

The Promise of a Unitary Sacred Theology: Rereading *Aeterni Patris* and *Fides et Ratio**

BRUNO M. SHAH, O.P.
St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish
Charlottesville, VA

I. Orientation and Introduction to the Problem

THE HISTORY of “neo-Thomism” has received much scholarly attention, especially since the centenary of its “*magna charta*,” *Aeterni Patris* (1879).¹ Through Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical, the nineteenth-century

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¹ “Neo-Thomism” refers to a particular focus and prominence of the broader Catholic intellectual revival known as “neo-scholasticism.” This movement proceeded from a certain re-appropriation of medieval systematics of inquiry and judgment, and aimed to combat and evangelize modern perspectives that were threatening the coherence and conclusions of Church doctrine. The dangers posed to the Church’s understanding of faith and reason were officially recognized and rebuked as early as the pontificate of Pope Gregory XVI (1831–46) in his condemnations of kinds of indifferentism, rationalism, and traditionalism (see *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, Heinrich Denzinger-Adolfus Schönmetzer [DS], 2730–2732, 2738–2756). At Vatican I (1869–70), the Church’s articulation of doctrine on revelation, faith, and reason was expressed in identifiably scholastic and even Thomist terms (see DS, 3000–3045). By 1879, Leo XIII’s Thomist vision for the Church, as particularly expressed in his second encyclical, *Aeterni Patris* (AP), galvanized this scholastic *ressourcement*.

Many accounts of neo-Thomism focus on the period between *Aeterni Patris* and the Second Vatican Council rather than locate the movement in terms of magisterial concerns in and immediately prior to the First Vatican Council. Two accounts in English that acknowledge neo-Thomism’s broader historical and magisterial progeny are those of James A. Weisheipl, O.P., and Gerald A. McCool, S.J. Weisheipl offers a favorable and succinct account; see his article, s.v. “Scholasticism,” in vol. 12, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). McCool provides an invaluable secondary resource but divides his history

Thomist philosophical and theological movement received official Church promotion and was carried well into the twentieth century. Representative modern accounts of this interconciliar, Thomist revival have researched well the philosophical origins and ecclesial scope of Leo's program for renewal. The common judgment is that the pope's restorative *philosophical* endeavor rested on an erroneous *historical* premise: *pace* the pope, the Church's patrimony had in fact not been singularly and authentically developed *ad mentem Sancti Thomae*.² Indeed, historical studies that were

into two separate books, practically effecting a kind of hermeneutic of discontinuity. See his *Catholic Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979) and *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989). McCool regrets that, whereas Vatican I was a collaborative ecumenical council that produced a dogmatic constitution concerned with teaching, Leo XIII was a "reigning pontiff," whose encyclical letter was "a purely disciplinary document, resting upon [his own individual] juridical authority" (see *Catholic Philosophy*, 1). Differently, the present study considers *Aeterni Patris* (theologically) as a document of the ordinary Magisterium, containing important teaching about the intrinsic requirements of the Catholic faith's endeavors toward understanding.

McCool's oft-quoted description of *Aeterni Patris* as the "*magna charta*" of neo-Thomism may owe its inspiration to Charles A. Hart, who twice calls *Aeterni Patris* "that great *modern charter* of Scholastic, and particularly Thomist philosophy." See his "Neo-Scholastic Philosophy in American Catholic Culture," in *Aspects of New Scholastic Philosophy*, ed. Charles A. Hart (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1932); and "America's Response to the Encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*," *American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings* 3 (1929): 98–117.

In the present author's opinion, the best overall study of Leonine neo-Thomism in terms of its broader historical, ecclesial, and intellectual situation is found in the work of Roger Aubert. See his "Le contexte historique et les motivations doctrinales de l'encyclique '*Aeterni Patris*,'" in *Tommaso d'Aquino nel I Centenario dell'Enciclica 'Aeterni Patris'* (Rome: Società Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino, 1979); and *Aspects divers du néo-Thomisme sous le pontificat de Léon XIII* (Rome: Edizioni 5 Lune, 1961). (Large segments of the latter book are cited verbatim in translation, with only a one-time mention of general indebtedness, by Thomas J. A. Hartley, S.J., *Thomistic Revival and the Modernist Era* [Toronto: University of St. Michael's College, 1971].)

² On this and the points following in this paragraph, see *The Church in the Industrial Age*, vol. 9 in *History of the Church*, ed. Hubert Jedin and John Dolan, trans. Margit Resch (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 307–24; Marcia Colish, "St. Thomas Aquinas in Historical Perspective: The Modern Period," *Church History* 44, no. 4 (1975): 433–49. The standard expositor of the line of reasoning found in this paragraph in the main text above is McCool; see his *From Unity to Pluralism*, 1–34; "Neo-Thomism and the Tradition of St. Thomas," *Thought* 62, no. 245 (1987): 131–46, especially 131–36; and *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 243–44, 253, 261.

themselves fostered by Leo's visionary program argued two major points:³ (1) Thomas's work was not the Church's intellectual lodestar for seven hundred years, as Leo imagined it had been. (Rather, as some have argued, the Leonine "imposition" of Thomist scholasticism manifested the same mindset as Pius IX's ultramontane deployment of ecclesial power, which centralization ended with the collegialism of Vatican II.)⁴ (2) "Thomism" is the spawn of an adulterated genealogy. The very advocacy of "Thomist" philosophy engendered the pullulation of "Thomistic" brands of thought, such that there eventuated "too many Thomisms," to borrow a phrase from Alasdair MacIntyre.⁵ Most notably, according to the thesis of Gerald A. McCool, S.J., the Leonine campaign was ultimately victorious precisely insofar as it was "internally" fated to defeat itself: what the Leonine pontificate supported in the name of synthetic

³ For an informed appreciation for Leo's pioneering historical sensitivity and interest, see Gustave Weigel, S.J., "Leo XIII and Contemporary Theology" in *Leo XIII and the Modern World*, ed. Edward T. Gargan (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 213–26.

⁴ For a standard view of neo-Thomism as officially concluded with and by Vatican II, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Thomism and the Second Vatican Council," chap. 4 in *Continuity and Plurality in Catholic Theology: Essays in Honor of Gerald A. McCool, S.J.*, ed. Anthony J. Cernera (Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 1998), 53–73. For arguments that Leo's theological program was ultramontane, see Terence McGuckin, "A Century of 'Pontifical Thomism,'" *New Blackfriars* 72, no. 852 (1991): 377–84; and J. Derek Holmes, "Some English Reactions to the Publication of *Aeterni Patris*," *The Downside Review* 93 (1975): 269–81. For a putative deconstruction of neo-Thomism, see Pierre Thibault, *Savoir et pouvoir: Philosophie thomiste et politique cléricale au XIXe siècle* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1972).

Although he does not discuss *Aeterni Patris* and does not personally espouse any variety of scholasticism, Joseph Ratzinger has offered an insightful historical and theological meditation on the problem of postconciliar pluralism. Among other things, Cardinal Ratzinger locates the provenance of the "pluralism's" modern usefulness in the socio-political field: Pluralist theories of social organization vaunted the multiplicity of social groupings, to which individuals necessarily belong, in order to militate against the absolute sovereignty of any one social institution. Although the Church is not simply a socio-political entity, theological pluralists tend to deconstruct her precisely in such terms, with deleterious effects upon ecclesial communion and doctrinal orthodoxy. In response, Cardinal Ratzinger offers a patristic consideration of "symphonia," which allows for a legitimate pluralism in terms of the Church's inner unity. See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Pluralism as a Problem for Church and Theology," in *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 73–98.

⁵ See chap. 3 of Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 58–81.

intellectual unity was intrinsically ordered toward the basic intellectual plurality that is the purportedly hale situation of Catholic philosophy and theology today.⁶

Arguably, the one aspect that is characteristic of contemporary Catholic theological practice is its sheer diversity. But the sundry styles and approaches that bear different kinds of commitment to the living Magisterium and the Church's doctrinal history are aggregated in name mostly—"Catholic theology." There does not appear, as a property of Catholic theology itself, a cohesive formal understanding that shapes and directs a healthy and understandable plurality.⁷

⁶ See any of McCool's works, cited above. This historical and evaluative thesis about intellectual pluralism with particular respect to Thomism and its contemporary prospects is rehearsed (as standard) in Peter M. Candler, Jr., "Introduction," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (2009): 319–22. For Candler, "Thomism" is not content-based but rather an "idea" about a "spirit of thought and life," 321. The question that such a romantic nominalism begs of Catholic doctrinal theology, however, especially when the latter is hermeneutically informed by historical understandings about the theological contexts of doctrinal articulation, is, What makes Catholic theology a "Catholic" kind of "theology"?

⁷ After this article's final drafting, the International Theological Commission published "Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria" (8 March 2012), a document the commission had begun to conceive in 2004. See www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_tologia-oggi_en.html (original in English). The purpose of the document aligns perfectly with the theological concerns of the present article. Considering the contemporary context, the document presents its orienting question: "The [post-conciliar] period has seen a certain fragmentation of theology, and in [otherwise hale] dialogue . . . theology always faces the challenge of maintaining its own true identity. The question arises, therefore, as to what characterizes Catholic theology and gives it, in and through its many forms, a clear sense of identity in its engagement with the world today" (no. 1). Toward answering this question, "Perspectives" offers no fewer than twelve criteria that should formally direct the proper work of theology: (1) recognizing "the primacy of the Word of God" (no. 9); (2) holding to "the faith of the Church as source, context and norm" (no. 15); (3) understanding theology "as the science of faith [with a properly] rational dimension" (no. 19); (4) "anchoring the Church's doctrine and practice in [the canonical] witness [of Scripture]" (no. 24); (5) finding necessary "fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition" (no. 32); (6) bearing due "attention to the *sensus fidelium*" (no. 36); (7) "giving responsible adherence to the magisterium in its various gradations" (no. 44); (8) "practicing theology in professional, prayerful and charitable collaboration" with all Catholic theologians (no. 50); (9) "constantly dialoguing with the world" (no. 58); (10) "striving to give a scientifically and rationally argued presentation" (no. 73); (11) "attempting to integrate a plurality of enquiries and methods into the unified project of the *intellectus fidei*, and insisting on the unity of truth and therefore on the fundamental unity of theology itself" (no. 85) (*nota bene*: the two largest contiguous

More than the pragmatic possibility of a common discourse encourages the search for unity in theological subject matter, terms, and grammar.⁸ The unitary dynamism of Christianity is amongst its most prominent and beautiful aspects: it has one baptism, and is therefore one faith; it communes in one Spirit, partakes of one loaf, and is therefore one body; it has one Lord, and is therefore alive in one hope. Indeed, the first of the Church's four, confessed marks—even before her holiness—is her oneness. Supremely, the Christian faith has “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (see Eph 4:4–6, 1 Cor 10:17, 12:4–13). Christianity is *the* religion of plurality in unity. Its God is, after all, three in one—a doctrinal position that was itself articulated out of the ecclesial desire for a theologically articulate unity of confession.⁹

Beyond practical and spiritual concerns for unity, there is a more fundamental—not to say, more important—methodological problem. As stated above, the popular publication of “revisionist historiographies” began to appear in the nineteen seventies;¹⁰ and their methodological characteristics are evident in more recent work as well.¹¹ The criteria in such types of assessment are principally historical. Their discursive mode of presentation is formally narratival, the logic of which is linear and dramatic, ordering successive events in time according to the drama of interpersonal conflicts and crises. The description of events and personages in the history of Catholic thought is thereby given primacy over the role and merit of that

sections of the document are those discussing the scientific and unitary criteria of 10 and 11); (12) “seeking and delighting in the wisdom of God” (no. 99).

⁸ R. R. Reno calls for a “renewed standard theology” amidst the pluralist situation in “Theology after the Revolution,” *First Things* 7, no. 173 (May 2007): 15–21. Cf. Fergus Kerr, O.P., who seems conflicted by his deference for methodological pluralism and his respect for reason's unitary objectivity, in “A Different World: Neoscholasticism and Its Discontents,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 2 (2006): 128–48.

