

***Philosophia Obscurans?* Six Theses on the Proper Relationship between Theology and Philosophy**

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IT HAS LONG BEEN OBSERVED that AD 529 was a momentous date. In that year, the Emperor Justinian closed the Academy in Athens—thus symbolically bringing pagan antiquity to an end—while, according to tradition, St. Benedict established the abbey at Monte Cassino, indicating the flourishing of Christian life and practice. The Academy and Monte Cassino provide, then, another trope—along with Athens and Jerusalem (in the early Church) and Paris and Assisi (in the medieval Church)—for imaging the relationship between reason and faith.

For Catholic theology, this relationship remains of primatial importance, for understanding it properly means grasping how human beings may be intelligent and inquisitive thinkers, lifelong seekers after truth, as well as men and women of faith. Further, one cannot read any serious book of theology without coming up against the correlation between philosophy and Christian faith. Has some Church teaching been influenced by a particular philosophical position that is no longer acceptable? Has a distinct philosophical approach had a baleful influence on some later ecclesial formulation of the Gospel? Have theologians relied too strongly on certain thinkers, seduced by Siren songs of reason, when, Ulysses-like, they should have strapped themselves to the mast so that they would not be captivated by alien forms of thought?

Of course, the criticism that mere human reasoning is tainting the Christian faith—that itching ears have traded the sound doctrine of the

Gospel for the wisdom of the Greeks—has a long and distinguished pedigree. St. Paul straightforwardly told his readers that “God has made foolish the wisdom of the world”; and again, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the learning of the clever I will set aside. . . . For Jews look for signs and Greeks for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:19–23). Still again, “The wisdom of the world is foolishness in the eyes of God” (1 Cor 3:19). St. Paul’s concerns continue unabated through Tatian’s attacks on philosophy in his “Address to the Greeks,” through Tertullian’s famous cleavage between Athens and Jerusalem, through Jacopone da Todi’s mocking poems on the allurements of Parisian learning, through the stern monitum of Pope Gregory IX to the Parisian theology masters, through the condemnations issued by the bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, through the claims of Peter John Olivi that philosophical questions are “unworthy of the Christian’s serious concern,” through the harsh comments of Luther against Aristotle and Plato, through Pascal’s famous dichotomizing of *le Dieu des philosophes et le Dieu d’Abraham, d’Isaac et de Jacob*, and through Karl Barth’s philippics against theology’s contemptuous toadying to foreign canons of rationality.¹ In all of these thinkers, one cannot fail to hear the comment by the long-forgotten Absalon of Saint-Victor (†1203) who insists, “*Non regnat spiritus Christi ubi dominatur spiritus Aristotelis*,” with Aristotle a proxy for any philosophy or philosopher who seeks to usurp the Gospel.²

In each of these cases, the wisdom taught by the prophets of Israel and by Jesus Christ needs no help from the Athenian Academy. Philos-

¹ See Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, ed. and trans. Molly Whittaker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982). For Tertullian, “The Prescription against Heretics” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), chap. 7, 246. For Gregory IX’s letter of 1228, see *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, ed. H. Denifle, vol. 1 (Paris, 1899), 114–16. Also, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann, 37th edition (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991), no. 824. For Olivi’s attitude toward philosophy, see David Burr, “Petrus Ioannis Olivi and the Philosophers,” *Franciscan Studies* 31 (1971): 41–71, at 46. For Tempier’s comments at Paris in 1277, see David Piché with Claude LaFleur, *La condamnation parisienne de 1277* (Paris: Vrin, 1999), 74–75. For Jacopone’s poems, see *Sons of Francis*, trans. Anne MacDonell (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1902).

² Absalon of Saint Victor, PL 211, 1855, col. 37, cited by Serge-Thomas Bonino, “Qu’est-ce que l’antithomisme?” *Revue Thomiste* 108 (2008): 9–38, at 15. For textual difficulties with Absalon’s comment, see Bonino, 15n22.

ophy serves only to deface and deform the fiery message of the Gospel. If it is not baldly asserted that faith and reason are at antipodes, then at least it is claimed that theirs is an uneasy relationship, with philosophy and theology circling each other as wary and aggressive enemies, each girding itself for a likely strike.

While forceful reservations have been expressed about philosophy's influence over Christianity, the broader tradition has acknowledged a salutary confluence between faith and reason. One sees this position championed in those early Christian writers who spoke glowingly of the role of philosophy, such as Clement of Alexandria who insists that the Old Testament and Greek wisdom are twin rivers leading to Christ, through Origen who boldly counsels Christians to take philosophical "spoils from Egypt," through the Cappadocians who never finish with Hellenistic thought, through Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* which reprises Origen's "spoils" trope for the West, through Boethius who, in a well-known discussion of the Trinity, counsels his interlocutor to "join faith to reason."³

Aquinas, of course, ardently defends the use of philosophy in theological reasoning, glossing St. Paul's biblical admonitions with the comment that the Apostle warns against trusting in one's personal erudition, not in human reasoning per se (*De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 1). Aquinas's confidence in the conjunctive nature of faith and philosophy is also powerfully reflected in the *Summa contra Gentiles* I, 7 where Thomas argues for the profound complementarity of faith and reason, principles restated by Vatican I at a time when the Church sought a Christian via media between currents of rationalism and fideism dominating the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This medieval assurance in the congruency of

³ Clement, *Stromateis*, 1, 29; Origen, "Letter to Gregory," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 393–94; Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 2, 40; Boethius, "Letter to John the Deacon," in *The Theological Tractates* (The Loeb Classical Library), trans. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 32–37, at 37. Boethius's comment, "insofar as you are able, join faith to reason" (*Fidem, si poterit, rationemque conjunge*), is found in his discussion of the principles of unity and diversity in the Trinity. Boethius argues that the terms God, truth, omnipotence, and immutability can be formally predicated of the divine substance, but the terms Father, Son, and Spirit cannot be so attributed. Boethius asks his interlocutor either to confirm his investigations or to proffer another opinion, one reconciling faith and reason.

faith and human wisdom was to be a guiding force in the founding of the great Western universities.

But the question remains: How does theology use philosophy so that the latter does not obscure or deform the Christian message? It is these two competing approaches, one arguing for evangelical purity and the other insisting on philosophical plenitude, which gives rise to this essay. I will examine the proper relationship between philosophy and theology in six theses, arguing that: (1) the point continues to be made, at times zealously so, that philosophy obscures the Gospel message, offering only an alien narrative that deforms biblical teaching; (2) the broader tradition has insisted that the Christian faith is always a “Jewgreek” enterprise, incorporating Hellenic and Hebraic traditions; (3) even while assimilating all forms of human wisdom, theology recognizes its need to “performatively discipline” every philosophical (and other) insight; (4) speculative philosophy has its own legitimate freedom and autonomy; (5) by its “incorporative” nature, Catholicism encourages authentic theological pluralism; and (6) some capacious metaphysical horizon is ultimately necessary to subserve properly theological reasoning.

Thesis One: Philosophy Deforms and Obscures Christian Faith (The Hellenization Thesis)

While reservations about the role of philosophical thinking in theological reflection go back to St. Paul, it is Martin Luther who seized upon this critique in service to his mission of reforming the Church by purifying her of non-scriptural accretions. As Yves Congar has pointed out, the principle of *sola Scriptura* had a long history before Luther, but Luther used this criterion in a new way.⁴ For the reformer’s turn to scriptural exclusivity was accompanied by a deep suspicion of philosophy, particularly the Scholasticism that was seen as badly deforming the foursquare Gospel. Luther’s attacks on philosophy resulted at times in formulations which, if taken in isolation, seem jarringly irrational: “Whoever wishes to be a Christian must be intent on silencing the voice of reason. . . . To the judgment of reason they [the articles of faith] appear so far from

⁴ Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 107–18.

the truth that it is impossible to believe them.”⁵ And again, “No one becomes a theologian, unless he becomes one without Aristotle.”⁶

Luther’s spirited critique of Pseudo-Dionysius serves as an example of his legitimate evangelical concerns. The primary salvo launched by the reformer against Dionysian thought is that it is philosophically rather than biblically inspired, owing more to Plato than to the Scriptures.⁷ As Luther says in his commentary on Genesis, “Nowhere does he [Dionysius] have a single word about faith or any useful instruction from the Holy Scriptures.”⁸ Negative theology cannot be rooted in the Dionysian dialectic of affirmation and negation, in an ascent beyond being and non-being; it can only be rooted in the cross and the suffering of Christ crucified. Luther’s clarion hermeneutical principle is *crux probat omnia*, the cross judges everything, or as he insists, “The Cross alone is our theology” (*LW* 25, 287). The reformer’s searing critique of Dionysius’s Platonism was essential because “neither darkness nor negative theology are ever linked to the cross of Christ in the Dionysian corpus.”⁹ Luther’s assault on Dionysius is a good example of his desire to develop a theology rooted only in Scripture and the central events of Christ’s life. The Bible alone can teach us something about the true God. Dionysius,

⁵ *Luther’s Works (LW)*, ed. J. Pelikan et al. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 23, 99. For a discussion of Luther’s mixed evaluation of philosophy, see Thomas G. Guarino, “Spoils from Egypt: Yesterday and Today,” *Pro Ecclesia* 15 (2006): 403–17.

⁶ *LW* 31, 12. Denis R. Janz says that to call reason the “Devil’s whore” as Luther does (*LW* 40, 175 and *LW* 51, 374) “is to invite misunderstanding and caricature.” But this phrase does not exhaust Luther’s judgment on human reasoning. See “Whore or Handmaid?” in *The Devil’s Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition*, ed. Jennifer Hockenbery Dragseth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 47–52.

⁷ Partial confirmation of Luther’s judgment comes from Alasdair MacIntyre, who says, “Dionysius was as much of a Neoplatonist as it is possible to be while also being a Christian.” See Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2009), 37.

⁸ *LW* 1, 235. Cited by Paul Rorem, “Martin Luther’s Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997): 291–307, at 293.

⁹ Rorem, “Martin Luther’s Christocentric Critique,” 300. At the same time, Rorem observes that Bonaventure is a precursor of Luther. While not hesitating to cite Dionysius’s work, the Franciscan simultaneously accents the centrality of Christ crucified, thereby crossing from philosophical nescience to the depths of revelation. See Paul Rorem, “Negative Theologies and the Cross,” *Harvard Theological Review* 101 (2008): 451–64.

with his unending philosophical dialectic of negative and positive affirmations, “deserves to be ridiculed.”¹⁰

Luther was followed in his attack on philosophy by the young Melancthon, who famously wrote, at the beginning of his *Loci Communes*, “[H]ow corrupt are all the theological hallucinations of those who have offered the subtleties of Aristotle instead of the teachings of Christ.”¹¹ The young reformer argues: “From the philosophy of Plato was added the equally pernicious word ‘reason.’ For just as we in these latter times of the Church have embraced Aristotle instead of Christ, so immediately after the beginnings of the Church Christian doctrine was weakened by Platonic philosophy.”¹² Given this attack, it is unsurprising that both Luther and Melancthon shied away from using analogical reasoning as a means of explaining the Trinity, and “even hinted that the [Trinitarian] doctrine may be contradictory to reason.”¹³

In more recent times, it is Adolf von Harnack who is the well-known coryphaeus of the claim that philosophy increasingly deformed Christianity, leading to the *Abfall vom Evangelium* that defaced the primitive

¹⁰ LW, 13, 111. Balthasar sympathetically evaluates Luther’s critique of philosophy (and particularly of Dionysius) saying, “[T]he showy splendor of such cosmic and mystical piety leads to a forgetting of Christ, and the world of beauty overshadows the mystery of the biblical glory and one must wait for Luther . . . to bring the sharpness of the crisis to consciousness.” See *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 4, trans. Brian McNeil, et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 320.

