In the Tabula Gratulatoria in Niemeyer's Festschrift Gregory Wolfe quite aptly applied to Niemeyer the words that Chaucer wrote about the clerk: "And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche." Niemeyer, whom I, along with many others, found a consummate teacher, when not teaching was an incessant learner, a quality that he also greatly appreciated in others. He was a man who could never stop learning as long as he lived. At an age when most people think of retirement he was writing prolifically, teaching full-time, and taking up a new musical instrument, and later, in his early 1970s, was ordained an Episcopal priest. In his late 1980s, near the end of his life he was studying Italian in order to read Dante in the original.

Niemeyer's published work, over a span of sixty years, channeled the abundant vitality of his constant reading, reflection, and intellectual growth within the strictures of rigorous analytical reasoning, and is far too rich to be adequately treated in a Symposium such as this. In the following essays the contributors have aimed simply at highlighting the development of particular themes in Niemeyer's writings, which is somewhat like tracing a few themes through an immensely complex fugue.

The fugue metaphor is one (inadequate) attempt to convey the growing complexity of Niemeyer's thinking, but it has to be understood as a fugue in which Niemeyer introduced and elaborated a number of new themes, while sustaining and playing variations on the earlier ones until, in his late works, he mastered a dense thematic texture that tightly interwove all of the numerous aspects of political analysis upon which he had meditated. Niemeyer's thinking evolved
through a number of stages and was constantly enriched and deepened by his assiduous search for truth, a search that for him was no mere intellectual exercise but was an urgent spiritual need as well as what he felt was a personal responsibility. His intellectual center of gravity remained the political, but its scope steadily grew and expanded beyond his initial work in international law, which he soon realized was inadequate for the mastery of the problems of his, and our, time. So he undertook a thorough study first of Communism and other ideologies, then of the philosophical and religious roots of the Western tradition. In the early 1940s he converted to a Christian faith that became increasingly contemplative, and in 1947 he met Eric Voegelin, whose work played, over the next four decades, a significant role in Niemeyer's own thinking (which is not to say that Niemeyer was always uncritical of Voegelin). He also learned a great deal about art, music, and literature, studied, and taught, the Asian religious traditions, and became quite familiar with the writings of Soviet "dissidents," particularly Solzhenitsyn. His late writings are steeped in the Christian faith that he eventually came to regard as the only adequate vantage point from which to understand what has happened in Western civilization. And always, always, his "clearmindedness . . . shone like a brilliant gem in the midst of the world's murkiness." 2

The five contributors all have the benefit of having known Niemeyer personally, in most cases for many years, and this direct knowledge of Niemeyer the man has guided our interpretation of his intellectual work. He was in the mold of the Aristotelian spoudaios, the good and serious man, and he was a man of awesome intellectual accomplishment in which, one sensed, there was no investment of ego. His posture was deference and humility, a contemplative waiting and listening in silence, a search that was a receptive openness to truth. He was the sort of thinker for whom thinking and being are complementary. Indeed, his ideas and beliefs are all deeply rooted in his character. His writings give us, not abstract speculation, but who he was in all his concrete, unique identity, both in the vigorous commitment to seek and uphold truth with all the (considerable) powers at his command and in the receptive, self-
effacing way in which he went about this.

Many of his students sought and found in him, not just a mentor, but a father who entered with them into a profoundly loving, mutually loyal spiritual and intellectual fellowship based on a shared love of the Good. The essays in this Symposium were written to convey, not simply Niemeyer’s ideas but also something of Niemeyer the man, for, as Gregory Wolfe also wrote, “an encounter with Gerhart Niemeyer is not merely a mental experience, but one which affects the whole person.” The hope of the authors of these essays is that readers already familiar with Niemeyer will come to know him a little more, and those not so familiar with be led to such a transforming encounter.

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NOTES
2. This is one of Bruce Fingerhut’s comments in the Festschrift, 303.
3. Ibid., 304.