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As *Logos* approaches its tenth year of publication it is helpful to reflect on the meaning of our enterprise: What is an interdisciplinary journal of Catholic thought and culture? What coherence ought we to seek among inquiries addressed to a wide variety of academic disciplines and cultural components? What kind of ongoing intellectual inquiry ought to emerge from the recurrent explorations of a journal that has persisted down its path every three months for nine years with the intention of renewing its efforts indefinitely into the future? Every aspect of our mission poses a challenge: How can we be interdisciplinary without becoming merely eclectic? How can we respond to the challenges of the day (as the etymological sense of the word “journal” suggests we ought to do) without being merely of the day? How can we be true to a Catholic vision of life without being sectarian? How can we discover the continuity of thought across the discontinuities of language and modes of inquiry that mark the separate academic disciplines? How can we open ourselves to the richness of cultural diversity without falling into cultural relativism?

The short answer to these questions—an answer that requires thoughtful development—is that we can achieve what is good in
our mission and avoid reductionist deficiencies by living up to what we experience as our calling as a Catholic journal of thought and culture. The coherence among disparate academic disciplines is to be discovered from within the unity of a Catholic vision of life. Addressing the questions and needs of the day must reflect the emergence of fresh aspects of the fullness of truth. The claims to universality (catholicity) of the Catholic tradition must be manifested. The unity of the created order must be seen as the source of the complementarity of different modes of inquiry. The symphonic nature of cultural diversity must be seen as emerging through diverse cultural forms.

Clearly we are demanding much guidance from the Catholic intellectual and cultural tradition. Can Catholic tradition live up to such high demands? Each issue of this journal attempts to show that such expectations can indeed be met, but providing a theoretical response to such a challenge would obviously require a scope that far exceeds the capacity of this or any journal. Nevertheless, we find a concise and profound demonstration of such qualities of unity and continuity in one of the most famous and significant strands of Catholic intellectual tradition—Thomism—in a new book by Romanus Cessario, OP, *A Short History of Thomism*. While explicitly eschewing any claim that Thomism is the “only approved theology recognized by the Christian Church” (34), Cessario demonstrates the continuing vitality of Thomism, its capacity to address new theological questions that emerge in changing historical and cultural circumstances, and its capacity to address the variety of concerns that stand at the heart of diverse academic disciplines. Although this journal is not dedicated exclusively to exploring the many dimensions of Thomistic theology—other journals fulfill that need admirably, as noted by Cessario when he praises the inception of the English edition of the international theological journal *Nova et Vetera* (to take but one example)—the concrete demonstration of the continuity and vitality of Thomism exemplifies the unity in the midst of ongoing development in Catholicism as a whole.
Cessario faces up to the charge that Thomism reached a point of exhaustion and is significant today only as a matter of intellectual history—a charge not unlike those made by various cultural critics over the last 150 years concerning Christianity as a whole. It would be a typical modern attitude to regard any tradition with roots in the Middle Ages and earlier as necessarily outmoded, rendered obsolete by the dialectic of history and significant only to the extent that it might have provided the context and preceding stage for contemporary forms of thought. Cessario shows that Thomism continues to flourish throughout the world and continues to be “an active force that has shaped the minds of clerics as well as of lay and religious scholars in a most personal way” (94). He sees such vitality in the continuity of the Thomistic tradition that he anticipates Thomism will “contribute to shaping the civilization of love whose foundation remains the one Truth that God has revealed in Jesus Christ. It was to the contemplation of this highest Truth that Aquinas consecrated his every word” (92). The demonstration of continuity and vitality in this strand of Catholic intellectual tradition bespeaks the same qualities in the broader tradition of Catholicism as a whole and indicates the continuing reach of the Catholic vision that Logos endeavors to explore in its many manifestations.

