

THE STATUS OF SCHOLASTIC PHILOSOPHY IN THEOLOGY TODAY

Until recently there was little question about the status of scholastic philosophy in Catholic theology. It was generally assumed, both inside and outside the Church, that Catholic theology was a firm structure built on the foundations of scholastic philosophy. And the particular form of scholastic thought which was Thomism occupied a position of prominence in both philosophy and theology. Some Catholic thinkers gloried in this state of affairs, others were frustrated by it, but most accepted it as the *de facto* situation. Events of the past five years, centering around the Vatican Council, have forced a serious re-appraisal of this situation. The theology emerging from the Council is not at all clearly Thomistic; it does not manifest the same scholastic patterns as did, for instance, the writings of Pius XII or even the first drafts of the conciliar documents. The language in which the documents of the Council are cast is not scholastic. It represents, of course, no iconoclastic break with the past, no dramatic surge into the future, but the categories of scholastic thought are conspicuously absent, however much they may have influenced the Council Fathers themselves. The debates at the Council and the documents which crystalized their results, presented to the Church and to the world a surprising consensus, pastoral in tone, biblical in foundation, which respected the past while not remaining embedded in it. As vote after vote was recorded in favor of an *aggiornamento*, it became clear to Catholic thinkers that the secure theological structure of the past was undergoing an overhauling. The Council's articulation of God's revelation, of the nature of the Church, of the problems of the modern world, seldom sounded like the familiar traditional tracts. A different presentation of the truths of the faith, a different proclamation of the mysteries of God, has been given by the teaching Church, making indisputably present, to the despair of some and the joy of many, a different theological face. Theology today is conciliar theology, it is the theology of the Council and of the Church after the Council. The question we are

facing involves the philosophical foundations of this theology: what they are, and where does Scholasticism fit into this picture. I plan first to describe the conciliar theology, secondly to explore its philosophical basis, and thirdly to suggest the role or the non-role of scholastic philosophy in it.

I. THEOLOGY TODAY

I use the word "conciliar" to describe Catholic theology today, because the Council is the major point of reference. The theology I am attempting to describe is based on the Council's documents, the debates leading to those documents, and the theologians whose work provided much of the Council's thought. I shall first go into the nature of theology from this point of view, and then summarize its outstanding characteristics.

Theology basically is the science of faith. It is the human elaboration of received revelation. God reveals himself, man responds in intelligent commitment. Faith is the attitude of the whole man placed in the presence of the mystery of God. Man makes his response of faith not because he sees the intrinsic evidence of what God has revealed, but because it is God himself who is there, and man responds because it is God revealing rather than because he is intellectually convinced of the truth of the revelation. The response is human, it is an act of the whole person assenting to God who has revealed himself or something about himself, and man responds both by accepting what God has revealed and by turning to God in openness. At the heart of this response of the whole man are the same intelligence and will that are at the heart of every human response.¹ Man is motivated to respond affirmatively to what God has revealed; his intellect does not see the truth of the mystery, but his will, prompted by grace, moves him to assent to it. This is not the occasion to explore the dynamics of faith. The aspect I wish to bring out is that the act of faith is the source of all man's theologizing. By

¹ Cf. the description of "the obedience of faith" given by the Council: "an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals Himself, and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him" (Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, n. 5).

faith man responds to God, but because faith is not based on intellectual conviction man desires to explore the mystery to which he responds. A desire for intellectual search is always present in the act of faith because of man's natural urge to know. In some people the intellectual spark might be dim, the urge for reflection might be weak, but the basic tendency is there. Faith seeks to understand. The scientific elaboration of this understanding of the faith is what we call theology.² By theology one who believes analyzes the content of his faith, looks for connections between its different aspects, explores its implications for human life. By theology the believer looks at the word of God with all the human resources he can command, and through definitions, divisions, distinctions, descriptions, comparisons, syllogisms, and all the other techniques of intellectual discovery he attempts to penetrate its mystery.³ As a human science of God theology exists in tension between two tendencies: that toward its own human structure and expression, which often produces what is most noble in human intellectual activity but which can lead to a stultifying rationalism; and toward the ultimate unknowableness of the totally transcendent God, which can lead to a proper sense of awe in the presence of mystery but which can also escape into a flighty mysticism. True theology preserves both orderly elaboration and a sense of mystery; it avoids the dangers of rationalism on the one hand and mysticism on the other.

Since theology is based on faith, which in turn is based on revelation, it is the structure of revelation which determines the nature of theology.⁴ The word God has spoken comes before the word man speaks. There has been a shift of emphasis in recent years in our view of revelation. In the standard theology texts of the first half of this century revelation was considered to be a series of truths that God revealed, things or facts that God told us about himself and about his ways with us. Now we are looking at revelation less in a conceptualistic framework and more as God's own personal self-

² Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., "Qu'est-ce que la théologie?" in *Révélation et Théologie*, Brussels, Cep, 1965, p. 86-7.

³ Cf. M. D. Chenu, O.P., *Is Theology a Science?* New York, Hawthorne Books, 1959, Chapter 4: "Theological Science."

