France in August of 1978. At that point, I felt that God was calling me to marriage, so I started dating a Catholic girl from a farm family. And I thought this was what I was going to do: become a farmer, have a big family, raise 10 kids, and I was on my way. The relationship was going well.

But then it was the fall of 1979, and Pope St. John Paul II had just been elected the year before. He was making his first trip to the U.S. and visiting all the major cities, as well as a stop in Des Moines, Iowa. My friends and I piled into vans to see this new Polish pope. It was the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, October 4, 1979. It was an outdoor Mass with some 3,000 people in attendance and, as he was wont to do, at the end of the Mass, the Holy Father made this appeal to the young men to consider the priesthood.

For me, until that point, it had been either “become a monk” or “get married.” I never even thought that I could be called to become a diocesan priest. But then John Paul II made this appeal, and it hit me like a bolt of lightning: Maybe God is calling me to be a priest!

My girlfriend actually set up the appointment with the first priest I talked to about a possible vocation. Long story short, I went down

to see him, he called the Bishop, whom I then met, and I was in the seminary in January, about four months later.

## What did your parents think of your entering the Church — and then becoming a priest?

My parents were not very religious, and I made the mistake of converting to the Church before telling them. Before the end of the fall semester of my junior year, I entered the Church and came home and made this announcement at Christmastime. It might have been at Christmas dinner. It went over like a lead balloon. My mom was actually happy because I had gotten my hair cut, and she could tell that I was becoming more serious minded, more mature.

But my dad was typical of that self-made, successful, post-war generation, and his first reaction was, “Well, son, I hope you know you've given up your freedom to think on your own. The Catholic Church is going to do all your thinking for you. The Pope is going to make all your decisions in life. And if you want to give up your freedom to think for yourself, you're an adult now, but I just want you to know what you've gotten yourself into.”

By the time I went into the seminary, he had softened a bit, and as time went on, he warmed up to the Catholic Church, in the sense that he got to know some priests and a few of my seminary friends. My father always had a great respect for the KU professors, even though he was a little suspicious. After my ordination as a priest in 1985, he got to know my first pastor, Fr. Don O'Hare, and that really had a big impact on him.

After four years in the parish, I was sent to Rome to get an advanced degree in moral theology, and while I was gone in Rome, unbeknownst to me, my parents began taking RCIA. Two years later, they announced that they wanted to become Catholic and wanted me to receive them into the Church. So, I baptized and confirmed them and gave them their first Holy Communion. It was on a Saturday morning, my dad stepped up to the baptismal font — and this had to be an inspiration from the Holy Spirit — before I poured the water, I said, “Dad, I hope you know that, when I do this, you're going to have to give up your freedom to think on your own, and the Catholic Church is gonna do all your thinking for you.” And he remembered that and smiled and said, “Go ahead.”

They both ended up becoming lifelong Catholics. Next to my ordination, that was probably the happiest day of my life.

## In your Commencement Address, you noted that in the 1960s and 1970s, colleges were rejecting the very existence of objective truth. Is that still true? It seems that academia has since become rather dogmatic.

I look back on my own experience in the humanities program, and the philosophical error that was then at the very heart of the crisis of higher education was rejecting the idea of objective truth and objective morality. Looking at everything 50 years later, I recall how Pope Benedict XVI spoke about the “dictatorship of relativism.” I think what's changed is that it has become a dictatorship. In other

words, relativism is what we were battling years ago, the idea of “to each his own,” and “who's to say” — whereas now, if you reject the prevalent philosophy, it's going to be forced onto you, like a dictatorship. You can't hold a position that's contrary to it. I think that's what changed, that it's become forced. It can't sustain itself unless it's forced upon you because it can't stand up to scrutiny.

The founders of Thomas Aquinas College and John Senior at IHP all knew that well. They were prophetic. They were living deeply in the world of academia, and they were young men, and they could see where it was all heading.



Bishop Conley visits the gravesite of Rev. Ramon Decaen ('96) with Fr. Decaen's parents, Ed and Mary Ann, and sister-in-law Rose.

## You also discussed many of the connections the College has with your diocese, notably among those being Rev. Ramon Decaen ('96) — a TAC graduate who went on to become a priest in Lincoln, and who tragically died of Covid in 2021.

Yes, I was able to visit his family when I came out for your graduation! I met up with Fr. Decaen's brother, Chris, who is a tutor on the College's California faculty. We went with their parents and with Chris's wife, Rose, and visited the cemetery where Fr. Decaen is buried in Santa Paula. He's buried in a Hispanic section of the cemetery, named for Our Lady of Guadalupe, which is fitting: Fr. Decaen served the Hispanics of our diocese as the pastor of Cristo Rey Parish, which is about 99 percent Hispanic. He was beloved by the Spanish-speaking community, “Padre Ramon.”

