

## Reflections of an Editor

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Little did I know when I joined the Society of Catholic Social Scientists in 1992 that I would wind up the Editor-in-Chief of its journal. In the early days of the Society, I was content to offer counsel in my role as Chaplain and submit memorial tributes for key figures in the life of the Church upon their deaths. Eventually, I submitted other pieces which were published in the *Catholic Social Science Review*. I was teaching, advising seminarians and writing in various venues when, it seemed like out of the blue, I was asked by Dr. Stephen Krason to assume the position of Editor-in-Chief more than three years ago. I accepted—mostly because I had been formed in the seminary to serve. That is what priests do in their ministries; they serve where they are assigned. Except, it should be acknowledged, that being an Editor is not an assignment requiring obedience as it would be for a diocesan priest who at his ordination promises that way of living to his bishop. Looking back now, I am glad I said “Yes” because editing is akin to exercising a priestly ministry.

A way that editing is like a priestly ministry is that both callings involve counsel. The counsel I have in mind is that which is offered to others to be better at something. Priests do this, for example, when they hear confessions. They offer penitents direction about how to avoid sin in the future, about how to live virtuously, about how to grow in holiness. In like manner, editors give counsel. To authors who submit articles and other works for publication, editors make suggestions about how to improve texts. Whether it is in the priestly ministry or in editing, both exercises require striving after a goal. And whether it is the goal of sanctity or communication, the pursuit is indeed a fine art. It is partly detail and partly big picture in the priesthood and in editing. How is one life, one article a true expression of, in the first place, union with Christ and, in the second instance, an acceptable statement of what we can know? On our own, we do not always attain better or best expressions. We need someone else who is daring enough to point out imperfections (and more) and challenge us to a greater degree of likeness to Christ. At the same time, we need someone bold enough to say that a second draft with corrections is in order. Why, however, must we conceive of this work occurring along two distinct but parallel lines, as if the effort can only be carried out by two different persons? Sometimes the work can be done, confidently but humbly, by one who is a priest-editor.

The Church has had her share of “hyphenated” priests in recent memory. Much of that did not work out too well—not for the priest himself and not for the Church. Yet, in another correlative juxtaposition, just like the first one I cited above, the priestly ministry and editing are analogous in that both involve mediation.

The priestly ministry—all of it—is a mediation. Priests are, in essence, go-betweens. Their ministries are right at the intersection of God and the people who look for Him and find Him in and through one like themselves but different too. Editing is a kind of mediation. The editor is a go-between for the author and the reading public. The editor, if he or she does the job well, connects two parties by the written word. The editor, in a sense, makes it possible for writer and reader who occupy different spaces to be in a conversation together. Mediation in its priestly aspect ends in transcendence and contact with the divine. Mediation in its editing aspect is elevational too. Through the right use of words and being attentive to the structures inherent in language, the editor helps the reader to make his or her way from one world to another world. The word in print is artful insofar as there is an ennoblement of spirit (for writer and reader). For in both endeavors, writing and reading, there is an irreducible teleology at stake.

So, there you have it. A few reflections on being a priest and being an editor from the current Editor-in-Chief of this journal as it turns twenty-five years old. Long live the *Catholic Social Science Review*!