

Dei Filius in Context

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"On January 3, Vérot, bishop of Savannah, made his debut at the council with a common-sense but long-winded speech, laced with witting or unwitting touches of humor that pleased some but annoyed others. He asked why the council was wasting time in refuting the errors of some obscure German philosophers. It should instead focus on real issues."

This article is an attempt to help understand the First Vatican Council's efforts which resulted in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, in the face of skepticism by Bishop Augustin Vérot (and others) about the need for the debate and subsequent constitution on faith and reason.

The philosophers in question were not particularly obscure: Georg Hermes and Anton Günther were influential figures in the Catholic intellectual world of the mid nineteenth century, while Louis Bautain, and indeed Antonio Rosmini-Serbatì, even apart from their influence in Catholic intellectual circles, were inspiring spiritual figures, founders of important and widespread religious orders which flourish to this day. Their "errors" were influential, and represented a broad flank of Christian thinking in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, in many cases demonstrating the truth of Karl Barth's remark that, in those years, "theology . . . retreated into the narrow regions of epistemology and ethics that Kant left for it."²

¹ John W. O'Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2018), 159.

² Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. Tomas Wieser and John Newton Thomas (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press 1960), 16, quoted in Kenneth Oakes, "Karl Barth

Their “errors” also reflected the dialogue which Christians, haltingly and awkwardly sometimes, but unavoidably, were carrying on with the world of the Enlightenment. Hermann-Josef Pottmeyer concluded his assessment of *Dei Filius* by saying that the constitution was nothing less than the solemn recognition of the elements of truth in the Enlightenment.³ Pottmeyer is offering a benign assessment of the council’s attitude, for the preface to *Dei Filius* rather speaks about *problems* to be solved, which had been caused or accentuated by the Enlightenment.⁴ Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that the Catholic semi-rationalists, ontologists, and even fideists were the ones trying to discern the truthful elements emerging from the Enlightenment.⁵

This introductory paper will try to assess: what the semi-rationalists such as Hermes and Günther, the ontologists such as Rosmini-Serbati, and the semi-fideists such as Bautain were trying to achieve; what the maturing judgment of the Church, assisted particularly by the theologians of the “Roman School,” was on their efforts; and how this prepared the ground for the Council and the constitution *Dei Filius*.

The Role of *Semi-Rationalism*

It is clear that semi-rationalism, the Catholic version of rationalism as it were, is one of the chief explicit targets of *Dei Filius*. While rationalism or a total reliance on reason for religious truth, ignoring or rejecting revelation in the process, is a bridge too far for Catholics, semi-rationalism in its

and Modernity,” in *Christian Wisdom Meets Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2016), 99.

³ See Hermann-Josef Pottmeyer, *Der Glaube vor dem Anspruch der Wissenschaft: die Konstitution über den katholischen Glauben Dei Filius des Ersten Vatikanischen Konzils und die unveröffentlichten theologischen Voten der vorbereitenden Kommission* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1968), 460.

⁴ The preface of *Dei Filius* refers to rationalism and its emphases: individual judgement; the Bible assimilated to the inventions of myth; the doctrine of rationalism, spread far and wide throughout the world and utterly opposed to the Christian religion, since this is of supernatural origin; the rule of simple reason or nature; the abyss of pantheism, materialism, and atheism; “confusing nature and grace, human knowledge and divine faith”; etc.

⁵ In *Rethinking the Enlightenment* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute, 2020), Joseph Stuart explains how the strategies of conflict, engagement, and retreat had been used by Christians throughout the eighteenth century to test the ability of faith to come to terms with the “Reason” of the Enlightenment at many different levels: political, philosophical, and scientific.

many forms can seem to offer a different kind of bridge, keeping Christian thought in touch with the deliverances of enlightened reason.

Semi-rationalism is the view that, while the revelation of God is important and even necessary for knowledge of religious truths (either initially or for the uneducated),

human reason can independently demonstrate all or almost all of the truths known through revelation. Accordingly, on this view there are no or very few divine mysteries that cannot be independently proven through reason. Semi-rationalism was especially popular among German Catholic philosophers and theologians at the start of the nineteenth century, as a way to defend Catholicism in post Enlightenment times.⁶

Thinkers of this kind who take center stage in the mind of the fathers of the Council, and of the Church's doctrinal concern in the years leading up to Vatican I, are Hermes, based in the University of Münster, and Günther, a Bohemian who worked and taught (privately) in Vienna. To these we turn.

Georg Hermes (1775–1831)

Hermes was an influential priest and theologian, professor of dogmatic theology in Münster and eventually in Bonn, with a wide following among his colleagues and students. He was motivated by his exposure to Kantian thought to approach theology as an apologist. His thought is sometimes termed an apologetic theology, a sustained attempt precisely to reconcile Christianity with Enlightenment rationalism.

