

The Future of Catholic Theology: A Question

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ONE WHO PREDICTS THE FUTURE inevitably sees it as an extension of the present; radical innovations and ruptures cannot be foreseen. The railroad barons of the nineteenth century might have anticipated faster coast-to-coast trains; they could not have foreseen that, a century later, most passengers would cross the country through the air. Secretaries in early twentieth-century offices might have looked forward to more efficient typewriters; they could not have foreseen that their successors would sit in front of computer screens. Predicting the future of theology could be just as risky.

But theology is not technology; it lives as the continuation of its own past. Revelation ended with the death of the last apostle; no third testament will be discovered and canonized. Tradition will continue to mean what has been handed down and received. And yet theology is carried out by living theologians, who do more than hand on the past: they reflect on the meaning of Scripture and Tradition for their own age, and on the message that the faith can offer that age. Racism, feminism, colonialism, environmentalism, for example, have entered theological reflection only in recent decades, at least as featured topics.

In other words, theology is in continuity with its past in a way that other fields are not. I want to read a theologian who has mastered Augustine and Aquinas; I do not want to go to a doctor who follows the teachings of Galen.

This essay, which is admittedly impressionistic, will fall into three parts. The first is an overview of Catholic theological eras in the past century and a half, roughly preconciliar, conciliar, and postconciliar. The second is an interpretation of these eras using categories on the meaning of “being” drawn from the work of Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI. The third presents some thoughts on the present state of theology and the directions it may be taking.

Three Eras of Catholic Theology

The "Pian" Century, 1846–1958

As an exercise, reflection on the past century and a half may be enlightening. A helpful starting point is the "Pian century," if "century" is taken a little broadly: from the election of Pius IX in 1846 to the death of Pius XII in 1958. (I lay a certain claim to the era since Pius XII died during my thirty-day retreat as a first-year Jesuit novice.) The era is also bracketed by two ecumenical councils, Vatican I (1869–70) and Vatican II (1962–65). The century may have been the high-water mark of papal authority, although that statement could easily be debated. The tone of much of the century was defensive, stoutly affirming Catholic faith and teaching as a barricade against rationalism, modernism, and historicism. It was the century of the *Syllabus of Errors* of Pius IX (1864) against the many errors of his time,¹ the decree *Lamentabili Sane* promulgated under Pius X (1907) against the errors of the Modernists,² and the encyclical *Humani Generis* promulgated by Pius XII (1950) against new tendencies in sacred science—that is, theology.³

The Pian century was also a Marian century, bracketed by the definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854⁴ and the definition of the bodily assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1950.⁵ Marian piety flourished, encouraged by the apparitions of Mary at Lourdes in France (1858) and Fatima in Portugal (1917).

Theology, in that era, was dominated by neo-Scholasticism, encouraged by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris*,⁶ which mandated the teaching of Christian philosophy in Catholic schools according to the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The characteristics of that century are easy to enumerate: neo-Scholastic theology, taught in Latin in Rome and in most seminaries, often as much Aristotelian as Thomistic, from textbooks written in Latin by

¹ The *Syllabus* was attached to the encyclical *Quanta Cura*, published on December 8, 1864, and comprised a list of eighty propositions to be rejected. The propositions were excerpted from Pius IX's previous writings.

² The Holy Office promulgated the decree *Lamentabili Sane* on July 3, 1907; the decree listed sixty-five errors of the Modernists. Pius X followed the decree with the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (September 8, 1907), which presented the doctrines of the Modernists more systematically.

³ Promulgated on August 12, 1950.

⁴ With the bull of Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, promulgated on December 8, 1854.

⁵ In the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, November 1, 1950.

⁶ Promulgated August 4, 1879.

professors at the pontifical universities in Rome; resistance to, and anxiety about, modern culture, exemplified in the *Syllabus of Errors* and the condemnation of modernism; fear of post-Kantian historicism, especially when applied to the Bible; and the intellectual near-paralysis in biblical studies that followed the condemnation of modernism.

New Rumbblings in the Pian Century

But there is never a total absence of movement, of development, of originality. Among the most striking developments of the earlier twentieth century was the rise of historical studies, especially a return to, and a new evaluation of, the patristic tradition, the so-called *ressourcement* or, as opponents called it, “la nouvelle théologie.”⁷

As that period began, history and theology were distinct and often hostile disciplines, and the study of history was often the occasion for suspicion and anxiety.⁸ Seminary theology was deductive: principles were established and conclusions drawn from them, and these conclusions were then proved from the Tradition.