⁴ Cf. S.T., I, q. 1, a. 3: Sacred Doctrine treats things under the formality of being divinely revealed.

disclosure to man; there is less emphasis on God telling man about himself, and more emphasis on God acting in human history and by means of his actions disclosing who he is and what he means for man.⁵ And so the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, of the Vatican Council begins its first chapter by stating, "In his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will" (n. 2), the emphasis being on God revealing *himself* rather than truths about himself. God chose to reveal himself by intervening in the history of man, by leading the people he chose out of slavery and into the land of promise, guiding that people through centuries of struggle and growth, victory and defeat, strength and weakness, until he finally and definitively revealed himself in the person and life of Jesus Christ. God reveals his purpose and plan by acting, and the words of the prophets come to make clear the meaning of this divine action. As the Council says in *Dei Verbum*, "This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them" (n. 2). The point I wish to stress here is that God's revelation takes place in history. It is God's actions and words in the changing, developing events of man. Schillebeeckx writes, "the salvific intervention of God reveals itself in becoming history, and becomes history in revealing itself."⁶ Revelation is more accurately approached not as a body of truths handed down for all time, but as the personal self-disclosure of God in and by human history. Since God revealed himself in history, in the saving history of his chosen people and the personal history of Jesus Christ, theology must go to this history to meet him.

Not only is God's self-disclosure accomplished in human history, but so is man's response of faith. No one hears the word of God in a vacuum. Man hears God's revelation in the midst of his own life, with his own talents and limitations, influenced by his own desires and imaginings, as he is at any moment in the center of a turmoil of

⁵ Cf. K. Rahner, S.J., "The Development of Dogma" in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I, Baltimore, Helicon, 1961, especially p. 48.

⁶ Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

events, as he is acted upon by the interplay of circumstances, as he has been formed by his own past, as he more or less perfectly lives in his own freedom and personal identity. He can never abstract from what he is at the moment, from his ever new, ever changing historical reality as he hears and responds to the word of God.⁷ Man's faith, then, exists not timelessly and forever, but immersed in the concrete, changing circumstances of his life. Faith is a human, history-embedded response to the divine, history-embedded revelation. Theology must have a fundamental concern with this historical character of revelation and faith.

One other point I want to mention in the description of theology is its motive. The motive of theology, the purpose for which theology is done, cannot be mere curiosity, but should correspond to the motive of faith, which is to be absorbed in God and in the purposes which God showed in revealing himself. God entered into human history for the salvation of the human race.⁸ He fully revealed himself in Jesus Christ, who "came that he might save the people from their sins and that all men might be made holy."⁹ He continues to act in his Church which, as the Council says, "has been divinely sent to all nations that she might be 'the universal instrument of salvation.'"¹⁰ Theology, then, ought to have the same purpose as God's revelation, as Christ, as the Church, which is to serve mankind for salvation. Salvation is both personal and communal. It is personal in that it is the individual person who acts and who is saved in his personal acts of intelligence and freedom. It is communal because these human activities are never performed without influencing other persons, and because we are saved by means of one another, we are joined to one another in the community of belief, the community of salvation, as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, says: "It has pleased God, however, to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness"(n. 9). Theology is directed

⁷ Cf. Rahner, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁸ Cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 2.

⁹ Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, n. 1.

¹⁰ Decree on Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*, n. 1.

to salvation, and salvation is always of individual men in the here and now circumstances of their personal and communal life. From the point of view of its motive, then, theology must be concerned with the contingent, changing circumstances in which men live and grow and die.

In summary, we can pick out the outstanding characteristics of the conciliar theology, taking into consideration what was said of its nature and purpose. The theology emerging from the Council, the theology of our times, should be biblical, historical and pastoral. I shall elaborate briefly on each of these three characteristics.

Theology has always been *biblical*, but today it is seen more clearly as emerging from the biblical revelation rather than looking to the Scriptures as proofs for its theses.¹¹ God's self-revealing activity and the prophetic word which brings it to light were received by a people who in the course of time expressed that revelation in the written words of the scriptures. It is this revelation, made by God and brought to light by his people, which is the foundation for their faith and for the faith of all subsequent peoples, the foundation also for our theological elaborations. To try to understand what that revelation meant to those people is the first task of every theologian. Every available means of scholarship must be used to uncover the original meaning of the Scriptures, exactly how they were intended by the people who wrote them. Theology talks about God; it must talk about God as he has revealed himself to his chosen people and in Jesus Christ. Every work of theology today must be based on the great themes of revelation as presented in the bible.¹² The theologian must be immersed in the bible, realizing in fact what Saint Jerome said centuries ago: "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." The Council calls study of Scripture "the soul of theology."¹³ As the soul gives life to the organism, Scripture gives life to theology.

¹¹ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., "Exegesis, Dogmatics and the Development of Dogma" in *Dogmatic Vs. Biblical Theology*, Baltimore, Helicon, 1964, p. 123.

¹² The Council stresses that in the study of theology in seminaries the biblical themes are to be presented first, then their development, and finally their penetration by the light of reason (Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatam Totius*, n. 16). This is in contrast with a system of biblical study based on a preconceived dogmatic pattern.

¹³ *Dei Verbum*, n. 23; *Optatam Totius*, n. 16.

As the departure of the soul means death, the absence of Scripture is the death of theology.