Hermes is a key theological response to the eighteenth-century enlightenment, the first modernity. He discovers Christian revelation through practical reason, as a postulate we need for successful functioning of freedom in moral life. He accepted Kant's basic project in this regard: going beyond knowledge to make room for faith.

Cartesian Doubt and Kantian critique

Hermes starts with the methodical doubt of Descartes, holding that theological investigations must begin by doubting all dogmas of faith and religious beliefs including the existence of God: "I have been scrupulous in

⁶ Alan Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy: The Nineteenth Century* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008), 49.

maintaining my resolution to doubt everything for as long as possible and to accept nothing as being determinately the case until I have been able to show the absolute rational necessity of admitting such determination.”⁷

Hermes works within the Kantian critical parameters of speculative and practical reason but still tries to find a rational basis for faith. His hope, of course, is to overcome Kant’s agnosticism, but he is respectful of Kant’s achievement: a *rational* basis for religion and ethics. Hermes’s thought oscillates between the poles of Kant’s paradigmatic duality: speculative reason and practical reason. He goes beyond Kant in believing that *speculative reason* can reach a number of the truths which Kant had ruled beyond its powers: the self, God, and even some of the attributes of God such as immutability. Speculative reason can also prove the existence of God, using the arguments from contingency. God is necessary for understanding the ultimate ground of change in the conditions of the inner and outer worlds. He is not part of the series of causes and processes, but the total cause of it. So far, so Scholastic, one might conclude, and as Aidan Nichols puts it, Kant would have thought this a “relapse into metaphysics.”⁸

Hermes does follow Kant closely when he deals with *practical reason*. Kant has successfully identified the a priori structure at work when we judge morally, just as he had identified the a priori structure in our scientific knowledge: he recognizes the existence of categorical imperatives such as (1) “establish and preserve human dignity in yourself and others” and (2) “use your intelligence and your experience. In general use all the experience which is absolutely necessary to fulfill a possible moral duty whether you already possess this experience yourself or must acquire it from others.”⁹ We must accept as true whatever is necessary for these a priori imperatives to make sense and lead to happiness and flourishing: in particular, a just and almighty God.

This “practical reason” *demands* that we accept God’s revelation and ultimately his self-revelation in the Incarnation. *Speculative* reason obviously cannot underpin these, but practical reason, our sense of duty and

⁷ Georg Hermes, from the preface to the first part of his *Einleitung in die christkatholische Theologie*, trans. in Bernhard Reardon, *Religion in the Age of the Romantics: Studies in Early Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 120 (quoted in Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 50–51).

⁸ Aidan Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI: Faith and Reason in Modern Catholic Thought* (Leominster, MA: Gracewing, 2009), 39–40.

⁹ Trans. in Gerard McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 62 (quoted in Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 52).

moral necessity, can. As Hermes put it: "The alleged revelation perfectly agrees in all its doctrines with moral reason, in such a way that it cooperates with the will and assists it to fulfil the demands of moral reason."¹⁰

How do we prove the truth of revelation then? Hermes answers by saying that, while critical natural theology can say only that it is not contradictory to God's nature to introduce into human consciousness a plan for saving the world and so on, to say that it has actually happened relies on the fact that practical reason finds that what revelation offers is an invaluable means, of a kind unavailable otherwise, to achieve this, and we *must* accept this; practical reason finds it absolutely compelling, in a way that theoretical theology could not.

As Nichols points out, the moral necessity of revelation after the fall is a commonplace; the semi-rationalist "Catholic Enlightenment" often felt that this necessity was really for the masses; for the mature, "the natural light of human reason and the fact of moral freedom was enough." Nichols surmises that Hermes did reach such people, the serious, the dutiful, the enlightened, at a distance from popular piety and rich liturgy.¹¹ At any rate, neither the German bishops nor Rome were convinced, and his teachings met with posthumous official disapproval in 1835.

The Church's response to Hermes

Pope Gregory XVI's brief *Dum Acerbissimas* (1835), concerning the thought of Hermes, contains the following statement as a summary of Hermes's method:

Reason is the chief norm and only medium whereby man can acquire knowledge of supernatural truths.¹²

It also condemned the view that all theological enquiry should be based on positive doubt.

In 1837 two Catholic professors from the University of Bonn, Johann Wilhelm Joseph Braun and Peter Joseph Elvenich, journeyed to Rome

¹⁰ Georg Hermes, *Introduction to Christian-Catholic Theology*, pt. I, sec. 85, trans. in *Romance and the Rock: Nineteenth-Century Catholics on Faith and Reason*, ed. Joseph Fitzer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 128 (quoted in Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 53).

¹¹ Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, 47.

