We live under what the Chinese curse calls “interesting times.” With strife in the Church in many places, not to mention persecution of varying levels throughout the world coming from a variety of secular and religious fronts, to many Catholics (at least in the Western world) it feels less like the bright springtime of the Church predicted by St. John Paul II than it does the drastic pruning of the Church predicted by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

What should the response be? The formerly Catholic and now Eastern Orthodox journalist and writer, Rod Dreher, has called for traditional Christians of all stripes to take the “Benedict Option,” a notion inspired by Alasdair MacIntyre’s suggestion in *After Virtue* that, in the face of the failure of the modern liberal project, “we await a new, doubtless very different, Benedict.” Dreher’s notion is a kind of imitation of Benedict of Nursia for Christians as a whole. He advocates targeted leaving aside of some public and legal fights that the Church and many Christians have been waging to retain Christian moral and cultural values within the law of many countries established under a Christian aegis, but now set on purging the law and the public square of anything specifically Christian. I say a “targeted” leaving aside of certain aspects of cultural and legal battles because
Dreher has been at pains to deny that he is suggesting a complete retreat from the public square or from the cultural world. But he emphasizes very strongly the need for the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, and serious Protestants of all stripes to refocus attention on evangelization within religious bodies that would involve liturgical, cultural, disciplinary, and intellectual renewal.

There is much to commend in Dreher’s own vision, as the Catholic University of America theologian Chad C. Pecknold wrote in 2014,

> Its greatest strength is that it sees that Christians need to attend to their communal formation as a whole. It is not enough to simply go to church on Sundays, for the religion of lifestyle liberalism is working on us the rest of the week. Rather, we need an all-embracing form of life coordinated and ordered to the love of God and neighbor. We can look to the very real Christian witness of cloistered, vowed religious life and say, “see, it can be done.”

But whether MacIntyre or Dreher intended a withdrawal from society, the very invocation of St. Benedict and monasticism will imply to many people a raising up of walls and a retreat to one’s own communities and away from political life and indeed the common good. Pecknold sees in the Dominican model, particularly in the vibrant and fast-growing Dominican congregations of men and women in the United States and abroad, a model of joyful, serious, and intellectual discipleship that is directed toward engagement with legal, cultural, philosophical, and theological issues. “Better, therefore,” Pecknold writes, “to speak of the Dominican Option. When I see them in the white habits at prayer, or giving lectures, or playing guitars and banjos on the subway, I have a plausible image of a ‘contrast society’ that is very much engaged with the world—an evangelistic witness which is joyful, intellectually serious, expansive, and charitable.”

It is a model that has stood the test of time. 2016 marks the eight hundredth anniversary of the *Ordo Praedicatorum*, the Order of Preach-
ers familiarly called Dominicans after their own founder, Dominic de Guzman (1170–1221). Dominic, a native of a small town in the historic Spanish region of Old Castile, came from a knightly family, as the “de Guzman” indicates. At the age of seven he left his home to study with his maternal uncle, a parish priest in the nearby town of Gumiel d’Izan. At fourteen he began study at the University of Palencia in the kingdom of Leon. There Dominic took in the seven liberal arts: the trivium—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—followed by the quadrivium of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. This training, notes Bede Jarrett, OP, one of the finest biographers of Dominic in English, had been carefully designed to produce an accurate and scientific temper. Almost to an exaggerated extent, as we might judge, education centred in subjects that must have been chosen purely for their corrective force, for it was part of the tradition from Greece that had filtered through Rome to Christendom that no boy should be taught to specialize. He was to be taught just the opposite of what he was by nature, for it was considered that he had to be developed, rounded off, completed, rather than have information imparted to him. He really learnt nothing, except that he learnt how to learn everything.

While some sources indicate that Dominic joined the Canons Regular (priests living under the Benedictine Rule organized by the bishop) around the age of twenty-five, some accounts have him enrolled in this order by the end of his six years studying arts in Palencia, presumably so that the young man would have the funds to complete the next four years of theological studies. But there was probably little need for excess funding, given that Dominic did not drink wine for ten years and spent most of his time in study and prayer, sleeping on the bare earth. “His only extravagance,” writes Jarrett, “was books, though this was not for him a luxury since they were, says his first biographer, ‘to him a real necessary of life.”

