The year 2007 seems to have rushed by in a flash, yet it was also our busiest and most productive year to date. Ambitious as our plans may have been, the most significant happenings of 2007 were not planned in the sense that they came as unexpected gifts. Above all, we received the unique privilege of being able to spend private time with Pope Benedict XVI. This and other key events deserve their own retelling, so please see the individual stories that make up the rest of this issue.

But in every respect, 2007 was eventful. To begin with, we were proud to be able to release our flagship publications. February saw the arrival of a new edition of von Hildebrand’s classic book, *The Heart*, and March saw the coming of *The Dietrich von Hildebrand LifeGuide*, the first ever English language anthology of his writings. The latter owes its existence to Jules van Schaijik, a member of our Advisory Council and recent founder of the Personalist Project, who generously contributed his time as editor of the *LifeGuide*.

Many of you have been eagerly awaiting the arrival of our translation of *The Nature of Love*. We thank you for your patience which, we hope, will soon pay off. Suffice it to say that we have learned the hard way how time-consuming it is to make a good translation, particularly for a German volume running over 400 pages. The same is true for our translation of the wartime memoirs of von Hildebrand as well as of his anti-Nazi essays from the 1930s.

Here again, we in many ways underestimated the time required for getting not just an adequate but truly sparkling rendition of the original German. Our experiences have taught us the importance of gathering together a team of world-class translators to aid us in this work, and we are very pleased to announce that we now have three new translators actively at work, and several others waiting in the wings. We now expect *The Nature of Love* to be available in the fall of 2008, while the wartime essays will probably appear in the spring of 2009.

Many of you will recall that in March of 2007 Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna, joined the Hildebrand Project as an Honorary Member. Naturally, we were overjoyed by his willingness to endorse our work, never realizing how significant and vital his support would become. In September of 2007, I was able to speak with the Cardinal over a lengthy breakfast in Vienna. Our conversation left a strong impression on me, for,
as I have since remarked, the Cardinal gave me far greater attention than have many others of far lesser stature. Over the past several months, I have repeatedly had the privilege of collaborating with Cardinal Schönborn, something I very much hope to continue in the months and years to come.

Beginning in 2006 and then in 2007, I was on several occasions the recipient of the gracious attention and support of Archbishop Raymond L. Burke of Saint Louis, Missouri. Archbishop Burke played a key role in our audience with Pope Benedict, yet beyond this he has in countless different ways supported the Hildebrand Project. Our collaboration reached a special culmination when in May of 2007 Archbishop Burke joined our Advisory Council. It is difficult for me to express the extent of my esteem and personal regard for Archbishop Burke.

2007 was a year of several major events. In May, I was able to address the first meeting of a newly formed Legatus Chapter in Irvine, California. September saw me traveling to Seattle with Alice von Hildebrand where we had the opportunity to address several audiences, including the Seattle Legatus Chapter. In October, we hosted our first international conference on the philosophical legacy of von Hildebrand (see the feature article). December saw a reception in honor of Alice von Hildebrand hosted in Wilmington, Delaware by our friends at the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities.

Finally, 2007 marked the first year during which the Hildebrand Project received serious media coverage. Naturally, our audience with Pope Benedict led to several articles, including a story in the Times of London, as well as several stories published by Zenit, the daily news service from the Vatican.

As I write this year-in-review, it is already April of 2008, which promises to be a very fruitful year, not only with several of our multi-year projects finally reaching completion, but also with the commencement of several major new ventures. The next issue of Transformation will be devoted to the launch of a major, multi-year initiative devoted von Hildebrand’s writings on art and beauty. 2008 also marks the implementation of a four-year strategic plan to translate all the remaining major German works of von Hildebrand with the help of our team of translators, while hosting annual conferences on major themes connected to von Hildebrand. The conference, tentatively slated for 2009, will be on philosophies of love, with the then newly published The Nature of Love as the central text for consideration. Future issues of our newsletter promise to include profiles of our donors, both individuals and foundations, as well as more remembrances of the master by those who had known him.