⁹ In the first volume of his already classic study of the historical development of Christian doctrine, Jaroslav Pelikan makes clear how theologically critical was the issue of doctrinal unity and orthodoxy. The origin of Christianity's unitary self-awareness emerges from questions of its continuity and discontinuity with Jewish religion, doctrines, and theologies. Indeed, throughout Christianity's growth, the historical coherence of the Church's teaching remains a fundamental criterion for establishing the theological design of orthodoxy. See his *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, vol. 1 in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

¹⁰ See Colish, “St. Thomas Aquinas in Historical Perspective,” 433–34.

¹¹ See, for example, Fergus Kerr, O.P., *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

same history's properly theoretical issues, such as the nature and tasks of philosophy and sacred theology considered in themselves.¹²

The historical study of a pope, his encyclical, and their time can rightfully enjoy a certain kind of autonomy of objectives and procedures. But it must be aware of and make explicit its own interpretative limits, apropos the allied disciplines of philosophy and theology that it discusses, and of which it must also make use. Historical inquiry of intellectual movements ought to make plain if it cannot fully address or does not admit the distinction between practical and theoretical orders of being and truth.¹³ This admission is hermeneutically critical, for it concerns a distinction that is presumed and operative in a text such as *Aeterni Patris*. Because of this hermeneutical oversight in critical historiographies of neo-Thomism, a major document of the papal Magisterium is absolutely devalued. The charge that *Aeterni Patris* is erroneous about the history of thought leads to the conclusion that it is wrong about thought itself. As a consequence, basic evaluative claims that a *philosophia perennis* exists or that the Christian faith is scientifically intelligible would thereby find themselves rejected. For the Catholic theologian and teacher, however, these are no mean or obsolete tenets: they have been consistently supported by the modern Magisterium.

¹² This critique is not meant to suggest that historical and speculative modes of inquiry are intrinsically incompatible—only that their proper methodologies must be mutually respectful. Recently, even within traditional strains of Thomism, there have been attempts to use historical enquiry to disclose the fundamental issues of speculative thought and its superiorly conclusive perspectives. For example, see Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009), which, in MacIntyrean fashion, seeks to show the superiority of traditional natural theology, precisely as emergent from historico-phenomenological critiques of the realist objectivity of metaphysical thinking.

For two influential, post-Harnackian attempts to discuss the formal prerogatives of historical theology, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971); and (the more pragmatic) Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961).

¹³ Cf. Robert A. Ventresca, "'A Plague of Perverse Opinions': Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* and the Catholic Encounter with Modernity," *Logos* 12, no. 1 (2009): 143–68, which offers a well balanced historical assessment of the encyclical. For Ventresca, "[i]t is the historian's task to understand historical actors and texts on their own terms, to establish *intent* as well as *effect*, and to keep historical study from becoming too deeply entangled in contemporary debates," 144 (*italics original*). Hence, he is able to render two important judgments, pertinent to our introduction. First, "It is clear . . . that for Leo, not only did thought precede action, it also shaped it, and decisively so," 153. And "[i]n the end, while many Catholic thinkers welcomed Thomism's decline and worked to hasten its fall since the 1960s, they may have done so more out of generational rebellion than genuine disaffection," 164.

Admittedly, one should not condemn particular kinds of work for a failure to answer questions they are not formally designed to ask.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it remains that the theoretical aspects of Leo's encyclical are, in fact, distinguishable from its socio-historical circumstances and results; such, at least, is a basic presupposition of this article. Somewhat despite themselves, then, studies of the Church's intellectual history of the twentieth-century encourage properly theoretical reflection on the intellectual data of that century.

II. *Aeterni Patris* and Discerning a Criteriology for the Unity of Sacred Theology

The following rehearsal of Leo XIII's second encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*, will focus on the unitary prospects for theology, considered in its subject matter, intellectual processes, and dialectical shape. As will become clear through our close reading, three criteria are discernible: theology must (1) recognize the fundamental doctrinal authority of the Church; (2) reason philosophically, according to the way perfected by the Scholastics, which has properly scientific prerogatives; and (3) appreciate that proper instruction in Catholic understanding requires discipleship to a master, namely, one who himself recognizes criteria 1 and 2—exemplarily, St. Thomas Aquinas. To be sure, *Aeterni Patris* is not expressly concerned with the unity of theology. However, the three claims bear upon “the right use of philosophy” and are therefore germane to theological methodology. They are here rendered as a threefold criteriology for the unity of sacred theology.

1. The Church's Fundamental Doctrinal Authority

The first significant aspect of *Aeterni Patris* is that it is, in fact, a teaching document: even if by way of reminder, the encyclical aims to instruct the faithful about the supernatural truth necessary for salvation.¹⁵ The encyclical begins by invoking the salvific expansiveness of the Church's divine prerogative to teach: “The only begotten Son of the Eternal Father, who came on earth to bring salvation and the light of divine wisdom to men, conferred a great and wonderful blessing on the world when . . . He

¹⁴ Romanus Cessario, O.P., makes this concession to Gerald McCool and his work; see “An Observation on Robert Lauder's Review of G. A. McCool, S.J.,” *The Thomist* 56, no. 4 (1992): 703.

¹⁵ Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris*, *Acta Sedis Sanctae*, no. 12 (1879): 97–115; English translation: www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris_en.html. All references in this section to *Aeterni Patris* are located parenthetically, in the main text.

commanded the Apostles to go and teach all nations, and left the Church which he had founded to be the common and supreme teacher of the peoples" (no. 1). Salvific teaching involves communicating the truths of the holy Catholic religion and combating errors against the same. In order that the Church's members avoid error—a quality of the mind—the Lord ordained for his Body a hierarchical ministry with the authority to teach all that essentially pertains to "salvation" and "divine wisdom [for] men."¹⁶

Leo is concerned about the Church's teaching ministry and its authority. He judges: "false conclusions concerning divine and human things . . . have now crept into all the orders of the State, and have been accepted by the common consent of the masses" (no. 2). This "common consent" was beginning to accept certain "false conclusions" about God and man, detrimental to the loving exercise of faith: "false opinions, whose seat is in the understanding, influence human actions and pervert them" (no. 2). The Church's authoritative teaching—necessarily considered both as an active participle and as a substantive noun (*doctrina*)—was under serious attack.

By her very constitution, the Church is an authoritative teacher of truths necessary for salvation. This "authority" means that there is a proper link between the Church's works of teaching and the Divine Author's ordinary, revealed initiatives of salvation: man cannot recognizably believe unto salvation without the Church's teaching.¹⁷ "For men

¹⁶ Hermeneutically critical questions of authorship and influence will not be addressed. In this regard, generally, see Roger Aubert, "Le contexte historique et les motivations doctrinales de l'encyclique 'Aeterni Patris,'" in *Tommaso d'Aquino nel I Centenario dell'Enciclica 'Aeterni Patris'* (Rome: Società Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino, 1979); and Claudio Basevi, "Léon XIII y la Redacción de la 'Aeterni Patris,'" *Scripta Theologica* (1979): 491–533. For an early, standard commentary and assessment of the encyclical, see Franz Cardinal Ehrle, "Die päpstliche Enzyklika vom 4 August 1879 und die Restauration der christlichen Philosophie," *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* 18 (1880): 13–28, 292–317, 388–407, 485–98.

Also, as already acknowledged, critical questions of the text's degree of authority and relationship to other magisterial texts will not be addressed. A *prima facie* evaluative approach is being taken here, rather than an analytic, interpretive one. (On this distinction between "evaluation" and "interpretation," see n. 33 below.) Suffice it to say that, as an encyclical, AP is an organ of ordinary papal teaching, which is grounded in the infallible teaching of Leo's predecessors, and so variously involves *credenda*, *tenenda*, and *disputanda*. For basic introductions in English to the biblical origins, historical development, and contemporary Church's understanding of the Magisterium, see Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (Naples, FL: Ave Maria Press, 2007); and Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983).

¹⁷ See Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 14.

whom the truth had set free were to be preserved by the truth; nor would the fruits of heavenly doctrines by which salvation comes to men have long remained had not the Lord Christ appointed an unfailing teaching authority to train the minds to faith” (no. 1).

Hence, the Church’s custody of the *depositum fidei* necessarily carries an authoritative and pastoral concern for the *intellectus fidei*—that error be avoided and understanding developed. Significantly, the Church’s work of teaching is related to her power of rule.

[The Church’s] constant aim and chief wish [is] this: to teach religion and contend forever against errors. To this end assuredly have tended the incessant labors of individual bishops; to this end also the published laws and decrees of councils, and especially the constant watchfulness of the Roman Pontiffs, to whom, as successors of the blessed Peter in the primacy of the Apostles, belongs the right and office of teaching and confirming their brethren in the faith. . . . [Thus], the supreme pastors of the Church have always thought it their duty [*muneris sui*] to advance, by every means in their power [*totis viribus provehere*], science truly so called, and at the same time, to provide with special care that all studies should accord with the Catholic faith. (No. 1)

The Church’s tasks of rule and education are intrinsically interrelated because the *triplex munera* are rooted in Christ’s immediate and personal institution.¹⁸ Although these offices to sanctify, teach, and govern are distinct, they are ontologically rooted in the unity of Christ’s personal headship over the Church. Those ordained to exercise a *ministerium in persona Christi capitis*—especially bishops, who enjoy the fullness of the ministerial priesthood and its sacred power—exercise a diversified ministry that is nevertheless unitarily rooted in a single sacramental character. Hence, one *munus* is never entirely without the others, at least by implication. Accordingly, *Aeterni Patris* is not reducible to a set of prudential judgments about the Church’s pastoral exercise of education, since such judgments are intrinsically guided by a particular and authoritative understanding of the faith. These judgments concern her task of teaching the faithful and whole world, which directly concerns salvation.

That the Church possesses a divinely authoritative prerogative to present the truths of the faith (as such) that are necessary for salvation is a criterion for the unity of theology: “Theology” is one because its unitary subject matter is apprehended under the aegis of a divinely instituted and assisted authority—the *ecclesia docens*. As a specific kind of understanding of the faith, then, “theology” possesses a unity that is necessarily rooted

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, nos. 18–21, 24–29.

in and subservient to the Church's teaching ministry. But how does this "understanding" thence proceed?

2. *The Proper Nature and Right Use of Philosophy as Scientia*

Aeterni Patris's main concern is for the true faith's need for and right use of the science of philosophy: "By reason of the gravity of the subject and the condition of our time," writes the pope, "we are compelled to speak to you on the mode of taking up the study of philosophy, which shall respond most fitly to the excellence of faith, and at the same time be consonant with the dignity of human science" (no. 1). For *Aeterni Patris*, "philosophy" can be understood as that exercise of reason that leads to conclusions about "the nature of the Divinity, the first origin of things, the government of the world, the divine knowledge of the future, the cause and principle of evil, the ultimate end of man, eternal beatitude, virtue and vice." Discerning the most ultimate *raison d'être* of reality, philosophy is sapiential and ordered to yield that wisdom "which is most necessary to the human race" (no. 10). The desire for wisdom is anthropologically constitutive; man's nature bears a philosophizing *élan* and *telos*.

Although the document never uses the term "Christian philosophy," *Aeterni Patris* highlights the distinctive dynamics that genuine "*philosophia*" offers the Christian religion.¹⁹ Reciprocally, the Christian faith does not destroy but purifies and elevates the noble integrity of philosophy. "Those . . . who to the study of philosophy unite obedience to the Christian faith,

¹⁹ James A. Weisheipl notes that the common ascription, "'The restoration in Catholic schools of Christian philosophy according to the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor,' is in no official publication of the document, and the phrase *philosophia Christiana* is nowhere to be found in the entire text." See James A. Weisheipl, O.P., "Commentary," in *One Hundred Years of Thomism: Aeterni Patris and Afterwards: A Symposium*, ed. Victor B. Brezik, C.S.B. (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1981), 24. Recognizing that "Christian philosophy" is not a term in the text of AP is intended to forestall easy connections to debates around the notion and term in the 1920s and 1930s, which Weisheipl characterizes as "idle." (On these debates, see Ralph McInerny, "Christian Philosophy," chap. 4 in *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006], 91–107.) However, Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R., discovers that the term "Christian philosophy," as well as the theme of "restoration," are explicitly found in speeches of Leo himself, in specific mention of *Aeterni Patris*. See Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R., "The Christian Philosophy of *Aeterni Patris*," chap. 1 in *Towards a Christian Philosophy* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990): "The import is that a Christian philosophy existed and flourished in former times. The aim of Pope Leo's encyclical was to restore the philosophy to its pristine vigor and to further its fruitful growth in the modern era," 64.

are philosophizing in the best possible way; for the splendor of the divine truths, received into the mind, helps the understanding, and not only detracts in nowise from its dignity, but adds greatly to its nobility, keenness, and stability.” Again: “Faith frees and saves reason from error, and endows it with manifold knowledge” (no. 9). As universal pastor of souls, the pope desires to heal and save all the works of human culture, preeminent among which is philosophical wisdom: “The natural helps with which the grace of the divine wisdom, strongly and sweetly disposing all things, has supplied the human race are neither to be despised nor neglected, chief among which is evidently the right use of philosophy” (no. 2). As the Vicar of Christ, Leo is furthermore determined to teach and preach that only the “right use of philosophy” can discern and safeguard the rational integrity of revealed truth. In this respect, one discovers that the rational explication of the mysteries of the faith (i.e., “theology”) necessarily depends upon a particular conception and use of philosophy, precisely as “scientific.”

