Music and poetry thrive within a vision of life that has been informed by an incarnational theology. When we view these arts with confidence that our embodiment is blessed and the material world is capable of conveying the sacred, their richness becomes evident and abundant. A musician, writer, and teacher, who approaches these arts with a deep awareness of this potential can bring them to life and enable others to participate in that life more fully. And this, I suggest, is why H. Wendell Howard, the most frequent contributor of articles to this journal, has been highly effective in numerous articles about music and literature.

Because Logos does not publish poetry, our readers have not had an opportunity to become familiar with Howard’s work as a poet through the pages of the journal. His 1999 collection, titled “In Praise of Women: Poems,” demonstrates his ability to depict the dignity and beauty of the human person at all stages of life through an unflinching and loving gaze that sees essential qualities engraved upon the body.¹ For instance, the opening poem of the collection, “The Scholar-Teacher,” depicts an old woman who through “her wrinkled/ Face, like hands kept overlong in tepid water” projects
the dignified melancholy of the aging teacher who knows that the abundance of her knowledge was usually received incompletely by her young students, leaving her

... waiting for the hearts of

Them so busy at some other work to clutch her

Unsubstantial manna measured out to feed their unknown

Needs.

A later poem conveys the sense of unlimited promise and the irresistibly enlivening presence of a young granddaughter who “on year-old wobbling legs of shyness” and with “an eager mind and bold imagination” exhibited in the energetic playful explorations of a child, has such power upon the speaker that she “thawed my blood and suppled me in portions.”

Howard’s poems, in keeping with a mature understanding of an incarnational vision of life, are never idealizing; although the analogy is unbalanced, it is nevertheless the case that just as the crucifixion does not annul the dignity conferred upon human flesh through the Incarnation, so also the inevitable flaws of real human bodies neither disrupt nor distort that dignity in daily life. In “In a World Where the Magic Is Otherwise Gone,” the speaker recognizes the confused unavoidable pain of long-term relationships and accepts such suffering: “I would not wish the hurt away, ev’n if I could,/ For my hurts rise from love, and to wish one away wishes both.” Yet the intense joy of love in such a relationship does open a perspective upon transcendence: “And our hunger for loving fortissimo swells/ Toward the day when we’ll taste one another unhampered by dark.” Another poem in this anti-idealizing mode, “Flawed Perfection,” acknowledges the blemishes of the flesh while recognizing that even a catalog of so-called defects does not destroy the fullness of the human person known through love: “Her beauty is a coalescing whole.” The tendency to use the immature idealization of love in some popular songs is skewered by “Lying Songs,” in which the
speaker talks back to popular refrains: “I Took One Look at You . . . and Then My Heart Stood Still”/ Projection! Dream perfection to the fleshly fair impart!”

This mode of incarnational vision exhibited in Howard’s poems is amply on display as well in his insightful commentaries on literature and music published in his many essays for Logos. Howard’s first article for this journal appeared in 1:4 in Fall 1998 and was a study of Puccini’s opera, Suor Angelica, arguing, as was stated in the subtitle, that this was Puccini’s Catholic opera. “It is not Catholic because the principal character is a nun, or because the action occurs in a convent, or because the dramatic conflict stems from serious sins, or because a miraculous vision appears at the end, although all of these elements contribute to its Catholicity. What truly makes it Catholic is its statement about the power of God’s forgiveness” (100). The article speculates that perhaps this opera lags behind other works by Puccini in popularity precisely because “it is an unabashed statement of the composer’s love and understanding of the Roman Catholic Church and its precepts,” and affirms that if this is the case, it is an injustice for such “overtly good music and high drama” to be overlooked.

