

The Essence and Topicality of Thomism

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Translator's Note: *Essence and Topicality of Thomism* is a translation of *Essenza e attualità del tomismo* (Brescia: La Scuola editrice, 1946). Some translations of St. Thomas come from the works mentioned in Thèrése M. Bonin, "Thomas Aquinas in English: A Bibliography," June 17, 2013, <http://www.home.duq.edu/~bonin/thomasbibliography.html>. All others are the translator's. Additional footnotes are also the translator's. The second part was translated from Italian with comparisons to the Latin original. Lastly, the translator uses "potentiality" and "actuality" to refer to what traditionally has been called, somewhat confusingly for novices, "potency" (*potentia*) and "act" (*actus*), respectively.

Introduction

Certain souls¹ today think that “a theology which is not current is a false theology” and that the theology of Saint Thomas in some of its important parts—e.g., when it conceives sanctifying or habitual Grace as a “form”—is only an application of the notions of Aristotelian physics, of the distinction between matter and form. And it is added: “Renouncing Aristotelian physics, modern thought has also deserted the notions and schemes that have value only for Aristotelian physics. Because theology continues to offer meaning to the spirit and can fertilize and progress with it, it is necessary that it renounces these notions.”

The theology of Saint Thomas, however, from this point of view, would no longer be current. And elsewhere it is also said: “A theology that is not current is therefore false.”

But why, then, would the Church recommend the doctrine of Saint Thomas to the point of insisting that professors of philosophy and theology teach this discipline “*ad Angelici Doctoris rationem, doctrinam et principia, eaque sancte teneant*”?² ([1917] Codice Canonico, c. 1366).³

“The Christian truth, it is observed, is stuck in contingent notions and schemes which determine its rational structure. It is not possible to isolate it from them. It is not rendered independent from a system of notions but changing into another. History—nevertheless—does not lead to relativism. It permits the grasping, in the bosom of theological evolution, of an absolute. Not an absolute of description, but an absolute of affirmation. If the notions, methods, systems *change; the affirmations* that they contain remain, even if they are expressed in other categories.”⁴

The present *opusculum*⁵ wants instead to recall that the

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- 1 Garrigou-Lagrange refers to theologians like Henri Bouillard, S.J.
 - 2 “according to the arguments, doctrine, and principles of the Angelic Doctor, to which they must religiously adhere”
 - 3 cf. 1983 Code of Canon Law, can. 252 §3: “...students are to learn to penetrate more intimately the mysteries of salvation, especially with St. Thomas as a teacher...”
 - 4 Garrigou-Lagrange quotes from Bouillard’s 1941 thesis *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d’Aquin*
 - 5 “little work”

doctrine of Saint Thomas remains and will always remain current precisely because it, in the present disorder and instability of souls, conserves those immutable truths⁶ without which it is impossible to have a correct idea of God, the soul, the world—because the doctrine of St. Thomas is moreover a philosophical defense of the real value of the first truths taught by common sense, which does not know how to defend itself alone.

In fact, the principles of Thomistic philosophy surpass Aristotelian physics; (this is not the moment to show the value of hylemorphism⁷). They are above all metaphysical principles, absolutely universal like the first notions of intelligible being, of unity, truth, goodness. They apply not only to material beings but, beyond matter, to the spiritual soul and God. The principle of non-contradiction or identity, the principle of sufficient reason (all that which is has its *raison d'être*⁸ in itself or in another), the principle of efficient causality, and that of finality dominate the order of bodies with which physics is occupied, and they permit us to raise ourselves to the sure knowledge of God; they apply to the supernatural world as to the natural world.

The distinction between potentiality and actuality that first arises for explaining the becoming of bodies is not only a distinction in the physical order, but also in the metaphysical order; it is a first division of intelligible being, and upon it rests the proofs of the existence of God which Saint Thomas conceived. If it does not have an immutable value, these proofs are no longer demonstrative, but only probable.

What, moreover, we wish to recall here is that the *immutable*

6 The so-called “preambles of faith” (*præambula fidei*). See: Ralph McInerny, *Præambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10282771>.

7 We only say that modern science has never known how to demonstrate that the doctrine of matter and form is false. Even in every molecule, or in each atom, an Aristotelian distinguishes the matter by which every atom or molecule are material, and the specific form by which they have a determinate nature (e.g., hydrogen or oxygen). So the corruption of an animal of which remains only ash deprived of sensitive and vegetative life is a *substantial transformation*. So again, in us, it is the *nutritive assimilation*, by which foods without life are transformed become human flesh.

8 “reason for being”

affirmations of the Christian Truth cannot be maintained if some *immutable notions* are not admitted.

Affirmation, in fact, is a judgment that reunites two notions, e.g.: sanctifying grace is distinct from the nature of the soul. If these two notions are not immutable, then the judgment could not be immutable either.

But the first notions of natural reason or common sense are at first *confused*, and it is only by long and methodical philosophical work that they become *distinct notions* of philosophical reason, as Saint Thomas shows in his *Commentary on Book II of Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*. So all men have used the verb *can*, saying, e.g., that matter *can* become—by nutritive assimilation—plant, animal, or human flesh. Thus, everyone says that the human intelligence *can* easily know the first principles and the conclusions that immediately derive therefrom. Everyone speaks of this ability. But the philosophical thinker passes slowly from this confused notion of the ability or potential to the distinct notion of the active or passive potential, and to that of actuality.

Now, if they dismiss these not only physical but also metaphysical notions, of potentiality and actuality, how does one maintain and defend the real value of the confused notions from which they derive and without which it is no longer possible to maintain the ontological and immutable value of the first principles of thought and reality?

How, without these notions of potentiality and actuality, does one reconcile the principle of non-contradiction or identity with the *becoming* and *multiplicity* of beings?

To dismiss the first principles of Thomistic metaphysics would be to increase considerably the current confusion of souls; it would lead us to another definition of truth in the domain of theology and, finally, in that of faith. It is in this superior domain that one must say: “For the abstract and chimerical *adæquatio rei et intellectus*⁹ one substitutes methodical research, the *adæquatio realis mentis et vitæ*.¹⁰”¹¹ Now, it is with a great responsibility to call “chimerical” a definition of truth admitted by many ages in

9 “adequation of thing and intellect”

10 “real adequation of mind and life”

11 Maurice Blondel, *Annales de Philosophie chrétienne*, 1906. p. 235.

the Church and to want to substitute another for it.

Is the life of which one speaks in this new definition of truth human life? If so, how does one avoid the condemned Modernist proposition: “*Veritas non est immutabilis plus quam ipse homo, quippe quæ cum ipso, in ipso et per ipsum evolvitur*”? (Denz., 2058).¹²

The philosophy of *Action* in the *Revue Thomiste* (1896 p. 36 ff., 413; 1897 p. 62, 239, 627; 1898 p. 578) is, in conclusion, what since 1896 our Master, Father Schwalm, O.P., has reproached and what we also have said in 1913 (p. 351-371) and since then have not ceased to repeat.¹³

We recall what [St.] Pius X had to write regarding the Modernists: “*Æternam veritatis notionem pervertunt*”¹⁴ Encyclical. *Pascendi* (Denz., 2080). How does one avoid this error when one pretends that the Christian claims can only be explained in ever-changing notions, if it is said that “the Christian truth is always stuck in contingent notions and schemes which determine its rational structure?”

Now, there cannot be any immutability in the most universally admitted theological conclusions. And even in the *conciliar definitions*, which utilize the most precise notions of common sense, there will always be *something mutable*, which will cease for it to be true. And, then, in these definitions, where does the immutable truth end, and where does what must change begin? Who will say it? The Church itself, from this perspective, could not respond.

Is it not perhaps to ascribe the Christian faith to a religious experience that is always evolving, expressing itself intellectually in ever new forms? We recall what the Modernists have said

12 Pope St. Pius X, *Lamentabili Sane* “58. Truth is no more immutable than man himself, since it evolved with him, in him, and through him.”

13 The doctrine of M. Blondel was able to attract a certain number of unbelievers toward the Christian faith, but what he wrote since 1898 against the traditional definition of truth is of such nature as to alter this absolutely fundamental notion in the mind of believers. This is a grave thing, as Father Schwalm told him in 1896 and as one can say to him today, too. The last chapter of *Action* appearing in 1898 was, from this perspective, deplorable. It must encounter, and it did in fact encounter, the most fervent opposition.

14 “They pervert the eternal notion of truth.”

regarding some dogmatic formulæ (cf. Denzinger, 2077).¹⁵ By them the believer believes his own religious experience and expresses it, at first, in simple and ordinary formulæ, and then in secondary formulæ that, if the Church approves them, are called *dogmatic formulæ*. These do not have any other purpose than to help the believer believe his religious experience. Dogmatic formulæ do not have an absolute value with respect to divine reality, but only a practical value: “Actuality with respect to Christ as with respect to God.” These formulæ are *vehicles of truth* and are mutable; one thereby arrives at intrinsic evolution of dogma, the Encyclical *Pascendi* (Denz. 2077) says, that destroys—it says—the immutability of Christian truth. One arrives at asserting that certain dogmas disappear because they are no longer *current*; they are no longer considered *true*: e.g., that of eternal punishment (cf. Denz. 2080).

One can see from this that the notion of truth itself was changed.

What must we say instead?

When the Council of Trent (Denz. 799, 827) says that the grace that inheres in the soul of the just is the formal cause of justification, we cannot affirm that this notion of formal cause will later cease to be true. Nor can we say how that the Council of Trent is neither true nor false, as one can say about a physical scientific hypothesis that claims only to classify provisionally discovered phenomena: what the Council of Trent affirms is true, and it will remain true.

One then understands why the Holy Office, on 1 December 1924 (cf. *Monitore ecclesiastico* 1925, n. 194) had condemned such a proposition derived from the philosophy of action and the new definition of truth censured in the same place: “Etiam post fidem conceptam, homo non debet quiescere in dogmatibus religionis, eisque fixe et immobiliter adhærere, sed semper anxius manere progrediendi ad ulteriorem veritatem nempe evolvendo in novos sensus, immo et corrigendo id quod credit.”¹⁶

15 from Pope St. Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici gregis*

16 “No abstract proposition can have in itself immutable truth. Even after Faith has been received, man ought not to rest in the dogmas of religion, and hold fast to them fixedly and immovably, but always solicitous to remain moving ahead toward a deeper truth and even evolving into new notions, and even correcting that which he believes.” Translation from:

The Rev. Father Gillet, Master General of the Dominicans, recently wrote a letter to the Theologians of his Order to remind them with what care they need to retain the traditional definition of truth, “*adæquatio rei et intellectus*,” the conformity of judgment with extra-mental being, considered above all in its immutable laws, and not to substitute for it the new definition, “*conformitas mentis et vitæ*,” the conformity of the spirit with human life that always evolves.

Nor does it follow from this traditional viewpoint that two contradictorily opposing theological systems cannot be true, the one and the other; one is true, the other false.

On the other hand, from the pragmatic perspective of the new definition of truth, the two systems can both be true as conforming each to a special spirituality, to a particular religious experience. Then there is no longer truth in itself, but only *relative to each of us*. It is relativism.

In the first part of our *opusculum*, we will speak of the topicality of Thomism for remedying the intellectual disorder and instability of souls.

First of all, we will treat of the excellence of the doctrine of Saint Thomas according to the judgment of the Church, then according to its nature itself inasmuch as it is a doctrine of being divided into potentiality and actuality. We will insist on its principle characteristics: its realism, unity, harmony, theocentrism. Lastly, we will recall the necessary dispositions for studying it fruitfully.

In the second part, we will talk about what the physical and metaphysical foundations of the doctrine of actuality and potentiality are and what the principle applications of this doctrine are.

The second part, related to the 24 Thomistic theses approved by the Sacred Congregation of Studies,¹⁷ was read at the international Thomistic Congress of Rome in 1925; it was published in *Acta Accademiæ romanæ S. Thomæ*, 1925. But this volume being sold out, we have reproduced it here as it was

Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “Where Is the New Theology Leading Us?,” trans. Suzanne M. Rini, *Angelicum* 23 (1946): 126–45, <http://www.cfnews.org/gg-newtheo.htm>.

17 See Appendix I.

presented in Latin, following it by an Italian translation.

St. Thomas Aquinas is deigned to bless these pages and by him the souls that make reason to study from them.

Part I.

The topicality of Thomism and the needs of our times

Many recent publications, more or less errant on the nature and method of theology, offer us the occasion to reclaim the value that the Church recognizes in the doctrine of Saint Thomas and to show how it responds to the most urgent needs of the present era, in the disorder that disturbs many intellects.

I. Recent deviations

This disorder already manifests itself in this epoch that seethes with Modernism, of which the 65 condemned errors from the Decree *Lamentabili* and from the Encyclical *Pascendi* were almost all, if not all, of the heresies, and some of them fundamental heresies on the nature of revelation and faith, reduced to pure religious experience.

The sign has been not of a crisis of faith, but of a very grave malady of the intellect, which conducts itself on the tracks of liberal Protestantism and through relativism to absolute skepticism.

To remedy this evil, of the philosophical order for the most part, [St.] Pius X recalled—as Leo XIII had already done—the necessity to return to the doctrine of Saint Thomas, and he also said in the Encyclical *Pascendi*: “Further let Professors remember that they cannot set St. Thomas aside, especially in metaphysical questions, without grave detriment.”¹ “*Parvus error in principio,*” as it is fitting to use words of the Aquinate himself, “*est magnus in fine.*”²—similarly in the *Motu proprio* Sacrorum Antistitum 1 Sept. 1910.³ Despite this admonition, some minds will continue,

1 “Magistros autem monemus ut rite hoc teneant, Aquinatem deserere, praesertim in re metaphysica, non sine magno detrimento esse.”

2 “A small error in a principle is a big error in the conclusion.”

3 cf. *Enchiridion clericorum*, 1938, n. 805, 891.

consciously or unconsciously, in the work of discrediting scholastic philosophy and theology that has no longer responded, according to them, to the exigencies of life, neither of the interior life that allows, they tell us, to judge everything. Some have even maintained theology to be, fundamentally, nothing but a spirituality, *a religious experience* that has found its intellectual expression. And often one writes “religious experience” where he should have said “Christian and Catholic faith,” forgetting that the proper and also the most authentic object of religious experience is very restricted compared to that of the faith that it presupposes. The just man experiences the filial affection that the Holy Spirit inspires in him in its own regard, but he does not have experience of the free creation *ex nihilo*,⁴ nor of the real distinction of the Three Divine Persons, nor of the Hypostatic Union, nor of the infinite value of the Redemption and of the Mass, nor of the eternal life of the blessed, nor of the eternity of the punishments of the damned, and all that he believes infallibly because God revealed it, as the Church proposes it. Authentic religious experience—which proceeds from the gifts of science, intellect, wisdom, piety—presupposes the faith, but it is not identified with it.

Some are drawn by these grave confusions to propose a shift in the definition of truth itself, and they reproduce this judgment of a contemporary philosophy: “For the abstract and chimerical *adæquatio rei et intellectus*⁵ is substituted the methodical research of the rule: the *adæquatio realis mentis et vitæ*⁶.”⁷ Truth is no longer the conformity of our judgment with *extra-mental reality* (with the nature and existence of the things), but the conformity of our judgment *with the human life* that constantly evolves and whose exigencies are known from religious experience.

But it remains to be seen if this religious experience or spirituality has an *objective foundation*, and if the action or the *life* of which it claims primacy for itself (as in the philosophy of action) is the *true life*, the action really ordered to the *true*

4 “out of nothing”

5 “adequation of thing and intellect”

6 “real adequation of mind and life”

7 Maurizio Blondel, *Punto di partenza della ricerca filosofica (Annales de Philosophie Crétienne*, 1906, a. 1, p. 235).

ultimate end. How does one judge this last thing if not by *conformity to reality*,⁸ St. Thomas has said, returning in such wise to the traditional definition of truth?

True action is defined in relation to the true ultimate end to which it speaks order and not *vice versa*; otherwise we will not escape from subjectivism, relativism, pragmatism.