¹² Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* [DH], ed. Peter Hünemann, 38th ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1999), no. 2738 (cf. no. 2739).

bearing a treatise titled *Meletemata theologica oder theologische Studien* defending the rationalistic position of their master, Georg Hermes; but the Roman curia refused even to open it, and Braun and Elvenich withdrew ignominiously back to Germany. In the 1840s Ignaz Ritter, a former colleague of Hermes in Bonn but now teaching church history in Breslau, made further somewhat naïve attempts to have the Brief either reformulated or explained in a way more favorable to his friend, but in vain.¹³

Anton Günther (1783–1863)

Günther was born in Bohemia and studied philosophy in Prague. There he lost his faith due to the influence of Kant's critical approach and turned to Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling for a more complete view of things, along the lines of a Romantic Idealism. He spent most of his life in Vienna as a tutor, but returned to the practice of the Catholic faith with the encouragement of St. Clemens Maria Hofbauer (who called Günther his "Augustinus") and also found that Idealism might be combined with Catholicism.¹⁴ He was ordained as a diocesan priest, briefly tried his vocation with the Jesuits, then returned to Vienna, where he had a number of posts, including one in the censorship office of the government, was offered a canonry and lived, and worked as a private scholar, with major influence in university faculties from Vienna to Munich. Günther went beyond Hermes by asserting that reason could prove not just that a revelation of God had occurred, but also what its individual contents were.

Günther's primary motivation was to attack pantheism, and he found it everywhere: ancient philosophy, of course, did not have a theory of creation, but the Fathers of the Church were somewhat tarred with the same brush. Scholasticism, too, he claimed, was pantheist, and also fearful: saying that we can only show that Christian doctrines are not counter-rational. Günther goes further, and claims that they are positively reasonable. He also points to dangerous quasi-pantheist Scholastic ideas such as "participation" in metaphysics. But it is Hegelianism which has really made Günther's enterprise necessary, as it is pantheism in its purest form.¹⁵

Nichols remarks that, while critical of Hegel, Günther drew much from him, especially the description of nature as the representation of the

¹³ Hubert Jedin, "Eine Denkschrift Joseph Ignaz Ritters über Georg Hermes," in *Annalen des Historischen Vereins für den Niederrhein* 174 (1972): 148–61.

¹⁴ Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, 49–50.

¹⁵ Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, 64–65.

concept, his view of the propulsive power of negation, and the place of process in being. He wished to purify Idealism evangelically in the service of Catholic thought and he also tried to profit by its advances, above all its sense of the unique status of self-consciousness and the importance of organic development.¹⁶

Günther begins by offering a proof of the existence of the soul and of God from reason:

The conditionedness of spirit itself . . . is an undeniable fact of consciousness and is called into the light of self-consciousness only by an unconditioned spirit.¹⁷

But he goes further: once God's *existence* is established, reason can go on to reflect on God's nature and rationally prove truths of Christianity that up to now were known only from faith in revelation (i.e., mysteries of the faith). This stands in stark contrast to Thomas Aquinas, who, after proving the existence of God, goes on to state that we cannot say what he *is*, even at the approximate level of natural awareness—only what he is not!¹⁸

Reason (with some difficulty and complexity) can show that God must be triune for Günther:

The moments of self-consciousness constitute the Triune God. We have the representer and the represented and the representation as the unity and likeness of the first two. In self-consciousness Spirit makes itself (not another) the object of inner representation. If God is as being through himself, and therefore also knowledge through himself, he makes his absolute being as such immediately the object of its contemplation. . . .

Likewise, a second moment of self-objectification which in addition to the subject and object posits a 3rd element (Spirit) in the absolute self-consciousness. It is, like the two previous moments, absolute substance, which proceeds from subject and object and attests to the simultaneous positing of the two members in opposition, that is, of these in their perfection and completion. In the divine self-consciousness the principle moves to itself as such in the

¹⁶ Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, 66.

¹⁷ Anton Günther, from epistle 11 in pt. I of *Propaedeutic to the Speculative Theology of Positive Christianity*, trans. in Fitzer, *Romance and the Rock*, 141 (quoted in Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 57).

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 3, prol.

opposition and thus has its conviction in a moment in which those two members again find themselves undivided and identical, because it has proceeded from both as third principle alongside both.¹⁹

Creation and Incarnation, too, can be proven. Creation: in opposition to the *self-consciousness* of God, Günther sees the world as *non-Ego*, with its thesis, antithesis, and synthesis—spirit, nature, and man as a blend of both. God's love for this world-idea is the motive for realizing it and as necessarily involving the three factors of nature, spirit, and man, and in man we find the resolution of nature and spirit, a resolution that is flawed but which finds its fulfillment in the Incarnation, which is required in order to restore the harmony of human nature, the rapport between spirit and nature, lost by Adam's sin. Jesus Christ alone, the Son of the Father, is able to do this, and to restore human beings as images of the Blessed Trinity, through his obedience to the Father. This obedience re-orders our appetites to God, re-orders our human spirit to the divine spirit.²⁰

Günther's works were placed on the Index in 1857 and in a brief to the archbishop of Cologne, Pius IX explained that this step was in response to the errors on the Trinity, the person of Christ, the nature of man, God's freedom in creation, and rationalism.