Cessario also shows that Thomistic theology seeks “to reflect the unity of divine truth” (9) and thereby provides a way of grasping the interrelatedness of diverse modes of inquiry and of the variety of academic disciplines without making theology merely an instrument capable of negotiating among the languages and intellectual techniques of the various disciplines. This means that theology knows what the individual academic disciplines cannot know based on their own intrinsic capabilities—that there is a level of fullness and simplicity that precedes their particular paths of inquiry, their particular technical vocabularies, and modes of proof and that this prior unity of knowledge makes all the more valuable the particular insights and areas of knowledge that individual disciplines are able to provide through their developed and applied power. In Cessa-
rio’s account of Thomistic theology, “as a single divine science about God, theology embraces each of the subordinate and ancillary disciplines within its transcendental unity and so is able to express the one divine knowledge that governs without qualification everything that exists” (9). Theology as understood in Thomism has this quality because “the best theology reflects the simplicity of God whose knowledge of himself remains the one source of all true wisdom” (9). This deep insight provides a strong account of the importance of seeking the complementarity among diverse academic disciplines and shows why it is valuable to bring together the contributions of different academic disciplines in an effort to glimpse the encompassing vision that brings life to each—a vision that can serve as a source of renewal to each discipline. This understanding of the unity of truth also shows why John Paul II strongly emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary pursuits within the Catholic university expressed in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. The reason for a journal such as *Logos* to continually explore such a vision of unity underlying diverse academic disciplines emerges from such an account as well.

A guiding thread of thought throughout Cessario’s concise history of Thomism is the demonstration that the Thomistic tradition at every stage exemplifies what Alasdair MacIntyre has termed the “rationality of tradition” (2). Cessario touches on this point throughout this volume because the concept helps us understand what it means to talk about the continuity and ongoing vitality of a tradition. Thomism exercises rationality within the context of an ongoing conversation stretching across many centuries. Thomistic tradition renews itself by returning to key sources recurrently and it revitalizes itself by enriching the conversation with the new questions and problems posed by changing historical and cultural circumstances. Roman Ingarden in the more limited context of examining the continuity that pertains to an individual literary work of art as it is read and interpreted across the centuries speaks in this sense of the “life” of a literary work of art. In Cessario’s account of the participation of Thomism within the rationality of tradition we
find a broader and more complex account of what it means to speak of the life of a tradition: St. Thomas immersed theology within the rationality of tradition through his prayerful approach to theology and in his active conversation with the thinkers and sources upon which he drew. And those scholars who carry Thomism forward from year to year and century to century similarly immerse themselves in and thereby bring vitality to the rationality of tradition.

We should reflect for a moment upon this concept. To speak of the rationality of tradition is to challenge the assumption of the Enlightenment philosophy of the eighteenth century that reason and tradition stand in opposition and in contradiction to one another. Such an assumption continues to influence contemporary views of tradition. Tradition is often understood as a purely historical phenomenon to be explained by reference to historical forces not amenable to rational understanding or intervention; Enlightenment thinking sought to establish a nonhistorical standpoint in the certainty of reason that would eliminate from culture whatever is derived solely from tradition and not from reason. That was the ultimate source of the revolutionary quality of Enlightenment thought. But any tradition that bases its ongoing life and vitality on the exercise of reason can develop itself through changing historical circumstances by exerting the critical power of reason to excise inevitable historical contingencies and to incorporate emerging cultural developments. In a time such as our own when many people think religion can be nothing more than a form of ideology sustained hegemonically by power and protected by force, this concept of Thomistic theology as participating in the rationality of tradition holds great significance. Once again we are entitled, I believe, to regard Cessario’s demonstration of what is true about one significant strand of Catholic intellectual tradition to be true more broadly of Catholic tradition, and we are entitled to regard the efforts of a journal such as Logos to be a continuing contribution to exemplifying the broader rationality of tradition that animates the full range of Catholic intellectual and cultural tradition.
In the conclusion of his study, Cessario argues that there is a common task shared by any Christian thinker and the Thomistic tradition: “to ponder a truth that comes from somewhere outside the givens of human history and experience, indeed, a truth that comes instead as a gracious gift from a God who made us and to whom we are all destined to return” (96). Logos is dedicated to exploring the contributions made toward this great task by the various academic disciplines when each is practiced with an openness to the guiding insights of theology.