## Can you describe how the liberal arts — which you experienced as an undergraduate at the erstwhile Integrated Humanities Program (IHP) at the University of Kansas (KU) — brought you into the Catholic Church?

For my first year in the program, I didn't even see a Catholic connection. It wasn't even on my radar. My second year, I did notice there were a lot of Catholics in the program, and there were a lot of people who were entering the Church. We read the Bible as literature and had to memorize some Psalms, with the collective effect of the second year, asking, “What is Truth?” You begin to ask yourself those questions: “What do I know? What do I believe? Is there a God? Does He exist? Can we know Him? Has He revealed Himself in the world?” These were questions that the texts were all discussing. You eventually have to ask yourself if you believe in these things.

That's what started with me, asking myself these questions while I was reading these great ideas. I was getting to know some friends who were converting, and it was through my roommate at the time that a group of us decided to take these classes being taught by a priest at the local parish. (RCIA didn't exist yet.) Fr. Michael Moriarty, this wonderful Irish priest, was a great storyteller — witty, smart, funny, and with a great gift of the gab. All these college stu-

*“I never even thought that I could be called to become a diocesan priest. But then John Paul II made this appeal, and it hit me like a bolt of lightning: Maybe God is calling me to be a priest!”*

dents would end up going to these classes, mostly from the humanities program at KU. It was the 1970s — I'm sure we were sitting around in beanbag chairs with lava lamps — and he would tell these stories of faith and weave doctrine into these wonderful stories.



*“Relativism is what we were battling years ago, the idea of ‘to each his own,’ and ‘who’s to say’ — whereas now, if you reject the prevalent philosophy, it’s going to be forced onto you, like a dictatorship.”*

We prayed and took pictures out at the cemetery, and then we all went out to dinner that night. I sent the pictures back to his parishioners at Cristo Rey. They still miss him and grieve his loss, even though Fr. Rafael Rodriguez is doing a wonderful job as his successor.

**You have spoken bravely, both in your Commencement Address and elsewhere, about your struggle with mental health. Often, it’s difficult for believers to distinguish a mental-health issue from a spiritual one. How do you make that distinction?**

It’s important to make that distinction because the two are not the same. Yet, while they are distinct, they are also related. We are spiritual beings, and grace builds upon nature. When nature is struggling in some way, the grace cannot be effective. The spiritual remedy for mental illness is not the answer. You cannot heal yourself by praying more, save for miraculous healing. But for most of us, we need to address our psychological and human sufferings in a way that’s responsive to the human struggles: psychology, counseling, even medication — there are a lot of resources and people out there who can help.

There’s a book called *The Catholic Guide to Depression*, by Dr. Aaron Kheriaty, and I think that’s the best resource out there from an intellectual perspective that can make that distinction between psychological and spiritual health. He goes through the great spir-

itual masters, like St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, and he has a whole section on medications. He really does understand. If you are actually suffering, you should probably go see a psychologist. But if you are just wanting to know more about mental illness and the relationship between mental health and spiritual wellbeing, that’s probably the best resource.

**Do you think it’s important for someone seeking mental-health care to go to a Catholic therapist?**

It’s not absolutely necessary, but I would say go there first. The field of psychology is all over the place. To find someone who is trustworthy and really understands the spiritual life and the sacramental life, that’s important.

**To what do you attribute the current resurgence in Catholic liberal education, and what role do you think Thomas Aquinas College plays in it?**

Public education is being rapidly hijacked by erroneous ideologies, even over the last five years. So people are looking for alternatives, and they are discovering that there’s a wealth of richness in our own heritage, especially as Catholics, that for too long has been basically ignored. The homeschoolers discovered it, and now these classical academies, and the charter school movement, are discovering it, too — a rediscovery of the great legacy of Western liberal education, the tried and true. Many bishops, myself included, are experiencing a renewal of our diocesan schools through a greater emphasis on the classical liberal arts. I am very excited about this renewal in my own diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska, and I am convinced this is the future of our Catholic schools.

It’s a rediscovery of perennial truths, which TAC has been doing since 1971. In the early 1970s there were only a few of these oases of sound liberal education. Now there are so many more choices for, say, parents with kids who are college age. That’s why I encourage your graduates — who have just completed this wonderful four-year education — to consider a career in education. They have great promise, great hope, and even a great responsibility.