Then, in the 1920s,⁹ the Dominicans at Le Saulchoir (then in Belgium) began to study St. Thomas’s “authorities”—that is, the authors he read and quoted—and thus to see him in his historical context. At the same time Étienne Gilson, searching for Descartes’s sources, reached back to the thirteenth century, and then discovered that one could not understand the thirteenth century without understanding the twelfth—a surprising assertion for its time. In Germany, Martin Grabmann distinguished four successive stages in medieval Scholasticism.¹⁰

In the 1930s, some theologians began to study the Fathers not to bolster

⁷ A name given by Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., to the work of Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., Henri de Lubac, S.J., and others. See Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 31.

⁸ The study of the history of dogma flourished among Protestants in the late nineteenth century; Adolf von Harnack is only the best known among many such historians. Without a doubt, one goal of these historians was to relativize dogma. Catholics came only later to write histories of dogma. At the time, the prevailing Catholic attitude was that the truth had no history.

⁹ Parts of the next few paragraphs are adapted from my article “Historical Theology in the Curriculum,” in *Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition: Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Patrick W. Carey and Earl C. Muller (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 266–79.

¹⁰ Martin Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode: Nach den gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen dargestellt*, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1909–11).

Scholastic theses but for themselves. The first were liturgists: Ildefons Herwegen and Odo Casel at Maria Laach were leaders. Anton Baumstark founded the science of comparative liturgy with his highly influential work *Comparative Liturgy*.¹¹ In the same decade, Gilson published books on Anselm and Bernard, and Georges Florovsky wrote an important book on the Byzantine Fathers of the fifth to the eighth centuries.

Jean Leclercq describes the two decades from 1940 to 1960 as the high-water mark of Catholic historical theology.¹² Historical research moved beyond liturgy to theology itself. A litany of names is easily composed: Louis Bouyer, Lucien Cerfaux, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac, Romano Guardini, Bernhard Häring, Josef Jungmann, Jean Mouroux, Pius Parsch, Hugo Rahner, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx. Authors began to interrogate the sources and to let them speak for themselves. It is easy to picture theologians reading through column after column in Migne's Patrologies and marking paragraphs that impressed and moved them. Anthologies began to appear: Erich Przywara's *Augustine Synthesis* in 1934,¹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar's selections from Augustine's writings on the Psalms in 1936,¹⁴ and his *Geist und Feuer*, a beautiful anthology of Origen's writings, in 1938.¹⁵ Daniélou published an anthology of Gregory of Nyssa's mystical writings.¹⁶ Despite the sufferings brought by World War II, remarkable new projects were undertaken. The first volume of the series *Sources chrétiennes* was published in 1942; the collection has now reached almost six hundred volumes. In 1959, de Lubac's *Exégèse médiévale* began to appear. The famous series *Théologie historique* was founded in 1962.

¹¹ Originally Anton Baumstark, *Liturgie comparée: Conférences faites au Prieuré d'Amay* (Chevetogne: 1939).

¹² See Leclercq's excellent summary article, "Un demi-siècle de synthèse entre histoire et théologie," *Seminarium* 29 (1977): 21–35.

¹³ Erich Przywara, *Augustinus: Die Gestalt als Gefüge* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1934). In English, *An Augustine Synthesis*, arranged by Erich Przywara, S.J., with introduction by C. C. Martindale, S.J. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936).

¹⁴ Aurelius Augustinus, *Über die Psalmen*, ed. and trans. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Christliche Meister* 20 (Leipzig: Hegner, 1936).

¹⁵ Origenes, *Geist und Feuer: Ein Aufbau aus seinen Schriften*, ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1938). In English, *Origen, Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984).

¹⁶ Jean Daniélou, S.J., *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, trans. Herbert Musurillo (New York: Charles Scribner, 1961). Daniélou revived interest in Gregory of Nyssa, who had been relatively neglected; the first volume of the series *Sources chrétiennes* was his translation of Gregory's *Life of Moses*.