¹¹ Philip Melancthon, *Loci Communes Theologici* (1521), in *Melancthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 23. Several authors have noted that the later Melancthon became somewhat more amenable to speculative theology. Oswald Bayer observes that at the height of Lutheran Pietism, Melancthon was even accused of slipping Aristotle into the back door of theology. See Oswald Bayer, “Philipp Melancthon,” *Pro Ecclesia* 18 (2009): 134–61, at 135. Also, E. P. Meijering, *Melancthon and Patristic Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1983).

¹³ Samuel M. Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23. Powell notes that whereas Melancthon was at first militantly opposed to any speculative explanation of the Trinity, he later adopted some use of the psychological analogy; this change leads Powell to conclude that “its bare presence in Melancthon’s thought testifies to its enduring fascination, even among those most resolutely opposed to it” (28). On the other hand, a recent work about Luther states, “The difference between Luther and scholastic Trinitarian speculation is easily overemphasized” (Sammeli Juntunen, “Christ” in *Engaging Luther: A (New) Theological Assessment*, ed. Olli-Pekka Vainio [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010], 60–61).

Church. Of long familiarity to theologians is Harnack's description of Christian teaching as "in its conception and development a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel."¹⁴ His parallel assertion is that "the victory of the Nicene Creed was a victory of the priests over the faith of the Christian people."¹⁵ According to Harnack, the philosophically educated clergy had forced an alien definition on the gospel. Nicene faith itself is here called into question as a Hellenistic import that obscures and misshapes the simple Hebraic belief in the one God of Jesus of Nazareth. This Hebraic-Hellenistic disjunction has become an enduring trope, invoked by subsequent generations with varying levels of intensity. It is no surprise, then, that even at the remove of more than a century, Benedict XVI at Regensburg felt compelled to attack Harnack's Hellenization thesis in direct terms.¹⁶

Despite his well-known differences with Harnack, Karl Barth echoes many of the same themes, for Barth, too, stands on restive guard for the purity of Scripture over and against the alleged philosophical accretions that have mutilated Christian faith. One may simply point to the prolegomena of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, where both the liberal Protestant axis of Schleiermacher-Hermann-Ritschl and the Catholic *analogia entis* are lumped together as pre-determining schemas inexorably distorting the Gospel through the imposition of foreign philosophical norms not drawn from the Scriptures themselves. This is the basis of Barth's notorious assertion that the analogy of being is the invention of the anti-Christ precisely because it seeks to force the Gospel of grace into a philosophical Procrustean bed.¹⁷ Barth similarly argues that by considering first the divine nature, rather than the God revealed by Christ, the door was opened [in the Middle Ages] to the domination of theology by philoso-

¹⁴ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958), I, 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 106.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, "Regensburg Academic Lecture" (September 12, 2006). An English translation may be found in *Origins* 36 (September 28, 2006): 248–52.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1949), x. I have treated Barth's criticisms of analogy at length in *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 224–30. Balthasar responded to Barth that the principles of causality and similarity (the ontological roots of analogical predication) exist only in the *unicus ordo supernaturalis* and so are never purely philosophical.

phy: "The fact that the life of God was identified with the notion of pure being, the fact that the idea of God was not determined by the doctrine of the Trinity, but that the latter was shaped by a general conception of God (that of ancient Stoicism and Neo-Platonism) was now avenged at the most sensitive spot." The philosophical idea of divine simplicity became an "all-controlling principle, the idol" which devoured everything concrete.¹⁸ Even more devastatingly, Barth says that the concept of God emerging from natural theology attempts "to unite Yahweh with Baal, the triune God of Holy Scripture with the concept of being of Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy."¹⁹ And, he continues, "The Lord who is visible in the *vestigia* [referring to the *vestigia Trinitatis* of the patristic era] we can only regard as a different Lord than the one so called in the Bible."²⁰

While limiting ourselves to just a few thinkers, we can easily cite contemporary theologians who repeat this line of thought. Robert Jenson, for example, in his *Unbaptized God*, attacks Hellenism as a foreign metaphysics: "The great task of the theological and spiritual history that leads to the Christianity now divided is reinterpretation by the gospel of Hellenism's antecedent interpretation of God." He continues, "And the heart of what needed reinterpreting in antecedent Hellenic theology is its posit of eternity as timelessness, as *immunity* to time's opportunities and threats and so of being as *persistence*."²¹ Jenson's stark claim that theology has conducted only an "incomplete exorcism" on "unbaptized Hellenism" finds echoes in other Protestant theologians, who argue that philosophy has too often become a theoretical prison, neutering the Gospel of its salt, light, and power.²² Philosophical reasoning is here

¹⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 329.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II/1, 84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I/1, 399.

²¹ Robert Jenson, *Unbaptized God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 137–38.

²² So, for example, Colin Gunton, commenting on *Fides et Ratio*, says that underlying the encyclical "is a conviction that the teaching of the Christian faith, dependent as it is on particularities, requires foundation in a general philosophy of being." See his *Act and Being* (London: SCM, 2002), 5. Eberhard Jüngel argues that Luther's chief philosophical point is that metaphysics fails to understand Christ's cross, which necessarily negates the traditional divine attributes of immutability and impassibility: see *God as Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 373. Pannenberg (gently) accuses Thomas of allowing philosophy to control his treatment of the Trinity in the *Summa theologiae*. See Wolfhart Pannen-

regarded as a pernicious Trojan horse in the City of God, an alien conceptual foundation that befouls the salvific biblical economy.²³

Although the Hellenization thesis has been principally associated with theologians in the Reformation tradition, the claim that philosophy has deformed revelation cannot be limited to Protestant thinkers. At times, Orthodox theologians adopt this line of thought as well (particularly when discussing Western theology). Sergius Bulgakov, for example, spends pages attacking the Catholic teaching on transubstantiation, observing that the doctrine is based on the Aristotelian distinction between *ousia* (*substantia*) and *sumbabekos* (*accidentia*). Bulgakov concludes that in the Eucharistic doctrine, one notices “an inherent strangeness in such a degree of dependence of the core of this dogma on the purely philosophical doctrine of some philosopher, and especially a pagan one.”²⁴ Of course, Bulgakov is fully alive to the early Church’s use of philosophy and its adoption of terms such as *hypostasis* and *physis*; he insists, however, that ancient Christianity employed these concepts in new ways. With the doctrine of transubstantiation, by contrast, “philosophy does not serve theology but theology is a slave to philosophy.”²⁵

A similar approach is taken by Christos Yannaras, who nods in assent to Heidegger’s claim that the Western theological tradition from Augustine to Aquinas has been typically philosophical: “God is the logically necessary first cause of all beings, and both the ontology and epistemology of the West were built on this logical necessity as a starting

berg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 287–89.

²³ On the other hand, Anna Williams insightfully remarks: “If Reformation theology was grounded on the sole foundation of scripture, and that of the schoolmen on a poisonous cocktail of tradition and human reason, it is hard to explain the marked similarities between the theology of the two periods.” See A. N. Williams, *The Architecture of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 97.

²⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Holy Grail and the Eucharist*, trans. Boris Jakim (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1997), 75.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 76. Avery Dulles, on the other hand, pointedly argues that the change that occurs in the Eucharist “does not fit into the categories of Aristotle, who believed that every substantial change involved a change in the appearances” as well. Consequently, the Church uses the term transubstantiation “to designate a process that is unique and unparalleled.” See Dulles, *Church and Society* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 457.

point.”²⁶ Yannaras argues that the Western emphasis on a rational, conceptual theology—culminating in the proofs for God’s existence found throughout the Western tradition—is rightly condemned by Heidegger as mere onto-theology, as the reduction of the transcendent God to a pedestrian *causa sui*. This has led, he concludes, to “a kind of ‘spiritual schizophrenia’ which basically characterizes the Western stance toward the world and history.”²⁷

Finally, Michael Azkoul has written that Augustine is the origin of “almost every religious opinion which separates Western Christendom from the Orthodox Church,” including cataphatic theology, the filioque, and purgatory. Prompting all of these deviations is “Hellenism, the invisible hand behind Augustine’s innovations.”²⁸ Speaking of Augustine’s theology, Azkoul says, “Hellenism . . . the elevation of ‘faith’ to rational knowledge—proved to be his undoing. He yielded to the same temptation [Platonism] by which Origen and other heretics were seduced.”²⁹ Indeed, Augustine’s “attraction to Platonism was very serious, perhaps fatal.”³⁰

In the eyes of these Eastern Orthodox thinkers, the West is largely rationalist and conceptualist, profoundly under the sway of secular philosophy, and far removed from the mystical and apophatic East, which glories in a theology accenting the transcendence and hiddenness of

²⁶ Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, trans. Haralambos Ventis (London: T & T Clark, 2005; orig., 1967), 43.

²⁷ Yannaras, “Orthodoxy and the West,” *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1971): 286–300, at 288. In a later book with the same title, Yannaras argues that the Western reception of Aristotle is very different from that found in the Cappadocians or John Damascene. For the West fell into an epistemology which lionized autonomous reason apart from its social and experiential roots. See *Orthodoxy and the West*, trans. Peter Chamberas and Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), 52–54.

²⁸ Michael Azkoul, *The Influence of Augustine of Hippo on the Orthodox Church* (Lewiston, ME: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 265.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 129. But note the work of Reinhard Flogaus, who argues that even Gregory Palamas was influenced by Augustine and such influence is not unimportant, since for certain Eastern theologians, Augustine is “the chief villain, the heresiarch,” whose theological errors led the West to atheism and rationalism. See “Inspiration-Exploitation-Distortion: The Use of St. Augustine in the Hesychast Controversy,” in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 63–80, at 68.

God. It is certainly true that the West and East *did* place the theological accent differently. James Gill, for example, relates that at the Council of Florence, the Greeks (even those well disposed toward Catholicism such as Bessarion) were suspicious of any Western argument that relied not only on biblical and patristic sources but also on syllogistic reasoning, giving rise to the Greek response that arguments are convincing only when citing “St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Basil, Gregory the Theologian; a fig for your Aristotle, Aristotle.”³¹ But cannot one admit, as did Vatican II, that Western and Eastern theologians have often developed different but complementary perspectives, without thereby entailing a division, or the claim that philosophy has disfigured Christian faith?³²

Catholics themselves, while frequently the target of the Hellenization thesis, are not exempt from invoking it. While rarely issuing blanket condemnations of philosophy or Hellenism, Catholic thinkers nonetheless point to select theological teachings as having been obscured by philosophical intrusions. One well-known instance is the split between the dogmatic tracts *de Deo uno et de Deo trino*. This disjunction was explored by Theodore de Régnon, the French theologian who argued that Western theology begins with a divine unity that is rationally argued, whereas Eastern thought originates from the triune relationality of God.³³ Fergus Kerr observes that in the English-speaking world, the story-line usually goes as follows: Aquinas first considered the divine nature philosophically and only later discussed the three divine per-

³¹ James Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 227. This Florentine response seems somewhat naïve, given the quantity of ancient philosophy which the Greek Fathers assimilated (and transformed).

³² Of course, not every Orthodox thinker adopts the Hellenization thesis vis-à-vis the West. But Paul Gavriluk observes that in the quest for a stronger contemporary identity, some Orthodox writers equate “Eastern Orthodox” with true and authentic, while “Western” becomes a marker for all that is distorted, misguided, or false. Gavriluk notes that “in [Vladimir] Lossky’s scheme, the term ‘Western’ has a very strong connotation of ‘doctrinally questionable.’” See Paul Gavriluk, “The Reception of Dionysius in Twentieth Century Eastern Orthodoxy,” *Modern Theology* 24 (October 2008): 707–23, at 709 and 715.