The Canons of Osma had been established by the bishop to help
supply priests for the diocese, and Dominic certainly served tireless-
ly while continuing his life of study and prayer. Elected subprior at
twenty-nine and prior of the community at thirty-one, this tireless,
prayerful, and bookish young man was a natural to accompany his
bishop, Diego of Osma, on both diplomatic missions and preaching
expeditions over the next few years, the latter directed toward the
Cathars or Albigensians, a gnostic-dualistic sect popular in the south
of France. The Albigensians had proved hard to dislodge even when
St. Bernard and his Cistercians attempted to address the predomi-
nantly Albigensian cities. It was Dominic’s own conviction that the
failures of the monastic and other preachers were due to their failure
to present what Pecknold describes as a “contrast society.” As Jarrett
puts it, not only were the Albigensians supported in their area by the
local wealth and trade-guilds, but they had talented, educated, and
often very ascetical apologists capable of addressing the rising popu-
lation in the cities. In contrast, the monks had made their arguments
while traveling with all the perks afforded to ecclesiastical officials
on official business:

There was no scandal against their lives, except the deadly
scandal of ordinary life. There were just like everyone else,
but no one could have said anything really more damaging
than that about them, for it was a deadly argument used by
the Perfect [the Albigensian ascetics], who certainly were as-
cetics and whom no one could accuse of being like their fol-
lowers. The leaders of the heretics were head and shoulders
above the crowd in their lives, real leaders; the monasticism
of Abbot Almeric and of Peter and Raoul was very ordinary
and gentlemanly and showed no kinship with the heroism of
the Albigensians.⁴

A second lesson Dominic learned from these missions was that
whatever the official power structures, both the orthodox and the
heretics usually credited their faith to their mothers or, in the case
of young women, to the teaching of Albigensian ascetical women.
Dominic saw this reality and established a number of female Catholic converts in a convent in Prouille in 1206.

A seed was being planted for a new kind of order that would be able to meet the needs of the day for preaching and teaching, one that would be flexible and capable of setting up houses where preachers were needed. As some historians have put it, what the Dominicans and other mendicant orders did was establish “monasteries on wheels.” It was in December 1216 that Pope Honorius III established the Order of Preachers with his bull *Religiosam vitam*.

One might use as a contrast the other most famous monastery on wheels dedicated to preaching that arose in that day, the Friars Minor or Franciscans. In many ways, the Franciscans were considered the more outlandish order, with a brand new rule written by Francis himself that was an attempt to apply the Gospel in a quite literal way (at the time, other new orders were required to adopt an existing rule, and Dominic’s order chose the Augustinian rule). But the Dominicans were, writes Simon Tugwell, OP, “far more radical in that they redirect their whole life towards the goal of ‘being useful’ to others.” Franciscan life was in certain ways more conventionally monastic. And while Francis’s friars were to preach penance, Dominic’s were established precisely to preach penance, but also doctrine; the kind of monastery on wheels they established was to have all the devotion and learning of the Benedictines with all the zeal of the original traveling band of apostles. Their most common mottos reflect this desire: *Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare* (to praise, to bless, to preach) and *Contemplare et Contemplata Aliis Tradere* (to contemplate and pass on the fruits of contemplation).