Secondly, theology today must be *historical*. God's revelation was accepted and responded to by people in their own peculiar circumstances of time and place, in the social and political milieu of their age, and the way it was understood in the past can help us see how it is to be understood in the present. One sees better what he is now by seeing his past, by understanding where he came from. God's revelation was heard and answered in the time of Moses and David and Christ. It was responded to in Corinth and Alexandria and Rome. But the word of God was spoken not just for the chosen people of both testaments, it is for people of all times, and the response of faith in the past helps condition our own response today. The community of believers, the Church, growing with the accumulated wisdom of Nicaea, Ephesus and Chalcedon, formulated certain aspects of the revelation which made it clearer to the men of their times. The carefully presented dogmas of other times were attempts by the Church to articulate something of the revelation, and because of the guidance of the Holy Spirit we are confident that the dogmas of past ages are true, they represent something really present in the revelation. There is no going back on dogma, but it is important to see doctrinal formulations in the context of their times, as answers to specific tendencies or reactions to difficulties which were pressing at the time. No dogma can adequately encompass a divine mystery, and it is important that we see why something was said in a certain way at a certain time. It would be inaccurate to read the documents of the Council of Trent in total abstraction from the pressures of the reformers; and the formula of transubstantiation must be seen in the light of the scholastic philosophy of the Church during the middle ages. It would be inaccurate to see the documents of any council as the last word on a mystery of revelation. The Church must be seen on its somewhat irregular march through the ages on its way to consummation in Christ's final appearance. Contemporary theology pays close attention to the historical perspective.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cf. K. Rahner, S.J., "Prospects for Dogmatic Theology" in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I, for a call to an historical consideration in theology.

Thirdly, there is a way in which all theology today must be *pastoral*. By pastoral I mean it must be concerned with and directed toward people as they really are. Not that theology must be watered down or popularized or made readily understandable to the man in the street or the man in the pew, but it must be adequate to the situation in which men find themselves today, which is different from the situation at the time of Constantine or Innocent III or Pius IX. Its pastoral quality comes about in two ways. The first is from its nature as the elaboration of faith. Since faith is the human response to God's revelation, theology should also be rooted in this human response, it should be as human as the act of faith. Faith is the act of specific, flesh and blood human beings, and theology too must be the amplifying of this flesh and blood human activity. Theology is the working out of faith, its unfolding in the intellectual life of man, and it is the intellectual life of real men who are living today. The second source of the pastoral quality of theology comes from its purpose, which ultimately is man's salvation, which proximately is the communication of the revelation of God in its implications. Theologians should talk to the men of their times, in ways which are understandable to the men of their times, and about things which are important in their times.¹⁵

Theology does not become pastoral in this sense simply by the updating of an older theology, still less by repeating the teachings of a theologian of another age as though they were timelessly adequate. A theology which is presented as timeless can end by being just that: adequate to no time at all. Theology must be continually done anew, not of course starting from scratch, and always taking seriously the theologies of the past. Theology should be new in every age because it is the word of God lived in the intelligence of every age. The revelation of God, spoken completely in Christ, is spoken also to men of a particular age, spoken through the Scriptures, spoken through the Church. It is heard by men of 1966, responded to by men of 1966, and theologized on by men of 1966. The situations of

¹⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 62: "While adhering to the methods and requirements proper to theology, theologians are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating to men of their times."

1966 are not the situations of 1266, nor are they the situations even of 66. We do not of course jump from 66 to 1966 as though all the theology in between is dead. To see how St. Paul explored the implications of revelation for his time and how Aquinas did it for his time is to provide invaluable assistance as we search how to do it for our time.

The pastoral demands of theology call for a deep knowledge of revelation; they call for an ever better appreciation of the past; they also call for an acute understanding of the present. The theologian is concerned to be adequate to reality, which means that he should try to know reality as it is now. The Council, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, said that "recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which influence life and demand new theological investigations"(n. 62). This means that the theologian must be attuned to the world about him in its political, economic and social dimensions. He must try to obtain an ever better knowledge of contemporary man and the contemporary world. If there was a time when a theologian could be content with knowledge of man and the world gained years previously, he cannot do so today. The Council, again in *Gaudium et Spes*, described the world today as characterized by "profound and rapid changes"(n. 4), which means that the theologian, concerned about the implications of revelation in the world of today, must work hard to come to grips with the times in their changes. Otherwise his theology, the wedding of revelation and man's intelligence, is not just irrelevant, it is untrue. This means that theology must be alert to and make use of contemporary sciences, especially those which probe the life and activities of man: psychology, sociology, economics, political science,¹⁶ as well as the natural sciences and their technological offspring. Theology today does not exist in a vacuum; its deep involvement in the world of our times, attempting to serve God and man, will exact its toll in hard work always, in disappointment often. But with the work and out of the disappointment will come a truly vital and useful theology.

¹⁶ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 62.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

Having said something about the nature and characteristics of contemporary theology, I would now like to turn to its philosophical foundations, to see what they are; and then to evaluate scholastic philosophy in the light of the demands of contemporary theology.

It must be said right away that theology cannot exist without philosophy. Theology is the scientific elaboration of man's response of faith to God's revelation. In order for man to respond at all he must be a man, existing with some degree of self-awareness and with some knowledge of his relationship to the world around him. Man's knowledge of himself and of the world about him is basically philosophical. Philosophy is man's natural but ultimate understanding of himself and the world. It can be implicit and undeveloped, as it is with most people, or explicit and highly developed, as it is with those who have made a study of being in its various aspects. Revelation, then, which is the basis of theology, comes to man as he is a philosopher at least in an undeveloped sense, with some self-understanding and some kind of world-view. Theology, working out the implications of this revelation as it has been received in man, must necessarily be based on an understanding of man and the cosmos in which he lives. The deeper this understanding and the more adequate to the reality of man and the world, the better will the theology be.