To be sure, the relationship between theology and the natural sciences in the modern, post-Enlightenment era was one of especial conflict. In many ways, the Magisterium’s negative judgments of error and positive declarations of truth in the time surrounding the First Vatican Council were rooted in this wider cultural conflict. But one of the three main reasons the pope so greatly desired the restoration of Thomas’s teaching was precisely to benefit the natural sciences by “ancient” philosophy’s “study of the nature of corporeal things, inquiring into the laws which govern them and the principles whence their order and varied unity and mutual attraction in diversity arise” (no. 29).²⁰ Leo makes clear that “our philosophy can only by the grossest injustice be accused of being opposed to the advance and development of natural science” (no. 30).²¹ Rather, the Catholic faith’s understanding and use of “philosophy” is properly scientific, such that any other discipline that is genuinely scientific—whether it be speculative or empirical—need not be found inimical to it. “Every word of wisdom, every useful thing by whomsoever discovered or planned, ought to be received with a willing and grateful mind” (no. 31). Because of this sapiential perspective, intellectual openness is not reducible to an arbitrary

²⁰ The three reasons Leo summons for a restoration of Thomas’s “golden wisdom” are “for the defense and beauty of the Christian faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences” (no. 31).

²¹ See the monumental 10-volume work of Pierre Duhem, who recognized the great confluence between medieval and modern scientists, hitherto disclaimed by the Enlightenment: *Le système du monde: histoire des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic* (Paris: A. Hermann, 1914).

harvesting of sundry insights and conclusions. Instead, this openness is a rationally contemplative openness that has for its constitutive goal the integral understanding of reality and the sure possession of truth.

For Leo, the rational work that leads to a sapiential possession of the truth is that of “science.” *Scientia* proceeds from “solid principles” intrinsic to the intelligibility of created reality as such. The most “solid” principle can lead to the most ultimate conclusion, itself the ultimate *principium principiorum* and the absolute *sine qua non*—the essentially existent God.

Aeterni Patris’s apologetic concern for philosophy’s properly scientific character, then, is both catechetical and evangelical. Because it is proper to the species of *homo sapiens*, the nature and utilization of scientific enquiry is of absolute concern to the Church’s supreme pastor. “Divine Providence itself requires that, in calling back the people to the paths of faith and salvation, advantage should be taken of human science” (no. 3). Leo proclaims, “[T]he supreme pastors of the Church have always thought it their duty to advance, by every means in their power, *science truly so called*, and at the same time to provide with special care that all studies should accord with the Catholic faith, especially philosophy, on which a right interpretation of the other sciences in great part depend” (no. 1, emphasis added). Specially, “the duty of religiously defending the truths divinely delivered, and of resisting those who dare oppose them, pertains to philosophic pursuits” (no. 7).

The “scientific” integrity of all rational enquiry is of the utmost concern to the Magisterium’s pastoral endeavors, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. And philosophy’s service to theology is especially important. As with other branches of human knowledge, theology must be authentically scientific and oriented by genuine philosophy. Leo teaches that “sacred theology” depends upon philosophy conceived as a science for an integrally discursive unity,

in order that [it] may receive and assume the nature, form, and genius of a true science. For in this, the most noble of studies, *it is of the greatest necessity to bind together, as it were, in one body the many and various parts of the heavenly doctrines*, that, each being allotted to its own proper place and derived from its own proper principles, the whole may join together in a complete union; in order, in fine, that all and each part may be strengthened by its own and the others’ invincible arguments. (No. 6, emphasis added)²²

²² Once again, the reader of *AP* must recognize that the theological prerogatives of Church doctrine are distinct but not separate from the Church’s works of governance. In a manner similar to the way that the Church’s power of rule is exercised so that her worship might bear a clear, reliable, and manifest unity, the

From the perspective of human agency, theology's scientific character is precisely that on which the Church's unitary teaching-as-taught depends. As a science, theology yields a "more accurate or fuller knowledge of the things that are believed, [a] somewhat more lucid understanding, as far as it can go, of the very mysteries of faith . . ." (no. 6). The scientific work of theology galvanizes and develops the Church's preaching and teaching.

3. Tradition—Sacred and Scientific

A systematic extrapolation of theological methodology is not being attempted here. Rather, *Aeterni Patris* is being researched for basal criteria that are necessary (even if not sufficient) for understanding the unity of sacred theology. Thus far, we have drawn two such criteria from Leo's encyclical: (1) pursuant to divine faith, the unity of theology necessarily depends upon the Church's authoritative teaching of what is necessary for salvation; and (2) because it is an intellectual work of the human creature—who is made in God's image—the unity of theology formally depends upon the right and integral use of "philosophic study," understood as a *scientia*—that is, the reasoned and sapiential knowledge of things according to their proper causes. The third criterion is perhaps the most difficult and controversial to present because it involves a particular school or tradition—and a particular theologian at that. Perforce, the theoretical account for this criterion will be the most provisional of the three. However, it will emerge as a kind of synthesis (not in the Hegelian sense) of criteria 1 and 2.

3.1 Historical Tradition

The unity of "sacred theology" is most recognizably thematic in *Aeterni Patris*'s veneration for "scholastic" methodology: "The doctors of the middle ages, who are called Scholastics, addressed themselves to a great work—that of diligently *collecting*, and *sifting*, and *storing up*, as it were, *in one place*, for the use and convenience of posterity the rich and fertile harvests of Christian learning scattered abroad in the voluminous works of the holy Fathers" (no. 14, emphases added). But this unity is not reducible to the positive collection of material; it also proceeds according to the formal direction of reason: "By the divine favor of Him who alone gives the spirit of science, wisdom, and understanding, and who, through the ages, as there may be need, enriches His Church with new blessings and strengthens it with safeguards, there was founded by Our fathers, men of eminent wisdom, the scholastic theology . . . [which was] *set in order* and *beautified*, and when *skillfully arranged* and *clearly explained* in a variety of

Church exercises this rule in order to direct (not determine) the unified theological explication of the one *depositum fidei*.

ways, handed down to posterity” (no. 14, emphasis added).²³ In other words, scholastic science is ordered toward an integral synthesis of traditional doctrine, achieved through discursive intellection and argument.

The doctrinal and scientific work of the Scholastics is understood by Leo (citing Sixtus V) as an especially privileged and providential monument in the Church’s divinely guided history and Tradition; it is “handed down to posterity.”²⁴ At the same time, the excellence of a particular school or group of theologians is not being promoted to the exclusion of another or others. Saints Thomas and Bonaventure are equally “glorious doctors,” even if neither is fungible with the other. But much less is scholastic theology being heralded simply for its usefulness in combating contemporary challenges to the faith. Rather, Leo commends the kind of thought practiced by “the Scholastics” as a veritable monument of Church Tradition. Developing the teaching of Sixtus, Leo adds, “Although these words seem to bear reference solely to scholastic theology, nevertheless, they may plainly be accepted as equally true of philosophy and its praises”

²³ The three virtues that Leo mentions as proceeding from gifts of “divine favor” are the three Aristotelian-Thomist virtues of the intellect—*scientia*, *sapientia*, and *intellectus*. They are “speculative” or “theoretical” virtues, meaning that their virtuosity rests in disposing their subject to know well. They are distinct from the two “practical” virtues of the intellect, *prudentia* and *ars*, which also dispose their subject to know well, but for the purposes of moral action and artful production. See, e.g., *ST I-II*, q. 57.

²⁴ The notion of “monument” is taken from Yves Congar. Specifically, the kind of “monument” that Thomas’s work represents is that which aids the Church’s understanding of her “constitutive” monuments, such as Scripture and the Apostolic heritage. Congar calls these supplemental monuments “declarative,” and amongst them he includes “theologians (and the use of reason).” The “constitutive” and “declarative” monuments of Tradition compose the Church’s material content or objective rules of faith. In addition, Tradition lives as in a personal subject—the teaching and believing Church. See Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P., *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966), 426ff.

According to the great scholar of historical theology, Martin Grabmann, “scholasticism” is constitutively traditional: “Scholastic philosophy is largely determined by the transmission of intellectual material, by the influx of new sources, by the joint action of tradition and independent penetration of traditional treasures of thought. It is precisely in this continuity of life and inheritance, in this organic and progressive unfoldment of previous fundamental doctrines of philosophy that it manifests and proves itself as the *philosophia perennis*.” See Martin Grabman, “Nature and Problems of the New Scholasticism in the Light of History,” chap. 1 of part 2 in *Present-Day Thinkers and the New Scholasticism: An international symposium*, ed. John S. Zybura (St Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1926), 132.

(no. 16). One must infer that, pursuant to its recognized monumentality in Church Tradition, the role of scholastic thought in the Church's life can never be overturned as such, even should it seem, for a while, passé. Again, Leo cites Sixtus: "The knowledge and use of so salutary a science, which flows from the fertilizing founts of the sacred writings, the sovereign Pontiffs, the holy Fathers and the councils, *must always be of the greatest assistance to the Church*, whether with the view of really and soundly understanding and interpreting the Scriptures, or for exposing and refuting the various errors and heresies" (no. 15, emphasis added). For Leo and Sixtus, there is a providential commensurability between the *depositum fidei* and the scientific style of thought that the Scholastics forged. This is to say that the apologetic utility of scholastic thought—just like its doctrinal utility—is perduring. The advent of scholasticism may be historically contingent, but it is henceforth Traditionally incumbent.

The pope's judgments about scholastic philosophy and theology concern the way the Word of God has been transmitted in the past and is present in the Church's current life. It is a crucial work of the Magisterium to recognize and interpret the monuments of this Tradition. Hence, the pope's reasons for approving and commending scholastic methodology are not essentially or irreducibly historical, where "history" is understood as an autonomous, secular mode of thought. Instead, the pope's arguments are about the Traditional preaching of the Church.²⁵ In paragraphs 10 to

²⁵ In its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council teaches that "[T]radition [*sacra traditio*]" is that which "preserves the word of God as it was entrusted to the apostles by Christ our Lord and the Holy Spirit, and transmits it to their successors." The episcopal successors to the Apostles are those to whom "the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether in its written form or in that of tradition, has been entrusted . . . charged with the church's ongoing teaching function [*magisterio*], whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching function [*magisterium*] is not above the word of God but stands at its service, teaching nothing but what is handed down." Moreover, "'what has been handed down from the apostles' includes everything that helps the People of God to live a holy life and to grow in faith. In this way, the church, in its teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to every generation all that it is and all that it believes." Hence, the Magisterium's pastoral exercise is grounded in Tradition, which is both distinct from and yet interrelated with the Magisterium itself. Rooted in the Church's Tradition, the Apostolic successors, "in turn, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, [are able to] faithfully preserve, expound, and disseminate the word by their preaching. Consequently, the Church's certainty about all that is revealed is not drawn from holy scripture alone." See Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, Latin with English translation in vol. 2, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1990), no. 9. See Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, nos. 8, 9, 10.