One of the legends about Dominic is that before his mother had given birth, she made a pilgrimage to the Abbey of Silos and dreamed that she gave birth to a dog who leaped from her womb and seemed to set the world on fire. No doubt the later legend was derived from the pun on the order’s common designation *Dominicanes* (hounds of the Lord—*Domini canes*), but there is a certain sense in which the Order of Preachers has indeed set the world on fire and continues to do so.
Some would dispute what kind of fire it is, associating the Dominicans with Tomás de Torquemada, OP, first Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition, or perhaps Girolamo Savonarola, OP, the dictator of Florence. But in eight hundred years, one is bound to have a few rough patches and a few mad or unruly dogs. A broader view would show them as the order that produced: great scholars from Sts. Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas down to the twentieth-century scholars Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu; great popular preachers such as the nineteenth-century Frenchman Henri Lacordaire and the twentieth-century Anglo-Irishman Vincent McNabb; mystics Meister Eckhart, St. Rose of Lima, and St. Catherine of Siena; figures of political importance like Bartolomé de las Casas, who made important but controversial defenses of the peoples of the New World; and five popes. Logos has itself been the beneficiary of this order over the years, publishing important articles from Dominican scholars including Paul Murray, Michael Sherwin, Maria Frassati Jakupcak, Andrew Hofer, Richard Schenk, Aidan Nichols, Bruno Shah, and Romanus Cessario (who has another fine article that is both doctrinal and practical in this issue). Future issues will feature important articles on boredom and acedia by Fr. Nicholas Lombardo and art and the incarnation by Fr. Anthony Giambrone. We also have a Dominican on our board, the distinguished theologian and bishop of Lausanne, Geneva, and Fribourg, Charles Morerod.

Given this remarkable history of scholarship, preaching, writing, and witness in the Church and in the history of this journal, we can only say yes to the Dominican Option and thank God for the previous Dominican centuries we’ve already had. It is clear that the Dominican Option has been a viable way of approaching various crises in the history of the Church’s existence—from that of the Albigensian challenge in the Languedoc to the current difficulty of secularism. We thank God for their work and witness and pray that God will send them many more men and women who will have the desire to set the world on fire with the fruits of their contemplation of the Lord and his goodness. Here’s to many more Dominican centuries.
That rounded-off quality that medieval training inculcated in young men like Dominic has certainly been a hallmark of the Dominican order. But as Eric M. Johnston in “The Apostle, the Philosopher, and Friar Thomas: The Place of Aristotle in Thomas Aquinas’s Dominican Vocation” shows us, the constitutions of the order when Aquinas joined it were weighted heavily against the study of pagan philosophers like Aristotle. Johnston continues the long-running debate on what the place of philosophy (and this would include natural philosophy, what we would today call “science”) in study was. Sts. Thomas and Albert helped reform the course of studies for young Dominicans out of a conviction that the orders of nature and grace were indeed connected and thus study of both were needed. Because even the pagans had access to true knowledge of nature, their witness was key to understanding it. “Thomas wanted to know,” writes Johnston, “not just how things appeared to his senses, but how they appeared to others, whether it was checking his own reading of the Gospel against Chrysostom’s or checking his own reading of natural reason against Aristotle’s.”

Another part of the medieval (indeed the ancient) world to survive and thrive is chant. St. Dominic was named for St. Dominic of Silos, a medieval Spanish monk. And in the 1990s the Benedictine monks of Santo Domingo de Silos became one of the first monastic establishments to achieve popular celebrity with their best-selling CD titled “Chant.” What was and is the revived interest about? H. Wendell Howard in “Silence, Solitariness, and Gregorian Chant” provides both a brief outline of the history of chant in late-medieval and modern monastic establishments and also evaluates how chant itself provides elements of proper inwardness, order, and depth that allow modern people, just as it allowed people in the past, to be properly prepared for the possibility of contemplation. In “a world that values the fast and transparent and easy above all else, a world that is bent on chaos, just a regularly planned single hour to cultivate a special relationship with the great Alone can integrate mystery into our daily existence and help us lead lives that are as deep as they are wide. . . .
Gregorian chant helps us appreciate what lasts and matters in our culture of the immediate.”