*“We are spiritual beings, and grace builds upon nature. When nature is struggling in some way, the grace cannot be effective.”*

Catholic classical schools are growing at such an exponential rate that your graduates can write their own ticket. I know there are schools and academies that, if they see you are a TAC graduate, they will hire you immediately because they know you have a grounding in the Great Books. They can’t open these upstart classical academies fast enough, and their biggest challenge is finding teachers who understand this. ❖



# Lives of Work and Wonder

## What’s Next for the Class of 2023

Between the addresses of this year’s two Commencement Speakers, members of the Thomas Aquinas College Class of 2023 received advice both practical and romantic.

“In the life you lead running up to having the spouse and children the Good Lord might grant you,” Daniel T. Flatley urged the graduates in New England, “be the example for them that you will want them to become eventually. ... Be productive, and don’t forget those coming along after you.” In California, the Most Rev. James D. Conley, Bishop of Lincoln, exhorted graduates to “keep reading and rereading the great and good books you have come to know and love here at TAC,” adding, “and each night, if you can, take the time to look up at the stars.”

Whether seeking to become lawyers or teachers, whether answering the call to the priesthood or to marriage, these new alumni are taking these wise words to heart, embracing lives both active and contemplative. In a wide range of vocations, fields, and disciplines, they have set out to become industrious members of society who continue to delight in the life of the mind — and the occasional heavenward gaze.

### Priesthood & Religious Life

Several of the graduates will follow



God’s call to pursue priestly or religious vocations. Margaret Burns (CA’23) is discerning life with a Carmelite community, while John Metilly (NE’23) will enter the



postulancy this summer with the Dominican Friars of the Province of St. Joseph. Matthew Witzaney (NE’23) is returning to Saskatchewan, Canada, to discern the diocesan priesthood.

For some, this next phase of life is not new, but long-anticipated. “I had always been thinking about the Carmelites,” says Miss Burns. “I wrote to them the summer before senior year of high school, and the mother prioress wrote back that I should go to college first.” Mr. Witzaney’s experience echoes Miss Burns’. “I decided that I needed a solid founding in good philosophy and, through that, solid, orthodox theology,” he says. “What better place to get that than at TAC?”

### Graduate School

Others, inspired by their initial pursuit of wisdom at the College, will continue pursuing it at higher levels. Newlyweds Esther (Ruehle) and John Benjamin Berry (both CA’23) will attend Franciscan University

of Steubenville for master’s programs in philosophy and theology, respectively. Also pursuing his M.A. in philosophy is Isaiah Martinez (CA’23), who will study at Boston College. Michael Bishop (CA’23) has been accepted on a full scholarship with stipend to study philosophy at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Not all, however, are bound for philosophy or theology. Hoping to revitalize beauty in residential buildings, Serafin



Olguin (CA’23) will study architecture at Texas A&M. Thomas Aldredge (NE’23) will undertake postgraduate work at Johns Hopkins University in



anticipation of doctoral studies in mathematics. “The education that we get is stellar in terms of mathematics,” he says. “But there are still some things that I need to know.”



## Medicine

John Esser (CA'23) will complete prerequisite courses for medical school at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, and Sean Dillon (CA'23) is entering a post-baccalaureate program at Boston University; both intend eventually to work in orthopedic medicine. "One of the principal things that Jesus did when He came was heal people," says Mr. Dillon. "I'd love to do that." Rachel Wroblewski (NE'23), meanwhile, is preparing applications for veterinary medical schools in Omaha, Nebraska.

Luke Hernandez (CA'23) is entering Franciscan University of Steubenville's nursing program, while both Fiona Mohun (NE'23) and Suzanna Montanaro (CA'23) are preparing applications for their own respective fields of midwifery and physicians' assistantship. "The discussions that you have in class build your communications skills," reflects Mr. Esser. "Being able to analyze arguments and listen to other people is going to be especially important in medicine — being able to talk to and listen to patients."

## Business & Nonprofit

Many more alumni will find their way in business, where their personal witness will shine the light of Christ on the wider world. Isabel Baer (CA'23), Irene Collins (NE'23), Patrick Heal (CA'23), and Kristina Turicchi (CA'23) have all taken positions at companies and organizations up and down California, such as St. Michael's Abbey and the Napa Institute. Lauren Gramlich (CA'23)

will enter the Busch School of Business at The Catholic University of America in 2024, while Alyssa Workman (CA'23) is exploring recruitment coordination in Washington state. All are confident that the College has



trained them, in Miss Turicchi's words, to "speak to others in a clear way; to get the same ideas across and work together."