Günther bowed to the Roman judgment but was disappointed by it, as were his many "neo-dualist" (i.e., anti-pantheist) followers in Austrian and German clerical and academic circles, some of whom moved to Old Catholicism in the aftermath of the condemnation of semi-rationalism in *Dei Filius*.²¹ In his discussions with his opponents, who claimed that he had reduced faith to reason, Günther had explained his position by allowing that faith could well serve as a basis for the religion of many, and indeed that there are mysterious aspects of a person's commitment to religion that can be experienced only in faith, not simply by an understanding of religious truths, and of course even more so, there are aspects of the Trinitarian divine life which are pervious only to faith in scriptural deliverances.²²

¹⁹ Günther, epistle 11 in pt. 1 of *Propaedeutic*, trans. in Fitzner, *Romance and the Rock*, 140 and 142–43 (quoted in Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 58–59).

²⁰ Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 58 (on creation) and 60 (on the Incarnation).

²¹ Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, 66–67.

²² Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 60–61.

Ontologism

Ontologism is the view that all humans can acquire a direct vision of God (or a component of God) in this life. All human beings possess this direct vision or immediate intuition of God while on earth because without it knowledge of any kind is impossible. Many ontologists believe in innate ideas, and many of them would point out that our exposure to sensible realities simply awakens our understanding to the inborn ideas which form the essence of our knowledge.

Various forms of ontologism had flourished in the wake of the theory of innate ideas put forth by Descartes: the pantheistic ontologism of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), for whom our innate idea of God is a modality of God himself; the ontologism of Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), who believed that we do not know things in themselves, but in the divine nature.

In the nineteenth century, this latter sort of ontologism underwent a renaissance at the hands of Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852), for whom the first idea (being) and the first reality (God) are one and the same. Gioberti did not claim that we know God in himself, but in his creative act and his relationship to his creatures. He believed that the properties of our knowledge (universality, veracity, immutability, etc.) cannot simply emerge from the senses, a posteriori, but need to be shaped a priori by a higher spiritual idea or ideas.

Rosmini-Serbati (1797–1855) was a priest, founder, and political leader in the papal states, and a foremost exponent of ontologism at this time. His approach emerges from his project, encouraged by Pope Pius VIII, to develop a renewed Christian philosophy, in his *New Essay on the Origin of Ideas* (1830). Here he muses on the ideal being present to our mind, which permits any knowledge whatever; after all, we can know things only qua beings. The realities presented to us by the senses—the “matter” of our knowledge—need to be given their “form” by divinely implanted intuition of ideal being, an innate idea in our soul. Our knowledge, he explained, Kant-style, is composed of the chaotic welter of sense impressions, the general idea of being, and finally judgments, by which we join the idea of being with our sensations, thus giving them form.²³

Many ontologists proved God’s existence by using versions of the ontological argument, since our knowledge of the world around us assumes in varying degrees a knowledge of God. Rosmini-Serbati, on the other hand,

²³ Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 97.

true to his aim of renewing Catholic thought, found ways of using proofs from the created world as well.

In any case, ontologism began to be addressed at Rome from 1840 on, and Rosmini-Serbati's works came under scrutiny, with two of them appearing on the Index in 1849. In 1854 a papal commission investigated his ontologism but found nothing worthy of censure in his works. In 1861 some ontologist propositions were indeed condemned by the Holy Office, not specifically associated with Rosmini-Serbati:

1. Immediate knowledge of God, habitual at least, is essential to the human intellect, so much so that without it the intellect can know nothing, since indeed it is itself intellectual light.
2. That being which is in all things and without which we understand nothing is the divine being.
3. Congenital knowledge of God as being simply involves in an eminent way all other cognition, so that by it we hold as known implicitly all being, under whatever aspect it is knowable.
4. All other ideas do not exist except as modifications of the idea by which God is understood as Being simply.²⁴

In 1862 further propositions were censured, and finally in 1864 the work of Casimir Ubaghs of Louvain was ruled out of court. While ontologism is not specifically mentioned in *Dei Filius*, the preface's reference to doctrines which confuse nature and grace does seem to emerge from the Church's engagement with ontologism in the previous two decades.

As far as Rosmini-Serbati was concerned, after the Council, under Pope Leo XIII, in a decree of the Holy Office entitled *Post Obitum* (1887), some propositions of his, mostly taken from posthumously published works and not far removed from those condemned in 1861, were indeed censured, due in part to the Thomistic renewal which Pope Leo had instigated in Catholic thought. In 2001, however, a *Note on the Force of the Doctrinal Decrees concerning the thought of Fr Antonio Rosmini-Serbati* issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith established that the propositions condemned were not to be understood in the sense in which the Holy Office had then understood them, and that the intention of the decree *Post Obitum* was rather to guard against interpretations of Rosmini-Serbati's somewhat ambiguous thought. Rosmini-Serbati himself, it pointed out,

²⁴ Quoted in Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 116 (condemnations found in DH, nos. 2841–45).

had never denied any truths of faith, although his system was “insufficient and inadequate to safeguard and explain certain truths of Catholic doctrine” (§5). Rosmini-Serbati was subsequently beatified (2007).