³³ Theodore de Régnon, *Etudes de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (Paris, 1892–96). For a recent argument that de Régnon sought only to identify differing but complementary approaches in East and West, see Kristin Hennessy, “An Answer to de Régnon’s Accusers: Why We Should Not Speak of ‘His’ Paradigm,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (April 2007): 179–97.

sons, thereby forgetting the specifically Christian God and, in the process, opening a path for Enlightenment deism and even atheism.³⁴ Karl Rahner is often invoked as one who decried the deleterious effects of this split between the one and the triune God.³⁵ Balthasar further accuses Aquinas of paying insufficient attention to the concrete events of salvation history; Barth, by contrast, is fully alive to theology as a *scientia de singularibus*.³⁶ In these instances, Aquinas's philosophical thought is seen as jeopardizing the specificity of revelation.

Also under discussion by Catholic theologians are the traditional divine attributes of immutability and impassibility. Are these reflective of biblical truth or are these attributes merely representative of the corrosive influence of Hellenism? The move toward advocating a passible Godhead had become so widespread in theology that by the 1980s, one author spoke of the "rise of a new orthodoxy."³⁷ As Paul Gavrilyuk has observed, "It has become almost commonplace in contemporary theological works to pass a negative judgment upon the patristic concept of divine impassibility."³⁸ Indeed, this traditional attribute has "often been caricatured as an alien Hellenistic concept."³⁹ Thomas Weinandy points out that even Catholic scholars with unimpeachably Thomist backgrounds, such as W. Norris Clarke, William J. Hill, and Jean Galot, imply that Christian thought must, at the very least, plot some distinction between God's ontological immutability and actual relationality if a properly biblical understanding of the traditional attributes is to be pre-

³⁴ Fergus Kerr, "Thomas Aquinas: Conflicting Interpretations in Recent Anglophone Literature," in *Aquinas as Authority*, ed. Paul van Geest et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 165–86, at 168.

³⁵ Ibid., 168, citing Rahner's "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise '*De Trinitate*.'" Kerr notes that Balthasar (although less frequently adduced) also accuses Aquinas of a defective Trinitarian doctrine. See Kerr, "Thomas Aquinas," 169, citing Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 263–66.

³⁶ Balthasar says that Scholasticism concentrates on natures and essences, which is the opposite of Barth's dictum, *esse sequitur operari*. See *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 191 and 266.

³⁷ See Ronald Goetz, "The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy," *Christian Century* 103 (1986): 385–89.

³⁸ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

³⁹ Ibid., 5.

served.⁴⁰ Immutability and impassibility continue to be discussed, then, as theologians explore the extent to which these predicates must be further disciplined with the Gospel if they are to bear fruit in Christian life.

Perhaps the highest profile Catholic case in recent decades to argue that theology has been defaced by philosophy is the signature work of Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*. Sounding deeply Barthian in his condemnation of being-language, Marion contends that metaphysics is “idolic” rather than “iconic,” screening and obscuring the donative phenomenon of revelation. For Marion, the philosophical notion of being, long a pillar of Catholic theology, is an affront to a proper understanding of the Godhead, because it establishes a constricting horizon within which the gratuitously given phenomenon of revelation must appear. Following Heidegger, Marion insists that this approach is nothing less than onto-theology, the inappropriate wedding of theology and metaphysics.⁴¹ Marion has bluntly stated that “conceptual idolatry” has a site (metaphysics), a function (theology in ontotheology) and a definition (*causa sui*).⁴² He does not hesitate to add, echoing Pascal, that, “The God who reveals himself has nothing in common . . . with the ‘God’ of the philosophers, of the learned and, eventually, of the poet.”⁴³ This Heidegger-like polemic against metaphysics has been softened by Marion in his later works (after some pointed criticism), but the theme has not disappeared from his thinking.⁴⁴

Despite the various criticisms that have been lodged, it remains correct to say that the broad Catholic tradition ardently defends the thesis that theology legitimately assimilates philosophical thought, even if it

⁴⁰ See Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 136n69.

⁴¹ See Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Also, Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians,” in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 279–96.

⁴² Marion, *God Without Being*, 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, “Saint Thomas et l’onto-théologie,” *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): 31–66. But Marion can still say, “In order to approach the question of charity, it is above all important not to suffer the influence of what metaphysics has thought about love.” See Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 168.

needs to discipline it and to mold it in the image of the Gospel. And this gives rise to the second thesis.

Thesis Two: Theology Assimilates Philosophy (and All Wisdom)

Of course, the claim that philosophy has deformed theology presupposes the prior theological appropriation of philosophical wisdom. Of this assimilation the Catholic tradition offers overwhelming evidence, so we will pass over this thesis quickly.⁴⁵

As everyone knows, a vital synthesis occurred between Christianity and Greco-Roman thought in the early years of the Church. In the third century, Origen used the term “spoils from Egypt” to describe, in biblical terms, the Christian use of ideas emanating, not only from Plato and Aristotle, but even from opponents of Christianity like Celsus.⁴⁶ Christians should act as did the Israelites at the time of the Exodus: “With the spoils taken from the Egyptians . . . were made the movable Holy of Holies, the ark with its cover . . . and the vessel of gold to hold the manna, the food of angels. These objects were truly made from the most beautiful gold of Egypt.” Under Origen’s influence, “spoils from Egypt” gradually became the major image sanctioning the use of Greek reasoning in Christian thought.⁴⁷

Augustine borrows Origen’s trope and popularizes it in the West: “If those who are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said anything that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it.”⁴⁸ And in book five of his *De Trinitate* Augustine strives mightily to defend the eternal relations among the divine persons by utilizing (and transforming) Aristotelian categories. This appropriation of philosophy is possible because for Augustine, as

⁴⁵ For examples, see Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 269–310. Also, Z. P. Thundy, “Sources of the *Spoliatio Aegyptiorum*,” *Annuaire mediaevale* 21 (1981): 77–90.

⁴⁶ Origen, “Letter to Gregory,” 393–94.

⁴⁷ Gregory of Nyssa adduced Moses as the paradigmatic example of “taking spoils” for, as Acts 7:22 testifies, Moses “received a *paideia* in all the *sophia* of the Egyptians.” See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 10.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, II, 40.

MacIntyre observes, “philosophical enquiry, even unaided by faith, is a work of natural reason and nature is never wholly corrupted.” The African’s final verdict on the philosophers of Greece and Rome, “was that, although they had made various mistakes, ‘nature itself has not permitted them to wander too far from the path of truth’ in their judgments about the supreme good.”⁴⁹

Aquinas, of course, was one of the most accomplished theologians at assimilating the philosophical wisdom of the ancients, freely pursuing “spoils” from the classical world. To those lodging objections against borrowing from pagan thinkers, St. Thomas counters that the Bible itself sanctions the use of ancient authors with St. Paul citing Epimenides and Menander (in Titus 1:12 and 1 Cor 15:33). Given these scriptural warrants, Aquinas asserts, “It is therefore licit for other doctors of divine Scripture to make use of the arguments of the philosophers” (*De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, sc). Sounding much like Origen, Thomas elsewhere affirms, “Whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁰

Six centuries later, John Henry Newman argues persuasively that assimilating new perspectives is an essential part of Christian life and an inexorable dimension of the Church’s proper development. The Christian “idea” must inevitably meet and absorb other points of view. This is the case because “whatever has life is characterized by growth” and any idea grows “by taking into its own substance external materials; and this absorption and assimilation is complete when the materials appropriated come to belong to it or enter into its unity.”⁵¹ He continues that “the idea never was that throve and lasted, yet . . . incorporated nothing from external sources” (186). Assimilation is not without dangers, to be sure, but it must be undertaken: “Whatever be the risk of corruption from intercourse with the world around, such a risk must be encountered if a great idea is duly to be understood, and much more if it is to be fully exhibited” (39–40).

⁴⁹ See Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 19. 1, cited by MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 31–32.

⁵⁰ *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 109, a. 1, ad 1, cited by John Paul II in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, §44.

⁵¹ See John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), 185. Parenthetical page numbers in the text refer to this volume.

In his response to those claiming that Christianity is a twisted amalgam of faith and philosophy, Newman memorably asserts: "They [his opponents] cast off all that they find in Pharisee or heathen; we conceive that the Church, like Aaron's rod, devours the serpents of the magicians. They are ever hunting for a fabulous primitive simplicity; we repose in Catholic fullness. . . . They are driven to maintain, on their part, that the Church's doctrine was never pure; we say that it can never be corrupt" (382). Newman concludes that no matter the falsehood attached to a particular system of thought, the Church can always extract good from evil because she is heir to the Lord's promise: "If they [his disciples] drank any deadly thing, it should not hurt them" (441).

A century after Newman, Henri de Lubac reprises Terence by insisting that "nothing authentically human, whatever its origin, can be alien to her [the Church]."⁵² Cyril of Alexandria rightly made use of Plato, as did Ambrose of Seneca, Aquinas of Aristotle, and Matteo Ricci of Confucius. Such was the audacity of early Christians that they even incorporated the pagan image of "*Magna mater*" (applied to the Church) into Catholic theology. This was "a typical example of the boldness of Christian thought which was strong enough to seize, without contamination, everything which could serve to express it [the faith]."⁵³ This daring, de Lubac insists, must be duplicated in our own day, with ideas harboring even Marxist and Nietzschean elements finding a place in some new theological synthesis, for "in the Church, the work of assimilation never ceases, and it is never too soon to undertake it!"⁵⁴ If the salt of Christianity is to maintain its tang, there must be an unending appropriation of human wisdom. The Church cannot simply revive the Middle Ages or even primitive Christianity; there must be a continual assimilation of new ideas.

Hans Urs von Balthasar similarly insisted that Catholic theology must open itself to every field of thought: Why did Aquinas devote himself to Arabic and Aristotelian philosophy? Why did Möhler avail him-

⁵² Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*, trans. L. Sheppard (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), 149–53.

⁵³ See Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sr. Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 54.

⁵⁴ De Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. E. Riley (London: Sheed and Ward, 1949), vi.

self of Hegel, and Newman of Locke and Hume? They did so in order to transpose natural philosophy to the supernatural order.⁵⁵ Balthasar pleads for the renewal of the assimilative imagination in Catholic theology, noting that Aquinas made full use of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Surely, “if he had known Buddha and Lao-Tse, there is no doubt that he would have drawn them too into the *summa* of what can be thought and would have given them the place appropriate to them.”⁵⁶ Theology must absorb all that is living, whether one finds this in Kant or Hegel, in Scheler or Heidegger.

The plea of the *nouveaux théologiens* for a renaissance of the absorptive imagination was, undoubtedly, a criticism of neo-Scholasticism’s attempt to foreshorten the process of assimilation by limiting itself to Aquinas’s Aristotelianism, as if any further theological advance would require nothing more than extended glosses on Thomas’s achievements. In this sense, the *nouvelle théologie* sought to move in two directions: to recover early Christian thought and to engage in an enriching dialogue with contemporary philosophical movements such as existentialism, personalism, and phenomenology.

In his controversial Regensburg Address, Benedict XVI dealt head-on with the issue of assimilation, directly attacking Harnack’s Hellenization thesis and pronouncing it providential that St. Paul journeyed north to Greece (with its philosophical riches) while his path to Asia was blocked (citing Acts 16:6–10). Benedict has also praised the Church’s gradual incorporation of Enlightenment themes, noting that, while one must exclude philosophies that eliminate God, one should nonetheless “welcome the true conquests of the Enlightenment, human rights and especially the freedom of faith and its practice, and recognize these also as being essential elements for the authenticity of religion.”⁵⁷ Even though the Enlightenment, in its most radical form, was developed *against* Christianity, it, too, has borne good fruit that the Church must admire, pursue, and utilize. Perhaps one may see just here a reprise of Ovid’s insight, *Fas est et ab hoste doceri*, “It is right to learn, even from

⁵⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time,” *Communio* 20 (1993; original, 1946): 155.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 158–59.