Karl Rahner, in an excellent little article,¹⁷ said that the relationship between philosophy and theology was part of the larger question of the relationship between nature and grace. "Just as grace as a concrete reality contains nature as an *inner moment* within itself, so theology contains philosophy as an inner moment of itself."¹⁸ He goes on to explain that grace, as a mode of personal existence, presupposes the person in his concrete reality. And so theology, as a certain mode of human knowledge, presupposes the human knowledge that a person has of himself and of his world. The person who receives God's revelation and expands it scientifically, the theologian,

¹⁷ "Philosophy and Theology," in *Theology Digest*, Summer 1964, pp. 118-122.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

that is, must have a certain view of himself and his world, and it is important that this philosophical view be as full and as deep and as adequate to reality as human effort can make it. Therefore I cannot agree with those who would say that contemporary theology does not need philosophy at all, but rather that it is based on history and exegesis, on language studies and archeology and on contemporary awareness of man.¹⁹ Or rather, if these studies are indeed the foundation of contemporary theology they themselves presuppose a philosophy, they presuppose a deeper view and a more ultimate understanding of man and his world.²⁰

I suggest that the philosophy which underlies contemporary theology has two outstanding characteristics. With regard to man it is *personal*; with regard to the world it is *evolutionary*. The first characteristic was eloquently described by Father Walter Burghardt in his talk given on the last day of the Vatican II Conference at Notre Dame in March:

Tomorrow's theology will be different from yesterday's. Paradoxically it is already different. And if any single word can focus the difference, I suggest it is the *person*. More accurately, *person within community*. Person as set over against thing; reality in its relation to living persons rather than reality somewhere "out there"; interpersonal relationship in place of isolated independence.

Father Burghardt went on to describe enlighteningly the personal dimension in many areas of contemporary theological thought. The Council's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, describes man as seen in today's theology. Chapter One, on the dignity of the human person, begins this way: "According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown" (n. 12). The philosophy which underlies contemporary theology must be one which sees man as the center of things. And further, it should be one which sees man not as an isolated being but existing in necessary relationship with other men. *Gaudium et Spes*

¹⁹ Cf. R. Lauer, "Thomism Today," *The Commonweal*, April 3, 1964, p. 41.

²⁰ Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, pp. 18-28 for another treatment of the relation between philosophy and theology.

continues: "By his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential"(n. 12). Further, it should be a philosophy which pays proper attention to man's dignity as a free being. To quote from *Gaudium et Spes* again, "Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness. Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly; and rightly so, to be sure. . . . Man's dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice"(n. 17).

The philosophy which underlies contemporary theology should bring out both man's superiority to material things and his necessary interplay with the material world.²¹ It should recognize human misery and man's innate inclination to evil.²² A personal philosophy of man is one which tends to see his powers in a certain unity rather than in isolation one from another. The philosophy adequate to contemporary theology will see the interplay between intellect and will, between reason and emotion. And in the sensitive area of epistemology it will stress the meaning that things have for the total man, rather than how man's intellect apprehends abstract essences.²³ It will see the meaning that man gives to things as much as the meaning things have in themselves. Material things have ultimate meaning through man, says the Council. "Through his bodily composition he (man) gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator"(n. 14). Contemporary philosophy therefore will see the proximate as well as the ultimate meaning things have through the person.

The word *personal* characterizes the philosophy of man which should underlie contemporary theology. The word which characterizes the philosophy of nature is *evolutionary*. Modern science has added the element of change to our view of the world. The scientific view of the world today is historical, developmental, compared with the static view of the world that was dominant until recently.²⁴ Modern

²¹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 14.

²² Cf. *ibid.*, n. 13.

²³ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., "Le Concept de 'Verité,'" *op. cit.*, p. 223-4.

²⁴ Cf. R. Francoeur, *Perspectives in Evolution*, Baltimore, Helicon, 1965, especially Part One.

physics postulates material reality to be constantly in motion. And biology sees living things as changing, as developing; it sees motion, evolutionary motion, as in one direction of development, of progress. The experimental sciences describe reality as it can be most carefully seen. Philosophy, which must be based on observation, must therefore build on the most accurate description of reality available, which today would be gathered from the experimental sciences. Aristotle's cosmology was based on his own scientific observations, the best that could be had in the fourth century B.C. Medieval cosmology was based on medieval scientific observation, the best that could be had at that time. Modern philosophy of nature ought also to be based on modern scientific observation, the best that can be had in the twentieth century A.D.²⁵ The broad view of reality provided by modern science is of reality in motion to its innermost core, motion to the degree not previously realized by the science of another age. If time is the measure of motion, or as Webster defines it, "the period during which an action or process continues," then time must figure prominently in our understanding of the material world. It is seen in fact today to be a fourth dimension which must be part of the full description of the world about us. Philosophers have always been aware of time. What modern science has added is the degree to which reality involves time, and also the understanding that time is unidirectional. The classic Greek philosophers thought that something could be fully understood only insofar as it was immutable, changeless. True reality for Plato existed only in his world of eternal, immutable ideas. In Aristotle's hylomorphic theory the basic principles of reality were potency and act. Things could be known insofar as they were in act; things changed insofar as they were in potency. Potency, therefore, or change, was the basis for the non-knowability of things; things could be known only insofar as one abstracted from their changeableness. Modern man, however, scientifically conditioned, sees that things can be known only insofar as they *do* change, because change is an intrinsic condition of reality. The concept of reality today is a dynamic one. Time is seen to be essential in the description of nature. The philosophical view which attempts