An Unforgettable Encounter:
Our Private Audience with Pope Benedict XVI

Had nothing happened in 2007 other than what took place on Monday, March 26, it would arguably have been a great year. This was the day on which Alice von Hildebrand, Patricia Lynch (a dear friend and trustee of the Legacy Project), and I had the extraordinary opportunity of meeting privately with Pope Benedict XVI to discuss with the work of the Hildebrand Project.

I should perhaps share a little of the history that led up to this meeting. In the spring 2006 issue of Transformation, I recounted my brief conversation with Pope Benedict at an outdoor Wednesday audience in Rome. Having asked about the well-being of Alice von Hildebrand, the Holy Father remarked of her, “Eine edle Frau!—what a noble lady!” I shared this with Alice—or Lily, as she is known to her...
friends—and that got the wheels turning: “Would the Holy Father grant us the privilege of a private audience?” So we set about sending a request for an audience, in which we received the gracious help of Archbishop Burke. Hopeful as I was of an affirmative answer, all of us were surprised and delighted when the eagerly awaited letter arrived: the audience had been granted and various dates were already being proposed.

Because the audience presented the unexpected opportunity of being in Europe, Lily decided to spend a week in Switzerland with one of her closest friends. It was decided that she would be accompanied by a dear friend of ours, not to mention one of the most generous contributors to the Hildebrand Project, Mrs. Patricia (Pat) Lynch. I was to join them a week later in Lugano, near Milan, from where we went to Florence, where Lily wanted once more to see the beautiful home in which Dietrich had grown up, known as San Francesco. After several days in Florence, where we were graciously welcomed by Starr Brewster, a great-grandnephew of Dietrich, we went to Rome in preparation for our audience with Pope Benedict XVI.

Call it the devil, call it bad luck, but our trip was plagued by a series of difficulties—many of which appear to have begun with my arrival. Within an hour of being picked up by Pat and Lily, I managed to lose a wallet belonging to Pat. And since she did not recall how much it contained, we naturally feared that it contained a substantial sum. Thank God, the wallet later turned up and it contained just a fraction of what we had feared. On another occasion, I managed to leave my own wallet at an Internet cafe in Rome. Upon realizing this I sped back fearing that it would long be gone. In fact it was, and in desperation I began looking for phone numbers to discontinue all of my credit cards. I offered the manager on duty some money for information about my missing wallet, which led to an operatic melodrama of wounded pride. Then, as I was about to call my first card, he sidled over to me with my wallet in hand saying, “Does it look like this?” I could hardly contain my relief and this time around he accepted my very insistant tip. Thereafter my visits to the Internet were very well received.

Little mishaps and difficulties continued to plague our journey, culminating in an urgent message left on my American cell phone by a priest in the Casa Pontificia, the Papal Household. I was to call him immediately, yet by the time I got the message it was Friday afternoon, and our audience was on Monday. This meant that we—or I, rather—were in for a long weekend of worry. I spent Friday evening and Saturday morning trying to reach the good priest. On Saturday afternoon, we happened to be at a reception at the North American College when my cell phone rang as I was soothing my nerves with a Campari and soda. It was the priest from the Papal Household, though his request was anticlimactic: would we be so kind as to provide an address in Rome where we could receive the “formal invitation” for our audience?

The devil was in quite a few other details, but let these few details suffice for now. Perhaps I will someday be induced to reveal them in a memoir which, even at my present tender age, could run to considerable lengths.