⁵⁷ Benedict XVI, “Christmas Address to the Roman Curia” (Dec. 22, 2006).

an enemy” (*Metamorphoses*, IV, 428), a position that has characterized the Church at least since Origen’s careful weighing of Celsus’s pointed criticisms of Christianity.

There is no need to multiply examples, since the thesis that the Church has assimilated philosophical reasoning, for weal or for woe, is uncontested. But the truly crucial theological question remains. How are Athens and Jerusalem properly related? Is theology more Greek than Jew, or more *pistos* than *logos*? And precisely which kind of correlation exists between these terms?

Thesis Three: Theology Must Performatively Discipline Philosophy (and All Wisdom)

The critical task in the theological absorption of philosophy (and other disciplines) involves the incorporation of new insights and perspectives without the concomitant loss of substantial identity. How is Christianity a capacious idea which takes every thought captive to Christ, as St. Paul counseled (2 Cor 10:5)? This is a particularly important point in the post-Enlightenment epoch when certain philosophers (the early Jürgen Habermas, for example) endorse precisely the opposite view: Every thought needs to be taken captive to the Enlightenment, since all religious claims need to be “publicly redeemed” if they are to have any role in societal discourse.⁵⁸

The early Christian writers continuously insist on the theological disciplining of secular reasoning. Origen, as we have seen, boldly encourages taking “spoils from Egypt,” yet argues that this project must be undertaken with caution: “Rare are those who have taken from Egypt only the useful, and go away and use it for the service of God. There are those who have profited from their Greek studies, in order to produce heretical notions and set them up, like the golden calf, in Bethel.”⁵⁹ St. Augustine likewise cautioned that while the Egyptians undoubtedly yielded valuable spoils, they also possessed “idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and fled” (*De doctrina christiana*, II,

⁵⁸ In recent years, however, Habermas has taken a much more benign view of religious belief. For a good overview of his developing attitude towards religious discourse, see Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2011).

⁵⁹ Origen, “Letter to Gregory,” 393–94.

40). As John Rist has noted, Augustine's deep attraction to the Latin text of Isaiah 7.9, *Nisi credideritis, non intellegitis*, implies that the solutions offered by the philosophers are incomplete because they lack the guidance of Scripture and the Church.⁶⁰ St. Basil argues that while Christians are permitted to entertain the accounts of some classical poets, others should cause them to stop their ears, like Odysseus before the Sirens. All Christians, Basil counsels, should learn from the bees, who extract only honey from the flower. Like them, we should cull the best from pagan writers, while passing over the rest.⁶¹ For all these thinkers, of course, the salient point is that philosophical wisdom may be utilized, but always subject to the Gospel. As St. Gregory Nazienzen stated, the Fathers theologized "in the manner of the Apostles, not in that of Aristotle," *alieutikos, ouk aristotelikos* (*Hom.* 23.12).⁶²

As earlier noted, there is no greater example of this process of assimilation and transformation than that offered by Aquinas himself. But St. Thomas nonetheless insists that one is in error employing critical reason if one is "willing to believe nothing except what could be established by philosophical reasoning; when, on the contrary, *philosophy should be subject to the measure of faith* as the Apostle says 'Bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ'" (*De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, c, emphasis added). Aquinas then offers his own image, intended to complement the traditional "spoils" trope: those who use philosophical doctrines in service to the Christian faith do not *mix* water with wine, but *change* water into wine (*De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 5).⁶³ For Aquinas, all human learning can be of service to the faith, but it must be adduced wisely and judiciously, avoiding the dangers of philosophical imperial-

⁶⁰ John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13.

⁶¹ Basil, "Address to Young People on Reading Greek Literature," in *The Letters*, vol. 4, trans. R. Deferrari and M. McGuire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 365ff.

⁶² Cited by Georges Florovsky, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 1, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), 108.

⁶³ Armand Maurer notes that Bonaventure quickly challenged this image, warning that, in any such mixture, the pure wine of Scripture is in danger of being reduced to philosophical water—the worst of miracles! See Thomas Aquinas, *Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I–IV of the De Trinitate*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987), xv note 24.

ism.⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, then, St. Thomas sounds the traditional caution: “In divine matters, natural reason is greatly deficient” (*ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 4). And he insists that no discipline can be a competitor to theology’s claims, for these derive their authority and certitude not from fallible human reason but from divine revelation (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2).

We have already seen that in the nineteenth century, Newman firmly endorsed the theological incorporation of all human sagacity. Only by casting a wide net could the idea of Christianity properly flourish, ripen, and develop. Yet Newman was also insistent on the performative disciplining of reason by faith. An idea surely grows by the absorption of external materials, but these very materials are “subjected to a new sovereign.”⁶⁵ And while the Church is a vast treasure house of wisdom, she is always “casting the gold of fresh tributaries into her refiner’s fire or stamping upon her own, as time required it, a deeper impress of her Master’s image.”⁶⁶ The Church, then, is always ingesting new ideas and perspectives—and, indeed, needs such novelty to thrive and properly develop. At the same time, the Church molds and measures human wisdom by the Word of God. Such theological measuring is essential; otherwise, the Church’s faith would be “depraved by the intrusion of foreign principles.” For Newman, the “original type” of Christianity must always be preserved, even while the Church gains vital nourishment from every form of thought.⁶⁷

Henri de Lubac, as earlier noted, boldly called for the assimilation of new philosophies, insisting that even ideas with a Marxist or Nietzschean stamp would find a place in some new theological synthesis. But to mark the proper relationship between faith and reason, de Lubac liked to cite Augustine’s recollection of the divine voice in the *Confessions*, “*Non tu me in te mutabis, sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me*” (You will not transform me into you [the Lord says], as with your

⁶⁴ For Aquinas’s warnings against philosophical colonization, see John F. Wippel, *Mediaeval Reactions to the Encounter Between Faith and Reason* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 14–28.

⁶⁵ Newman, *Development*, 186.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁶⁷ Of course, the crucial theological issue lies in determining how this “original type” is preserved, even while allowing for the growth and development that necessarily occurs over time. As Newman realized, this process involves a variety of *loci theologici*, including the work of theologians, the *sensus fidelium*, and the magisterium.

fleshly food; rather, you will be transformed into me).⁶⁸ Balthasar, too, although an early champion of assimilative theology, insisted that every concrete philosophy must be measured by its relationship to the one God in Jesus Christ.⁶⁹ The sovereign and free Lord of the Bible cannot be encompassed by any system, whether it is Hegel's *Geist*, Schopenhauer's *Wille*, or Schelling's *intellektuelle Anschauung*. In opposition to philosophical notions seeking to control divine revelation, Balthasar invokes Mary's Magnificat: *deposuit potentes de sede*.⁷⁰

Joseph Ratzinger similarly argues that the Church's absorption of philosophy always involves a transformation. In his well-known book on eschatology, for example, Ratzinger attacks the oft-repeated claim that the idea of an "immortal soul" is simply an alien import from Platonic philosophy.⁷¹ In fact, Ratzinger avers, the Church's teaching on immortality was determined by Christology. It was Christian belief that made assertive claims upon philosophical anthropology, not the other way around.⁷² While Aquinas undoubtedly uses Aristotelian language—speaking of the soul as *forma corporis*—this takes on an entirely different meaning than it had in Aristotle's philosophy. For the Stagirite, the soul is entirely bonded to matter, while St. Thomas protects the biblical affirmation that union with Christ overcomes death. In Aquinas, then, philosophical concepts are marshaled in order to champion what amounts to an impossibility in Aristotle's own thought. As Ratzinger would later say in the Regensburg Address, the Greek heritage forms an integral part of the Christian faith, but it does so only as "critically purified."

⁶⁸ Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. R. Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984), 69. For Augustine, see *Confessions*, VII, 10.

⁶⁹ Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 257.

⁷⁰ Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. A. Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 34.

⁷¹ The recently published Lutheran-Catholic dialogue quotes a contemporary Protestant theologian who says that "the battle against the concept of immortality. . . has dominated German Protestant theology for the last half-century." See Gerhard Sauter, *What Dare We Hope? Reconsidering Eschatology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999), 188. Cited by the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, *The Hope of Eternal Life* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2011), 11n42.

⁷² Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 143–47.

What is at stake in all of these examples is the epistemic primacy of theology, a discipline which nonetheless relies on and utilizes philosophy, and, indeed, all of the sciences. It is just this primacy (and precisely how it is understood) that gives rise to pressing contemporary questions: How does Catholic theology properly assimilate evolutionary biology, quantum mechanics, liberation theology, feminist thought, bio-ethical advances, Nietzschean postmodernity, Whiteheadian process philosophy, Heideggerian hermeneutics, and so the list continues? How does it refine and utilize every idea while stamping each, as Newman counseled, “with a deeper impress of [the] Master’s image”? The best theologians are well aware that assimilative efforts must be continually underway, for theology, if it is to flourish vigorously, must be in profound dialogue with all of the academic disciplines. Without such a dialogue, Newman recognized, the Christian “idea” could not thrive and flourish, could not become a powerful stream with a broad and capacious riverbed. The theological enterprise, then, must engage the entire treasury of human wisdom, not only because of Catholicism’s decided commitment to the conjunction of faith and reason, but also to ensure the continuing intelligibility of Christianity itself.

But it is one thing to insist on the incorporative nature of theology, and on the ultimate primacy of the Gospel. There exists little argument on these points, even from those stressing theology’s mutually correlational dimensions. It is another matter entirely to determine if *some particular and concrete use* of philosophy or other discipline is fully congruent with the Christian faith, that is, if it leads to some complementary development which is architectonically and harmoniously related to the earlier doctrinal tradition. This latter determination is usually not immediately visible and requires an extended process of discernment; it is the work of time, thought, and the Holy Spirit. *Gaudium et Spes* affirmed that “the recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which affect life and which demand new theological investigations” (§62). More recently, John Paul II, in his discourse on the Galileo case, chided theologians to keep up with developments in science and, if necessary, to make adjustments to their teaching. Rahner observed that the assimilative process (which at times requires the elimination of long-held conceptual models) is so sensitive that some fric-

tion inevitably accompanies this arduous but essential procedure.⁷³ The continuing theological task is to balance absorption and purification, learning from every quarter of human knowledge, even while maintaining “identity of type” over time.

Thesis Four: The Relative Autonomy of the Philosophical Order

Whereas theology assimilates and disciplines philosophy (and all human wisdom), it must be equally affirmed that other fields have their own legitimate autonomy; they cannot simply be subsumed under, or made lackeys of, theological reasoning. Indeed, there exists a long Catholic tradition acknowledging the comparative independence of the natural, created estate. One reason for such recognition was the indefeasible evidence that a host of ancient philosophers, without the palpable benefit of Judaeo-Christian revelation, had penetrated deeply into the *logos*-structure of the universe, and also into the existing moral order. Vatican II affirmed this tradition when stating, “For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order” (*Gaudium et Spes* §36). And again, “If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy.” These statements display the classical Catholic theme that the natural sphere possesses an integral excellence and intrinsic stability.

More recently, the relative independence of the natural order was ardently defended by John Paul II in his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. In this letter, the Pope insists that philosophy and reason have a legitimate autonomy that cannot be suppressed (*comprimere*), even by the content of revelation.⁷⁴ And he reminds readers that the ancient disci-

⁷³ See Karl Rahner, “Yesterday’s History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow,” in *Theological Investigations* 18, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 3–34, at 13.