*Vatican II: The Rhine Floods the Tiber*¹⁷

The definitive end of the Pian era came with the Second Vatican Council. Less than four months after the death of Pius XII, Pope John XXIII, in January 1959, announced the convocation of an ecumenical council. Scores of histories of the Council have been written; only a few highlights can be mentioned.

Even during the Council, the search for its meaning began. In the United States, one of the most widely read interpreters of the Council was the mysterious Xavier Rynne, who published a series of articles in the *New Yorker* entitled “Letter from Vatican City.” Rynne (years later the Redemptorist Francis X. Murphy admitted that he was the author¹⁸) interpreted the Council mostly in political terms: liberal versus conservative, traditionalist versus progressive, with the evil Cardinal Ottaviani as the archconservative villain and the northern European hierarchy and their theologians—the so-called Rhine Alliance—as the heroic good guys.¹⁹ One history of the Council, published shortly after it ended, was entitled *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*.²⁰

The turn from the theology of conclusions to the theology of sources was nowhere more evident than at Vatican II. Neo-Scholastic schemata were regularly rejected and replaced with earnest readings of the sources. Leclercq writes of “documents elaborated in a liturgical atmosphere, based on the Gospel, and prepared by experts imbued with the doctrine of the Fathers and of the theologians of the Middle Ages, but who were not ignorant of the currents of contemporary thought.”²¹

In the opinion of many, the great theological achievements of Vatican II are *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation; *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; and *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. In contrast, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, was greeted enthusiastically by some but raised

¹⁷ “The Rhine floods the Tiber” is adapted from Ralph Wiltgen’s title; see note 20 below.

¹⁸ Xavier Rynne (Francis X. Murphy), *Vatican Council II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999 [orig. 1968]), 581.

¹⁹ See Joseph T. Lienhard, “‘Faith of Our Fathers’: The Fathers of the Church and Vatican II,” in *Divine Promise and Human Freedom in Contemporary Catholic Thought*, ed. Kevin A. McMahon (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 1–14.

²⁰ Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber: The Unknown Council* (New York: Hawthorn, 1967).

²¹ Leclercq, “Un demi-siècle,” 29.

questions and doubts in the minds of others.²²

Second Vatican and Second Thoughts

The Second Vatican Council may have met at the best of times and the worst of times. The best of times: theologians of the Great Generation helped prepare and guide the Council and fostered its work: Yves Congar, de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Ratzinger, and many more. They were men trained in neo-Scholastic theology who knew the Tradition well but were also well aware of the shortcomings of neo-Scholasticism and ready to propose a new approach.

Of course there was also opposition, some of it fierce, epitomized in the much-maligned Cardinal Ottaviani, and in the theologian Sebastian Tromp, often allied with Ottaviani. Backed by the Roman curia and the faculties of Roman universities, they represented the effort to continue the papal theology of the Pian era.

But also the worst of times. A few years after the Council social turmoil broke out, in western Europe and in North America. Unrest among university students was growing, to climax in 1968, year of the *soixante-huitards*, still shorthand in much of Europe for the high point of dissent, protest, and rebellion. In the United States, opposition to the war in Viet Nam was moving toward fever pitch. In the Church, Andrew Greeley could write of the “new breed” of seminarians —energetic, questioning, activist.²³ While no one at the Council in Rome could have said, “Don’t trust anyone over thirty,” enthusiasm for the new was widespread.

Most Catholics first experienced the new wave in the Church in the celebration of the liturgy. Between the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, on December 4, 1963, and the formal introduction of the full *novus ordo* of the Mass on the first Sunday of Advent in 1969, changes and innovations came in a flood tide. Liturgical experimentation, some of it little less than bizarre, was widespread. More officially, the vernacular was

²² See the account of the genesis and redaction of *Gaudium et Spes* by Joseph Ratzinger, “The Struggle over Schema 13,” in *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, new ed. (New York: Paulist, 2009 [orig. 1966]), 212–14.

²³ Andrew M. Greeley, “The New Breed,” *America*, April 22, 1964, 21–22, at 24–25. In this article Greeley included a passing remark that foreshadowed much that affected Avery Dulles in the years that followed (see below): “As a Jesuit college administrator observed: ‘For four hundred years we have been in the apostolate of Christian education, and now we suddenly find that our seminarians are demanding that we justify this apostolate.’ And a confrere added: ‘Jesuit seminarians are the most radical people in the American church —bar none.’ Neither of the two was opposed to the New Breed, just puzzled by them.”

introduced, piece by piece; Mass was celebrated facing the people; hymns in the style of popular, even secular, music were introduced; homilies became much more frequent in number, but not always better in quality; the dialogue homily appeared, a sign of democratization and perhaps of desperation.