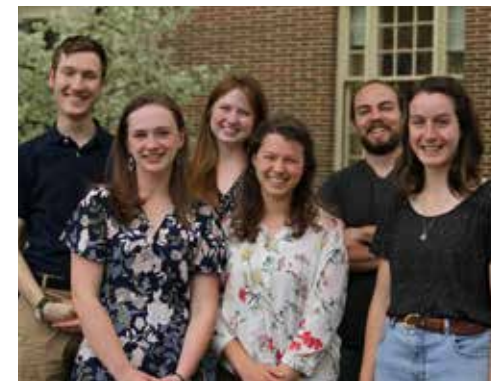
The financial sector will reap its share of that formation, as well. Abigail Lovold (CA'23) has taken a position as a staffing accountant for a firm in Santa Barbara, while Bernadette Mohun (NE'23) will work as a financial-services consultant for Charles Schwab. "I had done my thesis defense the day before my interview," says Miss Mohun with a laugh. "I mentioned that, and they wanted to hear all about it. I think it was largely TAC that got me the job!"

## Education

By far the most common professional destination for Thomas Aquinas College graduates is education, where their background in integrating theology, philosophy, and the liberal arts makes them coveted assets. Thomas Costa, Claire Dragoo, and Timoteo Kuhn (all CA'23) have accepted positions at Great Hearts Academies in Arizona and Texas, and Rebecca Scheurer (NE'23) and Tanner Sheffield (NE'23) at Chesterton Academies in Rhode Island and California, respectively. "Teaching will give me a chance to share all of the good things that I found here," says Mr. Sheffield. "It will also allow me to continue my education, reading

the Great Books alongside the students."

Other Catholic schools, both diocesan and independent, will likewise benefit from the zeal and experience of the College's graduates. Allanna Donnelly and Elayne Piquette (both CA'23) will teach for Mother of Divine Grace, the distance-learning program founded by TAC alumna Laura Berquist ('75); Hannah Brown (NE'23), Benjamin Domnarski (NE'23), Niamh McCann (NE'23), and Katie Parillo (CA'23) will teach various disciplines and grade levels at schools across the country. "The way that we do so many propositions and presentations gave me a lot of confidence," says Miss McCann, who will be teaching mathematics to middle schoolers in Dallas — but who initially approached the subject



with trepidation as a student. "I am able to teach math because of our math program."

Further afield, ZoëAnna Gibson and Brigit McNeil (both CA'23) have accepted internships at a European School in Brussels, where they will train in the Montessori method and elementary-classroom management. Combining the experience of both TAC campuses will be Abigail Cain (CA'23) and Magdalena Huckins (NE'23), who have committed to a missionary year with the Seton Teaching Fellows in the

Bronx. "I have been blessed with such a beautiful theological education, so it seemed fitting to try to share that with others," says Miss Cain. Adds Miss Huckins, "People are really thirsty for the truth. We've been given a lot of that here, so we can share it."

## Law

Reviving truth, beauty, and goodness can take more than academic or aesthetic forms. As numerous alumni have discovered over the last five decades, the College also suits graduates well for the legal field. JohnPaul Beckman (CA'23) has received a scholarship to attend the University of Notre Dame Law School, while Mitchell Brost (CA'23) will attend the Caruso School of Law at Pepperdine University as the recipient of the Faculty Scholars' award. "Studying here definitely made me feel prepared for the law," says Mr. Beckman, citing especially "the Discussion Method, and that we read hard texts very carefully."

Additionally, Peter Cain (CA'23) will work for alumnus attorney Raymond Tittmann ('94) at the Tittmann-Weix law firm in downtown Los Angeles while he applies to law school. Michaela Lessard and Catharine Sweeney (both CA'23) will work as assistants for another alumnus, Justin Alvarez ('97), at the Alvarez Firm in Camarillo, California.

## Marriage

Whatever their professional or education plans, numerous members of the Class of 2023 have also discerned vocations to marriage and, in the short time since Commencement, have married — or plan to do



so soon. Just one week after their graduation, Josephine (Dragoo) and Sean Dillon (both CA'23) returned to the California campus to exchange vows in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel. One week after that, California classmates Elayne (Piquette) and Ian Cochiolo (both CA'23) also tied the knot, followed in short order by the nuptials of Clare (Mangin CA'23) and Bryce Neukam, Esther (Ruehle) and John Benjamin Berry (both CA'23), and Ana Patricia (Cardenas NE'25) and Paul Dinan (NE'23) to round out the month of June. Eight more weddings are planned for the remainder of this year and early next!