16, Leo is certainly presenting a kind of “history of philosophy,” designed to “prove” his claims “by experience” (no. 10). But this “experience” is precisely that of the Church, as a living subject in time, with the Magisterium as its authoritative interpreter. Leo’s interpretation of the Church’s “history of philosophy” is a description of her Sacred Tradition: his survey is concerned not with mundane intellectual events but the Church’s saving teaching throughout time.

Leo teaches that, from the beginning of the Church’s Tradition, “the all-seeing God” has providentially equipped his people with “men of great wisdom, to defend, even by the aid of human reason, the treasure of revealed truths” (no. 10). Much of this work for the pilgrim and militant Church is necessarily defensive; perhaps it is always initially so, but ultimately it is positive and constructive. Thus,

while on the one hand, the early Fathers and Doctors of the Church, who well understood that, according to the divine plan, the restorer of human science is Christ, who is the power and the wisdom of God, and in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, took up and investigated the books of the ancient philosophers, and compared their teachings with the doctrines of revelation, and, carefully *sifting* them, they cherished what was true and wise in them and amended or rejected all else. (No. 10, emphasis added)

The “apologists . . . under the guidance of faith, found arguments in human [read: pagan] wisdom to prove that one God, who stands pre-eminent in every kind of perfection, is to be worshiped; that all things were created from nothing by His omnipotent power; that by His wisdom they flourish and serve each their own special purposes” (no. 11). This doctrinal and apologetic use of “truths [that had] been discovered by the pagan sages” is indicative of a particularly Christian “method” of understanding, “which is not of recent introduction but established use” (no. 4).

Because of the intelligible integrity that philosophical reasoning affords, Catholic thought is at once able to defend itself against attack and heresy and to provide reasons for the intrinsic good of the faith. Christian reason is able to judge all things, amounting to a divine perspective. Turning to Irenaeus of Lyons, Leo notes that the first-century bishop “explained (according to Jerome) the origin of each heresy and in what philosophic source it took its rise” (no. 12). At the same time, patristic attention to Catholic, philosophical study “turned the wealth of knowledge which each had gathered up in a course of zealous study”—not only “to the work of refuting heretics,” but further, to “preparing Christians.” This preparation is not reducible to the apologetics of catechesis

and evangelization but is sapiential in the fullest sense. For example, “the writings on the human soul, the divine attributes, and other questions of mighty moment, which the great Athanasius and Chrysostom, the prince of orators, have left behind them are, by common consent, so supremely excellent that it seems scarcely anything could be added to their subtlety and fullness” (no. 12). The entire field of rational discourse is amenable to the Catholic intellect, which is able to understand, correct, and appropriate thought that is not originally its own.

The partly combative and partly positive “sifting” work of the early Fathers and Doctors reached a point of maturity in St. Augustine of Hippo, who “would seem to have wrested the palm from all” (no. 13). With Augustine, the synthesizing perfection of the Scholastics is already inchoate. Not only was he a staunch defender of the faith, in line with the early Fathers; his thought displays a most remarkable breadth and comprehensiveness: “What region did he not diligently explore? . . . How subtly he reasoned on the angels, the soul, the human mind, the will and free choice, on religion and the life of the blessed, on time and eternity, and even on the very nature of changeable bodies” (no. 13).

With such an abundance of data for doctrinal reflection, the middle ages faced the unique challenge and opportunity to go beyond “collecting, sifting, and storing up.” Uniquely and providentially, it furthermore belonged to the medieval Scholastic theologians to “skillfully arrange and clearly explain.” As Leo understands it, the specific “endowments” of scholastic theology are its “ready and close coherence of cause and effect, that order and array as of a disciplined army in battle, those clear definitions and distinctions, that strength of argument and those keen discussions, by which light is distinguished from darkness, the true from the false” (no. 16). For the pope, sacred theology’s glory springs from its scientific analogicity. In other words, the “right use of philosophy” having come to full maturity in the Scholastics, “it was the proper and special office of the Scholastic theologians to *bind together* by the fastest chain *human and divine science*.” Leo further judges, “[S]urely, the theology in which they excelled would not have gained such honor and commendation among men if they had made use of a lame and imperfect or vain philosophy” (no. 16, emphasis added). If this last statement stood alone, it could be read as an historical opinion. However, read in the context of Leo’s judgments about the role of scientific philosophy and its scholastic apotheosis, it is better read as rhetorical supplement.

In summary, the pope’s “history of philosophy” is a doctrino-pastoral interpretation of the Church’s intellectual *Traditio*: the development of philosophy as a distinct science has served the beautifully stalwart order

and explication of the faith. But even though this Tradition of scholastic science and wisdom is the common preserve of the Church and her members, nevertheless, its proper instruction depends upon guidance from a suitably Traditional teacher.

3.2 Theological Discipleship

The entire encyclical is ordered to one, final exhortation: “Restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and spread it far and wide for the defense and beauty of the Catholic faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences” (no. 31). The promotion of a Thomist restoration is indeed a prudential, pastoral judgment of the practical order (see nos. 28–30); and it is laden with historical presupposition—specifically, that Thomas was once the preeminent philosophical lodestar of the Church. But more fundamentally, this statement indicates that “the right use of philosophy” (see no. 2), as exemplified and directed by the wisdom of Thomas, traditionally and scientifically serves the doctrinal unity of the faith.

Leo advocates imbibing from “those purest streams of wisdom flowing inexhaustibly from the precious fountainhead of the Angelic Doctor.” For the pope, these are draughts of “robust” and “solid doctrine” (nos. 26, 27). Leo commends the Angelic Doctor to the Church because his teaching exemplifies a unified methodology of understanding the Church’s one *depositum fidei*. The unity of Thomas’s “doctrine” is commensurable with the Church’s one *depositum*. Thomas is a master of doctrinal theology. He is the Church’s supreme theological tradent.²⁶

As was seen above in the first criterion of sacred theology’s unity, an authentically Catholic theology requires original, pistic *tenenda*, which are properly transmitted by the hierarchical Church. As a second criterion for unity, theology demands a properly scientific mode of enquiry and expression. Leo’s interpretation of Tradition judges that these two criteria are themselves intrinsic to an orthodox understanding of revelation. As a final criterion, *Aeterni Patris* teaches that one must be trained in the Church’s understanding of doctrine in a way that is both Traditional and scientific. The theologian must learn how to understand “the solid doctrine of the

²⁶ For a classic defense of Thomas’s authority, see Santiago Ramírez, O.P., “The Authority of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 15, no. 1 (1952): 1–109. After the publication of *Aeterni Patris*, there were a number of ecclesial documents of varying degrees of authority that emphasized the substantive doctrine and methodology of Thomas. The comparison of these documents with each other and with *AP* is beyond the scope of this article. See Pius X, *Motu proprio Doctoris Angelici, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 6 (1914): 336–41; Sacred Congregation for Studies, Decree of Approval [the “Twenty-Four Theses”], *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 6 (1914): 383–86; Pius XI, Encyclical *Studiorum ducem*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 15 (1923): 309–26.

Fathers and the Scholastics"; and he must learn how to "clearly and forcibly demonstrate the firm foundations of the faith, its divine origin, its certain truth, the arguments that sustain it, the benefits it has conferred on the human race, and its perfect accord with reason" (no. 27). Scientific theology is not only Traditional, it is also traditionary—it requires discipleship under a master.

Hence, the Church's universal teaching is categorically assisted when it discerns, amongst the ranks of its doctors, a master of both Tradition and science. For Leo, Thomas is just such a common teacher. "The doctrines of [the Church's most] illustrious men, like the scattered members of a body, Thomas *collected together and cemented, distributed in wonderful order, and so increased with important additions* that he is rightly and deservedly esteemed the special bulwark and glory of the Catholic faith" (no. 17, emphases added; cf. nos. 7, 14). Hence, there are material doctrines Thomas treated that are of especial significance to theology; such are his "important additions" to the Church's traditional theology. But more fundamentally, from a scientific and sapiential point of view, it is the methodology that Thomas uniquely exemplifies that is of perduring and unifying significance: "He reasoned in such a manner that in him there is wanting neither a full array of questions, nor an apt disposal of the various parts, nor the best method of proceeding, nor soundness of principles or strength of argument, nor clearness and elegance of style, nor a facility for explaining what is abstruse" (no. 17). Thomas's methodology—itself theological—is exemplary because it is perfectly philosophical and faithfully ecclesial.

To promote Thomas as *directive* of doctrinal methodology is, again, a "prudential" decision.²⁷ It is a practical and contingent judgment and, therefore, not of itself proposed to Catholic minds as the Church's ordinary teaching of faith and morals. However, that the pope deems Thomas *exemplary* is a theoretical judgment, not practical: The "manner" in which Thomas "reasoned" is itself formally relevant to the nature of understanding the faith. This evaluation is certainly not an infallible judgment about a primary object of the faith; however, neither is it merely practical—since it is dependent upon and indicative of decidedly theoretical understanding.²⁸

²⁷ See Abelardo Lobato, O.P., "Santo Tomas de Aquino en el Magisterio de la Iglesia desde la 'Aeterni Patris' a Juan Pablo," in vol. 12, *Atti dell' VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, 7–30 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981): "The decision entailed by *Aeterni Patris* constituted an act of cultural politics in the best sense, an act of gubernative prudence," 14.

²⁸ That St. Thomas Aquinas reasons in a manner that is exemplary for doctrinal theology is arguably a "secondary object" of faith. In distinguishing between primary and secondary objects of magisterial infallibility, Avery Dulles cites from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 1973 Declaration, *Mysterium*

As such, then, Leo's theoretical judgment calls for extrapolation and probative consideration: What are faith's possibilities for understanding, such that the pope finds, in Thomas, a superior master?

On the one hand, Leo believes that "reason, borne on the wings of Thomas to its human height, can scarcely rise higher, while faith should scarcely expect more or stronger aids from reason than those which she has already obtained through Thomas."²⁹ On the other hand, the reason why Leo renders this assessment is that "the Angelic Doctor pushed his philosophic inquiry into the reasons and principles of things, which because they are most comprehensive and contain in their bosom, so to say, the seeds of almost infinite truths, were to be unfolded in good time by later masters and with a goodly yield" (no. 18). By virtue of its unique datum—the Church's deposit of faith—theology must be unitary in some constitutive way. As we have seen, this sacred and doctrinal theology depends upon (1) the Magisterium and (2) scientific philosophy. In turn, the Magisterium's recognition of theology's intrinsic need for a Traditional utilization of philosophical science leads her to recognize a third criterion for the unity of sacred theology: the need for (3) disciplinary apprenticeship to a doctor of the Church's teaching and master of

Ecclesiae: "According to Catholic doctrine the infallibility of the Magisterium of the Church extends not only to the deposit of faith [i.e., the primary object] but also to those things without which this deposit cannot be properly safeguarded and explained [i.e., the secondary object]." Dulles then writes, "The extension of infallibility to the primary object is a matter of faith; its extension to the secondary object is theologically certain Catholic teaching." To say that believing in Thomas's theological *exemplarity* is necessary for properly safeguarding and explaining the primary data of the *depositum fidei*, however, is not to say that being a Thomist (precisely as opposed, say, to being a Bonaventurian or other kind of Scholastic disciple) is necessary for being an orthodox Christian. It is to say, however, that one cannot reject Thomas's intellectual exemplarity and yet still be able to hold integrally the Catholic faith. Of course, in the same way that one seeks to understand the data of the faith (criterion 1) in a scientific way (criterion 2), so too, one ought to seek to understand and apply the authority of Thomas (criterion 3) in a scientific way (criterion 2). Thomas's subordinated authority is a theological—not pistic—criterion. Nevertheless, the Church is saying that, if one would learn the unitary nature of doctrinal theology, one must learn St. Thomas, because he has become subjoined to Church doctrine in a way unlike any other Scholastic teacher. On primary and secondary objects of infallibility, including the quotation from the CDF's 1973 Declaration, see Dulles, *Magisterium*, 73–74; cf. *ST* II–II, q. 1, a. 6, ad 1um.

²⁹ One hears Leo's comment about "the wings of Thomas" echoed in the opening words of John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* (*FR*), which teaches that "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."

philosophical science. Given this theoretical judgment, she accordingly promotes such a *doctor et magister*, who himself recognizes the criteriological significance of both 1 and 2—and this accolade has consistently and uniquely been awarded to the friar from Aquino.

