

SELECT GROUPS

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING PIUS XII'S *HUMANI GENERIS*

Topic: *Humani Generis* after Fifty Years
Convener: Michael Slusser, Duquesne University
Presenter: Joseph A. Komanchak, Catholic University of America

Joseph A. Komanchak presented the events which led up to the encyclical *Humani Generis*, published August 12, 1950; the contents of the encyclical itself; and some examples of its impact down to the present day.

In the late 1930s, some French-language theologians tried to develop approaches to theology which could address the needs of the time directly and specifically, in a way which neo-Thomist scholasticism seemed unready or unable to do. Three Dominicans (Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves M.-J. Congar, and Louis Charlier) found themselves the object of Roman criticism in 1938-1939, and various of their works had to be withdrawn from sale. In February, 1942, Chenu's and Charlier's books were placed on the *Index*. The principal reason appears to have been their attacks on the limitations of Scholasticism, if we may judge by the article by Pietro Parente, which appeared in the *Osservatore Romano* at the time. Parente coined the term, "the new theology," which was later applied not only to these theologians but to several others. Chenu and Charlier had to leave their teaching positions.

French theology began three important publishing projects, even under wartime conditions: the series *Unam Sanctam*, *Sources Chrétiennes*, and *Théologie*, all of which manifested a historical consciousness which challenged Scholasticism. Going back behind the manuals to the sources of theology in the Bible, the liturgy, and the Fathers of the Church shifted the emphasis from theological conclusions to the interaction between theology and life. Jean Daniélou, S.J., summarized this in an article in *Études* in April, 1946, an article which looks like a manifesto. It was quickly answered by Dominicans from Toulouse, especially M.-M. Labourdette, who recognized the value of the historical work, but defended the speculative method of Scholasticism and the objectivity of the truth which it attained. While Labourdette mentions other Jesuits (Teilhard de Chardin, Bouillard, Fessard, Urs von Balthasar, de Lubac), the Daniélou article is his main target, and his criticism is sharp but not intemperate. The same cannot be said for the criticisms launched in Rome by R. Garrigou-Lagrangé, O.P. (some of which seem to have worked their way into the Pope's own speeches) or the collective response published by the Jesuits in

question. Despite well-meaning efforts by several (especially Mgr. Bruno de Solages) to calm the situation, the controversy issued in major changes in the Jesuit scholasticates, the reiteration of the importance of Scholastic method, and the removal of several of the named parties from their teaching posts. This may have taken place to prevent people from seeing these actions as a response to *Humani generis*.

We do not know who wrote the encyclical, but students of its text have seen in it various hands, some more irenic than others. It is more moderate than Pius X's *Pascendi* (1907), and it avoids designating by name the authors of the errors it censures. It opens with concern about the influence of a sense of history and change, and a misplaced and dangerously attractive readiness to minimize differences in order to present a common Christian front to the world. A whole series of theological errors are then named in no systematic order. What they all have in common is a backing away from the clarity and certainty of the conclusions of Scholastic theology. The encyclical voices a similar concern about any philosophy which questions self-evident principles and absolute truth and thereby endangers theology. A relatively short but famous part of the encyclical addresses issues from modern science, particularly evolution and its impact on the interpretation of the first chapters of *Genesis*. The opinions criticized by the encyclical are not to be advanced in teaching, public speaking, or writing, so that the Church's truth can be advanced without compromise.

The immediate effect of *Humani generis* fell mainly on French-speaking Jesuits, their schools and their publications. Even some Jesuits hostile to the so-called "new theology" were affected. *Humani generis* became a theme for courses and disputations, as at the Jesuit theologate at Woodstock. Later, when the Preparatory Commissions for Vatican II were at work, the encyclical played a large role in their early drafts, though in the end Vatican II cites it only six times. Pope John Paul II's *Fides et ratio* uses it more widely, particularly to uphold the value of speculative theology and classical philosophy and the "enduring validity" of concepts and expressions of truth which the Church has used. A comparison of *Fides et ratio* with Paul VI's *Mysterium ecclesiae* on the latter point can be helpful. Despite the points of contact with *Humani generis*, the present Pope's method and style are much more discursive and phenomenological, and more concerned to persuade than to pronounce. The issue of the absoluteness of faith and the relativity of its expression, however, which *Humani generis* prematurely tried to settle, is still with us and still important.

In discussion, Komonchak resisted the suggestion that the new theology had two strands, *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, and offered instead a contrast between those theologians whose work centered on Thomas Aquinas and those who worked more on the Fathers. He offered Congar's review of de Lubac's *Corpus mysticum* as an example. The varieties of Thomism at the time should not be overlooked, not only the difference between the Dominican studium in Toulouse and Le Saulchoir, but also Rome, where for some Thomism was another name for Aristotelianism. Garrigou-Lagrange tried to take the ambiguity

out of teaching philosophy "on Thomistic principles" by codifying those principles in twenty-four formulas. Lonergan, Rahner, and "transcendental Thomism" seem not to have been directly affected by the controversy around the encyclical. One could claim that Rahner's supernatural existential attempts to deal with the problems raised by de Lubac.

The whole discussion back memories for several participants: Pierre Charles, S.J., leaving his courses in Louvain-Egenhoven to prepare for the "reopening" of Vatican I; the way in which the theological differences also reflected internal French political division between Vichy and the *résistance*; and how Cardinal Billot lost his "red hat" over *Action Française* (I should emphasize that no member of the group claimed to recall this 1927 event personally).

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COMMUNION APPROACH TO MISSION

Topic: Conflicts on Mission:
 Toward Mutual Understanding and Reconciled Practice
 Convener: Thomas Hughson, Marquette University
 Presenters: Mary Ehle, Creighton University
 Ralph Del Colle, Marquette University
 Thomas Hughson, Marquette University

Theologians need not hurry toward mediating positions on every conflict in the Church or theology. Indeed, it has been customary to acknowledge that opposition often has played a role in theological and doctrinal development. At the same time, it has been less remarked that the history of the ecumenical movement has been a lesson in not assuming that every vehement conflict on a major theme springs from an underlying contradiction. Lutheran/Catholic conflict over justification is a case in point. In an ecumenical spirit appropriate also for tensions internal to Catholicism three papers explored theological territory between polarized positions on Christian mission.

Mary Ehle went beneath publicized conflict between the communion missiologies of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Leonardo Boff to their variant trinitarian principles, though both anchor Church mission in the Trinity and both wield an interpersonal, I-Thou-We, approach. Their conflict over the relative priority of either the universal or local Church springs from diverse understandings of divine and human persons. Ratzinger tends to locate the distinctiveness of the Son in the relation to the Father rather than in a distinct personal property and to treat Jesus's obedience to the Father as the historical expression of that relation. There follows a communion missiology that emphasizes obediential partici-