But in all seriousness: the trip, wonderful as it was, came with a surprising amount of difficulty. The night before the audience, I suffered some very unnerving nightmares, leaving me rattled as I awoke in the morning. After passing through “security” at St. Peter’s Basilica—which was really more of a traffic jam—we passed through the Bronze Door to enter the Apostolic Palace. From there, we went up the Royal Stairs, ascending several flights to reach the Papal Apartments. Upon arriving, we were greeted by a face familiar to me from my childhood and teenage years when my family had been privileged to attend mass with Pope John Paul II. It was the master of

Left to Right: 1. View into the garden through the main gate at San Francesco. 2. The central corridor in San Francesco. 3. Lily providing a much needed massage for Pat. 4. Lily and Pat in the room where von Hildebrand was born. 5. Lily and her grand nephew, Starr Brewster, descending the path from the “Paritato,” the hilltop on the property of San Francesco from which all of Florence can be seen. 6. Lily in the room of von Hildebrand’s birth. The portrait and fresco in the background are by von Hildebrand’s father Adolf.

An Unforgettable Encounter

Year in Review 2007
ceremonies who informed us that his “list” only indicated one person for the audience, whereas we had clearly indicated three. “I will take care of it,” he announced, yet he could not spare us a brief yet anxious period while he consulted with his higher-ups. We were brought to a sitting room covered in magnificent Renaissance frescos and told to wait. Finally, the master of ceremonies—or was it someone else?—came to give us the good news: all three of us were expected and all three of us could see the Holy Father.

Two groups were ahead of us, ultimately causing us to wait for at least an hour. Lily and Pat, more pious than me, began reciting a rosary while I prayed in decades of silent pacing. I kept telling myself that the Holy Father had an “obligation to be charitable.”

Then it was our turn. I think Msgr. Georg Gänswein, personal secretary to the Holy Father, greeted us just before we went in, but perhaps it was Archbishop James Harvey, the Prefect of the Papal Household. The door swung open and there stood the Holy Father to welcome us. Lily bent to kiss his ring, as did Pat and I. From the very first moment, there was a warmth and a spirit of friendship between Lily and the Holy Father as can only exude between Christian friends. The conversation began initially in German, and I seem to remember Lily saying to the Holy Father (or was she jesting?), “Your Holiness, I am older than you,” to which he said with a smile on his face, “Yes, I know.” After taking a group photo, the room was cleared, leaving just Lily and me with the Holy Father.

I will never forget the next fifteen minutes, though I no longer recall all that was said. Though the audience remains firmly etched in my mind, with certain aspects still clear as yesterday, somehow the overall memory remains with me as if it were a dream. We began the conversation in German, then shifted to English, a mercy for me, since I knew I could speak more expressively in English than in German. The very first thing I did was to give the Holy Father copies of the *Dietrich von Hildebrand LifeGuide* and of *The Heart*, both of which had just been published. Taking *The Heart*, the Holy Father remarked, “Ah, the young people will like this.” This was also my opportunity to thank the Holy Father for his financial support through the Papal Foundation, which had been so critical for our early success.

Lily too spoke about various themes. In fact, she arrived with a full agenda. At one point, she asked the Holy Father to write a new encyclical on Christian philosophy with a special focus on encouraging the study of philosophers, such as her husband, who were not primarily disciples of St. Thomas Aquinas. The Holy Father’s response was very interesting,
considering that his intellectual roots are not Thomistic but in St. Augustine and in St. Bonaventure. Referring to the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), in which Pope Leo XIII had strongly encouraged the study of St. Thomas, Pope Benedict remarked, “it [the encyclical] was absolutely necessary at the time.” Various other topics came up, some of them quite sensitive in nature. I remember being surprised at how candid the Holy Father was in his remarks.

Aside from thanking the Holy Father and presenting him with our first publications, I wanted to discuss various matters concerning the future of the Legacy Project. I had a particular request for him, which I asked for along the following lines. I said, “Dear Holy Father, we have been blessed by many friends and supporters, and many have certainly been impressed to know of your involvement in our work. Yet, I think there would be even greater interest, allowing our work to flourish even more, if they were to feel a concrete collaboration with you. Would you be willing to write for me a personal letter, expressing not only your support of our work but also explaining in just a few lines, the reason for your support?” And without any hesitation, he replied, “I would be happy to. Send me a letter.”