It is in these recent days likewise wanting to discredit the scholastic theology that some came to maintain that it cannot deduce with certainty, by means of a rational *minor premise*, any theological conclusion, not even this: "Christ (being truly man) needs to have a human will subjected to his divine will." This conclusion would not be, it is said, more rigorous than this other: "Christ (being truly man) needs to have a human personality subjected to his divine personality." This implies forgetting that theology deduces its conclusions in the light of revealed mysteries, here of the mystery of the Incarnation, according to which there is in Jesus Christ only one person and one personality.

One also comes to say that speculative theology today knows neither what it wants nor where it is going. It is the conclusion which the principles themselves need to reach, however much they neglect the doctrine of Saint Thomas, just as if a geometer, forgetting the principles of his science, came to say: Today geometry knows neither what it wants nor where it goes.

Hence, there is only one step to the disdain of the theological proofs, commonly received, even of those drawn from Holy Scripture and Tradition, that already presuppose a certain elementary conceptual analysis of revealed dogma (that very one that develops in following speculative theology for understanding the revealed data before deducing some conclusions).

Certainly, many of these proofs admitting an intrinsic and objective increase of the revealed deposit, even after the death of the last apostle, would not conserve their value. In such wise one comes to speak of the relativity and also the fragility of the dogmatic forms, as if to be were *a religious experience that*

8 Cf. I-II, q. 19, a. 3, ad. 2m: «*In his quae sunt ad finem (the means) rectitudo rationis consistit in conformitate ad appetitum finis debiti. Sed tamen et ipse appetitus finis debiti praesupponit rectam apprehensionem de fine, quae est per rationem (secundum conformitatem ad rem)*».

incessantly evolves, as if in these dogmatic formulæ the word *to be* were not always immutably true. Nevertheless, the Savior said: “Ego sum via, veritas et vita” (Jn. 14:6);⁹ “Cœlum et terra transibunt verba autem mea non præteribunt” (Matt. 24:35).¹⁰

It is maintained, in a recent publication, apropos habitual and actual grace, that the *notions* which the Councils themselves use in their definitions are not immutable and nevertheless one pretends to maintain that the conciliar *definitions* are immutably true. How could, in these conciliar definitions, the word *to be* (the core of judgment) make an immutable proposition, whose two terms are continually mutable? It would mean that an iron hook can stay immovably united to the waves of the sea. How can a judgment have an immutable value if there is not immutability in the first apprehension, *in the notions themselves* that this judgment reunites?

It is forgotten that under the abstract or philosophical *notions*—e.g., of nature, of person—there are the confused and immutable notions of natural reason and common sense, without which the *affirmations* of what is spoken would not have any immutability.

This is what we showed in the book that appeared in 1909: *Common sense, the philosophy of being, and the dogmatic formulæ*.¹¹

So one returns to maintaining that the *truth* can no longer be defined *in relation to being*, as does traditional realism, which is, firstly, the philosophy of being; but that it needs to be defined *in relation to action* as in the philosophy of action, a close relative to the philosophy of becoming.¹²

9 “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

10 “Heaven and earth shall pass, but my words shall not pass.”

11 Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le Sens Commun: La Philosophie de L’être et Les Formules Dogmatiques*, 4th ed. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1936).

12 One thus returns to a more or less pragmatic relativism, of which the Holy Office on 1 December 1924 condemned the following propositions: “1°. *Conceptus* seu *ideæ abstractæ per se nullo modo possunt constituere imaginem rectam atque fidelem, etsi partialem tantum.* [*Concepts* or abstract ideas cannot *per se* constitute a true and faithful representation, even if it is only partial.] 2°. *Neque ratiocinia ex eis confecta per se nos ducere possunt in veram cognitionem ejusdem realitatis.* [Nor can *reasonings* confected from them *per se* conduct us to the *true* cognition of the same reality.] 3°. *Nulla propositio abstracta potest haberi ut*

The question then remains: is the action of which you speak itself true?

It can only be that it tends to the true ultimate end. Now how does one judge, in turn, this ultimate end if not *by conformity with reality* (returning to the traditional definition of truth), as Saint Thomas has said¹³ and as Emil Boutroux has repeated in his very appropriate criticism of the philosophy of action?¹⁴

In the recent deviations that we recalled, theology is practically, little by little, substituted by history united with

immutabiliter vera. [No abstract proposition can be held as immutably true.] 4°. *In assecutione veritatis, actus intellectus in se sumptus, omni virtute specialiter apprehensiva destituitur, neque est instrumentum proprium et unicum hujus assecutionis, sed valet tantummodo in complexu totius actionis humanæ, cujus pars et momentum est, cuique soli competit veritatem assequi et possidere.* [In the attainment of truth, the act of the intellect taken in itself, destitute from every power, especially the apprehensive power, is not the proper and unique instrument of this attainment, but is effective only in the entirety of all of human action, whose part and importance it is, and which everyone agrees is alone competent to attain truth and possess it.] 5°. *Quapropter veritas non invenitur in ullo actu particulari intellectus in quo haberetur «conformitas cum objecto» ut aiunt scholastici, sed veritas est semper in fieri, consistitque in adæquatione progressiva intellectus et vitæ, scil. in motu quodam perpetuo, quo intellectus evolvere et explicare nititur, id quod parit experientia vel exigit actio: ea tamen lege ut in toto progressu nihil unquam ratum fixumque habeatur.* [Wherefore truth is not found in any particular act of the intellect in which «conformity with the object» is held, as the Scholastics say; but truth is always in becoming, and it consists in the progressive adæquation of the intellect and life, viz., in a certain perpetual motion by which the intellect tries to develop and explain what experience bears or action demands: however, by this law, as in all of progress, nothing will ever be permanently binding.] 6°. *Argumenta logica, tum de existentia Dei, tum de credibilitate Religionis christianæ, per se sola, nullo pollent valore, ut aiunt, objectivo, scil. per se nihil probant pro ordine reali.* [Logical arguments, both of the existence of God and of the credibility of the Christian religion, have no per se objective value, they say, viz., they prove nothing per se for the real order of things.] 7°. *Non possumus adipisci ullam veritatem proprii nominis quin admittamus existentiam Dei, immo et Revelationem.* [We cannot arrive at any truth of a proper name without admitting the existence of God and even Revelation.] 8°. *Valor quem habere possunt hujusmodi argumenta non provenit ex eorum evidentia, seu vi dialectica, sed ex exigentiis «subjectivis» vitæ vel actionis, quæ ut recte evolvantur sibi que cohæreant, his veritatibus indigent.* [The value which such arguments can have does not come from their evidence, or from dialectical force, but from the

religious psychology or with that of becoming, whose representative principles are cited with almost as much, if not more, authority than a St. Augustine, inasmuch as they have a topical value: “Theology that is not current would be a false theology.” And it is added that the theology of Saint Thomas is no longer current.

Truth is never immutable, they tell us; truth is what corresponds to the exigencies of human action, always evolving. M. Blondel wrote again in 1935 in *L’Etre et les êtres* p. 415: “No intellectual evidence, not even that of absolute principles *per se*,¹⁵ and which possess an ontological value, imposes itself on us with a spontaneously and infallibly compelling certainty.”

It is tantamount to saying that *before the free choice* that admits the necessity and the ontological value of these principles, they are *only probable*; after the choice, these principles are true by their conformity to the exigencies of action and human life; and, namely, that they have a *subjectively sufficient* but *objectively insufficient* certainty, like the Kantian proof of the existence of God. To where does all this lead? To conclude that the Thomistic proofs of the existence of God, *per se* only, are only probable.

It is precisely this confusion and instability of minds that shows the unavoidable necessity, as Leo XIII and [St.] Pius X

«*subjective*» exigencies of life or action, which rightly evolve and adhere to it, they require these truths.]” Another four condemned propositions regarding apologetics and the value of faith. The list of these propositions is found in the *Monitore Ecclesiastico* 1925, p. 194. How can this Modernist proposition be avoided (Denz. 2058): «*Veritas non est immutabilis plusquam ipse homo, quippe quæ eum ipso, in ipso, et per ipsum evolvitur*» [“Truth is no more immutable than man himself, since it evolved with him, in him, and through him.” —Pope St. Pius X, *Lamentabili Sane* 58.]?

13 I-II q. 19, a. 3, ad 2m., loc. cit.

14 *Science et religion*, 1908, p. 296: «Is it, therefore, the special action of the will that one claims to speak about? *But the will requires an end...* What is sought in these clever theories is self-sufficient action, independent of all the concepts by which we can try to explain and justify it, pure action, action in itself... Perhaps this means the return to an indeterminate program is desired or not?... And is it not hunted on a path without an exit, when the essence and the only veracious principle of religious life is searched in practice, far from theory?»

15 “through itself” or “in itself”

said, of returning to Saint Thomas.

As [St.] Pius X observed in the Encyclical *Pascendi*, the evil of which the modern world suffers is first of all a malady of the intellect: *agnosticism*. It, whether it be under the form of empirical positivism or under that of idealism, puts in doubt the ontological value of the primordial notions and even of the first principles of reason, which do not permit more than proving with objectively sufficient certainty the existence of God distinct from the world, and thus neither to establish the ultimate foundation of the moral obligation, or that of natural law. Modern philosophy proposes a subjective logic and criticism which do not enable us to arrive at truth, namely, to know extra-mental being. Ontology is suppressed or reduced to the statement of first principles, which are no longer immutable laws of being, but only laws of the mind that evolves, laws of mental, volitional, or sentimental becoming. Thereby we arrive at a psychology lacking a soul, which only understands phenomena, namely, the becoming that is at the base of the status of changeable knowledge. Morality becomes, then, a morality lacking obligations and sanctions, since we cannot know the ultimate foundation of duty, nor the ultimate and true end of man, according to a certain judgment of conformity with reality. Instead of that one necessary judgment, there are free options.

In place of the *philosophy of being*, we have a *philosophy of phenomena*, a *philosophy of becoming*, and a *philosophy of action*; and of the exigencies of this last one, rather a voluntarism according to which “metaphysics has its substance in the agent will” taking the place of its being and immutable laws. So it renounces the traditional definition of truth: conformity of the judgment with external reality, *adæquatio rei et intellectus*, for which is substituted the definition: *veritas est conformitas mentis et vitæ*, truth is the conformity of thought with always evolving human life. Thereby, behold our return to Modernism (Denz., 2058, 2026, 2079, 2080).

As to the fact of Revelation, it remains unknowable because the signs of revelation cannot be established with objectively sufficient certainty. Some doubt even the possibility of the miraculous, seeing a miracle seems to contradict the principle of causality, in the form it is formulated today by agnosticism and

phenomenology: “any phenomenon presupposes an antecedent phenomenon.” A miracle would be a phenomenon without an antecedent phenomenon; we may not admit it, if not as an effect of the religious faith or lived emotion that sometimes follows the religious sentiment. We arrive thereby at a religion founded on religious sentiment and its *natural evolution*. Christianity and Catholicism would be the highest form of this evolution, but there are no longer immutable dogmas, because dogmas are expressed by notions such as nature and person, whose *ontological* and *transcendent value* is always dubious.

So agnosticism leads to *naturalism*, the negation of supernatural realities.¹⁶

16 We have exposed in a detailed manner the principles and consequences of *agnosticism* and *evolutionism* in another of our works, *De Revelatione*, 4th edition, 1945, Rome, Ferrari, vol. I, p. 218-248; 259-299; vol. II, p. 2-92; 115-124. Even today, some do not exist who teach such imaginative and false doctrine with respect to original sin. 1° The hypothesis of the material evolution of the world is extended to the spiritual and supernatural order. The supernatural would be evolving toward the full coming of Christ, i.e., until his second coming. 2° Sin, inasmuch as it affects the soul, would be something spiritual and hence would not exist in time, so it matters little to God if it was committed at the beginning or in the course of humanity. 3° Human consciences somehow interpenetrate each other, and they all share in human nature, which would have its own independent existence. Because of this, personal sin of any soul affects all of human nature. 4° Hence, original sin would not be more than that of Adam, but of any man, a sin that would befall all of human nature. Some exist who would like to *change* thereby not only the manner of exposition of *theology*, but also its *nature* itself, and even that of dogma. Some teach more or less explicitly that *the material world would naturally evolve toward the spiritual*, or that likewise *the spiritual world would evolve naturally or quasi-naturally toward the supernatural order*, as if Baius had been right. The world would be thereby in natural evolution toward the fullness of Christ; it would be in continual progress and hence *would not have been able to be* in the beginning *in the perfect state* of original justice *followed by a fall*, namely, original sin; such evolutionism, which recalls that of Hegel, mutates the substance of dogma itself. The same tendency induces some to formulate, in regards the *Eucharist*, affirmations like the following: «*The true problem of the real presence was not given until now.*» To say that Christ is present in the Eucharist *ad modum substantiæ* [in the manner of substance] is to give an explanation that bypasses the real problem: in its deceptive clarity it suppresses religious mystery to content itself with a simple prodigy. It is necessary to substitute in this case the Scholastic method to reflect on the method of

At the origin of all these errors, from the times of Hume and Kant, there is the following: *The essential relation of the intellect with extra-mental being is suppressed*; so the modern intellect can no longer raise itself with certainty to God, First Being; it falls on itself and finally says that God does not exist in the transcendent order, but that he *becomes in us*. So it was that the agnosticism of Kant led to the pantheism of Fichte and to the absolute evolutionism of Hegel: evolutionism that finds itself in the most errant forms of contemporary idealism. Man no longer lives of God, but only of himself and is moving toward death, through the agony and desperation of which current *existentialism* treats, that is, as someone said, the anticipated experience not of heaven, but of hell.

It is thus necessary to save the intellect, heal it, make it understand that the first principles of natural reason or common sense have an ontological value, that they are laws of being which allow one to arrive at true certainty regarding the existence of God, upon which rests the immutable dogmas of the faith.

We find the defense of the ontological value and the transcendent or analytic value of the first notions and first principles in Thomism; this is not a superficial defense, like that of the philosophy of common sense proposed by the Scots Reid and Dugald Stewart, but extremely deep, which collects the fruits of the thought of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Fathers of the Church, and, above all, Saint Augustine. We have there an intellectual patrimony of an incommensurate value, which restores to the human intellect the knowledge of what is *de facto*,¹⁷ makes it to understand again its true nature, and so permits it to rediscover the way that leads to God, first cause and ultimate end, as well as to direct the will toward this supreme end.

Thomism corresponds to the profound needs of the modern

Descartes and Spinoza. Although Christ is truly God, one cannot say that with him there was a presence of God in Judea. *God was not present in Palestine more than elsewhere*. There was but an *efficacious sign* of the presence of God. Likewise, the *Eucharist* is an *efficacious sign* of the presence of God. *There is not a transubstantiation* in the physical and philosophical sense, but only in the religious sense. Bread and wine became the *signs* of the spiritual presence of Christ.

17 "of fact"

world because it restores *the love of truth for the sake of truth itself*. Now, without this love of truth for itself, it is not possible to obtain true infused charity, the supernatural love of *God for the sake of God Himself*, nor to arrive at the *infused contemplation* of God sought for Himself, that is, at the contemplation that proceeds from the living faith enriched by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, first of all, knowledge and wisdom.

As Jacques Maritain rightly observed in his good book *Le Docteur Angelique*, 1929, Annexe 1: *S. Thomas Apôtre des temps modernes*, p. 212:

The fact is that Saint Thomas—and this is the most immediate benefit he confers—brings the intellect back to its object, orientates it toward its end, restores it to its nature. He tells it that it is made for being. How could it possibly not give ear? It is as if one told the eye that it is made to see, or wings that they are made to fly... Simplicity of gaze is at the same time restored to it; artificial obstacles no longer obtrude to make it hesitate before the natural evidence of first principles; it re-establishes the continuity of philosophy and common sense.¹⁸

It is precisely this that we demonstrated in our book on *The Common Sense: The Philosophy of Being and Dogmatic Formulæ*.¹⁹

For its realism, the necessity, and the universality of its principles; Thomism also has a great *assimilative capacity*. It is able to assimilate all that is new and true in the discoveries of diverse sciences, and thus its experimental basis can be continually expanded; by way of the human organism, which conserves its proper substantial structure, there is in Thomism a perpetual process of assimilation. We will return to this argument at the end of the following chapter.