²⁵ T. J. Cunningham, O.P.'s article, "Where Has All the Philosophy Gone?" in *America*, April 9, 1966, pp. 496-499, makes this point very well.

to give an understanding of the world to theology must pay adequate attention to the changing character of reality.

We have already indicated that conciliar theology is historical, that it takes seriously the developing character of God's revelation and the developing character of man's living understanding of this revelation. The philosophical basis for this theology ought therefore also to take significant account of the developing character of the world, of life, of human existence. To be adequate to reality, to be true, in other words, contemporary philosophy must be both personal, as was said before, and also evolutionary, the word that could adequately describe the dimension of unidirectional time which reality is seen to possess.

III. THE ROLE OF SCHOLASTIC PHILOSOPHY

Thirdly now we must describe scholastic philosophy, particularly in its special form of Thomism, and evaluate this particular traditional philosophical foundation of theology in the light of contemporary demands. The term, scholasticism, is applied to the philosophical and theological thought which went on in the schools of medieval Europe from about the ninth century on. The society was Christian, and the basic lines of scholasticism were also Christian. Rational interests were dominated by religious concerns, and the teaching of the Church in the past and present was always the guiding norm. Reason came to be seen as having its own autonomy, but always within the limits designated by faith.

The early centuries of scholasticism, from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, were dominated by the thought of St. Augustine, which was strongly neo-Platonic in form.²⁶ In the thirteenth century, with the rise of the universities, came the rediscovery in western Europe of the thought of Aristotle, brought in through Spain by the Arabian philosophers. In the writings of Aristotle the medieval world was confronted with a consistent view of reality that challenged and in some ways surpassed what was then being taught. The reaction to it was mixed. On the one hand many were enthusiastic because of the grandeur and depth of the thought which came through. On the

²⁶ Cf. F. Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy: Vol. II, Augustine to Scotus*, especially Chapter XXII.

other hand there was caution because some things in the pagan Aristotle, especially when seen through the eyes of his Arabian commentators, contradicted the teachings of Christian thought. In the intellectual ferment that followed, particularly centering around the Universities of Paris and Oxford, there were some who tended to pursue the traditional Augustinian thought to the exclusion of the newer Aristotelianism. Such were Alexander of Hales and St. Bonaventure. There were others who attempted to integrate Aristotelianism with Christian thought, notably Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, the latter with spectacular success. I trust you will forgive the note of family pride with which I quote the consensus of authorities that St. Thomas was the greatest of the medieval scholastics. It was St. Thomas who achieved the best expression of Christian faith in Aristotelian terms, who magnificently synthesized the new philosophical thought with the traditions of the Father and Doctors of the Church. It is the corpus of the writings of St. Thomas which represents the best in medieval philosophical and theological thought.

In general, scholastic thought was characterized by two factors. The first was the subordination of philosophy to theology; the second was the use of a strict logic, employing precise methods of dialectics and demonstration and favoring the syllogistic presentation of its conclusions. Within this atmosphere St. Thomas worked out a philosophy of nature based on Aristotle's prime matter and substantial form; a philosophy of man based on the substantial union between body and soul; a philosophy of knowledge based on the distinction between subject and object; a philosophy of being based on the distinction between essence and existence; a philosophy of God based on the analogy of being; all of it expressed in beautiful logic, written with an economy of words and simplicity of expression, all of it subordinated to man's knowledge of God by faith and man's way to God through Christ. It was a magnificent synthesis, an awesome intellectual structure, analogous in beauty and power to the great cathedrals which were the architectural masterpieces of the same age.

Following St. Thomas' death in 1274 Scholasticism diverged along three lines: Thomism, Scotism and Nominalism. Scotus, in the line of the Franciscan tradition which had been basically Augustinian

and never really accepted Aristotle, followed St. Thomas in some things and departed from him in others. Nominalism, which re-emerged strongly with William of Ockham in the fourteenth century, attempted to preserve God's freedom and omnipotence by denying the existence of universals in the world of reality. Scholasticism's decline in the later middle ages was broken only by a period of renaissance in Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries centering around the school at Salamanca and the newly formed Society of Jesus. The twentieth century revival of Thomism dates from Pope Leo XIII, who in *Aeterni Patris* (1879) recommended the study of St. Thomas to the whole Church. Since then, and thanks to the efforts of such Thomistic scholars as Cardinal Mercier, Father Garrigou-LaGrange, Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, Yves Simon, Charles DeKonnick and others, Thomism experienced a new life which in the first half of this century brought it to probably its greatest strength since St. Thomas' death. It has formed the basis of most of the philosophy and theology taught in Catholic seminaries, under the direction of the code of Canon Law and the watchful guidance of the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries. Canon 1366, n. 2, stated clearly: "Instructors in conducting the study of the subjects of rational philosophy and of theology and in the training of the seminarians in these subjects shall follow the Angelic Doctor's method, doctrine, and principles and should steadfastly adhere to them."²⁷ Although other Doctors have been praised often and officially, Thomism was confirmed above all other systems by numerous papal decrees, speeches and citations.²⁸ It was propagated and defended strongly by many philosophy and theology teachers in Catholic colleges and universities, especially in this country, and held the favored position as the established system of thought in Catholic circles.