Well, send him a letter I did, and, one can only imagine my surprise when just a month later a certified packet arrived from the Papal Nunciature in Washington, DC. I knew what it contained the moment I saw its address of origin. My hands were shaking and I was so beside myself with excitement that I had to ask a friend to open the packet and read it to me. What I received in every respect exceeded what I had hoped for, and so it is with joy and an ongoing sense of indebtedness to the Holy Father that I share his letter with you in this issue of *Transformation*.

But let me return to the audience with Pope Benedict. It was now time for us to go. As we were getting up, Lily dropped one of her gloves onto the floor. Quick as a flash, Pope Benedict stooped to pick it up. He did it so naturally that it clearly did not cross his mind to do otherwise. We began walking toward the door, Lily holding the hand of the Holy Father. “You have no idea what a joy it is to see you,” she said. And twice, “Now I can truly say my *nunc dimittis*,” referring to the words of Simeon in the Temple, “now dismiss your servant according to your word in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

It must have been after noon. Various members of the Holy Father’s staff appeared in the room. I remember Archbishop Harvey standing behind the Holy Father, and I am certain that Msgr. Gänswein had come in. Others were present as well. Then came the most memorable moment of all. We stood there, Lily holding the hand of the Holy Father, with members of the papal household looking on. She could not let go. She was overjoyed. “If I could sing all of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, it would not suffice to express my joy,” she said. There was peace and serenity in the room, and joy and expectancy. I realized then that she saw with the eyes of faith, and in this her vision was transformed. The man she saw was not just the former Joseph Ratzinger, whom she had known over many years; rather, she saw the one whom, in faith, she understood to be Christ’s representative on earth. It was a revelatory moment, a moment of grace, and I think that everyone in the room saw the Holy Father as she did. I thought
To Mr. John Henry Crosby

Following my recent meeting with you and Mrs. Alice von Hildebrand, I wish to express my appreciation for the efforts of the Dietrich von Hildebrand Legacy Project to promote greater knowledge of and esteem for Professor von Hildebrand’s distinctive contribution to Christian philosophical thought.

Drawing inspiration from the Augustinian tradition and its Thomistic reception in the light of Aristotelian philosophy, von Hildebrand sought to advance that tradition by creatively reinterpreting it in the context of modern thought and its concerns. He was far from a “petrified” vision of the teaching of Thomas, based on a narrow and uncritical devotion to the “words of the Master”, and could well make his own the classic dictum: Amicus mihi Thomas, magis amica veritas!

It is this “legacy” which has motivated your Project. Grounded in the rich philosophical movement which stretches from the Presocratics through Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, to Augustine, Thomas and the great thinkers of the modern age, and taking up the challenge set forth in the Encyclical Fides et Ratio, the Dietrich von Hildebrand Legacy Project aims to enter into reasoned dialogue with contemporary currents of philosophy, bringing the full scope of reason to bear on fundamental human questions and contributing to the recovery of the sapiential dimension inherent in the philosophia perennis.

Without such a commitment to the philosophical enterprise, Christian faith would fall prey to a “fideism” which would deprive it of its grandeur as
man’s free submission of intellect and will to the splendor of God’s truth, and
gravely compromise its missionary dynamism, whereby believers are called to
offer to all a reasoned account of the hope that is within them (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).
I therefore express my appreciation and support for the work of the Dietrich
von Hildebrand Project, and my confidence that this praiseworthy initiative
will bear abundant fruit for the evangelization of contemporary culture.

To all associated with the work of the Project I willingly impart my
Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of wisdom, strength and peace in the Lord.

From the Vatican 30 May 2007

[Signature]
On October 12th and 13th of 2007 the Legacy Project hosted its first major academic conference in collaboration with the M.A. Program in Philosophy at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio. As the leading American center of von Hildebrand studies, there could have been no more natural institution to collaborate with the Legacy Project. Already from the outset, I must begin by giving special acknowledgement to Prof. Mark Roberts, Director of the M.A. Program in Philosophy, since I was undoubtedly the beneficiary of his extensive experience in organizing academic conferences. Our first foray into this area would never have been so successful had it not been for Prof. Roberts’ generous contribution of time and his keen and perceptive eye during the days of the conference itself.