II. The excellence of Thomism

According to the testimonies of several Popes, the doctrine of Saint Thomas is the most perfect philosophical and theological synthesis and the most secure expression of the truth in the order of nature as well as in that of grace.

We recall the words of Leo XIII in the Encyclical *Æterni*

18 <http://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/etext/thomas3.htm>

19 Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le Sens Commun: La Philosophie de L'Être et Les Formules Dogmatiques*.

Patris:

Among the Scholastic Doctors, the chief and master of all towers Thomas Aquinas, who, as Cajetan observes, because “he most venerated the ancient doctors of the Church, in a certain way seems to have inherited the intellect of all.” (In II. q. 148, a. 4 *in finem*) The doctrines of those 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... Philosophy has no part which he did not touch finely at once and thoroughly... Moreover, 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... Again, clearly distinguishing, as is fitting, reason from faith, while happily associating the one with the other, he both preserved the rights and had regard for the dignity of each; so much so, indeed, that reason, borne on the wings of Thomas to its human height, can scarcely rise higher, while faith could scarcely expect more or stronger aids from reason than those which she has already obtained through Thomas.²⁰

Leo XIII also cites the following words of Innocent VI: “His

20 Pope Leo XIII, “Æterni Patris: Encyclical on the Restoration of Christian Philosophy,” August 4, 1879, 108–9, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris_en.html. Latin original: “Iamvero inter Scholasticos Doctores, omnium princeps et magister, longe eminent *Thomas Aquinas*: qui, uti Caietanus animadvertit, *veteres doctores sacros quia summe veneratis est, ideo intellectum omnium quodammodo sortitus est*. Illorum doctrinas, velut dispersa cuiusdam corporis membra, in unum Thomas collegit et coagmentavit, miro ordine digessit, et magnis incrementis ita ad auxit, ut catholicæ Ecclesiæ singulare præsidium et decus iure meritoque habeatur... Nulla est philosophiæ pars, quam non acute simul et solide pertractant... Illud etiam accedit, quod philosophicas conclusiones angelicus Doctor speculatur est in rerum rationibus et principiis, quæ quam latissime patent, et infinitatum fere veritatum semina suo velut gremio concludunt, a posterioribus magistris opportuno... Præterea rationem, ut par est, a fide apprimè distinguens, utramque tamen amice consocians, utriusque tum iura conservavit, tum dignitati consuluit, ita quidem ut ratio ad humanum fastigium Thomæ pennis evecta, iam fere nequeat sublimius assurgere; neque fides a ratione fere possit plura aut validiora adiumenta præstolari, quam quæ iam est per Thomam consecuta.” (ASS 12 [1879], 97-115, <http://bit.ly/13nXTby>; originally from: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ass/index_en.htm).

teaching above that of others, the canonical writings alone excepted, enjoys such a precision of language, an order of matters, a truth of conclusions, that those who hold to it are never found swerving from the path of truth, and he who dare assail it will always be suspected of error.”²¹

St. Robert Bellarmine similarly speaks of St. Thomas in the introduction of his treatise on the Holy Trinity: “Certainly, if everyone proposes with such order, facility, and brevity to us, as I venture to affirm, that he who diligently studies a few of St. Thomas’s questions finds nothing difficult either in Scriptures, the Councils, or the future Fathers of the Trinity; he will make more all-around progress in two months devoted to the *Summa* than in several months’ study of the Scriptures and the Fathers.”²² Pope John XXII also said: “He (St. Thomas) has illuminated the Church more than all the other Doctors; to read his books for a year profits man more than to study the doctrine of others for his whole life.”²³



The fundamental intrinsic reason of the excellence of Thomism, from the philosophical point of view, is easy to grasp. This excellence comes from what is first of all *metaphysical*, which considers everything not in relation to movement, to *fieri*,²⁴ nor in relation to the human “I” or human action, but rather in

21 *Serm. de S. Thomas*. Latin original: “Huius (Thomæ), doctrina præ ceteris, excepta canonica, habet proprietatem verborum, modum dicendorum, veritatem sententiarum, ita ut numquam qui eam tenuerint, inveniatur a veritate tramite deviasse; et qui eam impugnaverit, semper fuerit de veritate suspectus.” (Ibid., 110.).

22 “Tanto si quidem ordine, tanta facilitate, tanta brevitate nobis omnia proponit, ut ego affirmare audeam, si quis diligenter has D. Thomæ paucas quæstiones incumbat nihil ei difficile vel in Scripturis, vel in Conciliis vel in Patribus de Trinitate futurum; et plus omnino profecturum aliquem si duobus menses in scripturis et Patribus legendis versetur.”

23 “Ipse (S. Thomas) plus illuminavit Ecclesiam quam omnes alii Doctores; in cuius libris plus proficit homo uno anno quam in aliorum doctrina toto tempore vitæ suæ.” Allocutio hab. in Concistorio an. 1318, in Vita S. Thomæ A. 81 apud Bolland. *Acta Sanct.* die 7 mart. cf. de hac re *Enchiridion clericorum* (Documenta Ecclesiæ sacrorum alumnis istituendis) an. 1938, p. 624

24 “in process of being made or coming into being” {“Fieri, N.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed July 19, 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/69982>. }

relation to being (nature and existence of things), that is, in relation to the first intelligible, the proper object of metaphysics. Because of this, Thomism differs notably from the doctrines that are, first of all, a physics or natural philosophy, or a psychology, or an ethics or moral dogmatism, and that do not sufficiently go back to the first notions and first principles of being as being or of reality.²⁵

The excellence of Thomism, from the philosophical point of view, comes secondly from its resolving all great problems *through the division of being into potentiality and actuality, admitting the primacy of actuality.*

This division is required, according to Thomism, for reconciling the first principle of reason and being (the principle of identity or of non-contradiction) with the becoming and multiplicity of beings affirmed by experience.

According to the principle of identity, “being is being, and non-being is non-being,” which is equivalent to saying “being is not non-being;” this is the simplest statement of the principle of non-contradiction. On the other hand, what *becomes* is not yet what *will be*, but *can be*; one needs to distinguish in it the potentiality and actuality: in the germination of a plant, there is the progressive actualization of a *real potentiality*, a *capacity for perfection* that the specific form will receive, of the essential structure of the oak or beech tree. In the same way, the multiplicity of oaks is explained only by distinguishing in each the specific form of the oak and the matter capable of receiving it, which is also a real capacity for perfection. From these first principles, the essential characteristics of Thomism from the philosophical point of view derive: realist, intellectualist, theocentric doctrine.

It is a *realist doctrine* since it admits the primacy of being over knowledge, conceived as essentially relative to being; our

25 If the human intellect did not know intelligible being and its opposition to non-being, if it did not know at least confusedly the *principle of non-contradiction* as a *law of being* (being is not non-being), it could not affirm with certainty *cogito, ergo sum* [I think; therefore, I am.], as it would be like to say simultaneously: *I think and do not think*, or: *I know and do not know*. Neither can one impersonally say “think,” like one says “rain,” as the impersonal thought would not seem to be truly “thought” and must lose itself in senselessness.

intellectual knowledge indeed begins from the idea of being presupposed by all the other ideas, and it takes place in judgment, the soul of which is the verb “to be.” This realism does not diminish in anything the vitality and imminence of the act of knowing, but it affirms its value in relation to extra-mental being.

Furthermore, Thomism is an *intellectualist doctrine* since it admits the superiority of the intellect (faculty of being) over the will that it directs. This doctrine, which applies to the divine intellect as to the human intellect, is strongly opposed to the arbitrary “*stat pro ratione voluntas.*”²⁶ But it truly saves freewill with respect to each good that is not the universal good in its fullness. It also perfectly guarantees the superiority of charity, affirming that here below the love of God, insofar as it leads to Him, is more perfect than the knowledge of God that attracts, so to speak, God to us, establishing Him in a certain way as the limit of our restricted and finite ideas.

Finally, Thomism is a *theocentric* doctrine that affirms the primacy of God, pure Actuality, over all creation, because actuality is more perfect than potentiality. There is more in what is than in what *becomes*. God is, thus, not universal becoming, but externally subsistent Being itself, infinitely more perfect in His fullness than all that participates in His perfections. It follows from this that nothing exists and nothing perseveres in existence if not by God, creator and conserver, and that no creature can act without His cooperation, not even the free creature. Indeed, no creature can pass from potentiality to actuality except under the influence of a superior cause in actuality and, in the final analysis, under the influence of the Supreme Agent, that alone is its activity, pure Actuality, that alone is Being itself, Good itself, and the supreme liberty of which ours is but a participation, certainly noble, but always limited.

These three characteristics—realism, intellectualism, theocentrism—are the essence itself of Thomism.



From these derive the other characteristics: its organic unity, universality, elevation, depth of its principles, exactness of its terms, manifest harmony, and perfect balance of its parts.

Its unity is not artificial or fictitious like that of an eclectic

26 “let the will stand for reason”

system, lacking directive principles and picking up good or bad elements left and right; it is not forced or imperious, as it would make a system too narrow, founded upon a mother-idea incapable of explanation, without doing violence to the diverse aspects of reality. It is an *organic unity*, similar to a living being, a unity founded on the nature itself of things, not only on the *coordination* of created agents and God, but on the subordination of all the causes to the supreme Cause.

The necessity, universality, elevation, and depth of the principles of Thomism come from what are *in the natural order* founded on a notion *first* of all, the most universal, that of *being* that has as properties the one, true, good, and beautiful. They are then founded on the very first division of *potentiality* and *actuality*, with the affirmation of the priority of actuality over potentiality. All the philosophical problems are illuminated by the light of these principles which alone permit an explanation of *becoming*, its varied forms and multiplicity of beings depending on the first Cause.

In the theological order, the necessity, universality, elevation, and depth of the principles of Thomism come from that they are founded on the *nature of God itself*, on His Deity in which the absolute perfections are identified without destroying themselves: Being itself eternally subsisting, supreme Wisdom, and the sovereign Good. All the theological treatises of Saint Thomas—that of God, One and Triune, that of creation and the divine government, that of the redemptive Incarnation, that of the Sacraments, that of the ultimate end of human acts, that of the virtues and gifts, that of grace—are illuminated by the *light of these superior principles*, while wanting to explain it with *less elevated*, and less universal, *principles* would do violence to their object, as a disputable definition of *human liberty* would be, or principles of a philosophy of (*human*) *action*, capable, at the most, of grounding a moral dogmatism, in which truth is defined not in terms of being but in terms of our human action, whose profound rectitude would remain problematic.



The *exactness of terms* is always reputed by the Supreme Pontiffs as a characteristic of Thomism. One reads in the Office of Saint Thomas: “*Stylus brevis, grata facundia: celsa, clara,*

firma sententia.”²⁷ This exactness of terms comes from the fact that the concepts and judgments that they express were considered *in the objective light of being and principles*, with the aim of understanding the nature of things and their properties and not only, as in every pragmatism, with the aim of directing human activity toward a *given end that is supposed good*. Because of this, Thomism excludes, when possible, the *metaphor*, a source of confusion and inexactness; it does not resort to it except when lacking the proper terms, and then it expressly says that it speaks metaphorically. The philosopher who, on the contrary, begins with expressing himself in metaphors, when he could and should preserve the exactness of terms, condemns himself to an eternal “roughly,” in such wise that he is no longer given to distinguish in his proofs and assertions what is only probably from what is truly certain.



The harmony of the parts in the doctrine of Saint Thomas is no less affirmed. It derives from a virtue that it has possessed in great exquisiteness: the sense of measure, balance, that has never permitted it to put one element in more light to the disadvantage of another.

Thereby it is the greatest classic of theology, very contrary to all the romantic exaggerations that capriciously dramatize the great problems and arrive at such antinomies between thesis and antithesis by rendering impossible the attainment of the superior synthesis that would truly and immutably reconcile the diverse aspects of reality. Thereby, the *great unresolved problems*, which are already considered as unsolvable, are substituted for the great truths. In the doctrine of Saint Thomas there is a manifest harmony between sense and intelligence, between traditional knowledge and the personal effort to deepen the tradition, between intelligence and liberty, between reason and faith, and from here the balance of all the other parts derives.

The senses supply to the intellect the matter of its consideration, but it itself judges of their value in the light of principles of first notions abstracted from sensible things. Tradition directs our effort, but our effort, assimilating to itself the content of the traditional contribution, always judges better of

27 “Concise style, pleasing fecundity: lofty, clear, enduring thoughts”

its intrinsic value. The intellect directs the liberty, but the free consent, accepting the practical judgment, *makes this be the last*, and the deliberation terminates. Reason demonstrates to us that it is reasonable to believe, by reason of the signs that accompany divine revelation, and this in turn confirms the superior views of reason on God, the spiritual soul, and the future life. As Leo XIII said in the Encyclical *Æterni Patris*: “Those, therefore, who to the study of philosophy unite obedience to the Christian faith, 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.”²⁸

Aristotelian philosophy receives its full development in the great questions on the spiritual and immortal soul, on liberty, on God and the liberty of the creative act only with Saint Thomas, thanks to the profound thought philosophy attains at its adult age. They need the Christian atmosphere and the light of divine revelation, *stella reatrix*,²⁹ that has shown from on high the goal to reach, the peak which, with the strengths of reason alone, it has reached. He who shows us the terminus of the assent is a great help for us, but we ourselves must walk with our strengths to attain it.

These are the reasons of the excellence of Thomism. It, as philosophy, is above all a metaphysics that considers each thing not in relation to becoming, nor in relation to the human “I” or to our action, but in relation to *being and to being distinguished into potentiality and actuality*, affirming the superiority of actuality. From this superior point of view it judges of all the philosophical problems. Therefore, a *realist*, *intellectualist*, and *theocentric* doctrine results from it. This pertains to its essence itself. Its other characteristics derive from it: the admirable unity, universality, loftiness, profundity of its principles, exactness of its terms for clarifying the most difficult questions, the manifest harmony of its parts and in particular of its three orders: that of sense understanding, that of natural intellectual understanding, that of

28 “Quapropter qui philosophiae studium cum obsequio fidei christianae coniungunt, ii optime philosophantur: quandoquidem divinarum veritatum splendor, animo exceptus, ipsam iuvat intelligentiam; cui non modo nihil de dignitate detrahit, sed nobilitatis, acuminis, firmitatis plurimum addit.”

29 “guiding star”

supernatural understanding, which, much higher than philosophy and the natural understanding of the highest angels, reaches the life of God and the mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity, of the redemptive Incarnation, and of eternal beatitude.



These characteristics of Thomism diminish and even vanish in the eclecticism in the works of Suárez and of his disciples. Suárez wanted to find a middle-way between Saint Thomas and Scotus, but he frequently vacillates between the one and the other and inclines at times toward nominalism, without accounting for the deviation of the latter. This will be seen further on in the position held by Suárez regarding the principle theses of Thomistic metaphysics, of which we will recall the foundation and connection.

This eclecticism diminishes the force of speculative reason, and it practically inclines toward a certain not-very-conscious fideism in which every serious and profound intellectual life disappears.

Hence, the little watchful interest, the scant response that they provoke anti-Thomistic, most risky and subversive theses.

III. Objections

It will be objected without doubt that the principles of the doctrine of Saint Thomas are *too abstract* and do not appear absolutely certain.

To this one must respond that these principles, by being absolutely universal and applicable to every being, whether material or immaterial, need to abstract from every subject and belong to the third level of abstraction.

The first level, that of physics, abstracts only from individual matter: e.g., from the water of this stream and from the water of that torrent, to consider the nature of water and its properties.

The second level of abstraction, that of mathematics, abstracts from all the sensible qualities to consider quantity, either *discrete* (numbers) or *continuous* (extension, its figures and its dimensions).

The third level of abstraction, in metaphysics, *abstracts from each subject*, and thereby it permits us to know the most universal laws of being and action, which are applied to all

beings, material or immaterial alike.³⁰

It is also objected that not all the principles of Saint Thomas appear sound. To this Thomists respond that these principles require a study deepened by seeing their connection to the very first principles of natural reason and of reality: to the principles of identity or non-contradiction, of *raison d'être*,³¹ of efficient causality, of finality. We will show in the following that the distinction of *potentiality and actuality* is absolutely imposed to conciliate the *principle of identity or of contradiction* (first law of thought and of reality) affirmed by Parmenides with *becoming* and *multiplicity* affirmed by Heraclitus, at the origins of the history of Greek philosophy.