⁷⁴ “Fides et ratio,” in *Acta apostolicae sedis*, 91 (1999), 5–88, §79. English translation in *Origins* 28 (October 22, 1998): 317–47. See also the supporting comments found at §§48 and 67. Of course, St. Pope John Paul II makes clear that philosophy has no *ultimate* “self-sufficiency.” This is why one fittingly refers to philosophy’s *real but relative* autonomy.

pline is “rightly jealous” of its independence. The pope’s intention here is transparent: the philosophical order—and the created estate generally—possess an authentic autonomy and freedom even “apart” from revelation. So earnestly does the pope defend this position that he eschews, at least theoretically, the venerable term for philosophy as *ancilla theologiae*, lest the impression be given that philosophical reasoning does not have a legitimate sovereignty within its own estate (§77). Reason, though embedded in the *unicus ordo supernaturalis*, has an actual, if not total, independence.

This insistence on the autonomy of the philosophical order has been taken up by Benedict XVI in several venues.⁷⁵ For example, in his 2008 discourse to the faculty and students of the University of Rome, the Pope speaks of the “autonomy which . . . has always been part of the nature of universities, which must be tied exclusively to the authority of truth.” And he eulogistically invokes Aquinas who “highlighted the autonomy of philosophy, and with it, the laws and responsibility proper to reason.” The Pope even invokes the Council of Chalcedon, observing that “philosophy and theology must be interrelated ‘without confusion and without separation.’”⁷⁶

A careful reading of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI reveals that while they endorse the independence of the natural order, they acknowledge this as a *relative*, not absolute, autonomy. As *Fides et Ratio* states, in the light of divine revelation philosophy itself must undergo “profound transformations.” And the encyclical makes a clear distinction between the valid autonomy of philosophy and its *illegitimate* self-sufficiency (§§75, 77). This is to say that whereas the philosophical sphere has an authentic liberty, it must ultimately be enlightened by the Gospel. One may conclude, then, that *Fides et Ratio* is endorsing the fuller maxim concerning philosophy’s traditional role: *ancilla theologiae sed non ancilla nisi libera*. Philosophy can properly serve theology only if she is free and independent, always exploring new realms of thought,

⁷⁵ I have adduced several “Benedictine” examples defending the relative autonomy of the natural sphere in “Nature and Grace: Seeking the Delicate Balance,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18 (2011): 150–62.

⁷⁶ See “Lecture of Benedict XVI at the University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’” (January 17, 2008) in *Acta apostolicae sedis* 100 (2008): 107–14.

entirely without constraint. Of course, what is said here of philosophy applies equally to the sciences and to other disciplines.

It is precisely because of philosophy's authentic autonomy that reason and faith can enrich each other, as *Fides et Ratio* states, with a mutually "purifying critique" (§100). Joseph Ratzinger expanded on this point in his 2004 dialogue with Jürgen Habermas: "I would speak of a necessary relatedness between reason and faith and between reason and religion, which are called to purify and help one another. They need each other, and they must acknowledge this mutual need."⁷⁷

This marked accent on the autonomy of the philosophical order makes me hesitant about unreservedly endorsing the claim of the well-known Thomist Victor Preller, who states, "Aquinas is always writing as *catholicae doctor veritatis*. . . . And in his interpretation of Aristotle . . . he tells us what Aristotle would say *after* his errors were corrected in the light of the *truth* of the Catholic faith."⁷⁸ Preller's formulation properly notes the priority of revelation in Aquinas's thought. But one wonders if his comment entirely protects the autonomy of the philosophical order as Aquinas understood it. Was St. Thomas always writing (explicitly) as a Catholic theologian? Or did he recognize that a significant amount of truth was delivered by philosophical reasoning alone? At times Aquinas appears to defend positions on purely philosophical grounds, positions he was convinced that philosophers had safeguarded without the light of revelation.⁷⁹

In just this regard, one turns to Aquinas's campaign against radical Aristotelianism, particularly its position on the nature of the intellect. Against the monopsychism of his fellow Parisian master, Siger of Brabant, St. Thomas argues that there exists a diversity of intellects in diverse beings. He states that he could easily prove his case by relying on the truth of the Christian faith. But he will display the error by ar-

⁷⁷ Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006), 78.

⁷⁸ Victor Preller, "Water into Wine," in *Grammar and Grace*, ed. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain (London: SCM Press, 2004), 253–69, at 262.

⁷⁹ On the issue of Aquinas as a philosopher, see John F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 240–71.

guing on philosophical grounds alone.⁸⁰ Does Aquinas argue this way only because he saw the truth of this matter on the basis of faith? Or did proper philosophical reasoning also deliver to him this correction of radical Aristotelianism? After all, Aquinas did not hesitate to affirm philosophy's powers, even while acknowledging that they fall short of the contents of faith (*De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, c). Indeed, at the very outset of his magnum opus, St. Thomas insists that philosophy's unfettered autonomy is called into question for one reason only: "Eye has not seen, O God, what you have prepared for those who wait for you" (*ST I*, q. 1, a. 1). While philosophy cannot be the last word about the world and humanity, the relative autonomy of the natural order is never evacuated.

Preller's comment may well reflect the tendency of certain thinkers to worry about the relative autonomy of the philosophical estate, thinking that to insist even on limited independence is to open the door inexorably to what an earlier generation called "separated philosophy." There exists the further fear that this accent on philosophical liberty—even in a mitigated sense—leads to the kind of rationalism associated with the radical Enlightenment. For if philosophy, science, and the created estate generally enjoy a substantial independence, cannot one fairly conclude that revelation and faith are superfluous accoutrements, prostheses for which contemporary men and women have no need? Why not live *etsi Deus non daretur*?

Precisely this fear of an imperious cultural rationalism appears to animate statements found in certain theologians. George Lindbeck, for example, concludes his influential *The Nature of Doctrine* by stating that the world must be absorbed into the biblical narrative.⁸¹ In one sense this is true, since heteronomous and alien standards of thought cannot ultimately judge revelation. However, neither can philosophy lose its proper autonomy by being simply absorbed into theology. More recently, D. Stephen Long, in a generally excellent work, exhibits some of these same concerns. He worries about a Catholic thought that divides

⁸⁰ See *On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists*, trans. Beatrice H. Zedler (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), 22. It is true that in this instance Thomas modifies Aristotle so that he conforms to Christian faith (and on its face this is supportive of Preller's thesis), but Aquinas is convinced that he is arguing on grounds that are entirely accessible philosophically, not only theologically.

⁸¹ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 135.

philosophy, particularly metaphysics, “too thoroughly” from theology.⁸² While Long is right that philosophy must be theologically disciplined, his work, at times, appears to suffer from the fear of even the *relative* autonomy of the philosophical estate.

Instructive about this entire issue of the comparative independence of the natural order is the thinking of Leo Strauss, who insists on philosophy’s *complete* autonomy, with no contribution whatsoever from revelation. For Strauss, Christianity has only hampered thinking by continually assimilating philosophy into decidedly theological narratives.⁸³ Because of the theological colonization of philosophy, Strauss continues, thinking today is much more difficult than it was at the time of Plato. Plato held that humanity must emerge from a natural cave, but Strauss argues that there are now *two* caves obscuring philosophy’s ascent to truth: the cave of natural ignorance, and the cave of a tradition based on revelation. This second cave cannot be attributed to Judaism or Islam, because in these religions there is a decided difference between human wisdom and the eternal dictates of Divine Law. For Strauss, “it is clear that Christianity alone has ‘stepped into the world of philosophy.’”⁸⁴ It has subjected philosophy to theological control, thereby deforming the classical tradition and creating unnatural conditions for thought.

Ironically, Strauss’s work purveys the Hellenization thesis in reverse. It is not Greek thought that has obscured Christianity. Rather, Christian revelation, with its incorporation of philosophy into a master theological narrative, has damaged the ancient discipline. It is no surprise, therefore, that “Strauss never ceases to highlight what he takes to be the fundamental opposition between Athens and Jerusalem.”⁸⁵ Strauss argues that philosophical reasoning needs absolute and unfettered autonomy if it is to reach truth. His position, then, throws into high relief the fundamental claim of Catholic thought: while accenting the freedom and

⁸² See D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 65, 258.

⁸³ For an excellent analysis of Strauss’s understanding of the relationship between philosophy and religious thought, see John Ranieri, *Disturbing Revelation: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Bible* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 23. Also illuminative is Clark A. Merrill, “Leo Strauss’s Indictment of Christian Philosophy,” *Review of Politics* 62 (Winter 2000): 77–105.

⁸⁴ Ranieri, *Disturbing Revelation*, 23.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

liberty of the philosophical and scientific orders, theology nonetheless insists that the light of revelation must clarify and illuminate philosophical discussion.

In summary, Catholic theology holds for the *real but relative* autonomy of the created estate. Nature has only a relative autonomy, because it is always embedded in the one and only sphere of grace. In the middle of the notorious nature/grace controversy of the 1940s, Balthasar gave a subtle response to both neo-Scholasticism and Karl Barth on just this point, insisting that, because all of creation is embedded in the supernatural sphere, the deeply Aristotelian term “nature” could be invoked only analogically. At the same time, Balthasar held that there is a certain stability and integrity in the natural, philosophical estate itself, even if it is always transformed and irradiated by divine revelation.⁸⁶

In certain segments of contemporary theology, there is a strong accent on the retrieval of biblical and patristic sources, on the entire project of *ressourcement*. This recovery, which legitimately accents the graced world of revelation and faith, should not be placed at antipodes with the autonomy belonging to philosophy and science. Nor should this renascence be naively opposed to modernity and the Enlightenment, as if these later movements contained nothing but errors and blind alleys. The Enlightenment’s mistake was not its affirmation of an independent and free reason. Such autonomy is essential, and the great medieval theologians affirmed it. Its error was that, by its positivism and radical empiricism, the existing real was entirely severed from the *fons et origo* of being itself.⁸⁷ This is what de Lubac meant when he remarked towards the end of his life that modernity will always *know* more, it will always *explain* more, but it will never *understand* more, because it has refused mystery.⁸⁸ But it would be an unfortunate mistake to allow the

⁸⁶ For a discussion of Balthasar on this point, see *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 224–31.

⁸⁷ Or, as Alvin Plantinga has recently argued, the Enlightenment’s error was its insistence that revelation justify itself before the bar of reason. But one cannot give a non-circular rational argument establishing that reason itself is reliable. Why, then, must the sources of religious belief justify themselves before the bar of rational intuition? See *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 48–9.

⁸⁸ Henri de Lubac, *A Theologian Speaks* (Los Angeles: Twin Circle, 1985), 25. This publication is an English translation of an interview of de Lubac by Angelo Scola, which first appeared in the Italian journal *30 Giorni* (July 1985).

Christian reaction to modernity's errors to evacuate philosophy of its proper autonomy and the *natural* visibility of truth that belongs to the created estate.