In regard to Church doctrine and authority, Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (summer 1968) also marked a break: the widespread rejection of *Humanae Vitae* meant that papal authority would no longer be accepted without question.

Even before the Council ended, religious orders erupted into near rebellion. Religious left their orders and congregations in great numbers, and vocations declined precipitously. Many who stayed, especially women, abandoned the habit or religious dress, and often gave up their traditional apostolates (for women, teaching and nursing). The diocesan priesthood suffered a similar decline.

Nor was theology exempt. To cite only one example, Father (later Cardinal) Avery Dulles published a book, in 1992, entitled *The Craft of Theology*, which marked a turning point in his thought.²⁴

In the early decades after Vatican II, Dulles had been optimistic, but he later began to perceive events that troubled him. The hope that marked his early career yielded to a certain disappointment several decades later. He saw a breakdown within Catholic theology. The freedom encouraged by Vatican II had devolved into chaos. It is best described in his own words:

At Vatican II (1962–65) a certain number of theological opinions that had previously been suspect seemed to win official endorsement. This shift contributed to a new theological climate in which novelty was not only tolerated but glorified. Many took it for granted that the heterodoxy of today would become the orthodoxy of tomorrow. To be a leader, then, was to venture onto new and dangerous territory, and to say what no Catholic theologian had dared to say.²⁵

²⁴ Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). He was more severe in an article published six years later, in which he reviewed the proceedings of the meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America for the preceding year, devoted to the Eucharist, and wrote, "my own conclusion . . . is that the 1997 convention of the CTSA confirms the presence of severe fault lines in contemporary American Catholicism, especially in the theological community" ("How Catholic Is the CTSA?," *Commonweal* 125 [March 27, 1998]: 13–14).

²⁵ Dulles, *Craft*, vii.

He continued:

During the decades after Vatican II the Holy See and the bishops were almost powerless to prevent the dismemberment and reconstruction of Catholic theology by revisionist theologians.²⁶

In summary: for a century or more, the Church tried to resist the turn to new categories in philosophy and theology—specifically, historicism, because it appeared to threaten the historicity of Scripture, and especially of the Gospels; and if the historicity of the Gospels were doubted, then the doctrine of the divinity of Christ would also, and inevitably, be threatened. The Second Vatican Council made peace, it seemed, with some recent intellectual movements, even if it did not uncritically accept historicism (and should not have). The postconciliar celebration of the Council's achievements, however, was soon tempered, especially in light of movements that appeared to demand reforms far beyond those prescribed by the Council. "What we really need is Vatican III" was heard in more than a few quarters, and some of the heroes of Vatican II came to express deep discouragement about the path that had been taken: that the Council was not so much implemented as neglected in the rush for further "progress."

A Longer Perspective: Joseph Ratzinger and the Three Meanings of "Truth"

The development of Catholic theology in recent centuries can be set in a larger perspective, one proposed by Ratzinger in his classic work, *Introduction to Christianity*.²⁷ In the extensive introduction, Ratzinger meditates on the first and last words of the creed, "I believe" and "Amen," and on "belief in the world of today." In the subsection on the boundary of the modern understanding of reality and the place of belief, he discusses three basic attitudes toward reality, which he formulates concisely: "verum est ens," "verum quia factum," and "verum quia faciendum."

"Verum est ens," "the true is what exists," represents the ancient philosophical, the early Christian, and particularly the Scholastic understanding of the nature of truth and its relation to reality. "For the ancient world and the Middle Ages, being itself is true, . . . apprehensible, because God, pure intellect, made it, and he made it by thinking it."²⁸ For God, think-

²⁶ Dulles, *Craft*, vii.

²⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004).

²⁸ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 59.

ing and making are one, and “things are, because they are thought.”²⁹ For that reason, all being is intelligible, *logos*, truth.³⁰ Human reason, *logos*, is participation in the one *Logos*. In this world, the work of man is contingent and transitory. Human things, contingent things, can be the object of *scientia*, but never of *sapientia*.