The metaphysical force necessary to appreciate the necessity of the principles formulated by Saint Thomas is thus very useful for defending the truths of common sense. Again: it is necessary because common sense cannot be defended philosophically by itself against the false philosophies; it cannot defend the real value of the first confused notions that it serves. The philosophical work that proceeds step-by-step from the *first confused notions to the first distinct notions* is indispensable because this defense acquired a philosophical value. This is what Thomas Reid, with his disciples, did not understand. Confounding his point of view with that of Thomas Aquinas would be to fall for a strange deception. Between these two Thomases there is an immeasurable distance.

Wanting to maintain the *immutable affirmations* of the Christian doctrine while maintaining that the notions that accompany it are continually changeable means not spotting that under the distinct or philosophical notions—e.g., of nature or of person—there are confused and immutable notions of natural reason and common sense without which those affirmations would not have any immutability. But these confused notions of common sense need to be defend philosophically. This is what Aristotle and Saint Thomas have done, passing methodically

30 For more detail on the three degrees of abstraction, see: Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences: Questions V and VI of His Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, trans. Armand A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/BoethiusDeTr.htm#L21>.

31 “reason to be”

from *nominal definitions* to *real definitions*, according to a dual, ascendant and descendant process, as they explain in *Posterior Analytics* lib. II. l. 6 ad 20.



Lastly, it will be objected that the obedience to the Holy See could not demand adhering to Thomism without diminishing the liberty of the spirit and intellectual research.

It is not about adhering to Thomism as to a truth of faith defined by the Church, but recognizing the great philosophical and theological value that the Pontiffs have always recognized, to such a point as to request that philosophy and theology be taught “according to the arguments, doctrine, and principles of the Angelic Doctor, which are to be held religiously” ([1917] can. 1366).³²

Far from diminishing the *true liberty* of intellectual research, it augments it, renders it *more perfect*, procuring it with much more impetus inasmuch as it has a firmer foothold, and liberating it from error according to the word of the Master: “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John VIII, 32), instead of abandoning oneself to a perpetual fluctuation.



Finally, what is needed to study Thomism fruitfully? What method must one follow?

1) *One needs to consider it in its organic totality and not in a fragmentary manner.* One does not comprehend it except in the light of its principles themselves which need to be deepened. Otherwise, one knows it only externally, as one would know a city by having crossed its peripheral quarters, without having visited its central plaza from which all its streets radiate in every direction.

2) *A frank and profound love for truth in itself, objectively considered, is needed;* beyond any subjective, even religious pragmatism and beyond any intellectual fashion, it will surpass every fashion. Truth is not what we want, nor is it the conformity of certain judgments with our more or less correct desires. Truth is not what pleases this or that generation and what will be disdained by the next generation. Thirty or forty years ago it was

32 “ad Angelici Doctoris rationem, doctrinam et principia, eaque sancte teneant” (cf. 1983 Code 252 §3, fn. 3 above)

necessary to be Bergsonians³³ to enjoy some consideration in the intellectual world; today, Bergsonism has already passed out of style. Truth is not what pleases, but *what is*, and it is founded, first and foremost, on the fundamental laws of *reality* which are also those of the thinker, of the natural intellect, and of every thinker worthy of this name.

3) To study Thomism fruitfully, *a true docility toward Saint Thomas* is needed; do not be esteemed superior to him, as certain historians of philosophy do, in a more or less conscious way, who consider his doctrine as one of many and who judge it from on high, without ever realizing that one of the greatest graces bestowed by God to his Church was endowing her a St. Augustine and a St. Thomas. Historians, moreover, who do not intellectually exceed a certain relativism nor ever attain doctrinal stability. For example, they recognize in the doctrine of potentiality and actuality an admirable hypothesis or a postulate liberally accepted by the spirit, without realizing that the proofs of the existence of God, founded on this doctrine, would thereby lose every demonstrative value and would not surpass speculative probabilism.

To know the doctrine of Saint Thomas more and better, it is also necessary to love it: then what could diminish it and alter it is quickly seen, like when one loves the Gospel and the Church, he immediately intuits what is opposed to them. He who loves possesses these intuitions, the Saints say.

4) Lastly, *humility and prayer in the search of truth* is needed. Truth, indeed, is, under various points of view, one and multiple, simple and complex, manifest and mysterious. It cannot be attained in its profundity and elevation except by following the great geniuses that God has given us as beacons and guides. Otherwise, we resemble him who plans to ascend a tall mountain without an expert guide, thus exposing himself to the danger of falling in some precipice. This occurred more times: in philosophy, to Descartes, Malenbranche, and again to Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Fichte, Hegel and many others; in theology, to the Pelagians and, in an opposite sense, to Luther, Calvin, and Jansen.

This *knowledge* of the mysteries—we repeat—is given by the

33 A better example today might be, e.g., the “deconstructivism” of Derrida.

conformity of the intellect with the same divine reality and not only with the subjective exigencies of human action. In this new declaration of the Church, the traditional definition of *truth* is always underlined, which is the *conformity of the intellect with extra-mental reality itself*. This is the notion of truth that Thomism constantly defends, as will be clear from its principle metaphysical theses that we will now consider.

As we showed elsewhere,³⁴ Thomism has a *great assimilative power* (we do not say “adaptive”). It accepts all that is positive and demonstrable in other conceptions, but it rejects what they unduly deny. So, it is as a superior synthesis beyond the systems opposed to themselves; beyond the *evolutionism* of Heraclitus or of the *immobilism* of Parmenides, with its doctrine of being divided into potentiality and actuality. It is also beyond *mechanism* and *dynamism* with its doctrine of matter and form of bodies; beyond *psychological determinism* and *liberalism*, as it admits that free choice is always directed by the last practical judgment, but it itself accepting that it be the last. It is also above *pantheism that absorbs God into the world and that which absorbs the world into God*; for the same reason, it is, with its doctrine of divine motion, beyond the *occasionalism* that suppresses secondary causes and beyond the *Molinism* that removes the secondary cause from the divine premotion.³⁵

Even from the social point of view, Thomism is held beyond the Communist State, which absorbs the individual into the State, and beyond the *individualism* that disregards the exigencies of the common good, object of social justice. For St. Thomas the *individual (ut pars societatis)*³⁶ is subordinated to the species and society, but society is subordinated to the *person* who needs to stretch toward God.

So Thomism admits that there is more in reality than in all the systems. Why? Because reality—above all, the divine reality—is

34 Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, trans. Patrick Cummins (St. Louis, Mo.: Herder, 1950), chap. 54, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/REALITY.HTM>., “Article Two: The Assimilative Power Of Thomism.”

35 Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “Prémotion Physique,” ed. A. Vacant, E. Mangenot, and É. Amann, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris: Libraire Letousey et Ane, 1936).

36 “as a part of society”

incomparably richer than all our philosophical conceptions. “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy,” says Shakespeare’s character.³⁷ Leibniz said: “Philosophical systems are true in what they affirm and false in what they deny.” But Leibniz said so as an eclectic. Thomism is not eclecticism, since it has its necessary and universal directive principles: above all, that of the division of being into potentiality and actuality and of the primacy of actuality, which always obliges it to trace back to pure Actuality, beginning and end of all things.

Part II.

The doctrine of actuality and potentiality and its applications according to St. Thomas

I would like in this relation to note briefly how the well-understood doctrine of potentiality and actuality is like the soul of all the philosophy of Aristotle and St. Thomas, which is but radically destroyed if potentiality is conceived as imperfect actuality, as it is found in some scholastics and in Leibniz.

Indeed, several authors, more or less attentive to this difference, give an almost nominal definition of actuality and potentiality, and they suggest by these definitions the mutual relations and commonly received axioms in Scholasticism, but they do not sufficiently determine with Aristotle himself how it is necessary to admit between nothing and determinate being the reality of potentiality and how potentiality is distinguished from privation, from simple possibility or, on the contrary, from imperfect actuality.

Now it is precisely this that needs, above all, to be noted, because then the value of the application of this doctrine is evident (1) *in the order of being according to the viam ascensus*¹ *from sensible things to God*; (2) *in the same order of being, according to the viam descensus*;² (3) *in the order of operating according to either viam.*

37 Hamlet in *Hamlet*, act I scene V

1 “ascending way”

2 “descending way”

I. What is potentiality and why must it necessarily be really distinct from actuality?

According to Aristotle, as is evident from *Physics* I. I and II and from *Metaphysics* I. I, V, and IX, the real distinction between potentiality and actuality is absolutely necessary to reconcile the *change* and *plurality* of sensible beings, given from experience, with the principle of non-contradiction or of identity: “being is being, and non-being is non-being,” or “being is not non-being, nor is something possible midway between nothing and being.”

That this is the thought of Aristotle results clearly from the solution that he gives to the two arguments with which Parmenides, by force of the principle of identity or of non-contradiction, claims to deny every change and multiplicity: 1°) Being does not come from being because it is already being, and from nothing comes nothing; thus absolutely nothing can change. 2°) Being cannot be limited, differentiated, or multiplied by itself, as is clear, but neither by another, because outside of being or existence there is only non-being, and non-being is nothing; thus being remains one, undivided, and unique. Spinoza will say: a single substance exists and another cannot in any way be produced.

Plato has resolved these two arguments of Parmenides with the distinction between being and *non-being existing in a certain way*, by which being is limited.³

Aristotle resolves them with much more profoundly and greater clarity with the distinction between actuality and potentiality, as is apparent from *Physics* I. I c. 8 and *Metaphysics* I. I, c. 5; I. IX, l. IX.

Being, in fact, does not come from being in actuality, because it is already being; a statue is not made out of a statue; but what becomes was first in potentiality and comes from a being in potentiality—the statue is made out of the wood in which it was first in potentiality; it comes from it as from a determinable and mutable subject.

The *determinable* or mutable, as such, from which the statue comes:

3 Cf. Plato, *Sophista*, 241 d, 257 a, 259 e.

1. is not *nothing*, because *ex nihilo nihil fit*,⁴ as Parmenides correctly says;
2. nor is it *non-being*, i.e., the negation or the privation of the statue to be made, because this negation *per se* is nothing and *ex nihilo per se nihil fit*,⁵ moreover, this negation is similarly in the air or water from which the statue cannot come;
3. it is not the *essence of the wood*, according to which the wood is already what it is in actuality; nor is it the *actual shape* of the wood that needs to be transformed, because *ex ente iam in actu nihil fit*,⁶
4. it is not the *imperfect shape* of the statue to be made, i.e., the *imperfect actuality*, which would already not be the simply determinable, but the motion to the statue, the shape of the same *in fieri*.⁷

But the *determinable* from which the statue comes is, in the wood, *a certain real capacity* to receive the form of the statue, a capacity that does not exist in the water or air, and which is called “real potentiality for the statue” or “statue in potentiality.”

This is the analysis Aristotle did in book I of the *Physics*. Plato spoke only of a “non-being existing in some way” that, as it seems, he confused at times with privation, at times with possibility, sometimes, on the contrary, with imperfect actuality: for this reason the thought of Plato regarding matter and non-being remains very obscure.

St. Thomas completes the Aristotelian notion of real passive potentiality, distinguishing it better from *simple possibility*, which is required and sufficient for *creation* from nothing but is not sufficient for *change*; change, in fact, different than creation, presupposes a determinable or mutable subject; moreover, creation *ex nulla præsупposita potentia reali*⁸ is proper only to Almighty God, and not from the human sculptor (S. Th. I^a q. 45 aa. 1, 2, 5; III q. 75 a. 8).

So, against Parmenides, *becoming* or change itself is splendidly explained: *aliquid fit non ex ente in actu sed ex ente in*

4 “Out of nothing, nothing is.”

5 “Out of nothing *per se*, nothing is.”

6 “From being already in actuality, nothing can be.”

7 “in becoming”

8 “out of no presupposed real potentiality”

potentia.⁹ The *multiplication* of the form or actuality, against the same Parmenides, is also explained. When, in fact, that which was in potentiality passes to actuality, the potentiality rests again under that actuality, because the wood that already possess the form of a statue can lose it and receive a new form. As long as the form of the statue rests in the wood, it is received and limited by it, and this form itself, numerically one, cannot be more than participatory, however much a similar form can be produced in another part of the matter at all.

So, the *multiplication of form*—e.g., the form of Apollo—is possible, inasmuch as this form or shape can be received, and it certainly is in various secondary matter, as in wood, clay, marble, etc., and thereby it is indefinitely participatory.

From all this the truth of this principle is already clear, at least in the order of sensible things: *actuality, as perfection, is not potentiality* or the capacity for perfection, *and it is limited and multiplied only by the potentiality* really distinct from it.

From this principle innumerable conclusions result as much in the order of being as in that of action, and as much *in the analytic or ascendant way (in via inventionis¹⁰)* as in the *synthetic or descendant way (in via iudicii¹¹)* from God to creatures (I q. 79, a. 9).

But all these consequences would be destroyed if potentiality were poorly understood as imperfect actuality. Let us look at the principles.

II. Applications in the Order of Being According to the Ascendant Way

1°) *Matter is not Form, but it is really distinguished from it.*

The principle above that “actuality is limited by potentiality” acquires greater clarity and profundity if substantial change is considered, e.g. the decomposition of an animal, a lion, of which remains only the ashes without any life, or the nutritive assimilation by which a food, also not alive, is substantially transformed into the living body of a man (cf. Aristotle

9 “Something is made not out of being in actuality but out of being in potentiality.”

10 “in the way discovery”

11 “in the way of judgment (or resolution)”

Generation and Corruption).

It is clear that in these substantial changes, the presence of *pure potentiality* is required, i.e., of a determinable and in no way determined subject only, otherwise it would already be a substance; it would already have its first substantial actuality and thus the change would only be accidental, not substantial.

And this potentiality or pure capacity for substantial form is not nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*); it is the simple *privation* of the form to come; it is not a *something* of substance already determined, “*non est quid, nec quale, nec quantum, nec aliquid huiusmodi*;”¹² it is not *the new incipient form*, or the imperfect actuality—as wood insofar as it is mutable, *ex quo fit statua*,¹³ is not the imperfect statue that it begins to be only while it is sculpted—; for motion is imperfect actuality, but not the real, necessary potentiality because motion is possible. This capacity of the substantial form is thus a certain *reality*, a *real potentiality*, which IS NOT the form, for it is opposed to it as the determinable is to the determined; rather it can be separated from the substantial form that possesses and receives another form, as the corruption of one being is the generation of another (*corruption unius est generatio alterius*). Thus, it is evident that first matter is really distinct from substantial form.

So from the distinction between potentiality and actuality, to explain substantial change, the real distinction between first matter and form results. Similarly, the multiplication of the substantial form is explained, as matter remains under the form that it received and can lose; so, e.g., the substantial form of a lion is indefinitely participable in matter, which limits and narrows it to the constitution of the generated and corruptible composite.

All this we find already expressed by Aristotle in the first two books of the *Physics*: the truth of the principle that *actuality is limited and multiplied by the potentiality*, at least in the order of sensible things, results with admirable clarity.

St. Thomas, in his turn, considered but more profoundly the same principle, according to metaphysical abstraction, to resolve

12 “It is not a ‘what,’ nor a ‘how,’ nor a ‘how much,’ nor anything of that sort.”

13 “out of which a statue is made”

the most universal problem of *change* and *plurality* of all finite, even spiritual, beings, and that of the infinitude of God essentially distinct from the world.