Fideism

Dei Filius also speaks of the positive ability of reason to prove the existence of God, and other central truths linked to revelation. “If anyone says that the one, true God, our creator and lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason, let him be anathema” (can. 1 of *Dei Filius* II). *Fideism* can be regarded as a reliance upon faith alone when it comes to the pursuit of basic religious truths. To a greater or lesser degree, fideism considers that reason is not able to justify itself and needs a deeper source or series of postulates to underwrite its deliverances, a point of view that seems to unite Kantian criticism to some forms of postmodernism. Faith or tradition is able to underwrite the axioms of reason. We begin by looking at the trajectory of Louis Bautain, a foremost fideist, who undertook a journey from a youthful rationalism to a conviction that reason needed a deeper wisdom which faith could offer.

Louis Eugène Marie Bautain (1796–1867)

Bautain (1796–1867) was born in Paris. After studying from 1814 to 1816 under the eclectic philosopher Victor Cousin, and brilliantly attaining a doctorate in literature, he took a position teaching philosophy at the *Collège royale* and the nearby University of Strasbourg in 1816. Hegel admired him. By this time Bautain had come to completely reject the Catholic faith in which he had been raised and instead he embraced a rationalist idealism influenced by the thought of Cousin, Fichte, and Hegel. Immersing himself too greatly in his academic work, Bautain had a mental breakdown while teaching and fell into a severe depression.

He was helped at this time by a Catholic mystic, Louise Humann, a devotee of Meister Eckhart, a woman of deep and somewhat anti-rational spirituality. With her inspiration, Bautain reconverted to Catholicism in 1820. While this conversion helped him to regain his well-being (Bautain resumed teaching in 1820), the fideistic tendencies already evident in his thought caused a suspension from teaching in 1822 when he began to proclaim that reason was powerless to know philosophical truth. He was nevertheless ordained in 1828, and taught in Strasbourg minor seminary. After some vicissitudes, including a visit to Rome to defend his work

in the face of his bishop's condemnations, he moved to Paris to teach at Juilly, wrote *The Philosophy of Christianity* in 1835, founded the St. Louis Congregation in 1842, and became vicar of the diocese of Paris and professor of moral theology at the Sorbonne from 1853 to 1863.²⁵

Bautain's fideism positively claimed that doctrine casts light on other areas of life and knowledge and negatively asserted that no preamble of faith based on objective assessment of the historical evidence is worth formulating. No rational reconstruction of revelation either in its grounds (Hermes) or its content (Günther) is possible.

In his introduction to the course of philosophy contained in his major work *Psychologie expérimentale* (1835), Bautain explains that philosophy seeks the good, the true, the self, and the non-self. This leads us first to sensualism, then to a philosophy of imagination, and finally to a rationalism or pantheism or idealism. All of this leaves us dissatisfied until we reach the depths that Christian revelation alone can plumb within us.

For Bautain, *la raison* is limited, plodding, workmanlike, and abstract, bound to the phenomena alone. As Kant has shown, reason can generate arguments for the "big issues" (God, world, and soul), but these will be countered by their contrary arguments. Any idea of God that reason can come up with will be limited, idolatrous, and probably a-moral. The best speculative reason can do in this area is to confirm what faith has already granted the human mind.

Intelligence, on the other hand, is intuitive, profound and able to receive innate ideas. It can open itself up to truths of a higher order, and it does this particularly when it receives the faith. This is the source of metaphysical truths. It is in the soul, spontaneously open to intuitive truth, that God speaks, and on the basis of this hearing we can understand the relation between finite and infinite, created and uncreated. Every science needs basic principles and this is the principle of metaphysics, it is from here that our knowledge of the important factors of life emerges.

The *only true philosophy* is the Philosophy of Christianity. Bautain is convinced, from his own bitter experience, that no philosophy can come up with the answers to the problems posed by human beings. "What is the meaning of life?" "What is our origin and destiny?" Look to the catechism for the solutions, he says; the Christian has the knowledge, flowing from the doctrine of Christianity as a matter of course. He saw rationalism in

²⁵ Paul Poupard, "Louis Bautain: Apologist and Apostle," in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 48, no. 192 (1959): 443–50; Bríd O'Doherty, S.S.L., "A Man with a Message: Louis Bautain (1796–1867)," in *The Maynooth Review / Reivéú Mhá Nuad* 11 (December 1984): 11–25.

the approach taken by the clergy, and its fruits in the phenomenon of large-scale defection from the Church. For Bautain, intellect, the intuitive faculty which forms ideas, perceives truth, and weighs evidence, has a better chance by far of founding certainty based on faith in the three great metaphysical ideas: the triune creator God; the fall of man and the redemption accomplished by the second Adam.²⁶