Thomas's *doctrina* is itself the superior monument of Church Tradition's doctrinal theology. Paragraph numbers 19–21 of *Aeterni Patris* explicitly advert to his significance for teaching theology, such that “the minds of all, of teachers as well as of taught, rested in wonderful harmony under the shield and authority of the Angelic Doctor” (no. 21). Amazingly, Thomas's theological authority bears an analogical similitude to the Church's authoritative teaching in his own faithful mastery of scientific inquiry (see no. 22). The superior magister seems to participate in the Magisterium.

That doctrinal theology is formally something taught and therefore received (rather than invented and constructed) is evident in the criticisms that Leo makes of “novel systems of philosophy.” The two most injurious effects of these systems, originating in “the sixteenth century,” are that they fragment and thus subvert the one, Catholic faith. These effects take place because the faithful have turned to new, overbold teachers. “Men are apt to follow the lead given them.” Thus, once “systems of philosophy multiplied beyond measure” (and once means of communication progressed so as to facilitate the dissemination of these systems), “Catholic philosophers” turned to other, untraditional teachers. “Throwing aside the ancient patrimony of ancient wisdom, [they] chose rather to build up a new edifice than to strengthen and complete the old by aid of the new ill-advisedly, in sooth, and not without detriment to the sciences.” These teachers do not advert to the living Magisterium in a fundamental way (apropos criterion 1), nor are they scientific in a truly philosophic way (apropos criterion 2).³⁰ Neither faith nor reason is adequately appreciated. Furthermore, they vaunt their own teaching and revolutionary projects in place of respecting criterion 3: “A multiform system of [their] kind . . . depends on the authority and choice of any professor.” Obtuse to the interrelation amongst the three criteria of doctrinal theology, they are formally incapable of taking on the role of Catholic teachers. Arguably, it is not until Pope St. Pius X and *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907) that “certain Catholic philosophers” will be

³⁰ Relevantly, James A. Weisheipl writes, “Modern philosophical thought, even in Catholic circles, goes back to the French Catholic philosopher and scientist, René Descartes. . . . Rejecting outright all previous thinkers, he elaborated a new philosophy, which he hoped would be acceptable to Catholic schools.” See James A. Weisheipl, O.P., “The Revival of Thomism as a Christian Philosophy,” chap. 9 in *New Themes in Christian Philosophy*, ed. Ralph M. McInerny (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 166.

accused of rejecting criterion 1. At any rate, in 1879, *Aeterni Patris* makes clear that doctrinal theology cannot—as had been happening—reject criterion 2: For “sacred theology . . . it is absolutely necessary to approach it in the grave manner of the Scholastics, in order that, the forces of revelation and reason being *united* in it, it may continue to be the ‘invincible bulwark of the faith’ ” (no. 24, emphasis added). And for Leo, St. Thomas Aquinas is the incomparable Scholastic teacher of divine, sapiential science. He is Tradition’s greatest theologian, the Church’s common doctor.

4. Summary of Criteria

Three criteria have been drawn from the internal understanding of *Aeterni Patris*: (1) as pursuant to divine faith, the unity of theology depends upon receiving the Church’s authoritative teaching of that which is necessary for salvation; (2) insofar as it is a work of the human creature, the unity of theology depends upon the integral use of “philosophic study,” classically understood as *scientia* and a kind of wisdom; and (3) the proper disciplinary understanding of theology requires apprenticeship to a master of criterion 2, who recognizes the fundamental significance of criterion 1; this apprenticeship is formally appropriated by the Magisterium, which is the proper agent of criterion 1. Hence, Thomas’s scientific authority has been introduced into the Church’s pistic authority—he is the master of doctrinal theology nonpareil. Whatever else the work and habits of Catholic theology, it must be schooled in the mind of St. Thomas.

III. *Fides et Ratio* and Confirming the Threefold Criteriology for the Unity of Sacred Theology

Here, the unitary theological methodology as discerned in *Aeterni Patris* is rehearsed in terms of Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998).³¹ *Fides et Ratio* is an appropriate historical, intellectual, and magisterial partner to *Aeterni Patris*. Although the pastoral situation of John Paul’s encyclical certainly differs from that of Leo’s, nevertheless, the two letters are strikingly complementary. Both letters are singularly important documents of popes whose pontificates fell on the heels of the two Vatican Councils. Both are written to combat modern trends of philosophical error. To be sure, the latter pope’s concern for modernity’s intellectual fragmentation is

³¹ For an excellently balanced and nuanced introduction to the encyclical, see Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., “Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II,” in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought*, ed. David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003): 193–208.

cast in a phenomenological disclosure of existential wonder. Nevertheless, his encyclical is ultimately concerned with the unitary designs of man's philosophical dynamism. In the introduction, entitled, "Know Yourself," Blessed John Paul writes:

The one who is desirous of attaining the ultimate truth about life strives to acquire those universal elements of knowing which give him the ability to understand himself better and which lead to the advancement of his own perfection. These fundamental conceptions arise from that wonder which the contemplation of created realities excites in him. . . . Without this sense of wondering amazement, man would subside into deadening routine and would bit by bit lose the power of leading a properly personal life. (No. 4)³²

John Paul links his existential reflection on man's unitary, sapiential vocation to what can be justifiably called "neo-Thomist" principles:

Despite changing times and an increase in knowledge, we may still admit a sort of nucleus of philosophical ideas, which are regularly present in the history of human reflection. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, of finality and causality. . . . This means that before our own eyes we may discover something like an implicit philosophy, the principles of which anyone might feel that they possessed, albeit in a general and unconscious way. Since these conceptions are shared in some way by everyone, these same conceptions can effect a certain middle point at which the diverse philosophical schools converge. (No. 4)

The extensiveness of *Fides et Ratio's* argumentation and intellectual influences preclude an exhaustive treatment of the encyclical in this summarizing and concluding section. There is no want of scholarly debate concerning the encyclical. But, as was our tack with *Aeterni Patris*, so too, with *Fides et Ratio*, we shall simply approach the encyclical's plainly evaluative judgments.³³ Now, by way of conclusion, it will be made clear that

³² John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 91 (1999): 5–88. For an English translation, see www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp_ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html. This translation, however, is widely known to be less than adequate. English quotations are therefore taken instead from the encyclical text as found (with Latin included) in *Restoring Faith in Reason*, trans. Anthony Meredith, S.J., and Laurence Paul Hemming (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 2–173. All references in this section to *Fides et Ratio* are located parenthetically, in the main text.

³³ In 2001, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a note that explains the import of the decrees condemning certain aspects of Antonio Rosmini Serbati's thought, no doubt occasioned by John Paul II's apparent

Aeterni Patris and *Fides et Ratio* represent a coherent and consistent magisterial teaching about the unitary prerogatives of sacred theology.

1. The Criterion of Authority

The first criterion drawn from *Aeterni Patris* was that the Church possesses a divinely authoritative prerogative to present the truths of the faith necessary for salvation. Because of the Church's constitutive mission to protect and transmit the deposit of faith, she has a foundational, doctrinal role in handing to theology its proper data. Indeed, according to St. Paul's understanding of God's salvific providence, there is a basic confluence between the manifestation of Christ and the Apostolic preaching: "[God] saved us and called us to a holy life . . . according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us before time began, but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed [*in quo positus sum ego*] preacher and apostle and teacher" (2 Tim 1:9–11). In the name of Christ, St. Paul commands bishop Timothy, "Take as your norm [*formam habe*] the sound words that you heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard this rich trust [*depositum*] with the help of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us" (2 Tim 1:13–14). The individual's salvific introduction to trinitarian life is administered by the hierarchical ministry of the Apostolic Church.³⁴ Accordingly, John Paul's encyclical teaches about

approbation of Rosmini in *Fides et Ratio*. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Note *On the Force of the Doctrinal Decrees Concerning the Thought and Work of Fr. Antonio Rosmini Serbati* (1 July 2001), www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010701_rosmini_en.html. In that note, the CDF makes an important distinction between "interpretation" and "evaluation." The Congregation warns that a "hasty and superficial reading of these different interventions might make one think that they give rise to an intrinsic and objective contradiction on the part of the Magisterium in its way of *interpreting* the content of Rosmini's thought and in the way it *evaluates* it for the People of God," no. 2 (cf. no. 7). Historical research is able to shed light on the interpretation of Rosmini's works that, for many legitimate reasons, was not possible when his works were placed on the Index. Certain of his works and teachings are now understood in a new light, and legitimate "interpretation" has changed. However, the force of the condemned propositions has not changed—even if they are not truly ascribable to Rosmini's thought: that is, the original "evaluation" remains.

Our studies of *Aeterni Patris* and *Fides et Ratio* remain at the level of evaluation, which takes the documents' arguments and propositions at face value, leaving aside important questions of interpretation.

³⁴ Also see Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum veritatis, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 82 (1990): 1550–70; English translation: www.vatican.va/

the word of God's intrinsic and proper needs for philosophical and theological reason (see no. 85). "The Church, vibrant with the authority which she has in virtue of her being guardian of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, wishes to insist upon the need for this meditation upon truth." Thus, the pope primarily addresses the encyclical to his brother bishops, "with whom [is shared] the duty of making clear 'the manifestation of truth' (2 Cor 4.2)" (no. 6), which office and duty (*munus*) has "its origin from God himself (cf. 2 Cor 4.12)" (no. 7). *Fides et Ratio* teaches that the Church Magisterium is formally involved in the transmission of faith—it plays an essential role in theological reflection on revelation.³⁵

Fides et Ratio presents the Church's *munus docendi* in terms of a single, overarching duty that is "particularly the Church's own"—the "*Veritatis*

roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19900524_theologian-vocation_en.html: "From the very beginning of the Church, the 'standard of teaching' (cf. Rom 6.17) has been linked with baptism to entrance into the mystery of Christ. The service of doctrine, implying as it does the believer's search for an understanding of the faith, i.e., theology, is therefore something indispensable for the Church," no. 1. Although an instruction does not have the same authoritative weight as a papal encyclical, nevertheless, it is to be considered as an authoritative document of the ordinary Magisterium. As *Donum Veritatis* teaches, "The Roman Pontiff fulfills his universal mission with the help of the various bodies of the Roman Curia and in particular with that of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in matters of doctrine and morals. Consequently, the documents issued by this Congregation expressly approved by the Pope [as *Donum Veritatis* is] participate in the ordinary Magisterium of the successor of Peter," no. 18. For an insightful treatment of why doctrinal theology begins with considering the Magisterium as ordinarily constitutive of the Church's divinely guaranteed teaching, see Giovanni Sala, S.J., "Fallible Teachings and the Assistance of the Holy Spirit: Reflections on the Ordinary Magisterium in Connection with the *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*," *Nova et Vetera* (English edition) 4, no. 1 (2006): 29–54. Extrapolating from the logic of the Instruction, Sala argues against positions that would begin with considering the Magisterium's extraordinary infallibility. For Sala, such positions are the result of a modernly skeptical spirit that encourages dissent and reduces the ordinary Magisterium to an ecclesiastical form of theological opinion.