Howard on occasion has been known to be timely in his reflections, as evidenced most fully by his turning to an article on Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis (5:2, Spring 2002) in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States on 9/11/2001. Here he draws upon his own experience as a performer, as he does from time to time, having been a member of the chorus for performances of the work under the direction of Arturo Toscanini, and upon his opportunities to have studied the work as a voice major at The Julliard School of Music. But the most profound understanding of the work, the article attests, while enriched by musicological knowledge and the insights of a performer, emerges through direct engagement with the powerfully consoling quality of the music experienced by the engaged listener. He points, for instance, to certain musical qualities in the Kyrie: “The contrasting forte and piano iterations of
the cry are surprising in terms of traditional liturgical treatments, but those contrasts are part of the meaningfulness. They help emphasize the awe of the imploerer in the presence of the grandeur of God” (140). In the Sanctus, he goes on to show, Beethoven inserts an orchestral interlude in which “the ethereally descending tones of the music convey ‘the peace of God, which passeth all understanding’ that the Eucharist primarily provides.” Howard concludes by recognizing that the character and scope of the music make it difficult for either liturgical use or for the concert hall, but supremely suitable for the listener in search of consolation.

Other composers and works ably examined by Howard in the pages of Logos include Franz Liszt, with consideration of what it meant for Liszt to have entered holy orders as an abbé (9:4 Fall 2006), Handel’s Messiah (10:2 Spring 2007), in which he places an account of the reception of that work in its premiere in Dublin in the context of intense Catholic-Protestant conflicts in Ireland, and Gounod’s Faust (12:1 Winter 2009), providing an insightful account of the musical portrayal of redemption in that work. All of these articles on music combine the historical knowledge and research of a scholar and the insight of the musician with the resonant responsiveness to the meaningfulness of music of a man who recognizes the significance of an incarnational vision of life.

Howard has also written a number of significant articles on literature for Logos. In Logos 3:1 Winter 2000, we published his article on Louise Erdrich, now the winner of a 2012 national book award. That article examines the intermingling of Catholic and Chipewa religious elements in Erdrich’s novels and poetry, and shows how these elements serve as a source of renewed spiritual insight. He examined the question of Oscar Wilde’s Catholicism in Logos 9:2 Spring 2006, arguing there that “both his life and his death were inextricably linked to Roman Catholicism” (126). In Logos 11:1 Winter 2008, Howard examined the mystery novels of Ellis Peters that feature his character Brother Cadafel, and in 14:2 Spring 2011 he provided a historical, literary, and cultural account of Saint Fabiola,
whose depiction by amateur and professional portraitists is said by one art historian to constitute a Fabiola movement operating outside the conventional art world. The range of Howard’s work as a discerning scholar has significantly enriched the pages of this journal as we consider the Catholic intellectual and artistic traditions.

It is stating the obvious to observe that Logos has published Howard’s essays so frequently because his writing helps to exemplify the vision that animates our journal. With this association in mind, I choose to share with readers an unsolicited testimonial for Logos that he recently sent to me in a letter, and I include his kind words about the journal only because I believe I can turn them back upon his own work as a description of what he has achieved as we publish his eleventh Logos article in this issue. He writes:

Today’s world is almost buried in information with devices to access it. Seldom, if ever, in all that is there a nod toward “spirit” so that life’s standard becomes the impersonal, the detached, and at worst the uncivilized. Printed books and journals carefully edited and manufactured are therefore hallmarks and even bulwarks of civilization, vehicles of civil discourse among writer and publisher and audience even when the subjects presented might be uncivil or at least have elements of the uncivil. Then when the journal is Logos with the added motivating principle of Catholic thought and culture, the reader can hold in his or her hand a physical work of beauty encompassing belief and experience a few aesthetic-spiritual-intellectual hours of learning and renewal.

We esteem H. Wendell Howard as highly as we do because of his engaging and untiring service as a guide to aesthetic and spiritual and intellectual renewal in wide-ranging cultural areas.