These views led to problems with the very bishop of Strasbourg who had privately tutored Bautain, admitted him to ordination, and appointed him rector of the seminary; Bautain's dismissal of Scholasticism, of the *praeambula fidei*, and of the general reasonableness of faith did not go down well, and the bishop was pleased to refer to Bautain's "mongrel philosophy." Bautain himself felt that he was defending the faithful from the danger of semi-rationalism. The bishop alerted Rome, submitting a series of propositions to which he suggested Bautain be asked to subscribe. As it happens, when Bautain traveled to Rome in 1838, he was met with an understanding attitude and found a mentor in the great critic of Hermes, Giovanni Perrone, S.J. (1794–1876), of the *Collegio Romano*, who helped Bautain to understand his own position better and that of his bishop. His visit facilitated a greater familiarity with Thomism, which he eventually embraced, and he was encouraged by Pope Gregory XVI, who explained to him that he had "only sinned by an excess of faith [*peccasti tantum excessu fidei*]." ²⁷ He was not asked for any further assurances, nor were the bishop's propositions, or Perrone's, put to him. Only in later years, in 1844, when he was engaged in founding the St. Louis Congregation, was he asked to subscribe to some somewhat milder propositions: reason can attain to the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, other basic principles of metaphysics, and the motives of credibility.²⁸

Paul Poupard refers to him as "Apologist and Apostle," and these titles are merited. His disciples included future bishops, Marie-Alphonse de Ratisbonne, founder of the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion, and Auguste Gratry, who renewed the French Oratory. Above all we should mention his foundation of the St. Louis Congregation.

²⁶ See Louis Bautain, *Psychologie expérimentale*, vol. 1 (1839), ch. 1: "Course of Philosophy, Introduction: On Philosophy in General, First Section: Definition of Philosophy" (trans. C. Michael Shea at academia.edu/1034247).

²⁷ Poupard, "Louis Bautain," 447. See also Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 33–35.

²⁸ Poupard, "Louis Bautain," 447–48.

Traditionalism

A variant on fideism which must also be mentioned is traditionalism. It, too, is distrustful of the ability of reason to reach the truths about God and man which are regarded as preambles of faith. Instead, traditionalism places its faith in an ancestral revelation which has given us awareness of such matters, as directly implanted by God in the human collective spirit. As Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald (1754–1840) would put it:

How can those who admit a Supreme Being, and even *the creation* of the human, suppose that this Being, essentially powerful and good, would have placed humans on the earth in order to live here in society, without recognizing at the same time that He had to give them or breathe into them, from the first moment of their existence, the necessary knowledge [les connaissances] for their individual and social, physical and moral life, knowledge which, transmitted naturally from father to children, and from generation to generation, has developed with society, and has deteriorated as society has?²⁹

De Bonald, a conservative soldier and politician who was exiled during the French Revolution and returned under Napoleon, held prominent academic posts and also worked with François-René de Chateaubriand on the *Mercur de France* gazette, receiving many awards and decorations during the latter years of his life. He taught that, while human intelligence can deal with particular truths and images through the senses and through reason, the more abstract and general realities are more difficult for the human mind, beset as it is by passion and prejudice. In language, an original gift to the human race, these realities are made accessible, and this points to an ancestral revelation made to humanity in language, which made possible our grasping and retaining of such important truths.

While the Enlightenment had rejected inherited beliefs and traditions, the competing and irreconcilable philosophies which emerged from it had, for de Bonald, cast a shadow over the powers of individual judgments to attain religious and moral truths. Corporate judgments, on the other hand, carrying memory from age to age and allowing us to think of the “past as present,” were tried and tested and could be relied upon to carry the weight of such far-reaching and needful assertions in the moral and

²⁹ Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald, *Philosophical Studies*, pt. 2, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 3 vols. (Paris, 1859), 3:66–67; cf. de Bonald, *Primitive Legislation* as cited in Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 45.

religious spheres. De Bonald pointed to the ubiquity of language, an anonymous process without a subject, which no one has created, as a proof of the existence of God as a First Cause and guarantee of the truths needed for social existence.

Félicité Robert de Lamennais (1782–1854) was equally committed to the witness of the race, and claimed that the authoritative consent of humanity is the principle of human knowledge and certitude. While his ultramontane views, which regarded the Pope as the guarantee and organ of this witness, gained some approval at Rome, his denial of natural theology, and thus of the gratuitous nature of supernatural revelation, merited him a papal denunciation in Pope Gregory XVI's *Singulari Nos* of 1834. Later, in the pontificate of Pius IX, the traditionalist (and fideist) view that reason cannot uphold the rationality of faith was censured in *Qui Pluribus* (1846), as was the traditionalism of Ubaghs in 1861.