I was motivated to pick up *A Short History of Thomism* after reading the article that opens this issue of Logos: “The Sacred, Religion, and Morality,” by Romanus Cessario, OP. The article examines the deficiencies that have resulted from the detachment of considerations of the sacred, religion, and morality from a theological perspective under the influence of nineteenth-century positivism, a development from which emerges a sociological analysis of religion that poses the likelihood of a reductionist view of the concepts named in the title. “We may now question whether the uncritical adoption of books and articles that proceed on the methodological and substantive assumptions of the modern empirical sciences has in fact served to both promote and sustain a sound Catholic theology.” The underlying unity of knowledge constantly kept in view by the Thomistic tradition, even as it enters into dialogue with newly emerging academic disciplines such as sociology, is missing when those disciplines are understood from the positivist perspective from which they arose. Cesario traces key moments in the development of the sociological study of religion (while recognizing that a comprehensive account of this development far exceeds the scope of a journal article) and argues that this development “has resulted in a widespread confusion about the proper place that theology holds in evaluating religion and religious experience.” The second part of the paper then offers a somewhat startling but insightful proposition: an understanding of beauty as developed within the tradition of Thomistic theology can correct the distortions brought
to light in the first part of the article. Cessario points out that the discussion of beauty in modern theology is not found exclusively in the theological approaches taken by thinkers such as Hans Urs von Balthasar or Dietrich von Hildebrand (whose approaches to beauty have indeed been a subject of much attention in the pages of this journal). Recent Thomists have written illuminatingly on this topic, and Cessario goes on to delineate the central components of the concept of beauty as developed in Thomistic theology. Beauty as understood in the Thomistic tradition provides a key to understanding the full nature of the sacred, religion, and morality: “Everlasting Beauty is what a Thomist should look for when he or she ponders the sacred, religion, and morality.”

As is now well known, beauty is taken up as a first word in the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Nathan Lefler in “Cruciform Beauty: Revising the Form in Balthasar’s Christological Aesthetic” examines a problem necessarily encountered in Christianity when viewed from the perspective of theological aesthetics: “How is the Crucifixion beautiful, if indeed it is? To formulate the problem differently, how is the Crucifixion not merely hideous? Is the ugly somehow mysteriously compatible with the beautiful at this one peculiar locus of human and salvation history?” The crucifixion poses a challenge to a worldly view of aesthetics, and Balthasar is on guard at every turn to prevent a reduction of theological aesthetics to a worldly aesthetics. Providing an account of the place of the crucifixion within a Christian understanding of beauty plays an essential role in the understanding of aesthetics in a manner that is truly informed by and immersed within Christian theology. Lefler helpfully offers three key moments selected from great works of art as a context for understanding the questions posed by his study: a scene from Dostoevsky’s The Idiot; paintings by the twentieth-century American artist William Congdon; and a short story by Flannery O’Connor. The article then examines a number of concepts drawn from Balthasar’s The Glory of the Lord and brings to light the challenges posed in Balthasar’s thought by the image of the suffering
Christ within a theological aesthetic perspective. The article demonstrates that Balthasar draws upon the thinking of Charles Péguy to find “a new dimension of aesthetic integrity, or holism that will ultimately be seen as an indispensable aspect of theological, including Christological, aesthetics.” Lefler expands the circle of his inquiry by drawing upon St. Thomas and on a recent book on beauty by a contemporary literature scholar, Elaine Scarry, and reaches an insight into the connection between suffering and beauty in a Christian theological aesthetic perspective: “perhaps, then, the beauty of the Crucifixion is in the reality, whether fully known through faith or only dimly glimpsed, that in this event, the rage and violence of sin and death have been received, taken in by this divine man, into his own body and into the human heart of his divine life and have there been overwhelmed and transformed—parsed out—into infinite love.”

The next article provides an additional opportunity to explore the writings of Charles Péguy in “A Man Talking: The Prayer and Poetry of Charles Péguy” by Paul Murray, OP. The article examines the question of Péguy’s place and position as a poet but also as a theologian. Murray brings out a prophetic dimension in the poetry and theology of Péguy: “Again and again in his mature work, Péguy does not simply meditate on some of the great dogmatic truths and mysteries of the faith. Instead, he assumes, as it were, the role of a prophet of the New Testament.” Murray points to prayer as “the very lifeblood” of the verse of Péguy while also recognizing that the kind of prayer undertaken by Péguy is that which is more at home in the life of a soldier than someone living a cloistered life. Murray helps us recognize Péguy’s immersion in the mystical life in his writing, but his mysticism again was not of a cloistered type but a movement toward the world: “An authentic mystical life, therefore—as, for example, the life manifest in Christ—was the most engaged life imaginable. It was a life which strove not to separate but to link the eternal and the temporal.” After examining the various components of the life and writings of Péguy, Murray insists on the importance
of holding all of the components within a single view: “In the end, it is impossible to separate Péguy the poet from Péguy the prophet or indeed from Péguy the soldier.”