In the first article in this issue of Logos, H. Wendell Howard in “Francis Poulenc, Profane and Sacred” approaches Poulenc’s Dialogues des Carmelites (Dialogues of the Carmelites) through consideration of a very different work by Poulenc, Les Mamelles de Tiresias
(The Breasts of Tiresias), using the two works to explore the qualities of the sacred and the profane in Poulenc’s music. Les Mamelles, based on a surrealist drama by Apollinaire, provides a concentrated interweaving of themes and qualities evoking melancholy and fear, providing a view of the profane as a perspective contained within the sphere of character and action, while the sacred elements of Dialogues evokes a sense of “reverence similar to that which attaches to holy things.” The article incorporates a rich account of Poulenc’s life circumstances and the broader cultural conditions in which he composed these works. Howard concludes with observations about the complexity of Poulenc’s faith and his engagement with the profane and the sacred: “The line between the earthly and the ecclesiastical is often indistinct, largely because his steadfastness in faith does not mean unquestioned certainty.”

R. Jared Staudt in “‘Religion and Culture’ and ‘Faith and the Renewal of Society’ in Christopher Dawson and Pope Benedict XVI” points to the emergence of the importance of culture in the Church’s magisterial teaching beginning with the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and then turns to a consideration of the importance of culture for the Church and theology through an examination of the connections between the thought of Christopher Dawson and Pope Benedict XVI. While acknowledging that Benedict does not cite the work of Dawson, Staudt argues nevertheless that Dawson’s work “provides compelling depth to Benedict’s account of culture and religion, and furthermore climaxes in a theme very dear to Benedict: the spiritual renewal of Western civilization.” After examining the nature of religion and culture and the essential place of religion within culture, the article turns to an account of the crisis of modern culture and to the project of the restoration of Christian culture. “Ultimately both Benedict and Dawson see that the Church can not only help restore and advance the culture of the West, but in doing so can also unite all of humanity in a culture rooted in a proper relationship of faith and reason and religion and culture.”
Richard Upsher Smith, Jr. confronts the now well-known information that Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta “suffered the dark night of the soul for almost fifty years.” In “‘Behold a Pale Horse’: Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the ‘Experience of Nothingness,’” Smith examines the broader cultural conditions in which the experiences of disconnectedness, isolation, and meaninglessness afflict many people. He also examines the philosophical phenomenon within modern existentialism and contemporary postmodernism of “the experience of nothingness,” in which thinkers courageously engage with the sense of universal homelessness in a world that is seen as a mere product of chance. The article closely considers selections from the works of Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, and Michael Novak, among others. In the conclusion, Smith considers whether a condition of radical doubt serves as a particular modern affliction, and then reflects upon the redemptive quality of suffering experienced by Mother Teresa.

Beth K. Haile searches for a defense of the consumption of meat in the works of Christian ethicists and moral theologians in “Virtuous Meat Consumption: A Virtue Ethics Defense of an Omnivorous Way of Life.” After establishing the need for such a defense, especially in light of modern industrial techniques in the production of meat for human consumption, Haile suggests that virtue ethics is particularly well prepared to provide a defense for meat consumption that takes such problems into account. “One way to approach this question is to identify individuals who make the conscious choice to consume meat, and yet still seem to lead lives oriented toward the good,” she suggests. She finds such a person in chef, farmer, and writer Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, author of The River Cottage Meatbook. Haile then draws upon the principles of virtue ethics as she establishes key points in the work of Fearnley-Whittingstall and constructs a set of principles in accordance with which the consumption of meat can be undertaken responsibly and ethically. In the conclusion, Haile suggests that these principles in fact can be extended to the broader problem of ethical consump-
tion in the contemporary consumer culture: “The virtues I identified in this essay—responsibility, temperance, and thrift (certainly not an exhaustive list)—are not just virtues for an omnivorous way of life, but virtues for consumption in general.”

