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RRR192Editorial

The first article in this Issue, by Silvianna Aspray, considers prayers as not only contingent historical sources, but also as a unique and elusive genre. In mind are prayers outside the familiar contexts of recorded church liturgies and private devotions, about both of which a lot is already known. To be sure, the extent of the survival in written form of prayers outside those contexts is not obvious; no multi-volume anthologies or heaps of archive manuscripts spring to mind. Yet irrespective of the context, the article reminds us that surviving sixteenth-century prayers, unlike sermons, do not conventionally enjoy much status as historical sources, as a distinctive religious and spiritual medium, and as a conveyer of insight beyond doctrinal assertions and propositions on the one hand, and pious sentiment on the other. The focus in this article is on the prayers of Peter Martyr Vermigli, particularly those said at college lectures, subsequently published and widely disseminated in a variety of vernacular languages. Aspray illustrates fully this situation, correcting some apparent misconceptions. More than that, she offers a kind of hermeneutical analysis of Vermigli's content. To this end she avails of the phenomenological approach to prayer by contemporary French thinkers such as Jean-Louis Chrétien; he sees true prayer as being beyond the parameters of rational articulation, normal experience and evidence. Accordingly, Vermigli's prayers are understood ultimately as an example of divine-human dialogue, or rather, human response to divine prompting – similar to the Psalms.

After this comes an illuminating study by Simon Burton on Johan Comenius (Jan Komensky), the highly influential Moravian bishop, Protestant irenicist, ecumenical visionary, cosmopolitan religious and cultural thinker in the seventeenth century. His vision was of one Christian world of concord and harmony in the form of a supervised body of diverse but united nations grounded in Trinitarian and Christocentric principles as well as availing of a new universal language. A Czech scholar recently asserted (to me) that there is nothing much more to say about Comenius. But this article, developing a line suggested by a previous Comenius interpreter, attempts to demonstrate more fully that it is reductionist to portray Comenius largely in terms of post-Reformation progressive, early Enlightenment, increasingly globalizing and unitive thought vis-à-vis negative confessionalism and an accelerating diversity in all spheres of life heading for disintegration and self-destruction. Rather, many of the key stimuli for Comenius's creative thinking originate in the re-priming of both early Christian Neoplatonism (as in Augustine in particular), and the late-medieval revival of Neoplatonism (most notably, in Nicholas of Cusa). Burton delineates

Comenius's world-reform concepts and strivings within a Neoplatonic continuity propelled by unity in diversity, concordance of differences, a teleological *coincidentia oppositorum* and so on.

Continuing on the theme of Renaissance Neoplatonism is an article by Hyun-Ah Kim, noted in her various writings for efforts to secure a hearing for the essential voices of theology and philosophy in religious musicological studies. This time the particular subject is the function of music (especially when combined with speech) in restoring unity and harmony between body and soul in disordered individuals and groups. She highlights the thinking on the matter by Marsilio Ficino, the 'icon of Renaissance Platonism' – but also in the context of his Classical predecessors as well as other contemporary writers on the topic. Of possible interest to some academic readers are Ficino's ideas of elevating music as a remedy for the depression or melancholy characteristic of many intellectuals due to mental exhaustion occasioned by excessive studying and thinking. Kim's article spells out Ficino's concept of how internal harmony and integration of body, mind and soul, induced by appropriate music, also reinstates divine-human harmony and religious stability. Looking forward, she also hints that developments in sixteenth-century metrical psalmody owe much (largely unacknowledged) to Neoplatonist restorative notions.

Amy Tan's case study of the well-documented demonic possession of a particular devout Christian in early-seventeenth-century England proceeds with reference to many other analogous instances. It was sometimes associated with malign witchcraft activities and so a case for the law courts. This is about phenomena which the Reformation evidently did not terminate: perceived Devil or evil-spirit possession of individuals with all its dramatically abnormal symptoms, and the various remedies undertaken to release victims from what was seen mostly as a religious problem. Tan clarifies semantic and procedural issues. 'Exorcism' refers to the Catholic practice of a priest interrogating and commanding devils or the Devil in the name of Christ. The Protestant and more specifically, the puritan vocabulary spoke of 'dispossession' remedies, chiefly prayer and fasting, since God alone ejects spirits. Moreover, the Church of England ban (1604) on clergy participating in such activities only opened the door to not only enhanced lay assistance at such distressing incidents, but also to increasing heroic 'resistance' by individuals affected, legitimated by James 4:7's *Resist the devil and he will fly from you*. The author also refers to the religious politics sometimes involved in the happy resolution of such cases: successful dispossession practices in religiously contentious England became linked to claims of divine endorsement ratifying the true faith and strengthening doctrinal credibility.