2°) *The created or finite essence is not its own actuality of existence; it is really distinguished from this.*

The Aristotelian principle that “*the form is not limited if not by the matter*” is examined by Saint Thomas not only in the physical order but also in the metaphysical order, i.e., according to the third level of abstraction. He notes that form is limited not precisely and exactly inasmuch as it is a form of the sensible order, but inasmuch as it is *actuality* or *perfection* that of itself is not limited and still is limited due to the *capacity for perfection* or by the matter, in the sense that this is *potentiality*. Speaking thus in the most universal way in the sensible and supra-sensible orders, it must be said simply: “*Actus utpote perfectio, non limitatur nisi per potentiam, quae est capacitas perfectionis.*”¹⁴ Now, St. Thomas adds, “*existence is actuality,*” i.e., it is “the most excellent form of all;”¹⁵ it is “the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except so far as it exists. Hence existence is what actuates all things, even their forms. Therefore it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received; but rather as the received to the receiver. When therefore I speak of the existence of man, or horse, or anything else, existence is considered a formal principle, and as something received; and not as that which exists.”¹⁶

But since being is *per se* unlimited actuality, it is *de facto* limited only by the real potentiality by which it is received, i.e., by the finite essence, which is the capacity to exist. “Since therefore the divine being is not a being received in anything, but

14 “Actuality as it is perfection is not limited except by potentiality, which is the capacity for perfection.”

15 I, q. 7, a. 1: “maxime formale omnium”

16 I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3: “ipsum esse est perfectissimum omnium, comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi in quantum est, unde ipsum esse est actualitas omnium rerum, et etiam ipsarum formarum. Unde non comparatur ad alia sicut recipiens ad receptum, sed magis sicut receptum ad recipiens. Cum enim dico esse hominis, vel equi, vel cuiuscumque alterius, ipsum esse consideratur ut formale et receptum, non autem ut illud cui competit esse.”

He is His own subsistent being, it is clear that God Himself is infinite and perfect”¹⁷ hence “He is distinguished from all other beings.”¹⁸

Some other philosophers, however, not having an exact conception of potentiality, the capacity for perfection, either negate the principle “*actus non limitatur nisi per potentiam in qua recipitur*,”¹⁹ or at least do not admit this principle and say that actuality can be limited by itself or by the agent that produces it.²⁰

Is this principle provable? Certainly not directly or with an illative procedure, because it is not a principle known *per se*, supposing the explanation of the terms potentiality and actuality.²¹

One can still propose this explanation of terms under the form of explicative discourse together with an indirect demonstration or demonstration *ad absurdum*.²² The following is how:

Actuality, as *per se* unlimited perfection in its order (e.g., existing, wisdom, love), can only be limited by a principle outside of actuality, but having with it an intrinsic proportion for limiting it.

Now, this extraneous principle, having this intrinsic proportion to actuality for limiting it, can only be potentiality or the real capacity for perfection. Thus actuality, as perfection, is limited only by potentiality, which is the real capacity for perfection.

The *Major* is clear because if actuality—e.g., of existing—is *de facto* limited, it is not limited by its own powers, not carrying *per se* any limitation, as in being, wisdom, love; therefore, it must

17 I, q. 7, a. 1: “Cum igitur esse divinum non sit esse receptum in aliquo, sed ipse sit suum esse subsistens, ut supra ostensum est; manifestum est quod ipse Deus sit infinitus et perfectus.”

18 *Ibid.*, ad 3: “distinguitur ab omnibus aliis”

19 “Actuality is only limited by the potentiality in which it is received.”

20 Suárez, *Disp. Met.* 30, *sect.* 2, *n.* 18 *et sq.* *Disp. Met.*, *sect.* 31, *n.* 14 *sq.* *De Angelis l. I^o, cap.* 12-15.

21 Guido Mattussi, S.J. *Le XXIX Tesi della Filosofia di S. Tommaso d’Aquino approvate della S. Congregazione degli studi*, Roma 1917, p. 1-33.

22 “To the point of absurdity; so as to demonstrate that the consequence of making a particular assumption is something absurd or contradictory” {“Ad Absurdum, Adv. and Adj.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/247781>.}

be limited by something else. And this something else must have an *intrinsic proportion* to actuality for limiting it, otherwise it would not constitute something *intrinsically* limited, as a plant or man.

The *Minor* is also clear: the intrinsic principle proportioned to actuality for limiting it can only be the potentiality or capacity for perfection, e.g., the essence of the plant. It is not in fact sufficient to return to the agent; being an *extrinsic* cause, it does not have an *intrinsic* proportion to actuality for limiting it, i.e., for constituting something intrinsically limited. Moreover, the agent can only cause what has *reason of being caused*, so it is proper for the reason of being caused that its essence be really distinct from its existence: “It is against the nature of a made thing for its essence to be its existence; because subsisting being is not a created being,” as St. Thomas says in I. q.7, a. 2, ad 1.²³

Otherwise, the argument of Parmenides, renewed by Spinoza, would remain unsolvable, i.e.: being cannot be limited, diversified, multiplied by itself, but only by another; so, outside of being there is nothing.

We respond: other than being there is the real capacity for being that limits the being.

This capacity that delimits actuality evidently is not nothing, nor privation (of actuality), nor imperfect actuality, but potentiality *really distinct* from being, in the same way that mutable wood remains really under the shape of a statue from which it is distinguished, as first matter is really distinguished from substantial form that it can admit.

As, in fact, matter, antecedently to our intellectual consideration, is *not* form, but is opposed to it, as the perfectible is to the perfected, so essence or the capacity that limits the existence is not its own proper existence; *it does not contain existence in its formal reason* (the essence of a plant does not contain its existence as an essential predicate), and, in turn, the essence does not pertain to the formal reason of the existence, since the existence can be limited in another way or not be limited at all. Rather, the finite essence and existence oppose each other as the perfectible to what perfects it, as the determinable to

23 “est contra rationem facti, quod essentia rei sit ipsum esse eius, quia esse subsistens non est esse creatum”

what determines it, as what limits to the limited.²⁴

Thus, supposing the objectivity of our reason, if the following proposition, “the essence of this plant *is not its existence*,” is true, the essence and existence are really distinguished before intellectual consideration. Neither the senses nor the imagination can perceive this real distinction, but only the intellect that is exactly distinguished from it, because *intus legit*.²⁵

Already a great and radical difference appears between the doctrine of St. Thomas and that of those who say that being is most simple and that in any way it exists, it is *being in actuality*, even if it is perhaps in potentiality to another; thereby first matter is already at least in actuality, nor is it really distinguished from its proper essence. Being—the perfection of existence—is limited, they say, not by the potentiality in which it is received, but either by itself or *perhaps by the agent*.²⁶

Such a solution does not transcend the physical order (of the physical production considered materially); it does not attain to the metaphysical order, in which the question still remains: and hence the argument of Parmenides, renewed by Spinoza, against the plurality of beings. Instead, St. Thomas resolves it when he says that “It is against the nature of a made thing for its essence to be its existence;”²⁷ likewise, existence is limited by essence that has an intrinsic proportion for limiting it, while the agent is an extrinsic cause. Wherefore, St. Thomas says: “God at the same time gives being and produces what receives being” (*de Pot.* q. 3, a. 1, ad 17).²⁸

According to Thomists the divergence between the two conceptions is again more radical because of the *notion of being* itself, which is placed at the beginning of Ontology, before the

24 And even the rapport between essence and existence is that of genus and specific difference, which constitute a single essence expressed with a single concept, as animalness and rationality constitute humanity. Essence and existence are instead two objectively irreducible concepts between themselves and irreducible to a third, since in each created being the existence is a non-essential but contingent predicate.

25 “it reads within”

26 Cf. Suárez, *Disp. Met.* 15, sect. 9; *Disp. Met.* 30, 31

27 I, q. 7, a. 2, ad 1: “est contra rationem facti, quod essentia rei sit ipsum esse eius”

28 “Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit”

divisions of being are examined.²⁹

For St. Thomas *being is not univocal, but analogical*, otherwise it would not be able to be diversified; in fact, what is univocal, like genus, is diversified by extrinsic differences, so outside of being there is nothing that can constitute the difference. Wherefore, St. Thomas said in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* I. 1, c. 5, lect. IX: “they (Parmenides and his disciples) were mistaken in this matter, because they used being as if it were *one in intelligible structure and in nature*, like the nature of any genus. But this is impossible. For being is not a genus but is predicated of different things in many ways.”³⁰

Scotus affirms that being is univocal, and so he returns in a certain way to the doctrine of Parmenides. Suárez, seeking a middle way between St. Thomas and Scotus, maintains that the objective concept of being is *perfectly one*, hence being, however it exists, is being in actuality;³¹ viz. pure potentiality is not conceivable; it would be outside of being, as is nothing. Thus, these arguments remain unsolvable, and the way of Aristotle for resolving the arguments of Parmenides is abandoned.

From this divergence on the fundamental notion of being at the beginning of all Ontology—at the beginning, i.e., of the way of discovery ascending to God—there follows another at the summit of this ascent. For Saint Thomas the supreme truth of Christian philosophy, truth that is a marvelous confirmation of the analogy of being, is this: *only in God are the essence and existence the same thing* (I q. 3, a. 4).

This openly contradicts those who reject the real distinction between created essence and being.

According to the Thomist, then, this supreme truth of Christian philosophy, as it is the arrival point of the way of discovery ascending to God, so it is the foundation of the way of deduction according to which we judge temporal things by

29 Thus *Reginaldus O.P.*, in his work *Doctrinæ D. Thomæ tria principia*, put first the principle that *Being is transcendent and analogical*; secondly, that *God is pure Actuality*; and, thirdly, that the *Absolute is specified by itself, the relative by another*.

30 “decipiebantur, quia utebantur ente quasi una ratione et una natura sicut est natura alicuius generis; hoc enim est impossibile. Ens enim non est genus, sed multipliciter dicitur de diversis.”

31 Cf. *Suárez*, *Disp. Met.* 15, sect. 9; *Disp. Met.* 30 et 31

already-known eternal things (I q. 79, a. 9).

Therefore, it will not be futile to note the principle differences that are deduced from this fundamental divergence, in the order of being as in that of operation. Some of these are already contained in the XXIV theses of the doctrine of St. Thomas approved by the Sacred Congregation of Studies.³²

III. Applications in the order of being according to the descendant way

1. *Only God, pure Actuality, is His existence, being per se subsistent and not received into potentiality, hence He alone is unlimited or infinite in perfection* (I, q. 3, a. 4; q. 7, a. 1). Thereby God is essentially and really distinct from any creature, from any human or angelic person.

The *person*, in fact—rather, the *personality* itself of Peter or Michael the Archangel—antecedently to the consideration of our mind, *is not its existence*, but only what is capable of existing or subsisting, for which it competes to exist in itself and not in another, rather than to exist separately *per se*. To exist, in fact, is the ultimate actuality which actualizes the created person, which would not exist.

The created person contains in its essential concept its own formal constitution, i.e., the personality; on the contrary, it does not contain its own existence. So, it is mistaken to say that “the subsistence (or personality) is the complement of the existence,”³³ or even that the created personality is identified with its own existence. In truth, neither the person nor the personality of Peter or Michael the Archangel is their existence; therefore, it is really distinguished from it.³⁴

32 Appendix 1

33 Suárez, Disp. Met. 31, sect. 13.

34 St. Thomas says (III q. 17, a. 2, ad 2): “Existence follows the person inasmuch as the person is what possesses existence” [«Esse personam consequitur tanquam habentem esse»] therefore, existence does not formally constitute the person. He also says in *C. Gentes* II. c. 51: “in created intellectual substances, the existence differs from what it is” [«in substantiis intellectualibus creatis differt esse et quod est»], viz., the existence and supposit or person. And again in *Quodl.* II, a. 4, ad 2m: “existence does not pertain to the reason of the (created) supposit” [«ipsium esse non est de ratione suppositi (creati)»].

If the real distinction between created essence and existence, or between the created person—rather, the personality—and existence is denied, the ultimate reason St. Thomas assigns for the infinitude of God and for His distinction from the world is also denied. In other words, if it is affirmed that “in creatures existence is the essence itself and substance,” what will be the response to the doctrine of Spinoza according to which *existing pertains to the nature of the substance* and thus there can be only one substance and one being *per se* subsistent, as Parmenides claimed?³⁵

2. *Only God*, pure Actuality, because it is His existence itself and ultimately actuality, *cannot have any accidents*; nothing can be added to Him (I q. 3, a. 6). Thus, He is His understanding, His willing, His acting. Against any pantheism, no modality can be added to God, because He is not ulteriorly determinable. The being itself is not received, nor can it receive anything. Similarly, it should be said of the creature, if its essence be not really distinguished from its existence: it would, in fact, be its being, i.e., the ultimate actuality.

But because *a creature is not its own existence*, but is really distinguished from it, it *can receive accidents*; it is ulteriorly actualizable (cf. the 5th thesis of the doctrine of St. Thomas³⁶). Moreover, each created substance needs an *operative potentiality* to act; nothing is immediately capable of operating: there cannot be a latent cognition in the essence itself of the soul. As, indeed, a creature is not its being, so neither is it its acting, as action follows being, because *being* and *acting* are two really distinct acts between themselves, to which are ordered two potential correlatives, distinct between themselves, i.e., the essence that is ordered to being and the operative potentiality ordered to operation: “Each proper actuality responds to its proper potentiality” (cf. I q. 52, a. 1, 2 and 3: and the 5th thesis of the doctrine of St. Thomas. Suárez, Disp. Met. 5, sect. 7, 8, 9).

Even if one can prove with reason alone the real distinction not only between created substance and operative potentiality but also between corporal substance and *quantity*, it is not the same

35 Cf. N. DEL PRADO, O.P. *De Veritate Fundamentali philosophiæ christianæ*, Freiburg (Switzerland) 1911, p. 199

36 in Appendix 1

for a body to be substance and to be quantity (extended). Substance, in fact, itself *per se* indivisible, is outside of the order of dimension; quantity, however, what gives to substance the ability to be extended, is really distinct from substance and thus is a true and proper accident (cf. the 10th thesis). Therefore, in the Eucharist the quantity of the bread can remain without its substance, and Christ can in this Sacrament be present according to the proper mode of the substance and not according to place (S. Th. III, q. 75). The substance of bread or of the human body is entirely in all its extension, and entirely in all the parts of this extension.

3. One can similarly demonstrably prove the *truth of creation* from the fact that the real composition of essence and existence pertains to the reason itself of caused being. Cf. I q. 44, a. 1: “God is the essentially self-subsisting Being and... the subsisting being must be one... Therefore all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation”³⁷ and that God causes all their being.

Those who deny the real distinction between created essence and existence need to follow another path to demonstrate the truth of creation, the path, i.e., of induction, showing the contingency of things, as does Suárez (Disp. Met. 20, sect. 1). But if the contingency of bodies is known through experience, because they are generated and corrupted, it is very difficult to demonstrate inductively that even the angels are made and created and do not exist *per se* themselves *ab æterno*.³⁸ How can this be demonstrably proven if the real distinction in them between essence and existence is denied? If their essence is their existence? (Cf. Del Prado, *De Veritate fundamentali*, p. 203.) From what was said above, it is also clear that “nothing is (absolutely) impossible without... in itself implying a contradiction” (*De Potentia*, q. 6, a. 1 ad 11):³⁹ to deny the principle that “nothing comes from nothing” or that “nothing is produced without a cause” would be like saying that “without any cause anything can be produced,” which is absurd. The

37 “Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens...[et] esse subsistens non potest esse nisi unum. Relinquitur ergo quod omnia alia a Deo non sint suum esse, sed participant esse.”

38 “from eternity”

39 “nihil est impossibile...nisi quod est contra rei formalem rationem”

immediate evidence of the principle of causality is *positive* and so it is stronger than the demonstration of it by contradiction,⁴⁰ which is only indirect and quasi-negative, inasmuch as it impedes the denial in virtue of the absurd conclusion.

4. — *Form not received in matter cannot be multiplied* and it remains unique in its species: thus there cannot be two angels of the same species (cf. I, q. 50, a. 4).

5. — *The rational soul is united in such a way to the body as being its true and unique substantial form*: otherwise, the *substantial unity* (*unum per se*) of the human composite, which would result instead as an *accidental unity* (*unum per accidens*), would be destroyed—as it happens with quantity in material substance.

From the union of two beings already constituted in actuality, an essential unity cannot result; this is given only by the union of the potentiality with the proper correlative actuality (I q. 76, a. 4). If the rational soul were not the *only* substantial form of the body, it would presuppose another—in the function of substantial form—and it would be a purely accidental form. This argument requires a metaphysical necessity according to the principles of St. Thomas, not according to the above-mentioned opposing principles.