The conviction that “*verum est ens*” was easily compatible with Catholic faith and theology, from the earliest years through the neo-Scholastic period. The creeds stated the truth, clearly and understandably. God could be known, in some way, by unaided reason. The Holy Scriptures were the unadulterated word of God. The Church could teach, authoritatively, in general councils, and did so at Nicaea, at Chalcedon, at Lateran IV, and at other councils.

“*Verum quia factum*,” “it is true because it has been done.” Even at the beginning of the modern era, in Descartes, history was not seen as a science.³¹ Still, Descartes (despite what was just said) prepared the way for Kant and (in a certain way) for Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), “who was almost certainly the first to formulate a completely new idea of truth and knowledge and who . . . coined the typical formula of the modern spirit when it comes to dealing with the question of truth and reality.”³² “*Verum quia factum*”: the only thing we can truly know is what we have made or done ourselves. With this formula, the old metaphysics has evaporated. The true is not what God has made, but what we have made, because “real knowledge is knowledge of causes . . . ; we can truly know only what we have made ourselves.”³³ True “knowledge is attainable only within the bounds of mathematics” (as Descartes already held) “and in the field of history.”³⁴

With this assertion, theology was mortally threatened. History grasps only the singular; a universal dogmatic truth can never be asserted. Historicism, thus understood, first took over Protestant theology. Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791) and Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860) were the founders of what came to be called historical-critical theology. History of dogma arose as a theological discipline. Inevitably, historians of

²⁹ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 59.

³⁰ Ratzinger notes that this is true only of Christian theology, which holds that God created everything, even brute matter. Ancient philosophers like the Stoics held that brute matter is an unintelligible surd.

³¹ As Ratzinger notes, in the medieval universities, the *artes* were only the first step towards real science, which reflects on being itself (*Introduction*, 60).

³² Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 59.

³³ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 61.

³⁴ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 61.

dogma discovered discordance and difference. Discordance and difference were interesting; unity and agreement were suspect. As one practitioner of historical-critical theology, David Friedrich Strauss, expressed it, "the true criticism of dogma is its history."³⁵

Catholics resisted the turn to historicism, as noted above. The Church of the nineteenth century erected a bulwark against historicism, to defend its unchanging teaching. But it was finally impossible to resist.

One man can serve as a symbol of the dilemma, Joseph Turmel (1859–1943), a French priest, ordained in 1882, who, by his own account, lost the faith on March 18, 1886, but decided to remain a priest and a scholar and fight the Church from within.³⁶ He published extensively, often using the same data, mostly in patristics, to come to opposite conclusions, one orthodox and the other heretical, the latter published under a pseudonym. Turmel was a symbol of the dangers of historical research and thought: raw historical data, unguided by the teaching authority of the Church, could lead to wholly unacceptable conclusions.

The Church's larger opposition to historicism appears in the Modernist crisis and its aftermath. Eventually, though, the Church made peace with a moderate form of historical research, perhaps best not called historicism. Some of it was detailed above, in the theologians of the preconciliar and conciliar periods. Historical research could provide excellent and true knowledge, but it could not be used to deny unchanging dogma. Still, the tension has not been fully resolved.

"Verum quia faciendum," "it is true because it is to be done." Truth is not about knowing the world, but about changing it. Ratzinger quotes Karl Marx: "So far philosophers have merely interpreted the world in various ways; it is necessary to change it."³⁷ In recent decades, a shift in

³⁵ David Friedrich Strauss, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und im Kampfe mit der modernen Wissenschaft*, 2 vols., repr. (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1984), 1:71.

³⁶ See Joseph T. Lienhard, "The *New York Review* and Modernism in America," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 82 (1971): 67–82. The *New York Review* was a scholarly journal published at St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie, in the Archdiocese of New York. The *Review* ceased publication in 1908, after three volumes had appeared, either suppressed for modernism or closed down out of fear. Turmel published articles in more than half the numbers of the *Review*. Investigators eventually found that Turmel had published under at least seventeen pseudonyms and appeared on the *Index of Forbidden Books* under at least six names besides his own. The complete story of Turmel's deceptions was set forth by Jean Rivière in *Le modernisme dans l'Église: Étude d'histoire contemporaine* (Paris: Letouzey, 1929), esp. 486–501.

