2. *Buddhist Offerings*
At one point in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the repentant Stephen Dedalus “prays” by reciting a paragraph of Newman. He shows admirable resourcefulness in having learnt by heart a text that touches his heart and that he can recite from the heart. For busy modern people, hanging on by the skin of their teeth to some semblance of a spiritual life, to have learnt by heart a number of such texts is a precious resource—be they psalms, hymns, the *Memorare*, the *Suscipe*, the *Veni Creator*, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, or excerpts from spiritual classics. Words lodged in the mind, so that they become part of the very texture of the mind, have a latent virtue ready for deployment in the moment of need; they shed their gracious perfume when one turns them over in rumination, and on occasion they may spark a dazzling epiphany. Religion cannot flourish without a rich stock of such words.

A text that many Buddhists know by heart is the Heart Sūtra. As a concentrated summary of the doctrine of Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) that is the distinctive foundational teaching of Mahāyāna [Greater Vehicle] Buddhism, this short text—only 280 or so syllables in the widely used Chinese translation from the original Sanskrit—is a package of spiritual and intellectual dynamite. The title refers to the hṛdaya—“heart” or “essence”—of Perfect Wisdom. The sūtra distills the essence of its predecessors, the Prajñāpāramitā [*Perfection of Wisdom*] Sūtras in eight thousand, twenty-five thousand, and one hundred thousand lines. It lends itself to analytical unpacking, and has been a favorite

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1 The spiritual and pastoral crisis of Catholicism has to do with the paucity of such resources, as seen in the lack of memorable scriptural translations, the failure to provide the faithful with a Prayer Book, and above all the sawdust of committee-generated liturgical language, such as the new ICEL texts soon to be imposed on a disempowered Church.

2 “According to Indian psychology, the heart is where the consciousnesses that pervade the body gather. In the same way, all of the meanings of the vast, intermediate, and brief mother sūtras are gathered in this small sūtra” (Lopez 30).