In this context I would also like to thank Dr. Max Bonilla, Vice President for Academic Affairs, for his ongoing encouragement throughout. Dr. Bonilla offered an eloquent welcome on the night of our first keynote address, which can viewed on our website at www.hildebrandlegacy.org/conference.

A special debt of gratitude is also due my father, Prof. John F. Crosby, founder of the M.A. Program and one of the leading students of von Hildebrand today; he played a key role in designing the mission and objectives of the conference.

2007 marked the 30th anniversary of von Hildebrand’s death (January 26, 1977), and so we had for some time been intending to honor his memory through a major academic gathering. From the experience of this conference, we at the Legacy Project have a new appreciation for the way in which public events, especially conferences and symposia, can lead people to a deeper and more receptive consideration of von Hildebrand’s contributions. In the future, we also hope to sponsor conferences on specific themes—such as the philosophy of love or natural law theory—so as to encourage our contemporaries who have made important contributions on the basis of other philosophical traditions, notably the Thomistic tradition, to engage from their point of view the seminal ideas of von Hildebrand in these areas.

In organizing our conference, we went to great trouble to extend a special welcome to those who did not already have an expertise in the thought of von Hildebrand. We wanted to draw people for whom von Hildebrand was perhaps a new interest and to give them an environment in which to enter more deeply into his rich philosophical legacy. Of course, already in planning the conference, we knew that most of the living students of von Hildebrand would attend, and as it turned out, seven former students of von Hildebrand ultimately attended with at least as many second generation students present as well. Among the direct students of von Hildebrand, we were able to welcome Prof. John F. Crosby of Franciscan University, Prof. Stephen D. Schwarz and Prof. Fritz Wenisch, both
of the University of Rhode Island, Prof. Damian P. Fedoryka of the Center for Personalistic Anthropology, Mrs. Madeleine F. Stebbins, and Josef Seifert, of the International Academy of Philosophy (based in Liechtenstein and Chile). Above all, it was our special joy to have in our midst Alice von Hildebrand, the widow of Dietrich von Hildebrand, who has devoted her entire life to the spread of her husband’s thought. The presence of these “von Hildebrand scholars” in turn provided a rare opportunity for those new to his thought to learn from those who had spent a lifetime in dialogue with his work. All told, the conference featured twenty-eight talks, two panel discussions, three keynote speeches and a final dinner address by Alice von Hildebrand. Our participation was three times what we had expected, with nearly 150 participants, including a number of faculty and students from Franciscan University. We were privileged to have a truly international group, with attendees coming from as far away as Australia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ukraine, Poland, and Austria.

Two of the three keynote speeches were given by eminent philosophers from outside of the von Hildebrand orbit—Prof. Kenneth L. Schmitz, emeritus of the University of Toronto, and Prof. Louis Dupré, of Yale University. Both presentations, each in its own way, achieved what we were hoping for, namely an engagement of von Hildebrand’s thought by accomplished philosophers from different intellectual traditions. Both men offered assessments of von Hildebrand’s contributions, and it was remarkable to see how two scholars in the golden years of their career still showed such a lively interest in ideas that in some respects were new to them.

The third and final keynote address was given by Prof. Josef Seifert on the interesting and important theme of the “future development within the thought of Dietrich von Hildebrand.” Prof. Seifert is the most eminent of the “von Hildebrandian’s,” having devoted his career to the promotion and development of his teacher’s contributions. He is also a noted philosopher in his own right, particularly with his many writings in the area of metaphysics, the body-soul problem, and issues of bioethics.