Thesis Five: The Assimilation of "Spoils" from Every Source Indicates the Necessity of Theological Pluralism

The capacious absorption of "spoils" means, as we have seen, that the Church assimilates all human wisdom to her evangelical perspective. Precisely because the Church casts a wide net, this incorporative action inexorably leads to theological pluralism. In the 1930s and 40s, the *nouvelle théologie* sought to overcome a conceptually univocal neo-Scholasticism that had been hegemonic since *Aeterni Patris* (1879), in order, thereby, to restore a broader assimilative imagination to theological reasoning. M.-D. Chenu and Henri Bouillard argued at length for the pluralism characteristic of the earlier theological tradition, while Yves Congar pointed to the unique witness of Eastern Christianity as displaying authentic plurality at the very heart of the ancient Church. Diversity and unity could not be placed at antipodes.⁸⁹

Bouillard was attacked (and ultimately disciplined after *Humani Generis* was published in 1950) for writing in 1944 that a simple study of history shows that, over the course of time, the Church borrows various philosophical concepts in order to express her faith. For example, when speaking about grace and justification, the concepts used by the evangelists, by Augustine, by Aquinas, and by post-Tridentine theologians differ significantly. But, Bouillard added, these varying formulations are not incongruously diverse; they are united by a fundamental affirmation: We are justified by God's grace in Jesus Christ, who empowers us to live holy lives. Bouillard argued, in other words, that the Church main-

⁸⁹ For Chenu, see *Le Saulchoir: Une école de théologie* (Kain-Lez-Tournai: Le Saulchoir, 1937). A 1985 reprint was issued by Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris. For Bouillard, *Conversion et Grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin: Étude Historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944). For Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978). Also, *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985). Of the many recent books on the *nouvelle théologie*, I have found helpful Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Also, Boersma, "Nature and the Supernatural in *la nouvelle théologie*: The Recovery of a Sacramental Mindset," *New Blackfriars* 93 (2012): 34–46.

tains doctrinal unity in and through a variety of philosophical forms and semantic lexica. The same is true of the term “transubstantiation.” Catholicism did not always use the Aristotelian language of substance and accident to explain the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (and Eastern Christianity did not use these notions at all). Nor does Catholicism require the language of hylomorphic theory (as used at the fourteenth-century Council of Vienne) to elucidate the unity of the human person embedded in Christian anthropology. Newer philosophical forms could and should be sought to mediate Christian teaching precisely because the Church of every epoch must express its faith in formulations that are intelligible. There exists, then, a continuing process of re-conceptualization, which allows for authentic diversity even while protecting the substantial identity of doctrine.⁹⁰

Bouillard, with the *nouvelle théologie* generally, was urging theology to widen its philosophical compass beyond the conceptual and lexical monism of neo-Scholasticism in order to engage in a more robust dialogue with the existentialism, personalism, and phenomenology that were sweeping European thought in the 40s. The markedly neo-Augustinian philosophy of Maurice Blondel was important to the *nouveaux théologiens*, as was the invigorating dialogue with modern thought conducted by Joseph Maréchal. And there were pressing pastoral concerns as well. When de Lubac published *Catholicism* in 1938 he was clearly uneasy that France was becoming increasingly Marxist and anti-religious. One reason for this was that the Church’s scholastic-tinged formulations failed to resonate with men and women of the day, while various political movements had appropriated the traditional Christian concepts of brotherhood and the unity of humanity. So, when the series *Sources chrétiennes* was founded in 1943 to propagate the thought of early Christian writers, and when Daniélou argued that neo-Scholasticism was largely outdated, this was not a full-scale attack on Thomism but reflected a marked desire to reprimarize the faith, to restore its evangelical vigor by widening the store of “spoils” beyond Thomas’s Aristotelianism.⁹¹ This is

⁹⁰ I discuss Bouillard’s position at length, as well as the entire debate over the context/content approach to pluralism, including the philosophical warrants necessary to sustain it, and the objections lodged against it, in *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 141–67.

⁹¹ See Jean Daniélou, “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” *Études* 249

why de Lubac spoke of the need for contemporary styles in theology and why he championed the ancient axiom "*Diversi sed non adversi*," a maxim indicating that there can be diverse approaches to theological issues without thereby sanctioning adversarial and incommensurable paths.⁹²

Of course, the importance of authentic pluralism had been defended on several fronts. Gilson had shown, in his careful studies of Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Scotus, that significant dimensions of plurality had already existed in medieval philosophy, with very different theoretical visions underlying a common faith. And Congar had vigorously argued in 1937, in his ground-breaking *Chrétiens désunis*, that Christians often affirmed the same mystery from different perspectives.⁹³ Well before the *nouvelle théologie*, one could find this same theme in the writings of Johann Evangelist Kuhn of Tübingen, who insisted that the Church's faith could never be "a monotone spiritless repetition of the same concepts and expressions." Kuhn argued, rather, that the Church's preaching and theology must be *geistlich* and *zeitgemäß*, speaking the ancient Christian faith in the language of the times and making full use of the surrounding culture.⁹⁴ As is well known, the authentic theological plurality championed by Kuhn and the *nouvelle théologie* was explicitly confirmed at Vatican II.⁹⁵ In my judgment, the *nouvelle théologie* and Vatican II (as

(1946): 5–21. The first English translation of this article of which I am aware is "The Present Orientations of Religious Thought," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18 (2011): 51–62. For a compact treatment of the issues surrounding the *nouvelle théologie*, see Brian Daley, "The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005): 362–82.

⁹² See Henri de Lubac, "A propos de la formule: *diversi, sed non adversi*," *Recherches de science religieuse* 40 (1952): 27–40, and Hubert Silvestre, "*Diversi sed non adversi*," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 31 (1964): 124–32. I am grateful to Marcus Plested for bringing de Lubac's essay to my attention.

⁹³ See Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom* (London: Centenary, 1939).

⁹⁴ J.-E. Kuhn, *Einleitung in die katholische Dogmatik*, 2 vols. (Tübingen, 1846–47).

⁹⁵ The most obvious official support for this position is found in the opening speech of John XXIII (repeated in *Gaudium et Spes* §62), with its distinction between the *depositum fidei* and the *modus quo veritates enuntiantur*, which led Yves Congar to remark that these few words summarize the meaning of the entire council. See Congar, *A History of Theology*, trans. Hunter Guthrie (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 18–19. Giuseppe Alberigo has called this distinction one of the decisive motifs of the council. See "Facteurs de 'Laïcité' au Concile Vatican II," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 74 (2000): 211–25.

well as Kuhn earlier) sanctioned what may be called “commensurable pluralism,” meaning by this term that there exists a fundamental unity of Christian doctrine (taking account of all the necessary qualifications, e.g., the hierarchy of truths and theological notes), but that doctrine is now expressed in a wide variety of concepts, forms, and lexica. History itself had witnessed to the fact that diversity and communion were co-existing realities. The council intended to recover the traditional theological appropriation of new philosophies, cultures, and languages, all in service to authentic plurality.

This conciliar distinction between the meaning of a Christian doctrine and the formulation or concept through which it is expressed is entirely traditional. Already in the early fifth century, Vincent of Lérins was fully alive to this distinction, exhorting Christians, *dicas nove non dicas nova*.⁹⁶ John Damascene endorsed the same position in the eighth century, as did Aquinas five centuries later.⁹⁷ Such authentic pluralism, of course, is never simply iterative repetition. A new concept or *Denkstil* necessarily throws into relief unseen aspects of a doctrine’s truth, bringing forth perspectives and insights which may have been languishing in obscurity (or adding a welcome and complementary supplement). By admitting that the traditional affirmations of doctrine could be expressed in new philosophical and cultural forms, the council sought to make the faith more intelligible to the times, to expose previously hidden dimensions of the mysteries of faith, to allow for legitimate doctrinal development, and, crucially, to acknowledge that the formulations of Orthodox and Protestant Christians might differently, but complementarily, mediate the truth of Christian doctrine.

Of course, precisely *how* the identical meaning is preserved over time and in new formulations requires nuance and sophistication.

⁹⁶ *Commonitorium*, no. 22. Vincent argues that although the words *homoousios* and *Theotokos* are not found in the earliest tradition, they perfectly express biblical faith. Vincent sanctioned not only re-expression; he was an early and vigorous champion of doctrinal development, *eodem sensu eademque sententia*.

⁹⁷ See John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 71. Gregory Nazianzen expresses the same thought in the fourth century when he says that there exists “a great deal of diversity inherent in names” for it is a matter of “meanings rather than words.” See *Oration* 31.24. For Aquinas, see *Summa theologiae* I, q. 29, a. 3, ad 1, where he argues that new words are necessary to express the ancient faith.

Rahner clearly recognized the difficulties attending this process, warning that “context” and “content” are not easily discernible or separable.⁹⁸ At the same time, Rahner insisted that, even within the process of re-conceptualization, one “must of course make simultaneously clear that the sameness of dogma in the old sense is assured and the effort to do this must not be regarded in principle as dubious, as a feeble and cowardly compromise.”⁹⁹ The underlying issue here is always the same: How can there be a spectrum of new philosophical forms and concepts which allow the Christian faith to speak robustly and vigorously in every age—the new wine of the Gospel always in fresh skins?

More recently, *Fides et Ratio* endorses philosophical pluralism at great length, a pluralism that ineluctably leads to theological diversity. The encyclical insists that the Church has no philosophy of her own, relativizes St. Thomas (even if he remains a unique master), and calls for a new philosophy which takes account of the entire prior tradition. This emphasis on authentic pluralism was further strengthened in 2001 when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith rehabilitated the thought of Antonio Rosmini, acknowledging that his desire to surpass neo-Scholastic language and concepts led to the illegitimate condemnation of theses drawn from his works.¹⁰⁰

One significant fruit of theological reflection from *Aeterni Patris* in 1879, through the *fin de siècle* Modernist crisis, through the *nouvelle théologie*, and down to Vatican II and afterwards, has been to show that one need not be a neo-Thomist or neo-Scholastic to protect, explore, or fruitfully develop the mysteries of faith. The truth of revelation is dependent on neither conceptual nor cultural univocity. Each epoch

⁹⁸ I outline Rahner’s cautious thought on the form-content distinction in *Revelation and Truth* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1993), 49–55 and, more briefly, in *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 192–93. Rahner chided the CDF’s 1973 declaration, *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, for making things easy for itself with the form/content distinction. Although Rahner himself used this approach, he was well aware of the difficulties attending the facile invocation of it. See Rahner, “*Mysterium Ecclesiae*” in *Theological Investigations* 17, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 139–55, at 151.

⁹⁹ See Karl Rahner, “Yesterday’s History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow,” 13.

¹⁰⁰ I have treated of the intricacies of the CDF’s statements about this case in “Rosmini, Ratzinger, and Kuhn: Observations on a Note by the Doctrinal Congregation,” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 43–68.

“performs” the truth of revelation in its own day, even while it is in doctrinal continuity with the Church of earlier centuries. Theology, then, fruitfully explores and assimilates philosophy and every academic field of inquiry, since penetrating reason can always further illuminate (and creatively develop) the mysteries of faith.

Thesis Six: The Unique Role of Metaphysics (Commodiously Understood) in Catholic Theology

Surely it smacks of a performative contradiction to insist that theology must be vigorously pluralistic, and then to contend for the essential role of metaphysics—capaciously understood—in theological thinking. Yet that is the argument offered here. For while theology must constantly incorporate fresh ideas, foster authentic diversity, and remain in lively dialogue with an extensive variety of perspectives, metaphysics, broadly speaking, provides the essential theoretical spine, buttressing (in the philosophical sphere) theology’s universal and trans-cultural claims.

Metaphysics under Assault

Although the Hellenization thesis extends to several forms of philosophy, it is metaphysics, in particular, that has been regarded as the primary enemy of biblical teaching and so, of revelation itself. As we have seen, the principle *theological* charge is that metaphysics is an alien ideology, a pre-existing Procrustean bed which seeks to shape and mold the Christian faith according to its own foreign and intrusive norms. But metaphysics, of course, has been attacked on philosophical grounds as well.