The Role of the “Roman School” in Preparing for the Council

Michael Shea points out that the two constitutions of the First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus* on infallibility and *Dei Filius* on faith and reason, in their interconnection, reflect the influence of the *Collegio Romano* (now known as the Gregorian University) and the “Roman School” based there, in particular the work of Perrone. Shea claims that the Council's dogmatic teachings reflected central themes from Perrone's theological curriculum. Other members of its staff such as Clement Schrader, Johann Baptist (later Cardinal) Franzelin, S.J. (1816–1886), Joseph Wilhelm Karl Kleutgen, S.J. (1811–1883), Franz Hettinger, and Willibald Maier made effective contributions to the workings of the Council.³⁰

The college had been returned to the Jesuits in 1824, ten years after the re-constitution of the order. Perrone was subsequently director of studies and rector, in a career which lasted over forty years. Under his guidance, the *Collegio Romano* became very influential, in a most practical way: “non sumus episcopi,” Perrone remarked, “sed facimus episcopos”—we are not bishops, but we make bishops.³¹ Many of the more influential bishops at

³⁰ C. Michael Shea, “*Ressourcement* in the Age of Migne: The Jesuit Theologians of the *Collegio Romano* and the Shape of Modern Catholic Thought,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 2 (2017): 579–613; Carlo Pioppi, “Scuola romana,” in *Dizionario di Ecclesiologia*, ed. Gianfranco Calabrese, Philip Goyret, and Orazio Francesco Piazza (Roma: Città Nuova, 2010), 1298–1301.

³¹ C. Michael Shea, “Giovanni Perrone's Theological Curriculum and the First Vatican Council,” *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 110, no. 3–4 (2015): 789–816, at 793.

the Council owed their theological training to the college; the “collegial” unanimity of the fathers of the Council and the relatively serene passage of *Dei Filius* may owe something to this; perhaps they recognized the framework of the curriculum they had studied in the first schema presented.

The influence of the Roman School was particularly strong from 1839 until 1879, when Leo XIII’s Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* encouraged the use of the works of St. Thomas in Catholic philosophical circles. Catholic writers associated with the school also included Cardinal Edward Manning, Matthias Scheeben, and Heinrich Denzinger. The school was one of the main instruments used by the Holy See in the preparation of magisterial documents during the Pontificate of Blessed Pius IX, in particular *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854) and the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864).³²

Perrone and other members of staff were deservedly influential in the life of the Church and of the curia, in which they served as consultors to congregations such as the Congregation of the Index and Propaganda Fide, thus contributing to the prehistory of the Council by analyzing many of the central figures in the drama of rationalist and fideist responses to modernity, in particular Hermes, and also by accompanying and befriending thinkers such as Bautain and John Henry Newman.³³

Perrone’s famous curriculum, *Praelectiones Theologicae*, was particularly influential: a manual, but more than a manual, offering a sweeping view and system of theology, strikingly anticipating many of the Council’s themes, such as faith and reason, the public and ecclesial nature of faith, hierarchy, and the role or “anteriority” of the Church, which was key in Perrone’s mind for understanding all that concerns Scripture and Tradition.³⁴ For Perrone, faith and reason were indeed key matters of the day, and issues concerning them and their relationship bookended his treatise. In 1860, Perrone’s work was referred to as a touchstone for orthodoxy in disputes between the Congregation of the Index and theologians at the University of Louvain regarding faith and reason. The Congregation of Propaganda went so far as to quote Perrone’s own writings in its response in 1868 to William G. Ward on the teaching role of the pope.³⁵

Perrone can be defined, loosely, as a Scholastic thinker, but was rather

³² Pioppi, “Scuola Romana,” 1298.

³³ Shea, “*Ressourcement* in the Age of Migne,” 606–7; Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, 97.

³⁴ Shea, “*Ressourcement* in the Age of Migne,” 609.

³⁵ Shea, “Giovanni Perrone’s Theological Curriculum,” 804. Shea points out that this step was quite unique at the time, but reflected Perrone’s “substantial labours” for curial congregations in the years leading up to the Council.

more of a positive than a speculative cast of mind. He collaborated informally with Newman in 1847, and some of Newman's ideas concerning the development of doctrine appear to have been discussed with Perrone. Newman remarked in 1849 that "the Pope has in a way taken up Perrone."³⁶ The work Perrone published in 1847 as a contribution to the debate on the definability of the Immaculate Conception shows that the development of doctrine, however this may be defined, was much on his mind.³⁷

When it came to the Council, its immediate preparation, and the workings of the commissions, the influence of the Roman School continued, above all with the work of Franzelin and Kleutgen, two Jesuits who were influenced by both the approach of the Roman school and the rebirth of Thomism, to which Kleutgen contributed under Leo XIII.