Over the two days of the conference, there were numerous memorable moments. The first came on the evening of the keynote address that was given by Prof. Kenneth L. Schmitz. Before introducing Prof. Schmitz, I took a few moments to address the audience in my capacity as director of the Legacy Project and primary organizer of the conference. My whole presentation centered on the special interest of Pope Benedict in the Legacy Project, for I was planning to read aloud his personal letter of support. As I spoke to the assembled listeners and as I recounted, first, the history of the Holy Father’s relationship to the Legacy Project and then, finally, as I read his letter for all to hear, I was struck by the enthusiasm and spontaneous joy which had brought this audience together. Moments

“Very little in contemporary philosophy is actually new. In the thought of von Hildebrand, however, I have the sense of something really new. Indeed, it seems to me that the entire history of thought takes a step forward.”

1. Damien Fedoryka and Stephen Schwarz 2. Maria and Michael Healy (professor of philosophy, past Academic Dean at Franciscan University); Robert Wood (University of Dallas) 3. Douglas Geivett (Talbot School of Theology, Biola University); Talbot graduate Alex Plato; Steven Ferguson (Senior Fellow at Fieldstead and Company, Irvine, CA) 4. Elizabeth Salas; Ana Krohn (JPII Institute, Melbourne, Australia); Philip Blosser and Victor Salas (Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, MI) 5. (In the background) Fr. Alfred Wierbicki (Catholic University, Lublin, Poland); Keynote Josef Seifert; Balasz Mezei (Loyola College, Baltimore)

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like this make all of the difficulties and challenges of the Legacy Project fade away.

Another moment came during the final panel discussion when a Monsignor in attendance enthusiastically arose and announced that he was donating $25,000 of his own money for a conference to introduce seminarians to the thought of von Hildebrand. I was flabbergasted. Again, I marveled that the message of von Hildebrand could be so contagious that it could motivate such spontaneous acts of generosity.

For many, the highlight of the conference was the address given by Alice von Hildebrand at the final banquet with which the conference came to a fitting and festive end. Over the past two days, conference attendees had been enriched in mind and heart. Now they were to have the chance to hear from the person who in a unique way incarnates the spirit of von Hildebrand. For if he had the “soul of a lion,” then doubtless she has the “soul of a lioness.” The bishop of Steubenville, the Most Reverend Daniel P. Conlon, had come to lead us in grace, and we were privileged to have as our master of ceremonies Fr. Michael Scanlan, T.O.R., the past President and current Chancellor of Franciscan University. As no one else, Fr. Michael embodies the spiritual and intellectual renewal that swept through Franciscan University when in 1974 he became president of an institution in serious moral and financial trouble.

We are presently preparing the proceedings of the conference for eventual publication. They will in any case be available on our website to allow interested readers from around the world to access them. We managed to record the plenary sessions as well as a few other sessions, which we hope soon to make available on CD and our website.

To see program and proceedings of our conference, please visit later in the year www.hildebrandlegacy.org/conference.

In the end, the best assessments of the conference surely came to expression in the many emails and messages we received in the days just after it ended. Michael Latzer, chair of philosophy at Gannon University, had this to say. “I wanted to commend you on such an outstanding job of organizing and running a first-rate conference. I had a wonderful time—the speakers were excellent, the hospitality gracious, and Mrs. von Hildebrand’s talk at the banquet was truly memorable. I am inspired to incorporate von Hildebrand’s work ever more in my own courses.” An especially satisfying reaction came from Greg Sadler of Ball State University who wrote: “One of the best conferences I’ve attended in recent years…. [T]his was a conference where the promises of Catholic intellectual life were fulfilled.”

But the non plus ultra of compliments came from Prof. Kenneth Schmitz during a conversation I subsequently had with him. I knew that Prof. Schmitz had always had a profound esteem for von Hildebrand; in fact, he was one of the earliest members of our Advisory Council. Yet in preparing for his speech at our conference, Prof. Schmitz’s esteem for von Hildebrand reached a new level. If I may paraphrase his remark to me, “Very little in contemporary philosophy is actually new. In the thought of von Hildebrand, however, I have the sense of something really new. Indeed, it seems to me that the entire history of thought takes a step forward.”

That our conference could have deepened this conviction in someone of Prof. Schmitz’s stature gives me great hope of what the von Hildebrandian message will mean for the many who have yet to encounter it.
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