³⁵ Appropriately, Avery Dulles wrote that "there is an intrinsic connection between the 'Catholic' mentality and the specific ecclesial affiliation, though the two are not identical." Hence, in outlining ten principles of "Catholic theology," "the Catholic principle par excellence" is the principle of "mediation." The foundation of this principle is the Incarnation itself, pursuant to which the Church "has received through Christ the fullness of revelation and the fullness of the means of grace." This mission gives the Church a formally mediating role in the historical work of salvation, and even in the shape of theology. This principle of mediation is further specified by two other principles that Dulles outlines as constitutive of Catholic theology, the "dogmatic" and "hierarchical" principles. See Avery Dulles, S.J., "Principles of Catholic Theology," *Pro Ecclesia* 8, no. 1 (1999): 73–84.

diaconiam” (no. 2). The Church tends both to faith and reason, which “seem to be like two wings by which the human spirit is raised up toward the contemplation of the truth” (no. 1). For John Paul, the unity of theological reasoning is rooted in the unity of truth itself, about which the Church has an ultimate concern. These now-famous “two wings” of the human spirit are not merely, however, two epistemic emphases but two orders of intentional reality, distinct in origin and object. The encyclical focuses on this *duplex ordo* as a fundamental doctrine of Christianity, critical for Christian thinking. John Paul affirms that Vatican I “solemnly confirm[ed] the doctrine that the ordinary papal Magisterium had always expressed, [making] it quite clear how inseparable and at the same time how distinct from each other are . . . natural knowledge and Revelation of God, reason and faith.” Vatican I “solemnly affirmed” the *duplex ordo cognitionis* (no. 53; also see nos. 8 and 9).³⁶

Following the existence of a *duplex ordo cognitionis*, there exist three types of theology. In *Fides et Ratio*, the three kinds of theological knowledge are named kinds of “wisdom.” John Paul’s decision to speak of three kinds of “wisdom” is rooted in his desire to explicate the intellectual unity of man’s spiritual vocation. Nevertheless, they are clearly qualified as kinds of theology, and are exemplarily located in the person and work of Thomas:³⁷ one is rooted in “the primacy of that wisdom which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and which leads to knowledge of things divine. This wisdom knows by means of connaturality.” There is also a “philosophical form” of wisdom, “supported by the faculty by which the intellect, within its own proper limits, is ordered to the making of enquiries.” Finally, there is “the theological form, which depends on revelation and examines the truths of faith, by attaining the very mystery of God” (no. 44). These three kinds of wisdom accord with the distinction between mystical, natural, and sacred theology. Nevertheless, these three kinds of

³⁶ Peculiarly, the International Theological Commission’s “Perspectives” shrinks from mentioning a *duplex ordo* of knowledge, even as it speaks in terms of reason’s work in the distinguishable lights of the natural and supernatural. Likely, the authors were apprehensive of supporting what could be taken as the purportedly scholastic and proto-atheistic bifurcation of nature and grace.

³⁷ Cf. Pius XI’s encyclical *Studiorum duces*, commemorating the 600th anniversary of Thomas’s placement on the universal sanctoral calendar, which states the following: “Sacred studies, therefore, being directed by a triple light, undeviating reason, infused faith, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, by which the mind is brought to perfection—no one ever was more generously endowed with these than Our Saint [Thomas Aquinas],” no. 13. See Pius XI, Encyclical *Studiorum duces*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 15 (1923): 309–26; English translation in Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. J. F. Scanlon (London: Sheed and Ward Publishers, 1931), 271–99.

theology are rooted in a unitary wisdom because the origin of all truth is God. “[St. Thomas] argued [*rationatus*] that the light both of reason and [of] faith comes from God” (no. 43). The complementary benefit of faith and reason establishes the possibility for a truly unitary wisdom that reasons about the revelation the Church transmits.

John Paul’s interest in the unity of truth is an interest in “wisdom.” To this end, John Paul goes beyond *Aeterni Patris* in emphasizing the Christological character of sacred theology: “The unity of truth is a basic postulate of human reason, which finds expression in the principle of non-contradiction. Revelation confirms the certainty of this unity by demonstrating that the Creator God is also the God of the history of salvation. . . . This unity of truth, natural and revealed, finds its living and personal identity in Christ” (no. 34). Just as the incarnate Word is the living mediation between God’s supernatural and natural measures of truth, man’s efforts at theology (in the strict sense) mediate between divine mysticism and discursive reasoning. It is, after all, sacred theology that architectonically distinguishes three kinds of wisdom. “The truth which flows from revelation is one which must also be understood under the light of reason” (no. 35).

Human reason is able to work on the data of faith according to its proper processes because revelation itself is, we might say, a humanized word. Concordantly, arguing against a hyper-hermeneuticism, John Paul teaches that “faith clearly requires that human speech should in some universal way give expression—even though voiced analogically, though no less meaningfully—to divine, transcendent reality.”³⁸ Deprived of this assumption, the Word of God, which despite its use of human language remains divine [*quod semper divinum est licet lingua humana contineatur*],

³⁸ An example of the historicism and hermeneuticism that John Paul decries can be found in the work of Claude Geffré, O.P., who summarizes well the methodology of “dogmatic theology” but opposes it to a historical and hermeneutical “critical theology”: “The starting point of theology is always the fundamental experience of salvation offered by God in Jesus Christ. The task of critical theology is to restore this fundamental experience by disassociating it from representations and interpretations belonging to a world of experience that is past. This work of interpretation only becomes possible by beginning with our historical situation and our present experience of human existence.” See Claude Geffré, “The Crisis in Metaphysics and its Consequences for the Future of Dogmatic Theology,” in *Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Thought*, ed. Richard P. Woods (River Forest, IL: Dominican Publications, 1988), 24–41, at 36–37. Our study of *Aeterni Patris* and *Fides et Ratio* suggests, to the contrary, that theology does not begin with the interpretation of personal experience—the “reading of an event,” in the phenomenological phraseology of Geffré—but with receiving in faith the teaching and preaching of the hierarchical Church. The problem with a methodology such as Geffré’s lies in the

could signify nothing of God” (no. 84). Turning again to Vatican II, John Paul affirms the intelligible unity of the revealed economy: “This economy of Revelation is realized by the inner unity of the deeds and words: as a result the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and bring to light the mystery they contain” (no. 10). Because truth is one and the revealing God is one, the historical deeds of salvation are commensurable with the logical words of revelation. Even supernatural meaning is logical “by means of that amazing ‘condescension’ that reflects the logical reason of the Incarnation” (no. 94). Theology is a logical science because the human mode of knowledge in which God reveals himself is itself logical.

The apprehension of revelation’s intelligible potentiality is the first step of theological exercise. Pursuant to the intelligible appeal of the data of revelation precisely as theological matter, the theologian begins scientific work. “Theology, insofar as it is the science of faith, is ordered by two established methodological principles, which are the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. With one principle it makes its own the content of Revelation, illustrated in the progress of time by Sacred Tradition, Holy Scripture, and the living Magisterium of the Church. With the other, theology wishes to reply to the demands of reason by means of speculative reasoning” (no. 65).³⁹ The *auditus fidei* is not merely the possession of the habit of faith.⁴⁰ Here, *Fides et Ratio* considers *auditus fidei* as a “methodological principle” by which one “makes one’s own” the data of revelation. The impetus to understand is begun.

degree to which its hermeneutic of criticism divorces the primacy of particular “experience” from that of the Church’s universal preaching. The fundamental ecclesial “experience” of faith is the *auditus fidei*. Also, see Reinhard Hütter, “Theological Faith Enlightening Sacred Theology: Renewing Theology by Recovering Its Unity as *Sacra Doctrina*,” *The Thomist* 74, no. 3 (2010): 370–405, which makes clear that an existentialistic understanding of faith (in theology) cannot promote the unitary dynamism of theological work, whereas the classical notion of supernaturally infused faith can.

³⁹ Meredith and Hemming’s translation of *FR* renders “*intellectus fidei*” as “understanding of faith.” This is certainly an acceptable translation; but the Latin preserves the appropriate ambivalence of the genitive’s subjective and objective function. “*Intellectus fidei*” is maintained, moreover, for a different reason: “*Intellectus*” not only properly denotes the perfective work of theological reason; it also suggestively connotes the originative possession of first principles. The Latin “*auditus fidei*” is preserved for the sake of stylistic balance with “*intellectus fidei*.” Use of the Latin finally suggests the technicality of these terms.

⁴⁰ Neither is the *auditus fidei* a pre-pistemic exegesis of data. Consider the following rejoinder Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M., Cap., makes to the Protestant theologian

The dialectical involvement between such critical apprehension and speculative explanation is affirmed in *Fides et Ratio*. John Paul notes that philosophy and the history of philosophy can help render more intelligible the conceptualizations of particular ecclesial traditions (no. 65). But John Paul gives precedence to speculative over positive functions of sacred theology. "A serious duty of theology is the interpretation of sources; but there is another of even greater prudence and necessity and that is the perception of revealed truth and the explanation of the *intellectus fidei*" (no. 97). There is no theology prior to the move from *auditus fidei* to *intellectus fidei*. For,

if we devote our attention to the *intellectus fidei*, we ought above all to remember that the divine Truth "which is proposed to us in Holy Scripture understood in accordance with the teaching of the Church," enjoys its own natural intelligibility, which is so logically coherent that it stands as an authentic wisdom. *Intellectus fidei* opens up this truth more clearly, both by perceiving the logical and intellectual structures of the propositions which make up Christian doctrine, and above all by making quite clear the salvific meaning contained by these propositions. (No. 66)

The intelligible dynamism of revealed data is available only in faith, and, having solicited man's intellectual operations, it initiates the work of theology.

And the intrinsic requirements of this work are such as to require a scientific criterion.

2. The Criterion of Science

For *Fides et Ratio*, the clear shape of *intellectus fidei* is one of sapiential science, wherein positive and speculative functions interpenetrate. "The beginning and the primal source of theology is the Word of God revealed in history, while its ultimate purpose is necessarily the understanding of that Word, which grows gradually with the progress of time. But since the Word of God is Truth (cf. Jn. 17.17), the human search for truth—the

John Webster: "The *auditus fidei* is not simply the mastery of sources (and even as mastery of sources only in a nuanced sense), but something much more profound. It is primarily the *hearing* of the Gospel and the accepting of it in *faith*. . . . What is proposed to the hearer is the Gospel as proclaimed in Scripture as traditionally understood and interpreted and as authoritatively taught by the past and present Church." Instead, "Webster interprets the *auditus fidei* as 'the pretty straightforward matter of mastering the sources, so that theology has the data on the basis of which it can proceed to its much more interesting and intellectually demanding task of speculation.'" See Thomas Weinandy, "*Fides et Ratio*: A Response to John Webster," *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 951 (2000): 231.

philosophical mind obeying its own laws—can only help God's Word to be better explained" (no. 73). Regardless of its natural or supernatural object, truth is one, and its human mode of apprehension is the same: the *adaequatio rei et intellectus* of scholastic science (see no. 82). The form of theology, then, is argumentative; and it seeks certainly known conclusions. "Dogmatic theology, for its part, ought to possess the ability of arriving at an understanding of the mystery of the One and Triune God and of the economy of salvation, whether through the structure of narrative, or preferably through the form of reasoning. It ought to achieve this above all by the use of those intellectual conceptions that are formed with critical judgment, in a way communicable to all" (no. 66). Of course, for *Fides et Ratio*, the end of theology is not mere conceptualization but service of the truth. "The theological work of the Church is assigned as its first priority the proclaiming of faith and catechesis" (no. 99). Theology is a scientific service of the Church's sapiential mission: "The principal task of theology consists in this, to provide both an understanding of Revelation and the teaching of the faith" (no. 93).

Although *Fides et Ratio* does not develop an analytical apparatus for theology, it clearly has orienting methodological concerns for Tradition's scientific theology. Hence, it acknowledges the fact of historical conditioning, yet repudiates a historicism that would reduce the data of theology to contingent experience or the work of theology to historical interpretation. "Metaphysics, therefore, exercises an important mediating role in theological research. Theology, however, destitute of a metaphysical outlook, will be incapable of going beyond the investigation of religious experience and will not be therefore the *intellectus fidei*" proper to absolute truth (no. 83). "No historical expression of philosophy can claim for itself the power of embracing all truth, nor of offering a total explanation of man, the world, and man's relationship with God" (no. 51). Such a unitary prerogative belongs to sacred theology alone.

Thus, for John Paul, the "metaphysical range of reason" is a constitutive dynamic of theology's proper work. Confirming our premise in approaching the theoretical serviceability of *Aeterni Patris*, *Fides et Ratio* teaches that the human intellect must be, by nature, a speculative faculty. "The power of speculation [*speculandi potestas*] is proper to the human intellect" (no. 4). *Fides et Ratio* does not proffer irrefutable demonstrations that prove that there is an "intellect" and that it is "speculative." To engage in such argument falls within the domain of philosophy.⁴¹ Nevertheless,

⁴¹ Hence, see *FR* nos. 82–85, under Chapter 7, *Postulata Hodierna et Officia*, which begins with the section *Verbi Dei postulationes haud renuntiandae*. Here, John Paul declares the three speculative concerns that are crucial for addressing the "crisis of

given the tasks of the Church's teaching ministry, the human intellect cannot but be speculative. Through speculative science, reason is able to form "an exact reflection, and so a logical coherence of assertions is built up through an ordered discipline, distinguished by a firm body of teachings" (no. 4). Still, John Paul is not so interested in rigorously defining a distinction between the practical and speculative finalities of the intellect for *Fides et Ratio*. He rather melds the two in his phenomenological meditation. However, one can see that the practical exigencies of philosophical reflection point toward speculative ultimates; and John Paul sees this practical-speculative transcendence in all cultures throughout time: "Shining through the variety of human cultures in different regions of the world there exist those primary questions by which human life is marked out: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why do evils appear? What remains to us after this life?" (no. 1). John Paul is talking about a philosophical potentiality that is a natural and constitutive dynamism of the human intellect.