Franzelin was from the Austrian Tyrol and a polymath, at home in various Eastern languages, as well as in dogmatic theology, having been assistant professor of dogma in the *Collegio Romano* since 1850, and he contributed a key *votum* to the preparation of the conciliar debate on faith and reason. His schema, entitled *Definitio doctrinae catholicae contra multiplices errors ex impio rationalismo derivatos vel contra multiplices absoluti ac temperati rationalism errores*,³⁸ was discussed and eventually gave rise to a second schema, composed by Franzelin, which was the one dealt with at the Council and eventually was the basis of *Dei Filius*.³⁹

This second schema was found by the Council fathers to be too long and complex. In early January, therefore, it was decided that the schema should, as Cuthbert Butler reports, be "retained in substance" but "shortened . . . and made more clear," and that "its tone should be tranquil, as befits the decree of a General Council."⁴⁰ The proposed emendations were sent to the Deputation on Faith, a twenty-four-member group elected by the council whose president was appointed by Pope Pius IX. Three members of the Deputation on Faith were chosen to carry out the emendations: Victor Auguste Dechamps, Louis François Désiré Pie, and Konrad Martin. Martin, the head of the group, asked for the assistance of two theologians: Kleutgen and Charles Louis Gay.⁴¹

³⁶ Shea, "Giovanni Perrone's Theological Curriculum," 803.

³⁷ Shea, "Ressourcement in the Age of Migne," 606.

³⁸ Franzelin's *Definitio* can be found in appendix of Pottmeyer, *Der Glaube*, 90*–105*.

³⁹ See *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (1759), ed. Ioannes Dominicus Mansi, vol. 50 (Leipzig: H. Welter, 1923–1927 [vols. 49–53 = Vatican I]), cols. 59–74.

⁴⁰ Cuthbert Butler, *The Vatican Council, 1869–1870: Based on Bishop Ullathorne's Letters* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962), 169.

⁴¹ Butler, *Vatican Council*, 170.

Kleutgen was a prominent member of the Society of Jesus. He was born in Westphalia, entered the diocesan seminary in Paderborn, but was ordained priest in Switzerland in 1837 after joining the Jesuits there. He began working in Rome in 1843 for the Jesuit generalate, and also in 1851 for the Congregation of the Index, where he was helpful in dealing with issues raised by German-speaking writers, in particular the semi-rationalism of Günther and Hermes. He also resisted the doctrine of the traditionalists and fideists, pointing out that human reason is able to have a firm grasp on the basic principles of reasoning and the *praeambula fidei*. He was thus well versed in the issues which the Council wished to treat. In later years his profound knowledge of St. Thomas Aquinas drew him into Pope Leo's project of the revival of Scholasticism, during which he was in charge of editing the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879).⁴²

Kleutgen had been caught up in the scandals surrounding the enclosed Franciscan nuns of the monastery of Sant'Ambrogio, whom he had served as extraordinary confessor since 1858. As a result of his indiscretions there, he had been stripped of his posts and sentenced to imprisonment.⁴³ Pope Pius IX commuted this sentence to a kind of house arrest, during which he was permitted to continue writing. Subsequently he made his contribution to the workings of the Council. His task was to rework Franzelin's schema in order to improve its clarity, presentation, and serenity. He succeeded in condensing it into four chapters, which eventually became the four chapters of the constitution *Dei Filius*.

Conclusion

St. John Paul II, in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, on the question of faith and reason, remarked that the Church has often intervened with regard to philosophical teachings, referring specifically to *Dei Filius*: "If the Magisterium has spoken out more frequently since the middle of the last [i.e., nineteenth] century, it is because in that period not a few Catholics felt it their duty to counter various streams of modern thought with a philosophy of their own."⁴⁴ Hermes, Günther, Rosmini-Serbati, and Bautain were indeed addressing the chief streams of the thought of their day, and attempting to discern the truthful elements emerging from the Enlightenment.

Dei Filius would, as Pope John Paul remarked, deal with these

⁴² Vincelette, *Recent Catholic Philosophy*, 124.

⁴³ For a brief summary of the "Kleutgen fiasco," see Nichols, *From Hermes to Benedict XVI*, 134–35.

⁴⁴ St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), §52.

philosophies in an “even-handed” way, identifying both the distrust of reason’s natural capacities in the thought of fideists *and* pointing out that rationalism attributed to natural reason a knowledge which only the faith could confer.⁴⁵ In the years coming up to the Council and in connection with issues of faith and reason which would later be dealt with at the Council, the magisterium was also even-handed, alert to exaggerations on both sides, sometimes even managing to temper attitudes and form a more balanced disposition toward questions concerning faith in dialogue with reason, as we have noted in the case of Bautain.

The work of members of the “Roman School” had a part to play in this when it came to the Council itself, but they were already active in previous years both in the strictly academic and pedagogical area, forming many of the bishops who would be active in the council, and by way of tackling the erroneous and negative developments in Catholic thinkers in those years, through both contribution to magisterial documents and personal contacts. The serene and smooth passage of *Dei Filius* also owed much to their influence. N.V

⁴⁵ St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §52.