Roland Millare in “The Sacred Is Beautiful: The Liturgical and Theological Aesthetics of Pope Benedict XVI” argues that “beauty is the foundation of the Holy Father’s liturgical and Eucharistic theology.” He finds the philosophical foundation of Benedict’s theological aesthetics in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, and points to the shift made by Benedict through a focus on beauty in the liturgy rather than beauty in Revelation. He also examines the important influence of Aquinas on the thought of Balthasar, a connection that is often overlooked. Millare establishes why the beauty of liturgy holds high importance in the thought of Benedict: “The Liturgy of the Church is the source and summit of her apostolic life. This is why a beautiful celebration of the liturgy must be the norm and not the exception.” This leads in the conclusion to a consideration of the renewal of culture in Benedict’s teaching: “Beauty as the form of how liturgy is celebrated enables authentic self-transcendence. Ugliness celebrates an immanent self-worship, which can be created and distorted at will.” The roots of cultural renewal on the one hand or cultural decay on the other can be found in such self-transcendence or self-worship.

In “The Confessions of Walker Percy,” John F. Desmond insightfully connects the narrative mode of confessional writing and participation in the sacrament of confession in the work and life of Walker Percy and illuminates key aspects of several of Percy’s works in so doing. Pascal’s Pensées and St. Augustine’s Confessions are two confessional works in the Catholic tradition that exerted a significant influence on Percy, and in his life he frequently participated in retreats at a Jesuit retreat center at which the sacrament of confession was readily available. Desmond also connects this concern with confession in both its secular narrative mode and its sacramental mode with Percy’s recurrent reflections on the predicament
of the modern self living within a technologically-ordered world. “It is not difficult to see how these two primary concerns of Percy—the ‘loss of the self’ and the devaluation of language—would radically affect the idea of confession and the challenges of writing in the confessional mode.” Desmond suggests that Percy came to understand confession as essential to overcoming the epidemic of alienation in the modern world: “To become oneself ‘transparently under God’—to confess truly in either sacramental or secular form—is to stand before God in humble acceptance of oneself as a sinner, ask forgiveness and the grace to live with hope, and learn to live and love fellow sinners in a broken world.”

Joshua Hren offers a detailed reading of Chesterton’s story, “The Sign of the Broken Sword,” in “Truth and Lies in a Chestertonian Sense: Father Brown and the Fault of the Depraved Saint.” He examines this mystery story in the context of the political importance of myths, legends, and lies as a seemingly essential but problematic force for political order. In the story, the detective-priest Father Brown investigates the mystery surrounding the death of General Arthur St. Clare, an English war hero. St. Clare is understood through common legend to have been a great leader who died in a battle against a Brazilian enemy, but Father Brown slowly uncovers through his investigation that St. Clare was killed by his men after he murdered a fellow officer who tried to denounce him and then undertook a suicidal battle to cover his crimes. But Brown chooses not to demolish the popular legend surrounding St. Clare; although he clearly does not approve of the prospect that St. Clare might one day be seen as a civil saint, he remains silent after discovering the truth. Thus, the real mystery of this mystery story is why Father Brown chooses to protect the noble lie concerning the supposedly heroic character of St. Clare. Hren ponders this mystery, considering whether it should be understood as a kind of “remedy against the democratic spirit’s tyrannical push for demystification or total transparency.” In the conclusion, Hren points to the persistence of the mystery itself as the key point of the story: “The
mystery of Father Brown’s silence, premised upon his belief that ‘there is so much good and evil in breaking secrets,’ galvanizes the reader into fruitfully questioning his prudence, into investigating the extent to which noble lies are simply the lies of the nobility.”

Our recurrent but somewhat irregularly appearing feature, “Reconsiderations,” offers “Historical (and often neglected) texts in the Catholic intellectual tradition with contemporary comment and reflection.” In this issue, we offer a sermon delivered in 1675 by Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet titled “For the Profession of Madame de La Vallière.” Christopher O. Blum provides an insightful introduction, “A New Heart: Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet on Conversion.”

Michael C. Jordan
Editor

Notes