Because the human intellect is speculative, the speculative science of theology is necessarily principled. Moreover, the role of understanding first principles (*intellectus*) is part of the Church's theological heritage. The "fathers" of this heritage, John Paul stirringly suggests, were in fact precursors to the Christian dispensation: "The first task of the fathers of philosophy was to display the close link between reason and religion. As they broadened their view to include universal principles, they no longer acquiesced in the ancient myths, rather they desired to support their belief in divinity on rational grounds. Thus, a journey began that left behind the ancient and local traditions and launched itself into a progress that was in agreement with the demands of universal reason" (no. 36). The natural theology of the pagans adumbrated the sacred theology of the Church. For John Paul, St. Augustine "was the first to produce a complete synthesis of philosophy and theology in which the teachings of Greeks and Latins alike flowed together." As we saw above, this confluence is not confused. In Augustine's first attempts at a sacred and sapiential science, "the perfect unity of knowledge resting upon the teaching of the Bible could be supported and upheld by a crown of speculative thinking" (no. 41). Philosophy mediates natural religious knowledge and supernatural theological knowledge (see no. 36).

meaning" in contemporary society and for integrally explicating the word of God: the sapiential character of philosophy, the capacity of man to arrive at knowledge of the truth (as the *adaequatio rei et intellectus* that the Scholastic doctors taught), and the metaphysical range of reason. The Magisterium recognizes these concerns and calls upon philosophy to address them according to its own discipline.

Hence, *Fides et Ratio* affirms the intellect's natural speculative ability to know the existence of immaterial things. For the pagan pilgrimage in preparation for receiving the light of the nations, the "notion of divinity itself was most useful for this journey" (no. 36).⁴² The encyclical teaches that this ability to know with certitude the existence of immaterial substances—foremost among them, God—rests in the mind's analogical capacity to measure reality in absolute truth.⁴³ The following passage is

⁴² Hence, in an interview first published in 1987, Yves Congar is perhaps overly negativist when he says, "It is easier to pray than to talk about God. First of all, this word 'God' does not really have a content of itself. We give it one: the Creator, the Lord, the Ruler, the end of all things, but in itself the word does not have any content. If one wants to give a content to God over and above this sovereignty, great though that is (see Islam and Judaism), one must say: God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." It is one thing to say that man does not have innate concepts (much less words) of God, or to say that natural conceptions of "God" are at best negative or indirectly drawn. However, John Paul affirms the propaedeutic and evangelical trustworthiness of analogically drawn notions of God, which, substantially attributive, depend on more than the mere notion of sovereignty (or, one might add, on the subject's feeling of absolute dependence). Cf. *ST*, I, qq. 8–12. See Bernard Lauret, ed., *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 59. All this being said, of course, one must see the truth and beauty of Vatican II's doctrinal and pastoral emphasis on biblical and trinitarian faith. Thus, commenting on Joseph Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity*, Aidan Nichols writes, "Are we to say that the God of faith is identical *simpliciter* with the God of the philosophers? No. The biblical revelation could not leave the philosophical concept of God as it stood. In the light of Christ, it had to factor into that concept the notion of all-sustaining love which, left to its own resources, philosophical reflection could not have attained. In this sense, the God of the philosophers is quite different from what the philosophers had thought him to be, though he does not thereby cease to be what they discovered." See Aidan Nichols, O.P., *From Hermes to Benedict XVI: Faith and Reason in Modern Catholic Thought* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2009), 227. The relevant notion here is *FR*'s "Christian philosophy," which John Paul describes in its "objective type, dealing with the material itself: Revelation brings into clear focus certain truths, which, though available to reason, would never have been discovered by it were it left to its own resources. In this general area certain questions are asked about the concept of a personal God who is both free and creator, which have had a profound influence on the progress of philosophical thought, above all with respect to the philosophy of 'being'" (no. 76). That is, divine revelation helps to clarify the philosophical conceptualization of God.

⁴³ Contrary to the opinion that, amongst all magisterial encouragements of St. Thomas and Thomism, no particular philosophical doctrine had ever before received express advocacy (see Knasas, note 45, below), it seems that the Church's theological tradition holds paramount the doctrine of analogical knowledge and naming. Indeed, the classic text of Rom 1:20 already contains, *in nuce*, the doctrine; and dogmatically, it was already intimated shortly before the time of

nothing if not an expression of the doctrine of the analogy of truth, and its intrinsic significance for sacred theology:

It is necessary that faithful reason should possess a naturally true and appropriate knowledge of created things, the world and of man, things which are also treated by divine Revelation; even more than this, it should have the capacity for defining this knowledge through the form of understanding and argument [i.e., through the form of science]. For this reason, speculative dogmatic theology presumes and embraces the philosophy of man and of the world, and more profoundly of “being” itself, which rests on objective truth. (No. 66)

The analogy of truth is ultimately reducible to the analogy of being. Similarly for *Fides et Ratio*, “If the *intellectus fidei* wishes to enfold within itself

Thomas at Lateran IV (see *DS*, 804–806). But in the modern era, i.e., after the “drama [*tragedia*] of the separation of faith and reason” (cf. *FR*, no. 45), the doctrine of analogy receives repeated affirmation, and the authority of Thomas is routinely cited. Vatican I uses the doctrine of analogy without naming Thomas (cf. *DS*, 3015, 3016). But Pope St. Pius X states the following: “The principles of philosophy laid down by St. Thomas Aquinas are to be religiously and inviolably observed, because [among other reasons]. . . . [t]hey also marvelously illustrate the diversity and analogy between God and his works.” “The capital theses in the philosophy of St. Thomas are not to be placed in the category of opinions capable of being debated one way or another, but are to be considered as the foundations upon which the whole science of natural and divine things is based” (See Pius X, *Motu Proprio Doctoris Angelici, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 6 [1914]: 336–41; English translation in Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 262–71.) In the promulgated 1917 Code of Canon Law, Pope Benedict XV supported the Twenty-Four Theses, published by the Sacred Congregation of Studies three years earlier (following Pius X’s mention of “capital theses” in *Doctoris Angelici*). Two theses specifically invoke the doctrine of analogy: no. 4, *ens, quod denominatur ab esse, non univoce de Deo ac de creaturis dicitur, nec tamen prorsus aequivoce, sed analogice, analogia tum attributionis tum proportionalitatis*; no. 22, *Deum, esse neque immediata intuitionem percipimus, neque a priori demonstramus, sed utique a posteriori, hoc est, per ea quae facta sunt, ducto argumento ab effectibus ad causam: videlicet, a rebus quae moventur ad sui motus principium et primum motorem immobilem; a processu rerum mundanarum e causis inter se subordinatis, ad primam causam incausatam; a corruptibilibus quae aequaliter se habent ad esse et non esse, ad ens absolute necessarium; ab iis quae secundum minoratas perfectiones essendi, vivendi, intelligendi, plus et minus sunt, vivunt, intelligunt, ad eum qui est maxime intelligens, maxime vivens, maxime ens; denique, ab ordine universi ad intellectum separatum qui res ordinavit, disposuit, et dirigit ad finem.* (See *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 6 [1914]: 383–86.) Much more recently, the Church’s universal catechism introduces its synthesis of doctrine by explaining the possibility of knowing and naming God in terms of analogy, and with reference to Thomas. See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), nos. 39–43 (cf. 31–35).

all the treasures of the theological tradition, it must have recourse to a philosophy of being. . . . Within the compass of the Christian metaphysical tradition the philosophy of being is an active or dynamic philosophy, which presents truth by means of structures which are at the same time ontological, causal, and capable of being shared with others" (no. 97). Of course, the ultimate ontological measure of all truth, naturally and supernaturally apprehensible, is God himself. Hence, the appropriate juncture for the analogical complements of natural and supernatural knowledge is in the light of revelation. Nevertheless, the proper functions of philosophical and theological reason are never blurred. "Revealed truth, which begins from the splendor created by that which IS, clearly shines upon all that exists and will enlighten the journey of philosophical reflection. Christian Revelation therefore becomes the true place where the philosophical and theological disciplines in their mutual relationships are yoked together and interact" (no. 79). Although these disciplines enjoy their rightful autonomy, *Fides et Ratio* recognizes that they are inherently traditional. And the mediator between sacred and philosophical traditions is none other than the Master from Aquino.

3. The Criterion of Tradition

According to both *Aeterni Patris* and *Fides et Ratio*, the proper disciplinary understanding of theology requires apprenticeship to a master of theological science who is a faithful son of the Church. The master nonpareil is St. Thomas Aquinas.

We have already seen the way John Paul's encyclical extols the scholastic notion of theology: a speculative task of inquiry into revelation that aims for universal judgments through the scientific connection of principles and concepts. This scientific prerogative of sacred theology is a definitive achievement and internally appropriated dynamic of the living Church. Dogmatic theology is a speculative theology; and the Scholastics are models of such. Above all, however, St. Thomas receives in *Fides et Ratio* an entire subsection dedicated to his methodology. English translations have rendered this subtitle as "The enduring originality of the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas" and "The enduring originality of the propositions of St. Thomas Aquinas," neither of which adequately captures the Latin: "*Perennis sancti Thomae Aquinatis sententiarum novitas*." Arguably, John Paul is evoking an important connection between Thomas and perennial philosophy.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The Latin of *FR* uses the word "*perennis*" (or its declined modifications) seven times; (in addition to the subtitle mentioned in the main text above, see nos. 12, 60, 85, 87, 94, and 97). Every instance refers to man's philosophical desires or endeavors. It would seem John Paul intends to maintain the notion that there

According to John Paul, “St. Thomas has always been rightly and deservedly regarded by the Church as the Master of teaching and also as an example of the way of undertaking theology” (no. 43). Both Thomas’s doctrine and methodology are traditional. Famously, the encyclical states that the Church does not canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to the others. However, the pontiff means something more subtle than to suggest a vague sort of pluralism: “*Suam ipsius philosophiam non exhibet Ecclesia, neque quamlibet praelegit peculiarem philosophiam aliarum damno*” (no. 49). Not only is John Paul alluding to the teaching and mindset of Pius XII’s *Humani generis* (1950). He is saying that the Church does not, of herself, produce a constitutively exclusive philosophical school; and that her preference of a particular school ought not to be taken as a condemnation of others.⁴⁵ The import of the statement is to declare that

exists a “perennial philosophy,” while he expands the appreciation for perennial truth beyond the province of “philosophy.” The Vatican website’s English translation (see n. 1, above) totally avoids using “perennial,” either glossing over the adjective entirely or using “enduring” instead. This rendering is a disservice to English readers, who would be familiar with the subject matter in association with the word “perennial.”