³⁷ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 63.

theology that follows this principle, “verum quia faciendum,” has come to the fore. As Ratzinger puts it, “theologically, too, the manipulation of man by his own planning is beginning to represent a more important problem than the question of man’s past.”³⁸ This shift comes to the fore in various forms of contextual theology: political theology, liberation theology, feminist theology, ecological theology, and others. It appears in recent attempts to deny that the natural law is a source of unchanging moral teaching, manifested, among other ways, in attempts to deconstruct John Paul II’s encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. Ratzinger concludes ominously, man “does not need to regard it as impossible to make himself into the God who now stands at the end as *faciendum*, as something makeable, not at the beginning, as *logos*, meaning.”³⁹

Whether contextual theology, if it is in the spirit of “verum quia faciendum,” can be reconciled with authentic Catholic doctrine, remains to be seen. Cardinal Ratzinger’s criticism of liberation theology offers at least a caution.⁴⁰

The Future Seen from the Present

One can note three changes in Catholic theology in the United States:

1. Theologians are no longer primarily clergy and religious, but lay men and women.
2. The locus of theology has moved from seminaries and religious houses of formation to universities and colleges.
3. The practitioners of theology may be bifurcating, with some moving toward religious studies, others more concerned with normative Catholic doctrine.

Theologians Are No longer primarily clergy and religious, but lay men and women. Since Vatican II, theology in the United States has, to a large extent, become the domain of lay people rather than clergy or religious. The sharp decline in vocations contributed to this change. Some seminaries closed, and many religious orders closed their theologates. A new generation came along, lay men and women theologians. This is not to question the fidelity of lay theologians, but it is to say that priests and religious were

³⁸ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 66.

³⁹ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 66.

⁴⁰ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation,’” dated August 6, 1984 (available at the Vatican website).

responsible to their bishops or religious superiors in a way that lay men and women are not.

The locus of theology has moved from seminaries and religious houses of formation to universities and colleges. At the end of the Pian era, the locus for Catholic theology in the United States was seminaries. Until the 1960s, departments of theology were rare at Catholic universities, which offered mostly religious instruction—typically, apologetics and Christian marriage—often taught by unprofessional religious.

As theology moved from seminaries to universities, it began to move, gradually, from theology in an ecclesial sense more and more in the direction of religious studies.⁴¹ Gradually these departments took on their own identity, often in line with the famous Land O'Lakes manifesto.⁴² Some kept the name "department of theology"; others adopted "theological studies" or "religious studies." In line with growing interest in diversity, these departments hired faculty from outside the Catholic tradition: first, Protestant Christians, then Jews, and students of world religions like Buddhism or Islam. These departments—granted, to varying degrees—offer more and more courses in non-Catholic, and also non-Christian, religions. Catholic identity typically does not play a role in hiring.

On the other hand, recent decades have seen the founding and growth of smaller, Catholic colleges, clearly committed to the Catholic faith and openly professing their Catholic identity. Many, but not all, were founded by lay people. To list names would be rash, risking omitting some fine Catholic colleges or being mistaken about others. But the movement is clear.

The practitioners of theology may be bifurcating, with some moving toward religious studies, others more concerned with normative Catholic doctrine. I avoid words like "liberal" and "conservative," or "traditional" and "progressive," but one is tempted to invoke them. Among many younger Catholic

⁴¹ Lienhard, "Historical Theology in the Curriculum."

⁴² In July of 1967 twenty-six executives from Catholic colleges and universities met at Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin (at a retreat and conference center owned by the Congregation of the Holy Cross), to prepare a position paper. They produced *The Idea of a Catholic University*, with Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C. identified as the author (Land O'Lakes, WI, 1967, with no publisher identified) —actually a 10-page pamphlet, whose influence was hardly proportionate to its size. The work is often taken as Catholic universities' declaration of independence from the Catholic Church and from the religious superiors of their founding orders and congregations. See James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 595.

theologians, fidelity to the Church's teaching is an important value. Just as second thoughts about Vatican II have grown up, so a new generation is questioning the values of the post-Vatican II enthusiasts.

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In conclusion, I put the phrase "A Question" into the title of this essay, and I end with the question unanswered. But I cannot believe that authentic Catholic theology is coming to an end, through self-dissolution. Rather, a Second Spring may have begun, and a new generation is ready to receive the baton and go forward with fidelity, courage, and dedication. N. V