J. L. A. García takes us into the territory of contemporary film in “White Nights of the Soul: Christopher Nolan’s film Insomnia and the Renewal of Moral Reflection in Film.” García makes it clear that we need not regard this film as a great work of art to benefit from an analysis of the way in which it poses important moral questions and considerations within popular contemporary culture. The article, then, is an effort to engage in a dialogue between philosophical ethics and popular culture. In approaching the film, García gathers resources from St. John of the Cross and Dostoevsky to examine the liminal experience of the “white night of the soul” and then poses what he regards as the most provocative moral question raised by Nolan’s film: “How does a life, how does a person, turn from good behavior to bad, and can a life suddenly reversed in this way really be thus redeemed? Is it still the same life? Can the same living human being perdure through such change?” Film as an art form is well suited to posing such questions because of its temporal quality as a medium and because of the opportunities for employing sophisticated narrative techniques in a medium that combines visual and aural components. García brings forward the 1997 Norwegian film by the same title upon which Nolan’s film is based and delineates the particular emphasis established by Nolan’s film as made evident by its departures from that film. He then shows that the changes emphasize the key moral issues concerning identity and redemption that he finds to be of particular moral interest in this film. The article develops the existential theme of identity as established within the film and shows how the film poses what he terms “an ethics of integrity” in relation to personal identity. García examines a number of important motifs in the film, including the motif of sleeplessness and the motif of unsure (treacherous) footing to mark out the key moral insights that emerge from the film. He draws upon thinkers such as Robert Nozick, Emmanuel Levinas, and Karol
Wojtyla to articulate the central moral question raised by the film: “it is only in and through committing ourselves to other persons, and therein to the moral virtues, that our personhood is known and brought to its fulfillment. This may well be where the film points in its linkage of morality to identity and the way in which, in fulfilling official duty, the good cop therein fulfills his or her self.”

H. Wendell Howard offers an illuminating account of the importance of Catholicism in the life and art of Franz Liszt in “Franz Liszt, Abbé.” Depicting the composer-pianist as a man beset by a “duality of character” that left him constantly at war with himself, Howard seeks and finds the religious significance and perhaps source of such duality in “the duality of soul that pitted a desire for saintliness and solitude against an imperious need of the crowd.” Liszt was a child prodigy at the age of eleven, but eventually he came to long for a religious life and wanted to join the priesthood, only to be thwarted by his obedience to his father’s opposition to such a plan. Howard keeps in view the ongoing significance of this thwarted desire for the Roman Catholic priesthood. Liszt eventually entered holy orders as an abbé, and Howard provides a context to clarify the meaning of holy orders in Liszt’s case. As Howard demonstrates, Liszt seems never to have overcome the duality that marked him so deeply, but viewing Listz within the context of the religious yearning that was always part of his life and music but perhaps never the ruling force helps us understand this famous musical figure. Howard offers a concluding insight that shows us Liszt as a man who was inspired by high religious ideals even while never bringing those ideals to fulfillment.

In our Reconsiderations feature in this issue we offer a translation of a 1937 lecture presented in Austria by Dietrich von Hildebrand titled “The Jews and the Christian West.” The lecture has been translated for Logos by John Henry Crosby, who has also translated for us an illuminating historical account of Hildebrand’s opposition to Hitler written by the current auxiliary bishop of Salzburg, Andreas Laun. Bishop Laun’s article, “Dietrich von Hildebrand’s
Struggle Against German National Socialism,” brings Hildebrand forward as a prominent example of a Catholic who opposed the anti-Semitism of the Nazis on the basis of Catholic principles from the early stages of the Nazi persecution of the Jews. John Henry Crosby then provides further contextual information to help readers recognize the role of Hildebrand’s views in this area as a contribution to the development of doctrine concerning the relationship between Catholics and Jews eventually expounded in the Second Vatican Council.

Michael C. Jordan
Editor

Notes