Christopher Beiting returns to our pages with another evaluation of the work of the Catholic science fiction writer Gene Wolfe. “The Divine Interregnum in Gene Wolfe’s The Book of the Short Sun” probes the three books of that series written between 1999 and 2001. “The Book of the Long Sun functions in part as a sly inversion of the ‘generation ship’ trope in science fiction, which has people traveling on a slower-than-light starship for so long that they have forgotten it is a ship at all. The end result is a materialist allegory wherein a Promethean few cast off their ‘supernatural’ worldview in favor of a ‘scientific’ one as they realize their world is just a machine.” In this space-saga, it is the steady realization of the unknown God (known as “the Outsider”) that disrupts both secular scientific and pagan cultures in ways that often look very much like the encounters of Christianity with hostile cultures in our past and in our present.

Dominican Father Romanus Cessario also returns to our pages, writing in “Charity, Mortal Sin, and Parish Life” about the difficulties faced in Catholic parishes when the idea that serious sins that are un-repented can break communion with God is either rejected or not taught about. Cessario describes the difficulties in current sacramental and moral life and, borrowing a page from C. S. Lewis’s description of friendship, proposes a “fresh approach” to teaching and preaching about the moral life that would not dispense with the juridical or ontological but would not begin there either. “I would start by speaking about the divine friendship within the context of the moral life. The first chapter of Veritatis Splendor offers a detailed account of what some call the vocational teleology of the Christian life. Christ invites the Rich Young Man to friendship with God. For this reason, as happens in the common things shared by human friends, Catholics must love the things that Christ loves.”

Moral and spiritual conversion quite often happen after we experience the “megaphone” (Lewis again) of pain. In “Nothing almost sees miracles / But misery’: Lucretian Philosophy and Ascetic
Experience in *King Lear,* Melinda E. Nielsen follows the mad Lear through a series of negations of his own ideas of the world. Negations of the negation of spiritual reality that is implied by pagan materialism, negations of his own claims on the world such as advancement and the avoidance of pain, and the negation of his own habit of reliance upon Cordelia when she dies. Lear’s stripping results in the vision of miracles, and the play ends with Kent who “fittingly concludes the drama of materialism and nihilism with negations that yield an affirmation—negatives that, perhaps, suggest a *fiat* glistening in Britain’s pagan air.”

The 2013 Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* proposed intercultural dialogue as a goal of true Catholic education. Leonardo Franchi’s “Catholic Education and Intercultural Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation” argues that “The Church must approach all forms of dialogue from a position of strength and confidence in its own worthy philosophical, theological, and educational traditions.” Thus an education that creates the conditions for true dialogue in its students will include these two keys: 1) it will involve a liturgical formation at the heart of catechesis; 2) it will require teachers who have a knowledge and love of the Church’s traditions. “The goal is to develop professional networks of doctrinally orthodox and pastorally sensitive Catholic teachers who will be a gift to the Church and leaven in society. How we reach this goal is one of the key challenges facing Catholic education today.”

Finally, in *Reconsiderations* we present the Hungarian-born moral and political philosopher Aurel Kolnai’s (1900–1973) essay “The Humanitarian versus the Religious Attitude.” Political philosopher Daniel J. Mahoney’s introduction, “The Humanitarian Subversion of Christianity,” opens up this “penetrating and pre-scient 1944 article” detailing the differences between the religious and the humanitarian outlook. While Kolnai, along with the Catholic tradition did not deny that “unbelievers can be just and kind and can
exercise self-control,” he “convincingly argues that the differences between the religious attitude and the humanitarian one are not merely a matter of a different motivation for moral behavior. To be sure, the humanitarian is able to discern the ‘moral sense’ as a guide to understanding the nature and needs of human beings. Yet humanitarianism ultimately impairs moral cognition, since a horizon that deifies undifferentiated ‘human needs’ has a hard time acknowledging the ‘unpleasant,’ the truly morally demanding dimensions of the moral life.”

David Paul Deavel
Editor

Notes

3. Ibid., 20.
6. The distinctive white cassock of the pope is often said to be taken from the practice of the Dominican pontiff St. Pius V, who continued to wear his white habit, but this white probably predated Pius.

Errata

The editors at Logos deeply regret the misspelling of a contributor’s name in our last issue. David D. Arndt was the author of “Liberal Education in Crisis.” He was wrongly credited as Daniel Arndt.