Not all Catholics were happy with this favored position of Thomism. Many thought it was too strictly imposed, too rigidly taught, that it did not allow the freedom of thought and investi-

²⁷ Abbo-Hannan, *The Sacred Canons*, Vol. II, St. Louis, B. Herder, 1957, p. 599.

²⁸ Cf. S. Ramirez, O.P., "The Authority of St. Thomas Aquinas" in *The Thomist*, Vol. XV (1952), pp. 1-109.

gation necessary to keep pace with the modern world. During the third session of the Council, at the debate on priestly formation, Cardinal Leger of Montreal spoke of the disadvantages of scholastic philosophy as the only system permitted in seminaries. Since philosophy should be concerned with the truth of things and not with what authors have said, it was unwise to give the impression the Church was imposing any type of philosophy exclusively. The important thing, the Cardinal said, was to recommend not so much the doctrinal ideas of St. Thomas, as his scientific and spiritual approach, which was to use the ideas of his day to illustrate and affirm the Gospel.²⁹ The final decree on priestly formation, in the section on philosophy, makes no explicit mention of St. Thomas although it does say that students should pursue their studies "basing themselves on a philosophic heritage which is perennially valid"(n. 15). St. Thomas is mentioned in the following section, on theology: "Students should learn to penetrate them (the mysteries of salvation) more deeply with the help of speculative reason exercised under the tutelage of St. Thomas"(n. 16). The only other time St. Thomas is mentioned in the Council texts is in the decree on Education. The text says, "The Church pursues such a goal (the evaluation of modern problems) after the manner of her most illustrious teachers, especially St. Thomas Aquinas"(n. 10). It seems that the Council in its official texts is much less insistent on St. Thomas' teachings than was the authority of the Church before the Council.

Finally, now, in evaluating the status of scholastic philosophy in contemporary theology we must first of all be clear about the term, scholastic, which has many shades of meaning. The word is broad enough to cover the thought of Anselm, Bonaventure, Abelard, Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, Scotus, Ockham, Cajetan, Banez, Suarez, all of whom were scholastics; it is from the writings of these men and others of their times that we derive what is called scholastic philosophy. Even if we single out from all these the work of Aquinas, and if by scholasticism we mean Thomism, we still must be clear whether we are referring to the work of St. Thomas himself or of St. Thomas as interpreted by Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, the school

²⁹ X. Rynne, *The Third Session*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965, p. 223.

at Salamanca or Garrigou-LaGrange. But granting that we know what we are talking about when we use the term scholastic philosophy, and granting that we are talking about the philosophy of St. Thomas himself, it must be said that obviously any philosophy of an earlier age has to be updated, to say the very least. It must be updated in terminology, since it does not use the language of our times. It must be updated in the problems it treats, and it must be updated to incorporate the new knowledge that has been made available to mankind since the middle ages. But even with the normal updating, which every scholastic or Thomistic philosopher does anyway if he is interested in presenting truth and not just preserving a system, there are more serious difficulties with scholastic philosophy even in its Thomistic form. First of all scholasticism was a philosophy controlled by theology, it was not free to explore and theorize at will. It was always at the service, or should we say at the mercy, of sacred doctrine. The men of the schools in the middle ages were theologians first; their philosophy was a subsidiary pursuit, undertaken to provide a sound basis for their theological view of God, man and the world, undertaken often to solve difficulties and overcome objections to sacred doctrine.³⁰ Modern philosophy of course has not been like this at all; it has been free-wheeling and independent, often with disastrous effects for the faith, but sometimes opening new horizons and providing new insights that can be used well by theologians. Here we are touching again on the delicate relation between philosophy and theology. If philosophy provides some kind of world-view, some kind of deeper and coherent picture of reality, and if no man can think without *some* kind of world-view, then every time a theologian opens his mouth he is speaking out of some kind of philosophy, whether he is conscious of its explicit structure or not. Perhaps this is why St. Thomas' incorporation of Aristotle in the thirteenth century caused such a disturbance in theological circles. Theologians had previously been speaking out of an Augustinian-Neoplatonic world-view, and Aquinas' articulation of the faith based thoroughly on an Aristotelian outlook was not just theology making use of a different philosophy, it was a radically

³⁰ Cf. S.T., I, q. 1, a. 8.

different theology.³¹ And it was disturbing not just to his fellow theologians, but to the ecclesiastical authorities as well.³²

A theology based on a philosophy which was tailored to fit the theology is bound to be involved in a kind of vicious circle. Scholastic philosophy was evolved because of the needs of theology. For theology today to restrict itself to that philosophy is to restrict itself to something which has already been restricted by theology itself. This seriously hampers theological creativity. It would seem much better, and in fact this is what is being done by many conciliar theologians, to make use of whatever philosophical insights are available from any source, including contemporary non-Catholic thinkers and even including non-Christian thinkers from entirely different cultures. In this way the theologian is speaking to the world of his times, not trying to squeeze the world of his times into a medieval pattern of thought. Let the free-wheeling philosophers go where truth leads them. God's revelation is meant for man in his contemporary existence, and contemporary philosophy will provide for revelation the same opportunities as well as the same dangers provided by any frontier.