Louis Dupré has provided a useful typology for the assault. He notes that the ancients were constructivists only to the extent that a pre-existing nature or essence could be further refined and cultivated. With Descartes and Kant, however, there develops a gradual loss of the intelligibility mediated by the form-giving principles of *kosmos* and *physis*, of the truth mediated by nature. The accent is placed, rather, on the subject’s own intense, form-shaping role; humanity itself, not an antecedent cosmic structure, is the measure of all things. For post-Kantian voluntarism (including, one might add, postmodernity), nature—and, indeed, any insistence on a discernible *logos*-structure of the world—gradually

becomes the enemy of emancipatory freedom, since it tries to shape the subject according to apriori norms. But only the autonomous person in his or her sovereign liberty is the proper locus of meaning and truth.¹⁰¹

By the time one reaches Nietzsche, meaning is entirely and without remainder bestowed by human subjectivity. In his parable, "How the World Became a Fable," Nietzsche says that the "true world" was first available to the wise man, the follower of Plato. Later, the truth was promised to the Christian, the one who was committed to a virtuous life. In Kantian philosophy, the true world became unknowable, with reality itself (the noumenon) escaping humanity's cognitive grasp. Today, Nietzsche adds, positing an "objective world" no longer makes any sense; it is entirely superfluous. In other words, the "world" does not possess a pre-existing *ratio*, nor do human beings have a given nature or essence; intelligibility is *created* by every person who has the fortitude to establish his or her own self-propelled meaning (the very definition of the *Übermensch*).¹⁰²

This attack on the metaphysical structure of reality is also exemplified by Wilhelm Dilthey, an early champion of the antipodean Hebraic-Hellenic typology. In his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* of 1833, Dilthey argues that St. Augustine was an early opponent of the truth mediated by *physis* and *kosmos*, recognizing that the interior life of the spirit is the measure of all things. Crucial here is Augustine's famous cry, "I wish to know God and the soul." When Reason asks, "nothing more?" Augustine responds, "nothing at all."¹⁰³ Dilthey takes this dramatic plea of the Augustinian soul as the evaporation of cosmology, the dissolution of metaphysical objectivity. The great theologian presciently recognized that the inner dynamics of the spirit, not an antecedent "nature," is the primary purveyor of meaning.¹⁰⁴

Dilthey concedes that Augustine's work remains scarred by classical

¹⁰¹ Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹⁰² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 50–51.

¹⁰³ Augustine, *Soliloquies*, Book, I, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, trans. Ramon J. Betanzos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 231–39. Dilthey insists that Augustine's profound concern for self-consciousness "swallows up all interest in studying the cosmos" (234).

thought. Because the Church was the only remaining power after the fall of the Western Empire, the responsibility for maintaining civilization fell to Christianity, and this entailed the adoption of Greek philosophy. To some extent, then, Augustine's thought remains bound by the fetters of (neo-Platonic) antiquity. But the essential turn has already been made. There is a palpable move away from Hellenic objectivity (the cosmic-metaphysical path) toward an accent on subjectivity and interiority. Augustine's interest in the soul's relationship to God gradually dissolves and corrodes the "metaphysical" dimension of Greek thought.

One may see the influence of Dilthey on the young Heidegger, who, in his early works, adopts this oppositional Hebraic-Hellenic narrative.¹⁰⁵ For example, in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (lectures delivered from 1918 to 1921), Heidegger argues that St. Paul's apocalyptic attitude is gradually buried under the weight of Hellenic thinking. In several New Testament passages, such as Paul's second letter to the Thesalonians, there exists a tangible sense of uncertainty and judgment, of instability and eschatological expectation. But this biblical attitude is gradually crushed by the fixed thought of metaphysics; a hardened philosophical *ousia* slowly betrays the primordial experience of the early Church. Indeed, the original Pauline sense of foreboding is no longer grasped in late antiquity and the Middle Ages following the penetration of Greek thought into Christian faith. And so, Heidegger concludes, "already at the end of the first century, the eschatological was covered up in Christianity. In later times one misjudged all original Christian concepts. In today's philosophy, too, the Christian concept-formations are hidden behind a Greek view."¹⁰⁶ Theology has turned away from the genuinely biblical attitude toward the fixed, the objective, the always-already at hand (*Vorhandenheit*) and, thus, toward the "onto-theological."

When Heidegger publishes *Being and Time* a few years later, the explicitly biblical language disappears, although the fundamental themes remain the same. The entire post-Socratic tradition has been a "forget-

¹⁰⁵The early Heidegger's religious writing is discussed at length by Gianni Vattimo in *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 123–37.

¹⁰⁶Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 67–82, at 73.

ting of being.” The philosophical tradition has been perniciously saturated with *ousia*, *energeia*, *actualitas*, *essentia*. But these philosophies of substance have led only to the objectification and reification of being, confusing one episodic “appearance” of being in history (Hellenic thought) with Being itself. Being is now conceived of as that which is substantial and ready-to-hand, rather than as irruptive, epiphanic, and evanescent.

So, Heidegger famously argues, to speak of God in terms of causality, or as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, is to name a god before whom one cannot dance and sing, a god of the philosophers, but not God himself. This is why theology can never be a founding and primordial discipline— *for it does not and cannot think Being*. It thinks within particular, epochal, ontic, and regionalized forms of being.¹⁰⁷ Philosophy alone is the true *ontological* discipline, thinking the very fountainhead of Being, the very source of the Being/beings distinction. Heidegger’s conclusion is that theology is not truly thought; it is inattentive to the primordial nature of Being, to its transitory and evanescent disclosures in time. Heidegger comes close, then, to the position espoused by Leo Strauss: theology is simply another “cave” from which true thinking must emerge.

Heideggerian anti-metaphysical thought lives on in contemporary postmodern thinkers such as Gianni Vattimo and John Caputo. Vattimo, for example, has long argued that philosophical interest in being, in the *ontos on*, has waned over time. Indeed, Vattimo’s “weak thought” (his signature idea) holds that assertive claims about the “*logos*-structure” of reality, or the “universal natural law,” are no longer tenable. In fact, the history of Western philosophy (which comes to fruition in Nietzsche and Heidegger) may be read precisely as the progressive dissolution of objectivity and metaphysical assertion. Virtually every educated person now concedes that there exists no grasp of “truth” that is not already deeply encased within historically bound predispositions. It is precisely this lesson that accounts for the contemporary ascendancy of hermeneutical thought which adopts as its slogan, “it’s interpretation all the way down.” By de-constructing the alleged “structure” of the world, by exposing the historicity and socio-cultural horizons attending all

¹⁰⁷ For Heidegger’s remarks on theology as a regional discipline, see *The Piety of Thinking*, trans. J. Hart and J. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 6.

thought, hermeneutics has been unveiled as a truly *emancipatory* philosophy, one that does not force us to conform to a pre-existing “nature” or definitive cosmic *ratio*.¹⁰⁸

What survives in the educated Christian West, then, is not *veritas*, with its aggressively metaphysical implications, but *caritas* (read as tolerance of all non-violent viewpoints). It is precisely “tolerance” which describes how the Christian tradition has been “received” by the great majority of Western Europeans and significant numbers of North Americans. This is why Vattimo can say, much like Dilthey, “Christianity is a stimulus, a message that sets in motion a tradition of thought that will eventually realize its freedom from metaphysics.”¹⁰⁹ Properly understood (as *caritas*/tolerance), Christianity encourages us to perceive humanity as an *historical project* with the ability and freedom to create its own norms. With the demise of metaphysics we have learned that so-called “objective and universal structures” are mere artifice; rather, “postmodern nihilism constitutes the actual truth of Christianity.”¹¹⁰

One sees in Vattimo’s work (and Caputo’s) an adoption of the traditional Hellenization thesis, with metaphysics, in particular, detrimentally infecting enlightened Christianity.¹¹¹ The danger lurking in these thinkers, however, is that one kind of philosophy (the Heideggerian-Derridean approach), accenting the provisional event of Being, the *Ereignis*, the Impossible, is simply exchanged for another. Since metaphysics must be eschewed as ontologically inappropriate, faith’s creedal

¹⁰⁸I have examined Vattimo’s thought at length in *Vattimo and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2009). On the demise of metaphysics, see also the suggestive study of Santiago Zabala, *The Remains of Being* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). For Vattimo’s most recent comments on metaphysical dissolution, see *A Farewell to Truth*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁹Gianni Vattimo, “Toward a Nonreligious Christianity,” in John Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 35.

¹¹⁰Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 47.

¹¹¹Without minimizing differences between them, I regard Caputo’s thought as similar to Vattimo’s insofar as both thinkers urge theology to abandon its metaphysical captivity. Caputo counsels theology to temper its Hellenistic traditions by fostering Israel’s prophetic spirit. See John D. Caputo, “Philosophy and Prophetic Postmodernism: Toward a Catholic Postmodernity,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74 (2000): 549–67.

claims should now be understood as epiphanic and transitory rather than as definitive and lasting. In making this move, however, doctrinal teachings are stripped of their cognitive yield, making them fallibilistic at best and nihilistic at worst. Does such an exchange truly “free” theology from philosophy? Or is theology now simply enslaved by new masters?

As Caputo says, theology is a “Jewgreek” enterprise—and so it has always been.¹¹² But isn’t the Vattimo-Caputo proposal merely an exchange of metaphysical for non-metaphysical “Greeks”? And are the non-metaphysical Greeks truly more congruent with biblical claims? Further, does not this postmodern dissolution of historical Christianity into *caritas* simply duplicate the quintessential move of modernity, defanging religion by dissolving its “hard” cognitive claims, thereby allowing religion to play a public, societal role only when it is jejune and toothless? The truly crucial question is this: which Greeks—that is to say, which philosophical form—best serves the revelatory demands of the God of Israel who has come near to us in Jesus of Nazareth?

Metaphysics (Commodiously Understood) Is Necessary for Theology

It is my contention that some capacious metaphysical approach is essential to Catholic theology for the following reasons: (1) Metaphysics points to the participationist structure of reality whereby the mind ascends, by way of the theater of the world and the intelligibility of the existing real, to the *fons et origo* of being and truth; (2) metaphysics, in the form of the *analogia entis*, philosophically grounds the predication of names to God. Without the structure of analogy, all divine attribution is either reduced to metaphor or simply asserted as true absent the further dimension of intelligibility (precisely *how* may human concepts denominate the Infinite) that analogical language (and its ontological underpinning, the analogy of being) provides; and (3) metaphysics al-

¹¹²Caputo borrows the expression “Jewgreek” from Jacques Derrida, who in turn borrowed it from James Joyce. The term accents the fact that the Christian tradition is “miscegenated,” always a combination of biblical (Hebraic) and philosophical (Hellenic) thinking. See John Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 6–8. Derrida explains the term in his essay “Violence and Metaphysics” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79–153, at 153 and at 320n92.

lows for an anthropology that establishes an eidetically discerned human nature or form which helps to explain why stable textual meanings (such as those found in the Nicene Creed) may be reliably transmitted over millennia and are not swallowed up in socio-cultural-linguistic contingency.¹¹³

Catholicism has traditionally taught, and *Dei Verbum* reaffirms, that in its essential dimensions revelation is universally, perpetually, and normatively true. As Vatican II says, "God has seen to it that what he has revealed will abide *perpetually* in its full *integrity* and be handed on to all generations" (*Dei Verbum* §7, emphasis added). The substance of this conciliar citation could be easily duplicated, but the point is transparent: the Church's foundational teachings are trustworthy and authoritative across generations and cultures. As the International Theological Commission has stated in one of its most insightful documents, "the truth of revelation . . . is universally valid and unchangeable in substance."¹¹⁴ The point of these statements is that if revelation is truly God's *self-manifestation*, then it entails an irreducibly cognitive dimension that is perpetual and irreversible.

It is no surprise, then, that in *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II states that a "theology which shuns a metaphysical approach is unsuited for mediating divine revelation" (no. 83). Why is this the case? Because theology requires modes of reasoning that can protect and substantiate, in the philosophical order, the Church's fundamental doctrinal convictions. Christian truth claims, as found for example in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, are intended to be trans-cultural and trans-generational. While re-appropriated and re-conceptualized in every generation, the Church's teachings perdure from epoch to epoch in their fundamental meaning. But such a belief would make no sense whatsoever if one could not speak intelligibly about the very *possibility* of substantially enduring

¹¹³I can mention these points only briefly here. I have defended them at greater length in *Foundations of Systematic Theology*.