Furthermore, it is the rational soul which communicates to the body its actuality of existence for which it is: the soul is, in fact, capable of subsisting and operating without intrinsic dependence on the body. There is, therefore, a *single substantial actuality of existence* in man, not two. So, in the human *essence*, a composition—i.e., of matter and form—results, but not in the existence of the man: he who cannot admit this denies the real distinction between created essence and existence (cf. the 16th thesis of the doctrine of St. Thomas).

6. At the bottom of man, in each substantial composite of matter and form, neither the matter nor the form *per se* possesses existence, and nor can one properly say that they are produced or corrupted. Matter, in fact, is not *that which* (*id quod*) is, but *that by which* (*id quo*) something is material; similarly, form is not *that which* is, but *that by which* something is placed in a certain species. Only the composite is *that which* is: in it there is thus a

40 *demonstratio per absurdum*

single substantial actuality of existence that actualizes both the matter and the form. The composition thus is in the essence, not in the existence: those who do not admit the real distinction between essence and existence (cf. the 9th thesis) deny this.

7. *The principle of individuation is matter* “*quantitate signata*,” or the matter capable of this determinate quantity and not another (cf. the 11th thesis). It is false to say that each reality is individuated by itself:⁴¹ each form, then—e.g., that of a lion—would be *that which (id quod)* is and would be individuated by itself; it could not be multiplied; there could not be more lions of the same species. Again, the arguments of Parmenides against the plurality of beings would be unsolvable.

8. *First matter cannot exist without form*: otherwise “it would exist actually, yet without actually, which is a contradiction in terms” (I q. 66, a. 1).⁴² This thesis of Aristotle and St. Thomas is denied by those who do not admit the real distinction between essence and existence: for them, first matter has its own existence; it is not pure potentiality, but imperfect actuality.

9. “Matter in itself can neither exist, nor be known” I, q. 15, a. 3, ad 3m.⁴³ There is, rather, in God the idea of matter, but this idea is “not apart from the idea of the composite” (*ibid.*).⁴⁴

What is not in actuality—what is not determined by form—is, in fact, not intelligible. Our intellectual understanding, whose object is administered by sensible things, needs to occur *by abstraction* from matter: so the agent intellect is required. Another logical consequence is that *our intellect cannot directly understand the material singular*, but only indirectly. The material individual is “unexplainable” not in the sense that it be above intelligibility, like God, but below. Cf. I q. 86, a. 1 and the 19th and 20th theses of St. Thomas.

The opposing proposition, that “our intellect directly understands the material singular,” follows logically from that conception according to which potentiality is considered as imperfect actuality.⁴⁵

41 Suárez, *Disp. Met.* 5, sect. 3 et 4.

42 “Dicere igitur materiam praecedere sine forma, est dicere ens actu sine actu, quod implicat contradictionem.”

43 “materia secundum se neque esse habet, neque cognoscibilis est”

44 “non tamen aliam ab idea compositi”

45 SUÁREZ, *Disp. Met.* 6, sect. 5 et 6; *Disp. Met.* 35 sect. 2, 3, 4, *De Anima*, 1.

10. *Instead, the form of sensible being, not being matter, is per se and directly intelligible in potentiality; there is not heterogeneity between the form of the sensible thing and the intellect, so that it can be both in the matter (as objective concept, actual idea, regulating, e.g., the development of the embryo) and in the intellect (as formal concept). Cf. I q. 85, a. 1.*

11. Consequently, *immateriality is the root of intelligibility and intellectuality* (I q. 14, a. 1), and the degree of understanding and intellectuality is in direct relation with the degree of independence from matter. The senses, already possessing a certain spirituality, can intentionally become the sensible objects (I. q. 78, a. 3).

Hence, the distinction of the speculative sciences according to the three levels of abstraction is deduced. Moreover, one understands how the Angels are distinct and subordinated among themselves, according to which they more or less approach the supreme immateriality of God, who alone is His understanding as He alone is His being (cf. the 18th thesis).

The objectivity of our understanding, on the one hand, is also defended against subjective idealism: the objective concept in its content is really in sensible things, from which our abstract understanding and first apprehension of intelligible being under the veil of the sensible is born; on the other hand, against materialism, the irreducibility of the spirit to matter is defended, because already the form itself of the sensible thing is not reducible to matter (cf. I, q. 75, a. 1, 2 and 5; q. 85, a. 1, and the 18th thesis).

Finally, the distinction between 1. *being of reason or logic*, 2. *metaphysical being* considered in the third level of abstraction and 3. *physical being*, that studied by physics in the first level of abstraction, clearly results.

If the real distinction between created essence and existence is denied, the distinction between *that which is (id quod est)* and *that by which the thing is (id quo aliquid est)* no longer holds, viz., between the concrete physical being and the metaphysical principles by which it results (1st and 9th theses). The object of metaphysics would reduce to something physical or, contrarily, to something purely logical and no longer ontological.

4, c. 3, de cognitione singularium

IV. Applications in the Order of Operation According to Both the Ways, Analytic and Synthetic

1. *The faculties and habits are specified not by themselves, but by the object formed by the act to which they are essentially ordered* (cf. I, q. 77, a. 3; I-II, q. 54, a. 2).

Wherefore, the agent or extrinsic efficient cause cannot specify the habits independently of their formal object. Thus St. Thomas writes II-II, q. 5, a. 3: “the species of every habit depends on the formal aspect of the object, without which the species of the habit cannot remain.”⁴⁶

2. Hence, *the diverse faculties of the soul are really distinguished from it and from each other*. Cf. I q. 77 a. 1, 2, 3, 4. The internal senses can, rather, always become more perfect in their order, but never reach the formal object of our intellect, against sensualism or empiricism.

The real distinction between the agent intellect and the possible intellect is similarly proved, “because as regards the same object, the active power which makes the object to be in actuality must be distinct from the passive power, which is moved by the object existing in actuality.” I q. 79, a. 7.⁴⁷

3. *In the production of the act of cognition, the cognitive faculty and the impressed species that determine it* are not two partial causes (i.e., two acts by which an accidental unity would result), but *two total causes* (I, q. 56, a. 1); rather, one needs to say that *the knower and the known in the act of knowing form a unity more strict than matter and form*, since the knower, because of its immateriality, intentionally becomes the known object itself, while matter does not become form (cf. I q. 14, a. 1; Cajetan, *ibid.*; for the opposite view: Scotus I, D. III; q. 7, n. 38 and q. 8; Suárez, Tr. De divina substantia I. II c. 12, n. 7 sq.).

Thus, this agreement between the intellect and the intelligible species is established: however much the intellect is superior in the level of intellection, so much fewer are the necessary species

46 “species cuiuslibet habitus dependet ex formali ratione obiecti, qua sublata, species habitus remanere non potest”

47 “quia respectu eiusdem obiecti, aliud principium oportet esse potentiam activam, quæ facit obiectum esse in actu; et aliud potentiam passivam, quæ movetur ab obiecto in actu existente”

for understanding the totality of the intelligible (I, q. 55, a. 3).

4. Similarly, *in the production of free will, the intellect and will concur*, not as two partial causes—like two that pull the same boat—, but *as two complete causes*, and therefore any choice whatsoever is only made with the last practical judgment (cf. the 21st thesis; and for the opposite view, Suárez Disp. Met. 19 sect. 6).

5. *The principle that “everything that is moved is moved by another”*⁴⁸ immediately results from the distinction between potentiality and actuality: nothing, in fact, can pass from potentiality to actuality except in virtue of a being in actuality—of a being, i.e., that possess in itself or in counterpart what is to be produced. This principle is for St. Thomas the foundation of the first way for demonstrating the existence of God. For Suárez, however, this principle remains uncertain “because,” he himself says, “there are many beings that, because of *virtual actuality*, seem to be moved and pass to *formal actuality*, as one can see in the will...” (Disp. Met. 29, sect. 1).⁴⁹

But if our will is not its act of willing, as is the divine will, then it is only in *potentiality* to it and thus it cannot pass to it without a divine motion: the contrary would imply that more comes from less, the more perfect from the less perfect, against the evidence of the principle of causality (cf. I q. 15 a. 4 and 5). The proofs of the existence of God would lose their value.

6. *In the series of efficient, actually existing, and necessarily subordinate causes* (e.g., a ship is supported by the ocean, the ocean by the earth, the earth by the sun, the sun from a greater center; a series in which each subordinate cause depends in its causality on the preceding), *one cannot proceed to infinity* because a cause, subordinated in its causality to a higher cause, only moves if, in turn, it is moved by something else: “But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false.”⁵⁰ I

48 “omne quod movetur ab alio movetur”

49 “multa sunt quae per *actum virtualem* videntur sese movere et reducere ad *actum formalem*, ut in appetitu seu voluntate videre licet”

50 “Sed si procedatur in infinitum in causis efficientibus, non erit prima causa efficiens, et sic non erit nec effectus ultimus, nec causæ efficientes mediæ, quod patet esse falsum.”

q. 2, a. 3, 2nd way.⁵¹

Suárez, however, in conformity with his principles, says: “In the series of *per se* subordinated [efficient] causes, it is not repugnant that an infinite multitude of causes, given that it exists, acts simultaneously.”⁵² The reason is that in subordinated causes, according to Suárez, the first cause is not the cause of the activity of the successive cause and so on until it reaches the last effect, but they all operate not one on the other but together *through a simultaneous concurrence* for the production of the effect: they operate as partial, coordinated, not-totally-subordinated causes, as if each created cause were its own being and its own operation.

For St. Thomas, on the contrary, *no created cause is its own being, nor its own operation, and thus nothing can operate without a divine premotion* I q. 105 a. 5: “God operates in each operating being.”⁵³ For St. Thomas, there is a subordination between the created cause and God; for Suárez there is hardly coordination.

7. “Every being, whatever the mode of its being, must be derived from the First Being” I-II, q. 79, a. 2.⁵⁴ This is also true for all the absolutely simple perfections that are found participated in creatures: *Each good depends on the first good, each good determination on the supreme determination of pure Actuality, each action on the supreme action, each intellection on the supreme intellection, each volition on the supreme volition, each freedom on the first freedom, each act of choice on the supreme choice, each order on the supreme order.* Whence Saint Thomas writes: “If God moves the will to anything, it is *incompatible* with this supposition, that the will [at the same time that our will does not will it] be not moved thereto. But it is not *impossible* simply.” I-II q. 10, a. 4 ad 3.⁵⁵ In fact, “The Divine

51 According to St. Thomas, the impossibility of the infinite regress in the series of accidentally subordinated causes is not evident: e.g., a son depends on his father, grandfather, great-grandfather and so on: the past causes, in fact, no longer have any current influence. Cf. I q. 46 a. 2 ad 7.

52 *Disp. Met.*, 21, sect. 2: “In causis *per se* subordinatis non repugnat infinitas causas, si sint, simul operari.”

53 “Deus operatur in omni operante”

54 “Omne...ens, quocumque modo sit, oportet quod derivetur a primo ente”

55 “si Deus movet voluntatem ad aliquid, *impossibile* est huic positioni quod voluntas ad illud non moveatur. Non tamen est impossibile simpliciter.”

will extends not only to the doing of something by the thing which He moves, but also to its being done in a way which is fitting to the nature of that thing. And therefore it would be more repugnant to the Divine motion, for the will to be moved of necessity, which is not fitting to its nature; than for it to be moved *freely*, which is becoming to its nature” *ibid.* ad 1⁵⁶ and I q. 19, a. 8; q. 105, a. 4; I-II q. 112, a. 3.

Sin, or the deficient act *inasmuch as it is deficient*, is not produced by God, but by the defective created cause, *according to the permission of God*, and this permission is ordered to a superior good (I-II q. 79, a. 1 and 2).

As it says in the question *de malo* q. 6 a. 1 ad 3: “*But God moves the will in an unchangeable manner on account of the efficacy of His moving power which cannot fail; but because of the nature of the will moved, which is related indifferently to diverse things, necessity is not induced but liberty remains.*”⁵⁷ Otherwise, God would not be *pure Actuality*; for in Him a passivity for the prevision of possible future events would need to be put, the determination of which would not depend on Him. And, consequently, in the work of salvation, *not everything* would come from God: He would be a true partial, not total, cause; the creature would in some thing act and be determined without dependence on God, as if in some way it were its own acting. But God alone is his being and acting because “*Potentiality and Actuality so divide being that whatsoever exists either is a Pure Actuality, or is necessarily composed of Potentiality and Actuality, as to its primordial and intrinsic principles*” (1st thesis of the doctrine of St. Thomas⁵⁸). If it were not so, we repeat, the arguments of Parmenides and Spinoza against the mutability and plurality of beings would remain

56 “*voluntas divina non solum se extendit ut aliquid fiat per rem quam movet, sed ut etiam eo modo fiat quo congruit naturæ ipsius. Et ideo magis repugnaret divinæ motioni, si voluntas ex necessitate moveretur, quod suæ naturæ non competit; quam si moveretur libere, prout competit suæ naturæ.*”

57 “*Sed Deus movet quidem voluntatem immutabiliter propter efficaciam virtutis moventis, quæ deficere non potest; sed propter naturam voluntatis motæ, quæ indifferenter se habet ad diversa, non inducitur necessitas, sed manet libertas*”

58 in Appendix 1

unsolvable, and either the principle of non-contradiction or the most certain facts of experience would have to be denied, without any hope of reconciliation, and, in the end, either the negation of the mutable world or the immutable God or acosmism⁵⁹ or atheism would logically remain.

8. Finally, *in the supernatural order*, many applications of the doctrine of actuality and potentiality can be highlighted, both in the order of being and in that of operating.

In Christ, e.g., there is a single act of existence through two natures (III q. 17, a. 2), and in the Most Holy Trinity, a single act of existence, as a single divine nature, through the Three Persons: existence, therefore, is not what formally constitutes the personality.

It suffices, with respect to the order of truth and supernatural life, to note that, by force of the aforementioned principles, one can apodictically prove the existence of this order in God.

Faculties are, in fact, specified by the formal object of the essentially ordered act. So, the divine intellect, being its own act of understanding, cannot be of its specific nature itself of the created or creatable intellect: the contrary would be a pantheistic confusion. One must conclude, therefore, that the formal object of the divine intellect cannot be naturally understood by any created or creatable intellect, however much its evolutionary progress extends. Cf. I q. 12, a. 4. Wherefore St. Thomas wrote, C. Gentiles I. I c. 3: “That there are certain truths about God that totally surpass man’s ability appears with the greatest evidence.”⁶⁰

For Scotus, on the contrary—I Sent. d. III, q. 4, 24—according to the univocality of being and to the voluntarism that is proper to him, one cannot from the divine nature itself deduce the demonstration of the real distinction between the order of nature and that of grace because, according to Scotus, this distinction depends on the free divine will: if God had wanted, the light of glory would have been an essential property of the human or angelic nature. If the intellect were so created, it would be of the same nature as God and would need to be both its

59 that the universe does not exist

60 “Quod autem sint aliqua intelligibilia divinorum quæ humanæ rationis penitus excedant ingenium, evidentissime apparet.”

existence and its understanding. Thus, God alone is His own being.

Accordingly, there cannot be in our nature an *innate* desire for the beatific vision, as Scotus says, nor an *active obediential potentiality*, as Suárez says. Such an *innate* desire and a not only passive but *active obediential potentiality* would be something essentially natural as a property of our nature, and something essentially supernatural, as specified by the supernatural formal object. It would be equivalent to confounding the two orders, as if our intellect is specified by God, as is infused faith, and our will by the divine good, as is infused charity. Then, elevating grace would not be absolutely necessary for raising us to the supernatural order because the formally supernatural object, by its active obediential potentiality, could already attain it.

Hence, against the nominalists and their followers, it must be said that the formal object of infused faith cannot be attained by acquired faith, which is in the demons, even if natural good will is added to it; otherwise infused faith would not be necessary, but only useful for more easily believing, as the Pelagians affirm: it would be like an unnecessary ornament, a luxury in the Christian life. Cf. II-II, q. 5, a. 2, 3; q. 6, a. 1.