The first difficulty then is the subservient and restricted character of scholastic philosophy in relation to theology. The second difficulty is that scholastic philosophy provides only a partial view of reality as we see it today. Or rather it provides a particular view of the same reality which we see differently today. And here I will return to two points made previously. Reality today is seen to be more person-orientated. Man is seen to be at the center of reality and all things are seen in relation to him. Scholastic philosophy saw the hierarchy of beings in the universe, and man had his proper place in

³¹ In his article "The Authority of St. Thomas Aquinas," Father Ramirez quotes from the biography of St. Thomas by William of Tocco: "Thomas instituted new articles in his teaching, discovered a new and brilliant method in his presentation, and adduced new reasons in support of his arguments. No one who heard him teach new things and illustrate doubtful matters with new reasons would doubt that God had enlightened him with the rays of a new light. So swift and certain in judgment was he, that he did not hesitate to teach and write new opinions which God had thought worthy to inspire anew." *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

³² Cf. Copleston, *op. cit.*, pp. 430-433.

that hierarchy. One could say that scholastic philosophy was cosmo-centric, while contemporary thought is anthropocentric. This is of course a matter of a perspective. One could take a hierarchy of being outlook and stress the value of man within it, as today's scholastics do; or one could take a completely person-centered view and restructure the hierarchy. To the scholastic philosopher the categories of freedom, responsibility, personal identity and love are seen in the orderly context of man's place under God and in the world. For the contemporary man these categories are of primary importance in forging his moment to moment existence. Again it is a matter of a viewpoint, a perspective with which to view reality, an outlook with which to come to grips with the real.³³

Reality is also seen today as in motion, as evolving. Scholastic philosophy, Thomistic philosophy, provided an essentially static view of the universe. Substantial forms were immutable; essences were changeless; intellectual knowledge abstracted from the changing character of things. Contemporary man views essences as changing; knows that intellectual knowledge must include the changing character of things if it is to be adequate. A static, hierarchic view of reality is inadequate today, and must be either revised, if this is possible without destroying it, or substituted for by another more realistic view that is based on the changing, evolving character of things.

Where then are we to turn for this newer philosophy, if scholasticism is outmoded, if Thomism is inadequate? In the first place we must be alert not to develop a rigid new system in place of a rigid old system. There must be no restrictive view of reality, no matter how all-embracing, which will be the plague of future theologians in

³³ Reflecting on something similar to these two points of view Yves Simon once wrote: "Interest in Scholastic philosophies was revived toward the end of the nineteenth century and the old conflict (between scholasticism and humanism) could be observed again. In fact, it had never died out. I know of liberal arts colleges where there is a tendency to center training about Philosophy; because of my professional interest, I might be expected to be enthusiastic about such programs. I am not. I rather think that on the college level it is man considered in the contingencies of his concrete existence who should be the main subject of liberal studies." Cf. Simon, "Jacques Maritain: the Growth of a Christian Philosopher," *Jacques Maritain, The Man and His Achievement*, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1963.

search of God's truth in a changing universe. In the second place we must admit that there just is no new Thomas Aquinas in our times, and maybe there never will be. In the middle ages it might have been possible for a genius like Aquinas to be master of the knowledge of his time, or at least master of his sources, and so to construct a *summa* of theology which embraced all of known reality in its principles if not in its elaborations. Reality today is too vast, the knowledge explosion has put beyond the human reach probably forever the possibility of one man attaining the universal grasp that Aquinas showed. Maybe no one man will ever again be able to construct a *summa* of theology which will be as adequate to his times as Aquinas' *Summa* was to the thirteenth century. Maybe too the quest for total order is illusory. Today's knowledge is bringing out as much the randomness and confusion of things as it is their order. The evolutionary nature of biological reality happens not in an orderly fashion but out of a near infinity of random possibilities. A new *summa*, if it is to be produced today, if it is desirable to try to produce one today, must be the product of a team rather than of one man, however gigantic in intellectual stature he is.

Where then are we to turn? We can retreat safely into the world of Thomism, of neat order and demonstrative proofs, and there continue to speak to each other and commend each other for saying something clearly and forcefully, and then we pay the penalty of irrelevancy to the world of our times. But if we cannot turn to any twentieth century philosophical or theological giant, and if our consciences will not let us retreat, what is left? It seems that we must strike out ahead in the partial darkness of our times, attached by the lifeline of tradition to the good things of the past, and yet building resolutely the structure of theology out of the wood of the wilderness of our times. We cannot be honest to reality if we relegate our scholastic heritage to the slag heap of the past, to use a phrase of Father Burghardt, but neither can we remain comfortably within its solid and proven structure: this would be equally untrue to reality. Philosophy we must have. Where to find it is the problem.