- ⁴⁵ Even apart from adverting to the Latin, John Haldane opines, “While the Pope repeatedly assures readers that he is not seeking to accord priority to any single philosophical system—writing that ‘The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others’ (no. 49)—the suspicion arises that in truth he believes that only one approach (or family of approaches) will do.” See Haldane, “The Diversity of Philosophy and the Unity of its Vocation: Some Philosophical Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*,” in *Faith and Reason: The Notre Dame Symposium 1999*, ed. Timothy L. Smith (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), 142. A bit differently, we believe that one has grounds for more than a protesteth-too-much “suspicion.” For an attempt to single out a particular member from the “family of [Thomist] approaches,” see John F. X. Knasas, “*Fides et Ratio* and the Twentieth Century Thomistic Revival,” *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 955 (2000): 400–408. Knasas argues that, alone amongst papal documents advocating Thomism insofar as it advocates a particular doctrine—the primacy of the *actus essendi*—John Paul II’s encyclical authoritatively endorses existential Thomism of the Gilsonian variety. Differently, Michael Sweeney uses the apparent tension between the encyclical’s openness to other schools of thought and its superior praise for medieval scholasticism as hermeneutically directive. For Sweeney, the pope is not judging the possibilities of modern thought according to medieval thought. Rather, he extols medieval insights into the concept of nature, the metaphysics of truth, and the objectivity of the moral order. At the same time, his notion of “Christian philosophy” admits and even encourages the possibility for other perspectives that would accommodate these fundamental notions and principles. What Sweeney does not sufficiently emphasize, however, is that the possibility for intellectual pluralism in the Church is moored to a unitary vision that finds its traditional explication in the

the modern Church's preference for neo-scholastic Thomism does not *eo ipso* vitiate the validity of other schools. Rather, the reason for the Magisterium's consistent praising of St. Thomas was and is "to put him forward as both leader and exemplar of the discipline of theology" (no. 78). John Paul admits that this "was not in order to embrace certain philosophical positions" (no. 78). But given our exposition in the two sections above, it seems clear that John Paul does not mean that there are no basic, essential philosophical positions that are intrinsic to the practice of sacred theology—such as the speculative constitution of the intellect, the probative structure of reasoned inquiry, or the analogy of being and truth. Rather, he means to say that these philosophical positions are so basic that they are not the property of Thomas or a particular (Thomist) school, which the Magisterium has selected. Hence, at the same time, John Paul does not shrink from placing Thomas and Thomism on a philosophical and theological—on a sapiential pedestal: "The design of the Magisterium was, and is, to indicate how St. Thomas is an authentic exemplar for those who seek truth. In his reflections, the demands of reason and the vigor of faith found the most profound unity of any that human thought attained" (no. 78).

Scholastics (rather than "the medievals"), and above all, in St. Thomas and his progeny. See Sweeney, "The Medievalism of *Fides et ratio*," in *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et ratio*, ed. Foster and Koterski, 163–76.

Apparently at odds with other statements of the Magisterium, Pius XI's *Studiorum ducem* states the following: "We consider that Thomas should be called not only the Angelic, but also the Common or Universal Doctor of the Church; for the Church has adopted his philosophy for her own, as innumerable documents of every kind attest" (emphases added), no. 11. Two things can be said here. First, what the two popes mean by "for her own" likely amounts to two different senses. John Paul seems to mean that there is no one philosophical system that controls—to the exclusion of all others—the understanding of Truth, whether natural or revealed. Pius seems to mean that, if one honestly considers the Church's most important teachings, especially at Trent and Vatican I, Thomas's teaching is especially and uniquely employed. These two senses are entirely compatible. Secondly, one must consider that the Latin of Pius says that it is Thomas's "*doctrinam*" that "*suam Ecclesia fecerit*." This statement is rendered in support of the title "Common" (in addition to "Angelic"). Pius does not call Thomas the "only doctor" or even "doctor of doctors." Pius is speaking quite generally of "teaching," and not merely "philosophy" or much less a philosophical "system." Here, "*doctrina*" generally refers to Thomas's "*ratio, doctrina, et principia*" that Pius has just cited from the 1917 Code of Canon Law. The canon that he extols binds all seminarians to study of the Angelic Doctor's "method, doctrine, and principles" as foundational to both philosophy and theology (see Can. 1366, §2). And this "*ratio, doctrina, et principia*" forges a veritable *sacra doctrina* that is very much the privileged intellectual resource of the Church.

To some, it might seem that John Paul's promotion of the Angelic Doctor, especially in paragraph number 49, is too reserved to be in continuity with the Church's previous neo-Thomist fervor. However, consider the judgment of *Humani Generis*: "We know well from the experience of the centuries, the method of Aquinas is singularly preeminent both of teaching students and for bringing truth to light; his doctrine is in harmony with Divine Revelation and is most effective both for safeguarding the foundation of the faith and for reaping, safely and usefully, the fruits of sound progress."⁴⁶ Paragraph number 60 of *Fides et Ratio*, which discusses the Church's postconciliar recognition and promotion of philosophical study, supports this judgment. It concludes with a citation of a handful of documents from the hand of John Paul himself, which unreservedly promote the study of Thomas.⁴⁷ In two documents especially—"Perennial Philosophy of St. Thomas for the Youth of Our Times" and "Method and Doctrine of St. Thomas in Dialogue with Modern Culture"—John Paul links his appreciation for Thomas with that of Leo XIII and all intervening popes. He quotes not only preconconciliar encomiums but also the following one of Pope Paul VI: "Without a doubt, St. Thomas, as willed by divine Providence, reached the height of all 'scholastic' theology and philosophy, as it is usually called, and set the central pivot in the Church around which, at that time and since, Christian thought could be developed with sure progress."⁴⁸ For John Paul, "The hundred years of the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* have not passed in vain, nor has that celebrated document of pontifical teaching gone out of date . . . Suffice it to consider the consistent Magisterium of the Church from Pope Leo XIII to Paul VI and what was completed in Vatican Council II . . ." ⁴⁹ The Magisterium of John Paul "repeat[s] the thought with which Leo XIII ends his *Aeterni Patris*": Follow St. Thomas.⁵⁰

Although Thomas stands out as the exemplary tradent of sacred theology, nevertheless, it is only because he is subservient to a greater tradition of wisdom—that of the Church itself.⁵¹ "Theology, in its searching for

⁴⁶ Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani generis*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42 (1950): 561–78; English translation: www.jesus.2000.years.de/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis_en.html. See no. 31.

⁴⁷ *FR*, no. 84.

⁴⁸ See John Paul II, "Method and Doctrine of St. Thomas in Dialogue with Modern Culture," in *Two Lectures on St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Donald A. Gallagher and Ralph J. Masiello (Niagara, NY: Niagara University, 1987), 265.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 264

⁵⁰ See John Paul II, "Perennial Philosophy of St. Thomas for the Youth of Our Times," in *Two Lectures on St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Gallagher and Masiello, 225.

⁵¹ Nicholas Rescher makes a helpful distinction in stating that, with regard to dogmatic matters of faith, one owes "allegiance and acceptance" to the Church's

truth, by its very nature enjoys the mark of *ecclesiality* as the tradition of the people of God” (no. 101). Although “truth cannot be confined in one time or cultural form, it is known within history, [while going] beyond history” (no. 95). Hence, the Church’s own teaching cannot but be understood according to the “light of tradition” (no. 87). John Paul’s recognition of knowledge as traditional—both naturally and supernaturally—is arresting.

Whoever today wishes to respond, like philosophers, to the demands that the Word of God imposes upon human reflection should, we believe, work out their ideas in accordance with these demands [of a unitary wisdom], and should also point out their coherence with the great tradition, beginning with the ancients, passing through the Fathers of the Church and the masters of Scholasticism, and coming at last to an understanding of the particular fruits of more recent and even contemporary reflection. . . . This appeal to tradition is not simply a remembrance of time past, rather, it recognizes the cultural inheritance which is proper to all men and women. Indeed, it may be said that it is we who belong to the tradition and that it is not ours to dispose of as we wish. Precisely because our roots lie in the tradition itself, are we today able to develop for the future new and original reflections. What is named here applies even more to theology. This is not only because theology possesses as its primary source of knowledge the living Tradition of the Church, but also because theology ought to be able to call upon the deep theological tradition that has marked earlier ages. (No. 85)

Fides et Ratio affirms a model of discipleship to sacred Tradition and intellectual tradition as the ground of creativity.

The encyclical also invokes the providence of God as directive of wisdom’s twofold traditionality. In paragraph 72, the pope outlines three criteria for engaging in mutually beneficial dialogue with other religious traditions. “The first norm is the universality of the human spirit.” The third is the principle of prudential discernment between that which is particular and capable of Christian receptivity and that which is not. The second, however, covers *ex hypothesi* necessity, analogous to that of the Incarnation: “When the Church deals for the first time with cultures of great importance, but previously unexamined, it must even so never place

Traditional teaching; with regard to classical philosophical doctrines, one owes “respect for the tradition.” Insofar as theological methodology involves specifically philosophical equipment, then, sacred theology owes a profound and orienting payment of respect to the Church’s philosophical tradition. See Rescher, “Respect for Tradition (And the Catholic Philosopher Today),” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 78 (2005): 1–9.

them before the Greek and Latin inculturation already acquired. Were this inheritance to be repudiated, the providential plan of God would be opposed, who guides his Church down the paths of time and history. This is a law appropriate to the Church of all the ages, even of that which is to come" (no. 72). This providence that has directed the history of revelation also directs and ensures the history of dogma. Thus, "theology has received as a gift an entry into and possession of things by whose vigor the science of faith is able to exist" (no. 101). This judgment immediately follows upon *Fides et Ratio*'s concluding reaffirmation of Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* (see no. 99).

Rightly, then, *Fides et Ratio* confirms an exploration of theology's unitary nature as cued by *Aeterni Patris*. John Paul affirms the intellectual renewal for which Leo called as having been "necessary" and having "made progress of truly historic importance for the life of the Church." For John Paul, *Aeterni Patris* is not reducible to a disciplinary or prudential document. For, "a century later many insights of that writing have lost nothing of their usefulness either in practice or from the point of view of teaching [*sive re sive paedagogico usu*]" (no. 57).

IV. Conclusion

This analytic review of two important papal encyclicals began with an orientation to the basic shortcoming of revisionist histories of neo-Thomism. For this critique, it was presupposed that truth is not essentially reducible to constructive and deconstructible categories of historical and sociological understanding. Of course, neo-Thomism itself held that truth is not limited to phenomenality. More significantly, however, the Church continues to affirm as a principle that truth is originally and ultimately speculative, transcending the contingent, practical order; ("heaven and earth will pass away, but . . ."). Hence, even if an intellectual movement is recognizably concluded—that is, even if "neo-Thomism," considered as a sociological phenomenon, has been declared dead—it does not follow that such an intellectual movement's philosophical concerns—whatever its accidental if regrettable excesses and blind spots—are no longer true or relevant for the practice of theology.

Both the adherents and the detractors of neo-Thomism considered its neo-scholasticism as the Church's "official" philosophy and theology. But this institutional force is not all there was to neo-Thomism's unitary potential. The most fecund of neo-Thomism's features was its regard for the unitary dynamism (not uniform machinery) of intellectual exercise. Methodic concern for the intellect's speculative nature and its analogically scientific rationality is precisely the way in which the modern problems

decried by Popes Leo XIII and John Paul II can yet still be rightly managed by the Catholic theological community.

We have shown the consistency of methodological understanding between two historic documents of the ordinary papal Magisterium. Fuller and more rigorous attention needs be given to the modern problems that the encyclicals were designed to face, each in their philosophical and historical contexts: modernist rationalism and historicism for Leo XIII, and post-modern nihilism and activism for John Paul II. The magisterial continuity between the teaching of Vatican I and that of Vatican II—in substance and in mode of articulation—also begs theological address.

From our reading of *Aeterni Patris* and *Fides et Ratio*, five methodological principles of sacred theology's unitary nature can be extrapolated from the threefold criteriology. (1) Theology's data is received from the doctrinal teaching and preaching of the hierarchical Church. (2) Theology's work is a work of faith that seeks understanding according to the scholastic model of science. (3) Theology is a work of the speculative intellect. (Since it bears an epistemic finality that is distinct from and more constitutive than that of the practical intellect, speculative theology has the prerogative of judging and appreciating all practical kinds of theology—not only "moral theology," but also historical and spiritual kinds.) (4) Theology is a disciplinary tradition that demands apprenticeship to a magister and docility to the Magisterium.⁵² (5) Theology's leader and exemplar is St. Thomas Aquinas. When these five principles are acknowledged by theology—whose exercise certainly does not exhaust the work of theology—the legitimate prospects of theological pluralism and dialecticism will perforce emerge.⁵³ N.V

⁵² Inspired by Hans Urs von Balthasar, one might also appreciate the constitutive verve of holiness within the practice of theology and therefore seek, as one's principal master, a theologian of evident—even canonical—saintliness.

⁵³ Criteria 4 and 5 appear additive to the twelve criteria proffered recently by the International Theological Commission (see n. 7, above).