¹¹⁴International Theological Commission, "On the Interpretation of Dogmas," *Origins* 20 (May 17, 1990): 9. Catholicism, of course, is not alone in this belief. Orthodoxy holds the same for the creeds and councils of the early Church and, as Geoffrey Wainwright has said, "For classical Protestants, at least, the Apostles' Creed and the conciliar Creed of Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon . . . have always been taken as the irreversible deliverances and continuing guides of the Tradition." See Wainwright, *Is the Reformation Over?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2000), 39.

meanings over time. This is why *Fides et Ratio* states that “philosophy should confirm the intelligibility and universal truth of its [theology’s] claims” (§77). Absent such a “confirming” philosophy (that is to say, absent the ability to defend philosophically the very *possibility* of the universally true, and the very *possibility* of meaning invariance), Christian doctrine would rightly be perceived as nothing more than authoritarian, or even irrational, assertion. But philosophies with a metaphysical range consistently protect the universality of truth and the stable identity of meaning in and through vast socio-cultural-linguistic diversity.

One must immediately add that this defense of the metaphysical dimension of thought is *not* intended to tie theology to the thirteenth century or to some constricted understanding of the *philosophia perennis*. Doing so would be to ignore the insights of Vatican II about authentic plurality. This is why one more cogently speaks of philosophies with metaphysical horizons rather than simply metaphysics *sensu stricto*. Several philosophies are protective of such dimensions without being neo-Scholastic in kind, as the case of Rosmini (noted above) clearly indicates.

Further, one traditional and obvious defect of metaphysics was that it failed to take adequate account of the irrepressible horizons of historicity and subjectivity.¹¹⁵ It was just this failure that led Rahner and Lonergan to enter into an animated philosophical dialogue with modernity. It is why Rahner concluded, “I also believe that one can say that neo-scholastic theology and philosophy, for all their accomplishments, are quite passé today.”¹¹⁶ But recognizing the defects of neo-Scholasticism led neither Rahner nor Lonergan to an abandonment of metaphysics, but to its rediscovery in a transcendental (and to some extent hermeneutical) key. Revealingly, Rahner found Heidegger’s thought deficient and continued to defend metaphysical themes, including the universal anthropology developed in his earlier philosophical works.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵I have criticized *Fides et Ratio* because, while calling for capacious philosophical options, it largely ignores approaches which, although broadly committed to metaphysical thought, seriously engage historicity and human subjectivity. See Thomas G. Guarino, “*Fides et Ratio*: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism,” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 675–700.

¹¹⁶Karl Rahner, *I Remember*, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 88.

¹¹⁷Rahner states: “Heidegger himself was, of course, convinced that after the pre-Socra-

Both Rahner and Lonergan insisted that historicity and metaphysics need not be enemies.

For all theologians, the fundamental issue is this: Which philosophies can sustain faith's claims? If Catholicism insists (as it surely does, with all the necessary qualifications) that certain of its teachings are universally true, substantially identical over generations and cultures, then which philosophies can support this bold assertion? It is just here that narratives with metaphysical dimensions seem particularly congruent with the Catholic faith.

Of course, the objections to metaphysics must be taken seriously. Above all, there exists the concern that metaphysically inspired philosophies will "freeze the flux," marginalizing the profound effects of historicity and cultural specificity, and thereby dismissing as extraneous and accidental the political and social interests integral to thought. Is it not possible that metaphysics, which claims to express the foundational principles of reality, will end by defending structures reflective not of truth but of shopworn ideology? Given this possibility, prominent Catholic thinkers have warned about the dangers of metaphysical approaches. One need only witness Jean-Luc Marion's Heideggerian concern that a metaphysics of presence too easily treats God as a reified object, thereby missing the gratuitous phenomenon of revelation itself. David Tracy, for his part, has developed the notion of "fragment" as a theological form resistant to rationalist totality, seeking in apocalyptic and eschatological models elements assuring that a steely metaphysics will not simply bury the "Other" under a reductive system.¹¹⁸

It is important, then, not only to reiterate the necessity of authentic pluralism, but to insist that theological reflection must incorporate all that has been learned from phenomenology, from analytical and evolutionary thought, and from various modes of liberative and emancipatory reasoning. If theology must *ultimately* eschew philosophies such as Heidegger's, it is compelled to admit that hermeneutics in general has forced the discipline to think, and profoundly so, about human em-

tics . . . a philosophy was being carried out that was based on an ultimate misunderstanding of being. I cannot share this opinion. I consider it false." See *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, trans. ed. Harvey Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 311.

¹¹⁸See David Tracy, "Fragments," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 170–84.

beddedness in history, culture, language, and tradition. Together with postmodernism, hermeneutical philosophy has rightly challenged the ahistorical and wooden conceptualism that was often a hallmark of metaphysics.

However, if theology were to bypass metaphysical thinking entirely, it would have only two options: to assert Church teaching fideistically, without finding theoretical support in the natural, philosophical order for the universality and perpetuity of Christian doctrine or, conversely, to concede that Church teachings are, indeed, circumscribed in scope by the deeply incommensurable layers of socio-cultural-linguistic diversity. In this latter option, theology would need to jettison its defense of the universality, material identity, and relative meaning-invariance of Christian doctrine over time. Catholicism has rightly avoided this path, since embracing it would entail an abandonment of doctrine's universal and perpetual truth claims (and, necessarily, would lead to a complete reinterpretation of the very notion of revelation as *locutio Dei*). One may conclude, then, that non-metaphysical approaches, while ultimately unacceptable, make their own contributions, challenging theology to examine its philosophical convictions so that the decided effects of historicity and contingency are neither ignored nor diminished.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

The Catholic theological tradition places a strong accent on the assimilation of every mode of thought, even those which are seemingly opposed to the Christian faith. This approach is essential because there can exist no fundamental opposition between Athens and Jerusalem, between *logos* and *pistos*. But the process of thoughtful appropriation is neither quick nor easy. The theological incorporation of classical antiquity was a journey of some twelve centuries, from the time of the earliest Fathers right up until Aquinas. With Vatican II, the Church began the official sifting and absorption of the fruits of the Enlightenment, a reception that will likely continue for decades and perhaps centuries.

¹¹⁹This means that theology must take account not only of Heidegger's primordial notion of historicity, but also of Wittgenstein's cultural-linguistic web of experience, of Gadamer's *phronesis*-based rationality, and of Habermas's neo-pragmatic communicative theory, all of which provide salutary cautions to metaphysical thinking.

This process of assimilation (and purification) must be bold and undaunting. Echoing de Lubac's plea to utilize the thought even of Marx and Nietzsche, *Fides et Ratio* encourages theology to enter into "demanding critical dialogue with both contemporary philosophical thought and with the philosophical tradition in all its aspects, whether consonant with the word of God or not" (§105). This openness to every idea, no matter its provenance, is also enunciated in John Paul II's statement on the Galileo case: "It is a duty for theologians to keep themselves regularly informed of scientific advances in order to examine, if such be necessary, whether or not there are reasons for taking them into account in their reflection or for introducing changes in their teaching."¹²⁰ Many of these themes are also found in John Paul's 1988 letter to George V. Coyne, S.J. While lauding those theologians who utilized "spoils" from Aristotle, the Pope says: "Contemporary developments in science challenge theology far more deeply than did the introduction of Aristotle into Western Europe in the thirteenth century. Yet these developments also offer to theology a potentially important resource. . . . Can we not hope that the sciences of today, along with all forms of human knowing, may invigorate and inform those parts of the theological enterprise that bear on the relation of nature, humanity and God?"¹²¹

The vital and vigorous appropriation of new ideas, then, is a living one in Catholic theology, encouraged by the popes themselves. As earlier noted, however, such absorption rarely occurs without a certain amount of tension and friction. One need only recall the thirteenth-century University of Paris to see this procedure, with all its attendant difficulties, at work. More recently, Rahner has observed that "friction and struggle" is an integral part of the process when deciding if some aspect of Christian teaching is essential, or is simply part of an historically conditioned model (using the example of original sin and monogenism). In service to continuing assimilation, theologians have offered speculative works in liberation theology, feminist hermeneutics, evolutionary biology, postmodernity—and so the list continues.

¹²⁰St. Pope John Paul II, "Lessons of the Galileo Case," *Origins* 22 (November 12, 1992): 372. Needless to add, what the Pope says about the physical sciences is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the human sciences as well.

¹²¹"Letter to George V. Coyne, S.J., Director of the Vatican Observatory," *Acta apostolicae sedis* 81 (1989): 274–83, at 282.

The Catholic Church must encourage this exercise of critical reasoning, recognizing the essential role of the *schola theologorum* in understanding and architectonically developing the Christian faith. One profitably turns here to John Henry Newman, who acknowledged at great length the important role of theological speculation.¹²² Newman was well aware that a too-quick resolution of knotty issues illegitimately foreshortens the essential process of theological debate. Judging whether or not some position is harmoniously congruent with the Gospel often takes decades of thought, debate, and reflection. The authority of the Roman See is properly invoked, Newman believed, at the end of a protracted process, after an idea had been debated by a wide variety of theological courts.¹²³ For this very reason he insists that the theologian needs liberty; otherwise, “he would be fighting, as the Persian soldiers, under the lash, and the freedom of his intellect might truly be said to be beaten out of him. But this has not been so . . . Zosimus treated Pelagius and Coelestius with extreme forbearance; St. Gregory VII was equally indulgent with Berengarius; by reason of the very power of the popes they have commonly been slow and moderate in their use of it.”¹²⁴ Extended theological reflection is essential precisely because authentic development requires “the slow, painful, anxious taking up of new truths into an existing body of belief.”¹²⁵

The contemporary physicist Peter E. Hodgson recently echoed just this point when discussing the difficulties that Galileo faced: “The consultants were theologians trained in the theology of Aquinas that was thoroughly integrated with Aristotelian cosmology. The synthesis of Aristotle had stood for two millennia . . . and was congruent with Catholic beliefs. . . . To them [theologians] it was simply inconceivable that Galileo, simply by looking through a little tube with lenses at either end,

¹²²In his important preface of 1877, Newman famously says, “Theology is the fundamental and regulating principle of the whole Church system.” See Preface, *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, vol. 1, third edition (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), xlvii.

¹²³Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895), 267. Originally published in 1864, a new edition appeared the following year. See also, *Via Media*, xlvii.

¹²⁴Newman, *Apologia*, 267–68.

¹²⁵Newman, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, 366.

could overthrow this majestic synthesis. . . . It did not take them long to decide that Galileo's views were absurd and indeed heretical."¹²⁶

Hodgson's point, like Newman's and Rahner's before him, is that the assimilation of new ideas is never easy, particularly when a specific paradigm or model has been in long use in the Church. While the magisterium has been entrusted with making the ultimate decision about the successful absorption of philosophy and the disciplines, it must extend due freedom to theologians as well. And, of course, the magisterium speaks with varying levels of authority, so the judgments rendered, while authentic, are themselves often contingent and provisional rather than final and determinative.

Deep within the heart of Catholicism is the recognition that faith and reason, theology and the disciplines, *pistos* and *logos*, are one reality, reflective of the supernatural order instituted by the Creator. It is precisely through the incorporation (and purification) of new insights in philosophy, the sciences, and other fields that the *mysterium fidei* is more fully penetrated and architectonic doctrinal development properly occurs. It is in theology's unending assimilation and transformation of human wisdom, with every thought taken captive to Jesus Christ, that "the Church, through the unrolling centuries, continuously tends toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God come to fulfillment in her" (*Dei Verbum* §8).

N&V

¹²⁶Peter E. Hodgson, "Galileo the Theologian," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 8 (2005): 28–51, at 42–3.