The same goes for hope, charity, and the infused moral virtues. I-II, q. 63, a. 4.

This is the irradiation, in the doctrine of St. Thomas, of the distinction between potentiality and actuality, an irradiation whose luminous source is in this principle: *real potentiality is not actuality, not even most imperfect actuality, but is essentially ordered to actuality*. From this flows the division of the four causes and all their related consequences, in particular: that it is not possible to proceed to infinity in any order of causes essentially subordinated *per se*, but that at the vertex one is always inevitably facing pure Actuality.

It is the glory of God, therefore, that this doctrine incessantly sings, on the melody of these most universal principles, both in the order of being and in that of operating: without Whom nothing is and nothing can in any way operate. Each determination in the order of being as in that of action depends on the supreme determination of the same pure Actuality: without this dependence, there is nothing but deficient actuality,

insomuch as it is properly deficient, i.e., sin.

Appendix 1: The Twenty-Four Fundamental Theses of Official Catholic Philosophy

Introduction¹

Pedro Lumbreras, O.P., S.T.Lr., Ph.D.

Nobody can deny that the Church has full authority to regulate the teaching of philosophy in Catholic educational institutions. Pope Leo XIII said: “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, about to ascend again into heaven, He 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.”¹ And Pius X: “Let no sincere Catholic dare to doubt the truth of this statement of the Angelic Doctor: ‘The regulation of studies belongs chiefly to the authority of the Apostolic See, by which the universal Church is governed, whose welfare is promoted by general study.’”² The reason is obvious. For since there was given to the Church a certain number of truths spoken certainly by God, but to men and consequently in our human language, it is a duty on the part of the Church, not only to keep intact such a sacred deposit, but also to explain it as much as possible, and to defend it by means of human reason. The Church, therefore, has an absolute and exclusive right to pronounce judgment on the accordance of any system of philosophy with revealed dogma; to determine which of the various philosophical systems is more suitable for the right explanation of this dogma and offers the most solid basis for its safeguard and vindication. “The Apostle warns us,” Leo XIII declares, “that the faithful of Christ are often deceived in mind ‘by philosophy and vain deceit.’ For this reason the supreme

1 Pedro Lumbreras, “The Twenty-Four Fundamental Theses of Official Catholic Philosophy,” *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 23 (March 1923): 588–98.

pastors of the Church have always held that it is part of their office to advance, with all their power, knowledge truly so called; but at the same time to watch with the greatest care that all human learning shall be imparted according to the rule of the Catholic faith. Especially is this true of philosophy, on which the right treatment of other sciences depends in great measure.”³ Furthermore, since the professors in Catholic institutions receive from the Church their right to teach, and teach, consequently, in the name of the Church, the Church is evidently entitled to control their teaching, and to determine for them a line of doctrine to be followed in their teaching. It is Pius X, who addressing the professors of Christian philosophy and sacred theology reminds them that “they did not receive the faculty of teaching to communicate to their pupils their own opinions, but to impart to them the doctrines most approved by the Church.”⁴

There arises then a true and strict obligation for all Catholic teachers, the day the Church fixes a body of philosophical doctrine to be taught by them. Catholic teachers must fulfill such an obligation, and must teach the doctrine the Church wants them to teach, and must teach it with that favor, that praise, that commendation which the Church demands.

It may be objected that this ecclesiastical interference might become an obstacle to further progress, or to any improvement in philosophical sciences. This is not true. If, as intelligent Catholics, we are sure of the divine assistance which guides the Church in all her doctrinal judgments, especially when this doctrinal judgment concerns the universal body of Catholic teachers, then it would seem that this very definite system should give us greater help and confidence in real advancement, since we know how to advance in the right way. Such a system would insure us against false progress, and ratify, assure and encourage true progress. It was in the use of such a power conferred upon the Church and in the accomplishment of his duty to teach the faithful, that Pope Leo XIII, on August 4, 1879, restored the scholastic philosophy. “If anyone look carefully,” he says, “at the bitterness of our times, and if, further, he consider earnestly the cause of those things that are done in public and in private, he will discover with certainty the fruitful root of the evils which are

now overwhelming us, and of the evils which we greatly fear. The cause he will find consists in this—evil teaching about things human and divine—has come forth from the schools of philosophers; it has crept into all orders of the State; and it has been received with the common applause of very many. Now, it has been implanted in man by nature to follow reason as the guide of his actions, and, therefore, if the understanding goes wrong in anything, the will easily follows. Hence it comes about that wicked opinions in the understanding flow into human actions and make them bad.”⁵ And afterwards: “Here and there a certain new kind of philosophy has taken the place of the old doctrine; and because of this, men have not gathered those desirable and wholesome fruits which the Church and civil society itself could have wished. The aggressive innovators of the sixteenth century have not hesitated to philosophize without any regard whatever to the Faith, asking, and conceding in return, the right to invent anything that they can think of, anything that they please. From this it quickly followed, of course, that systems of philosophy were multiplied beyond all reason, and that there sprang up conflicting and diverse opinions even about some of the chief things, which are within human knowledge. From a multiplicity of opinions men very often pass to uncertainty and doubt; while there is no one who does not see how easily their minds glide from doubt into error.”⁶

Such a deplorable condition was not the exclusive lot of non-Catholic students of philosophy. For the same Pope adds: “But, since man is drawn by imitation, we have seen these novelties lay hold of the minds of some Catholic philosophers, who, undervaluing the inheritance of ancient wisdom, have chosen rather to invent new things than to extend and perfect the old by new truths, and that certainly with unwise counsel, and not without loss to science; for such a manifold kind of doctrine has only a shifting foundation, resting as it does on the authority and will of individual teachers. For this reason it does not make philosophy firm and strong and solid, like the old philosophy, but, on the contrary, makes it weak and shallow.”⁷

As the only remedy, the Roman Pontiff desires the scholastic philosophy to be implanted everywhere. “The Doctors of the

Middle Ages,” he says, “whom we call scholastics, set themselves to do a work of very great magnitude. There are rich and fruitful crops of doctrine scattered everywhere in the mighty volumes of the holy Fathers. The aim of the scholastics was to gather these together diligently, and to store them up, as it were, in one place, for the use and convenience of those that come after.”⁸ And, having quoted the authority of Sixtus V, who said that God had enriched and strengthened His Church by the founding of scholastic theology, whose study must always be of great assistance, “whether it be for the right understanding and interpretation of Scripture, or for reading and expounding the Fathers with greater safety and profit, or for laying bare and answering different errors and heresies,” Leo XIII expresses himself in these terms: “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. For the noble endowments which make the scholastic theology so formidable to the enemies of truth—to wit, as the same Pontiff adds, that ready and close coherence of cause and effect, that order and array as of a disciplined army in battle, those clear definitions and distinctions, by which light is distinguished from darkness, the true from the false, expose and strip naked, as it were, the falsehoods of heretics wrapped around by a cloud of subterfuges and fallacies —those noble and admirable endowments, We say, are only to be found in a right use of that philosophy which the scholastic teachers have been accustomed carefully and prudently to make use of even in theological disputations. Moreover, since it is the proper and special office of the scholastic theologians to bind together by the fastest chain human and divine science, surely 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.”⁹

The warning of Pope Leo XIII was not sufficiently heeded. And years after, his successor, Pope Pius X, was obliged to condemn an error which had spread not only among the Church’s open enemies, but among many who belonged to the Catholic laity, and, what is far more lamentable still, to the ranks of the priesthood itself, who lacked, as the Pope testifies, the firm

protection of philosophy and theology. This error is known under the name of Modernism.

Now, one of the demands of the Modernists was the “reform of philosophy, especially in the seminaries: the scholastic philosophy is to be relegated to the history of philosophy among obsolete systems, and the young men are to be taught modern philosophy which alone is true and suited to the times in which we live.”¹⁰

But Pius X, a man of our days, living in our own century, and conscious of present progress, not less than of present evils, condemned such a tendency, as a Modernistic one. And coming to the remedies to be applied to such a critical situation he says: “In the first place, with regard to studies, We will and ordain that scholastic philosophy be made the basis of the sacred sciences.”¹¹

Scholastic philosophy, however, is a very large name. For there were many who strove in the Middle Ages for the establishment of a rational philosophy in conformity with dogma and with a view of affording assistance to the theological studies. Since then we have had several systems of philosophy among the schoolmen. And each system has its opinions. And these opinions are never uniform, often contradictory.

When the Pope, therefore, decrees the teaching of Scholastic Philosophy, does he mean indifferently any of those systems of philosophy? Are all the scholastic teachings, in the mind of the Pope, on an equal basis in this regard?

Certainly not. For there is one schoolman specially mentioned in the pontifical documents; and there is a system of scholastic philosophy, which is individually praised, and praised with special recommendation by the Roman Pontiffs. “Far above all other scholastic Doctors,” Leo XIII says, “towers Thomas Aquinas, their master and prince. Cajetan says truly of him: ‘So great was his veneration for the ancient and sacred Doctors that he may be said to have gained a perfect understanding of them all.’ Thomas gathered together their doctrines like the scattered limbs of a body, and moulded them into a whole. He arranged them in so wonderful an order, and increased them with such great additions, that rightly and deservedly he is reckoned a

singular safeguard and glory of the Catholic Church. His intellect was docile and subtle; his memory was ready and tenacious; his life was most holy; and he loved the truth alone. Greatly enriched as he was with the science of God and the science of man, he is likened to the sun, for he warmed the whole earth with the fire of his holiness, and filled the whole earth with the splendor of his teaching. There is no part of philosophy, which he did not handle with acuteness and solidity. He wrote about the laws of reasoning; about God and incorporeal substances; about man and other things of sense; and about human acts and their principles. What is more, he wrote on these subjects in such a way that in him not one of the following perfections is wanting: a full selection of subjects; a beautiful arrangement of their divisions; the best method of treating them; certainty of principles; strength of argument; perspicuity and propriety in language; and the power of explaining deep mysteries. Beside these questions and the like, the Angelic Doctor, in his speculations, drew certain philosophical conclusions as to the reasons and principles of created things. These conclusions have the very widest reach, and contain, as it were, in their bosom the seeds of truths well-nigh infinite in number. These have to be unfolded with most abundant fruits in their own time by the teachers who come after him. As he used his method of philosophizing, not only in teaching the truth, but also in refuting error, he has vanquished all errors of ancient times; and still he supplies an armory of weapons, which brings us certain victory in the conflict with falsehoods ever springing up in the course of years. Moreover, carefully distinguishing reason from faith, as is right, and yet joining them together in a harmony of friendship, he so guarded the rights of each, and so watched over the dignity of each, that, as far as man is concerned, reason can now hardly rise higher than she rose, borne up in the flight of Thomas; and faith can hardly gain more and greater helps from reason than those which Thomas gave her.”¹² And again: “There is nothing which We have longer wished for and desired than that you (the Bishops), should give largely and abundantly to youths engaged in study the pure streams of wisdom which flow from the Angelic Doctor as from a perennial and copious spring.”¹³

This same principality was granted to St. Thomas’ philosophy by

Pius X. "Let it be clearly understood above all things," he says, "that the scholastic philosophy We prescribe is chiefly that which the Angelic Doctor has bequeathed to us, and We, therefore, declare that all the ordinances of Our Predecessor on this subject continue fully in force, and, as far as may be necessary, We do decree anew, and confirm, and ordain that they be by all strictly observed. In seminaries where they may have been neglected let the Bishops impose them and require their observance, and let this apply also to the Superiors of religious institutions."¹⁴ And the Pope ends this paragraph with these precise words: "Further let professors remember that they cannot set St. Thomas aside, especially in metaphysical questions, without grave detriment"; words which come again a short time after with some little, but meaningful modification: "Let professors remember that they cannot set St. Thomas aside, however slightly, especially in metaphysical questions, without grave detriment."¹⁵

Still, St. Thomas' philosophy is not simply the chief one within the official Scholasticism, but it is the only one.

Leo XIII had expressed this before: "We, therefore, while We declare that everything wisely said should be received with willing and glad mind, as well as everything profitably discovered or thought out, exhort all of you, Venerable Brothers, with the greatest earnestness to restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and to spread it as far as you can, for the safety and glory of the Catholic Faith, for the good of society, and for the increase of all the sciences. We say the wisdom of St. Thomas; for it is not by any means in our mind to set before this age, as a standard, those things which may have been inquired into by Scholastic Doctors with too great subtlety; or anything taught by them with too little consideration, not agreeing with the investigations of a later age; or lastly, anything that is not probable. Let, then, teachers carefully chosen by you do their best to instill the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas into the minds of their hearers; and let them clearly point out its solidity and excellence above all other teaching. Let this doctrine be the light of all places of learning, which you may have already opened, or may hereafter open. Let it be used for the refutation of errors that are gaining ground."¹⁶

But it was Pius X who gave the most express and conclusive interpretation: “Since We have said (in the *Motu Proprio ‘Sacrorum Antistitum’*) that Aquinas’ philosophy was *chiefly* to be followed, and We did not say *solely*, some thought to comply with, or at least not to oppose Our will in taking the philosophy of any of the Scholastic Doctors indiscriminately, even when such a philosophy was in repugnance to the principles of St. Thomas. But these their mind has greatly deceived. It is quite evident that when We set St. Thomas up as the leader of scholastic philosophy, We have wished this to be understood especially of his principles, upon which such a philosophy is established. Because as we must reject that old opinion which held as irrelevant for the faith what anyone thinks about creatures, if he thinks rightly about God—since an error on the nature of creatures originates false knowledge of God—so we must keep reverently and inviolately St. Thomas’ principles on philosophy, from which flows such a doctrine on creatures as is in harmony with faith; by which all errors of all ages are refuted; by which we are made aware of those attributes which must be given to God and to nothing else but Himself; and by which both the diversity and the analogy between God and creatures is skillfully illustrated... Neither sane reason will neglect, nor religion will allow that such a wonderful richness of science—which he received from his predecessors and with his almost angelic genius he himself ameliorated, increased and used to prepare, illustrate and defend the sacred doctrine for human minds—suffer any loss. Particularly, for if the Catholic truth be destitute of this valuable help, in vain would anyone seek help from that philosophy whose principles are common with, or not opposed to Materialism, Monism, Pantheism, Socialism and Modernism... Consequently We have already instructed all teachers of philosophy and sacred theology that to deviate a single step from St. Thomas, especially in metaphysical questions, would not be without great detriment. Now furthermore We say that those who have perversely interpreted or absolutely despised the principles and chief propositions of St. Thomas’ philosophy, those not only do not follow St. Thomas, but wander also widely from him.”¹⁷ And the Pope, overcoming some objection which could be made from pontifical documents

praising some other Doctor or philosopher, adds: “If We or any of Our Predecessors have ever approved the doctrine of some other author or saint, even as to recommend and ordain its divulgation and defense, it is easily understood that the same is to be approved, inasmuch as it is consonant with the principles of St. Thomas, or at least not opposed to them.”¹⁸

Such a disposition of the Popes became finally a formal universal precept, since the promulgation of the Canon Law: “Religious who have already studied their humanities should devote themselves for two years at least to philosophy, and four years to theology, following the teaching of St. Thomas in accordance with the instructions of the Holy See.”¹⁹ And “The study of philosophy and theology and the teaching of these sciences to their students must be accurately carried out by professors according to the arguments, doctrine, and principles of St. Thomas, which they are inviolately to hold.”²⁰

Nevertheless, St. Thomas did not write a textbook on philosophy, neither did he draw up a list of the fundamental principles of his philosophy.

Hence we have many philosophical books, which claim to reflect the mind of St. Thomas, though they contain opinions contrary to each other. We know of several scholastic doctors, who appropriate for themselves the title of Thomists and whose teaching is contradictory in many points. And we are aware that some of the doctrines, which by one school are supposed to be fundamental in the Thomistic Philosophy, are neglected and may be rejected by another school.

Pope Leo XIII had admonished on this subject: “But lest the false should be drunk instead of the true; or lest that which is unwholesome should be drunk instead of that which is pure; take care that the wisdom of Thomas be drawn from his own fountain, or at any rate from those streams which, in the certain and unanimous opinion of learned men, yet flow whole and untainted, inasmuch as they are fed from the fountain itself. Take care, moreover, that the minds of the young be kept from streams which are said to have flowed from thence, but in reality have been fed by unhealthy waters from other springs.”²¹

Yet, such a distinction was anything but easy, on account of the traditional prejudices of every School.