There is no dearth of philosophers today, or rather of philosophical attempts. We must, I think, be guided by the characteristics of Catholic theology as they have emerged from the Vatican Council,

and look to the philosophers who can provide help in making our own theology scriptural, evolutionary and pastoral. The result is bound to be a greater divergence among theologians simply because the field of human thought is so vast today. One attempt at a specifically evolutionary theology is the so-called "process theology" which is today being written about by some Protestant and Catholic thinkers. The central conviction of process thought is that the evolutionary perspective must be taken with utmost seriousness. Process theologians see man as part of a changing, moving, living, active world, in which we have to do not with inert substances but with dynamic processes.³⁴ The Catholic pioneer here would of course have to be Teilhard de Chardin, and there have been some interesting contemporary attempts to construct a theological treatise on this evolutionary perspective.³⁵

What is the status of scholasticism, or more precisely, Thomism, in theology today? We cannot simply abandon it outright. We must look upon Thomas as we do upon every great thinker, with respect for his genius and with genuine investigation of his contributions. The Vatican Council, as was noted, did not impose Thomism although it did show great respect for it. While not being bound by all the restrictions of Thomism we can still profit by its genuine contributions. The Dominican Master General recently completed a visitation to this country. During his stay in New Haven, Connecticut, he is reported to have said this: "Every age must create its own theology, and Saint Thomas will be a source for present day theology but not a substitute for it. . . . For solving problems of the present day St. Thomas offers principles and insights that simply cannot be ignored."³⁶ St. Thomas will be a *source* for present day

³⁴ Cf. Norman Pittinger, "A Contemporary Trend in North American Theology: Process-Thought and Christian Faith" in *Religion in Life*, Autumn, 1965, pp. 500-510.

³⁵ Cf. A. Hulsbosch, O.S.A., *God in Creation and Evolution*, New York Sheed and Ward, 1965; P. Schoonenberg, S.J., *God's World in the Making*, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1964; also cf. Francoeur, *Perspectives in Evolution*, for a treatment on the development of the evolutionary perspective down through the ages, and for an attempt to interpret the creation and fall in this viewpoint.

³⁶ Interview with Father Fernandez, *The Hartford Transcript*, May 20, 1966, p. 2.

theology but not a *substitute* for it. I think of Thomism as I do the magnificent medieval cathedrals which one sees in Chartres, Rheims, Cologne. It is breathtaking, awe-inspiring, and spoke eloquently of God and man to a past age.

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Digest of the Discussion:

The undersigned called attention to a necessary distinction between the manual versions of Scholasticism which were admittedly influenced by essentialism and a tendency to the abstract, and the genuine approach of the Scholastics themselves; which recognized no uniform organized system but was pluralistic and reasonably open to freedom of interpretation. Viewed in this light, it would not seem that it has been established that Scholasticism is incapable of adaptation to satisfy the requirements of personalism, existentialism and evolution. On the other hand, neither has the adequacy of Scholasticism for these requirements been demonstrated. A further consideration is that it would seem impossible for the Church to propose its dogmas as to their unchanging truth without recourse to the basic, universal, necessary, transcendental notions, of Scholasticism, so as to avoid slipping into complete relativism, agnosticism and purely situational ethics. Possibly a solution might be developed which would continue to utilize these basic notions of Scholasticism, while incorporating what is true and useful in modern philosophies and an existential Thomism, personalistically orientated and flexible enough to account for authentic evolution of reality and doctrine. Such a philosophical approach would not be a mere eclecticism which would attempt to unify tendencies which would ultimately clash, but an approach which would leave room for legitimately diversified interpretations of the unfathomable riches of revelation, while respecting the continuity of the traditional teaching of the Church.

In the discussion, attention was called to the fact that that although theology had in a sense guided the development of Scholastic philosophy and dominated it, the emancipation of philosophy from

theology, so earnestly desired by modern philosophers had in fact greatly contributed to man's understanding of himself. However it would be a mistake to run into the extreme of having philosophy dominate theology. Father Vanderhaar stressed the fact that modern philosophy did greatly influence Catholic theology at the Council, especially through the writings of Rahner and Schillebeeckx. *Father Tyrell* of Huntington mentioned that both Rahner and Schillebeeckx considered themselves Thomists and argued the possibility of fidelity to the inspiration of Thomism in modern approaches.

Father Vanderhaar distinguished between Thomism as a fixed system of principles which has had great value and on the other hand, the spirit of Thomas which is ageless.

Father Tyrell was worried about the need for continuity in the understanding and explanation of the Faith in regard to the faithful in view of changing philosophies. He wondered if Scholasticism is capable of developing to a satisfactory level along the lines of modern emphases. *Father Doherty S.A.* raised the question of what effect the introduction of the principles of the modern philosophies would have on the character of Scholasticism. *Father Burton Farrell C.P.*, Union City, contended that there was no need for theologians panicking in the face of the historicist emphasis. Scholasticism is neither irrelevant nor inadequate if freed from the limitations of textbook level. The philosophy of St. Thomas especially is not inadequate. His *Summa contra Gentiles* could afford a justification for some of the theories of Teilhard de Chardin and the same might be said for certain other modern theologians.

John Corrigan of Salve Regina College, Newport, a lay theologian, asserted that authentic Thomism and especially the spirit of St. Thomas will find a ready acceptance in many modern minds.

The discussion was brought to a conclusion with the comment on the value of scholasticism's contribution to theology in the past and its importance for theological continuity. Thomism has been the most successful philosophy in the use of the Church but others have also been necessary. Thomism should not have a monopoly.

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