Notably, several inter-class couples delayed weddings to ensure that both could fully avail themselves of the College's program of Catholic liberal education. "It makes the most sense," says Thomas Aldredge (NE'23) of fiancée Anna-Mae Hinkle's (NE'24) decision to finish her undergraduate studies before getting married. "She's smarter than I am!" The College's value is clear even to those who have experienced it only indirectly. "My fiancé and I saw that this education was really worthwhile, and that it would benefit us tons," remarks Miss Mangin. "I put off marriage for two-and-a-half years so that I could finish."

## ... and More!

Still others will blaze paths that are uniquely their own: Nick Blewett (CA'23) will join the United States Coast Guard. Sophia Ferri (CA'23) will begin living her lifelong dream of following in Laura Ingalls Wilder's footsteps and becoming a farmer, growing organic vegetables and helping to market microgreens

for a small business in Ojai. "I'm going to carry the intellectual life with me, but I will be living both sides of this whole human experience," she says. Regina Terreri (CA'23) will continue to illustrate children's books, completing assignments which she began last summer. "I think about it as just as meaning-packed as the philosophy readings we do here," she says. "A lot of the ideas that I hold as tenets of my own moral life I learned from children's books."

Wherever in the world their paths will lead, members of the Thomas Aquinas College Class of 2023 will surely heed Mr. Flatley's call to "never forget this place" and take to heart Bishop Conley's farewell blessing: "May the song of truth, goodness, and beauty always be in your hearts, and may the love, joy, and wonder of learning be ever with you." ❖



**IN MEMORIAM**

**Dennis McDaniel**

June 7, 2021  
Benefactor

**Mary Dean Trenda**

December 16, 2022  
Grandmother of Monica ('11),  
Maria (Dumais '11), Elizabeth ('16),  
Thomas ('20), Patrick ('23),  
and Andrew Mazza ('25)

**Gloria Griffin**

April 3, 2023  
Mother of former College Governor Paul

**Bruce Ruedig**

April 14, 2023  
Father of Nick ('08), Allison ('11),  
Caroline ('17), and Peter ('19)

**Margaret Dale**

April 22, 2023  
Mother of Martin ('88) and Michael ('91)

**Phil Ruedig**

April 24, 2023  
Grandfather of Nick ('08), Allison ('11),  
Caroline ('17), and Peter ('19)



*Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.*

**Rev. Terrence Patrick Gerard  
Gordon, F.S.S.P.**

April 28, 2023  
Brother of Melissa (Gordon '91) Steenson

**Joan Therese O'Rourke**

May 17, 2023  
Mother of John O'Rourke ('84)

**John Illo**

May 21, 2023  
Father of former chaplain Rev. Joseph Illo

**Colin Kramer**

April 28, 2023  
Brother of Sean Kramer ('86)

**Dr. Richard Berquist**

May 2, 2023  
Brother of College co-founder Marcus  
and Duane Berquist

**Elisabeth Lucy**  
June 16, 2023  
Friend

# Commencement 2023 Keepsakes!

Order photos and portraits at [thomasaquinas.edu/commencement2023](http://thomasaquinas.edu/commencement2023)



## Because the future needs the wisdom of the past ...



Please contact Paul Blewett, Director of Gift Planning  
[pblewett@thomasaquinas.edu](mailto:pblewett@thomasaquinas.edu) | 805-421-5924

... help shape  
the future  
with a  
legacy gift  
today.



The St. Thérèse of Lisieux  
Legacy Society

### UPCOMING EVENTS

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Convocation..... <b>August 19</b>  |  Lecture: Dr. Sean Kelsey ('92) ..... <b>September 8</b><br>Rev. John A. O'Brien College Professor of Philosophy<br>University of Notre Dame |
|  Convocation..... <b>August 21</b>  |  Opening Concert..... <b>September 15</b><br>Madison String Quartet  |
|  Opening Lecture..... <b>August 25</b><br>Dr. Steven Cain, Senior Tutor   |  Opening Concert..... <b>September 22</b><br>Ilya Yakushev, pianist  |
|  Opening Lecture..... <b>August 25</b><br>Dr. Christopher Oleson, Senior Tutor  |  Alumni & Parent Day ..... <b>September 23</b>   |
|  Lecture: Dr. Kathryn Duda ('03)..... <b>September 8</b><br>Assistant Professor, Russian Studies<br>Mercyhurst University |  Alumni & Parent Day ..... <b>October 7</b>  |

For complete campus calendars, see: [thomasaquinas.edu/events](http://thomasaquinas.edu/events)

For Mass schedules, see: [thomasaquinas.edu/masstimes](http://thomasaquinas.edu/masstimes)



THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

10000 Ojai Road

Santa Paula, CA 93060-9622

[thomasaquinas.edu](http://thomasaquinas.edu) | 800-634-9797

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