Hence a further official declaration was necessary.

The Congregation of Studies published on July 27, 1914, a document whose title is as follows: “Certain theses, contained in the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas, and proposed by masters of philosophy, are approved.” Here is the introduction: “After the Holy Father Pope Pius X, by the *Motu Proprio ‘Doctoris Angelici’* published on June 29, 1914, wisely prescribed that in all the schools of philosophy the principles and major propositions of Thomas Aquinas should be sacredly held, not a few masters, appertaining to different institutions, proposed to this Sacred Congregation of Studies for examination some theses which they were accustomed to teach and defend as conformable to the holy Doctor’s principles, especially in metaphysics. This Sacred Congregation, having duly examined the above mentioned theses, and submitted them to the Holy Father, at the command of His Holiness, replies that they clearly contain the principles and major propositions of the holy Doctor.”²²

By a later document, these same theses were all officially declared to contain the genuine teaching of St. Thomas.²³ And to the question whether they should be imposed upon Catholic schools to be held, the Congregation answered: “*Proponantur veluti tutae normae directivae.*”²⁴ Proposed, not imposed: since it is philosophy, not faith, which is concerned.

But they must be proposed; namely, taught. For we have such an interpretation in the following words of Pius X: “The chief doctrines of St. Thomas’ philosophy cannot be regarded as mere opinions—which anyone might discuss pro and con, but rather as a foundation on which all science of both natural and divine things rests. If they are taken away, or perverted in any way, then this necessarily follows: that the students of sacred studies will not perceive even the meaning of those words whereby the divinely revealed dogmas are uttered by the teaching of the Church.”²⁵

These theses must be taught as a sure guide of direction; sure guide of direction on the philosophical official teaching in the

Church; sure guide of direction on the support, which faith derives from philosophy; and sure guide of direction on philosophical truth.

These theses are twenty-four in number. All of them are concerned with metaphysics, since it was chiefly upon the metaphysical teaching of St. Thomas that the Popes insisted. In the next issue we intend to publish a short treatise on these theses.

Notes

1. Encycl. "*Aeterni Patris*," August 4, 1879.
2. *Motu Proprio* "*Doctoris Angelici*," June 29, 1914.
3. Enc. "*Aeterni Patris*."
4. *M. P.* "*Doctoris Angelici*."
5. Enc. "*Aeterni Patris*."
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ib.*
8. *Ib.*
9. *Ib.*
10. Encycl. "*Pascendi*," September 8, 1907.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Enc. "*Aeterni Patris*."
13. *Ibid.*
14. Enc. "*Pascendi*."
15. *Motu Proprio* "*Sacrorum antistitum*," September 1, 1910.
16. Encycl. "*Aeterni Patris*."
17. *M. P.* "*Doctoris Angelici*."
18. *Ibid.*
19. Canon 589 [of the 1917 code].
20. Canon 1366, 2 [of the 1917 code].
21. Enc. "*Aeterni Patris*."
22. *Acta Apost. Sedis*, August, 1914.
23. *Acta Ap. Sed.*, May, 1916.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *M. P.* "*Doctoris Angelici*."

Commentary on the Theses²

In our preceding paper³ we proved by documents of recent Popes that the Church, in exercising her right, has adopted the scholastic philosophy as her official philosophical teaching, that by *scholastic philosophy* the Church understands not only chiefly but exclusively the philosophy of St. Thomas, and that St. Thomas' philosophy stands for at least the twenty-four theses approved and published by the Sacred Congregation of Studies.

In this paper we will give a translation of these theses with a very brief explanation of each.

Sacred Congregation of Studies

Decree of Approval of some theses contained in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas and proposed to the Teachers of Philosophy

Sacred Congregation of Studies
Datum Romæ, die 27 iulii 1914.

B. Card Lorenzelli, *Praefectus*
Ascensus Dandini, *a Secretis*
L + S.

Postquam sanctissimus Dominus noster Pius Papa X Motu Proprio Doctoris Angelici, edito die xxix iunii MCMXIV, salubriter præscripsit, ut in omnibus philosophiæ scholis principia et maiora Thomæ Aquinatis pronuntiata sancte teneantur, nonnulli diversorum Institutorum magistri huic sacrae Studiorum Congregationi theses aliquas proposuerunt examinandas, quas ipsi, tamquam ad præcipua sancti Præceptoris principio in re præsertim metaphysica exactas, tradere et propugnare consueverunt.

2 Commentary by Pedro Lumbreras, "The Twenty-Four Fundamental Theses of Official Catholic Philosophy," *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 23 (July 1923): 1040–53. Latin translation of theses by Hugh McDonald, trans., "Sacred Congregation of Studies - Theses Contained in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas," accessed July 10, 2013, <http://www.vaxxine.com/hyoomik/aquinas/theses.eht>. Citations of St. Thomas from Édouard Hugon, *Les vingt-quatre thèses thomistes* (Paris: Téqui, 1946), <https://archive.org/details/SelectionsFromTheRevueThomiste>.

3 the previous section

After our most Holy Father Pius X ordered in the Motu Proprio *Doctoris Angelici*, on June 29, 1914, that in all schools of philosophy the principles and main teachings of Thomas Aquinas be held, some teachers from various institutions proposed some theses for this Sacred Congregation to examine, which theses they had been accustomed to teach and defend as being those of the Holy Teacher [St. Thomas], especially in metaphysics.

Sacra hæc Congregatio, supra dictis thesibus rite examinatis et sanctissimo Domino subiectis, de eiusdem Sanctitatis Suae mandato, respondet, eas plane continere sancti Doctoris principia et pronuntiata maiora.

This Sacred Congregation, having duly examined the aforementioned theses and having presented them to the Holy Father, by the mandate of His Holiness, declares that they clearly contain the principles and more important thoughts of the holy Doctor [St. Thomas].

Sunt autem hæc:

They are as follows:

ONTOLOGY

Thesis I.

Potentia et actus ita dividunt ens, ut quidquid est, vel sit actus purus, vel ex potentia et actu tamquam primis atque intrinsicis principiis necessario coalescat.

Potentiality and Actuality so divide being that whatsoever exists either is a Pure Actuality, or is necessarily composed of Potentiality and Actuality, as to its primordial and intrinsic principles.

Commentary: Every actual subsisting being—inanimate bodies and animals, men and angels, creatures and Creator—must be either Pure Actuality—a perfection which is neither the complement of Potentiality, nor the Potentiality which lacks further complement—or Potentiality mixed with Actuality—something capable of perfection and some perfection fulfilling this capacity. This statement is true both in the existential and in

the essential order. In each of these orders the composition of Actuality and Potentiality is that of two real, really distinct principles, as Being itself; intrinsic to the existing being or to its essence; into which, finally, all other principles can be resolved, while they cannot be resolved into any other. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 77 a. 1; *Sententia Metaphysicæ*, lib. 7 l. 1 et lib. 9 l. 1 et l. 9]

Thesis II.

Actus, utpote perfectio, non limitatur nisi per potentiam, quæ est capacitas perfectionis. Proinde in quo ordine actus est purus, in eodem non nisi illimitatus et unicus existit; ubi vero est finitus ac multiplex, in veram incidit cum potentia compositionem.

Actuality, because it is perfection, is not limited except by Potentiality, which is capacity for perfection. Therefore, in the order in which the Actuality is pure, it is unlimited and unique; but in that in which it is finite and manifold, it comes into a true composition with Potentiality.

Commentary: Since Actuality means perfection, perfection belongs to Actuality by reason of itself; imperfection, then, by reason of something else. Limits, therefore, belong to Actuality but on account of Potentiality. Consequently, if an Actuality is pure, it is perfection without limits, and gives no ground for distinction and multiplicity. On the contrary, any finite or manifold Actuality is mixed with Potentiality: for it is only as subjected in Potentiality that it is limited and multiplied according to the capacity of the subject. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 7 a. 1 et a. 2; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 43; *Super Sent.*, lib. 1 d. 43 q. 2]

Thesis III.

Quapropter in absoluta ipsius esse ratione unus subsistit Deus, unus est simplicissimus, cetera cuncta quæ ipsum esse participant, naturam habent quæ esse coarctatur, ac tamquam distinctis realiter principiis, essentia et esse constant.

Wherefore, in the exclusive domain of existence itself God alone subsists, He alone is the most simple. Everything else,

which participates in existence, has a nature whereby existence is restricted, and is composed of essence and existence as of two really distinct principles.

Commentary: If there is any being, the actuality of whose existence—for existent means actual—is not received into the Potentiality of essence, such a being subsists of itself, because it is perfection without limits; it is unique, because it excludes composition of any kind; it is the most simple Being: God. All other things, the actuality of whose existence is received into the Potentiality of the essence, participate in existence according to the capacity of the essence, which limits thereby the actuality of existence. Essence and existence hold in them the place of Potentiality and Actuality in the existential order, and are two real and really distinct principles, which intrinsically constitute the compound, the existing being, in the order of existence. [*Summa Theologiae*, I^a q. 50 a. 2 ad 3; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 38 et cap. 52 et cap. 53 et cap. 54; *Super Sent.*, lib. 1 d. 19 q. 2 a. 2; *De ente et essentia*, cap. 5; *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1; *De veritate*, q. 27 a. 1 ad 8]

Thesis IV.

Ens, quod denominatur ab esse, non univoce de Deo ac de creaturis dicitur, nec tamen prorsus æquivoce, sed analogice, analogia tum attributionis tum proportionalitatis.

Being, which derives its name from existence, is not predicated univocally of God and creatures; nor yet merely equivocally, but analogically, by the analogy both of attribution and of proportionality.

Commentary: If the actuality of existence is in God a Pure Actuality and is in creatures an Actuality mixed with Potentiality, Being cannot be predicated of God and creatures in an identical way: God is self-existing, creatures have their existence from God. Still, because the effect in some manner reproduces its cause, Being does not belong to God and creatures in a totally different sense. Being, as predicated of God and creatures is an analogous term. Its analogy is first that of attribution, since Being appertains to creatures as far as they have it from God, to whom it appertains by essence; and is secondly that of proportionality,

since the actuality of existence is intrinsic to God and creatures as existing beings. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 13 a. 5; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 32 et cap. 33 et cap. 34; *De potentia*, q. 7 a. 7]

Thesis V.

Est præterea in omni creatura realis compositio subiecti subsistentis cum formis secundario additis, sive accidentibus: ea vero, nisi esse realiter in essentia distincta reciperetur, intelligi non posset.

There is, moreover, in every creature a real composition of subsisting subject with forms secondarily added—that is, accidents; but such a composition could not be understood unless the existence were received into a distinct essence.

Commentary: The compound of essence and existence is itself the subject or Potentiality of a further complement or Actuality: this Actuality or complement is but an accidental perfection. The new composition is a real one, as the addition itself is real. It can be observed in every creature. Bodies have quantity, spirits have faculties and operations upon which, furthermore, quality follows; every creature has some relation to the Creator. But this real composition of accidents and subsisting compound lacks a philosophical basis if we put aside the composition of essence and existence. The subsisting being cannot be the subject of accidental Actuality except in so far as it is Potentiality; but existence is not Potentiality. The actuality, then, of existence and that of accident come together in the same substantial essence only because this essence is a Potentiality really distinct from both Acts. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 3 a. 6; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 23; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 52; *De ente et essentia*, cap. 5]

Thesis VI.

Præter absoluta accidentia est etiam relativum, sive *ad aliquid*. Quamvis enim *ad aliquid* non significet secundum propriam rationem aliquid alicui inhærens, sæpe tamen causam in rebus habet, et ideo realem entitatem distinctam a subiecto.

Besides the absolute accidents there is also a relative accident, or ‘toward something.’ For although ‘toward something’ does not mean, by its own nature, anything inhering in something, frequently, however, it has a cause in things, and, therefore, a real entity distinct from the subject.

Commentary: In addition to the absolute accidents—which modify the subject in itself—there is a relative accident—which affects the subject with respect to something else. The proper nature of predicamental relation consists in the very habitude to something else; relation, as relation, does not indicate inherence *in* something, but reference *toward* something. We may think of a merely logical relation. This is not always the case. For often we have a real subject, and a real and distinct term, and a real foundation, no one of which, however, is that very habitude which relation means. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 28 a. 1]

Thesis VII.

Creatura spiritualis est in sua essentia omnino simplex. Sed remanet in ea compositio duplex: essentiæ cum esse et substantiæ cum accidentibus.

The spiritual creature is as to its essence altogether simple. Yet there remains a twofold composition in it: that, namely, of essence with existence and that of substance with accidents.

Commentary: The essence of angels is only Actuality, for the actuality of the form is not received into the Potentiality of matter. Angels, indeed, are but intellectual substances, since to understand is a wholly immaterial operation. The last statement of the thesis has already been justified. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 50 a. 1 ff.; *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1]

COSMOLOGY

Thesis VIII.

Creatura vero corporalis est quoad ipsam essentiam composita potentia et actu; quæ potentia et actus ordinis essentiæ, materiæ et formæ nominibus designantur.

The corporeal creature, on the contrary, is in its very essence composed of Potentiality and Actuality. Such a Potentiality and Actuality of the essential order are designated by the names of matter and form.

Commentary: Besides the composition in the existential and accidental order, bodies are composed also in the order of essence. Bodies, indeed, are extended and active, divisible and yet one, multiplied in individuals while keeping specific unity, subject to substantial changes, which by different and often contrary successive properties are made known. Consequently, there must be in bodies an intrinsic principle as the basis of extension, division, numerical multiplicity, the permanent subject of the substantial change; and another intrinsic principle as the foundation of the activity, unity, specific likeness, the successive phases of the change. The first principle, passive, undetermined, incomplete, potential, the root of extension, the support of the substantial change, is material and substantial. The second, active, determining, completing, term of the substantial change, is substantial and formal. Matter and form, then, constitute the essence of bodily substance: neither one is an essence, a substance, a body: each is but a part of the compound, which is a single essence, a single substance, a single body. [*De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1]

Thesis IX.

Earum partium neutra per se esse habet, nec per se producitur vel corrumpitur, nec ponitur in prædicamento nisi reductive ut principium substantiale.

Neither of those parts has existence, properly speaking; nor is produced or destroyed; nor is placed in a Category except by way of reduction, as a substantial principle.

Commentary: Since existence is the Actuality of essence, neither matter nor form can be granted an existence of its own; the existence belongs to the compound. And because production brings things into existence, and destruction deprives them of it, the term of production or destruction is likewise the compound. Finally, since matter and form are substantial principles, they cannot be collocated among accidents. But neither can they be placed directly in the category of substance, for it is the complete substance, which is classed there. They fall, then, into the category of substance by reduction, as principles of substance, as substantial Potentiality and substantial Actuality. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 45 a. 4; *De potentia*, q. 3 a. 5 ad 3]

Thesis X.

Etsi corpoream naturam extensio in partes integrales consequitur, non tamen idem est corpori esse substantiam et esse quantum. Substantia quippe ratione sui indivisibilis est, non quidem ad modum puncti, sed ad modum eius quod est extra ordinem dimensionis. Quantitas vero, quæ extensionem substantiæ tribuit, a substantia realiter differt, et est veri nominis accidens.

Although extension into integral parts follows corporeal nature, it is not, however, the same for a body to be a substance and to be extended. For substance of itself is indivisible; not certainly after the manner of a point, but after the manner of that which is outside the order of dimension. On the other hand, quantity, which makes substance to be extended, really differs from substance, and is a veritable accident.

Commentary: To have integral parts—homogeneous, distinct and outside of each other, united together at the extremities—is a proper sequence of matter, one of the essential principles of body. Still, body as a substance implies only essential parts, matter and form—heterogeneous, within each other, united together by compenetration. Substance, of itself, is indifferent to any quantity, and may even exist, miraculously, without any quantity. It is, then, of itself indivisible: not simply as a point—unextended by privation, —but as something devoid of dimension—

unextended by negation. Substance is indebted to quantity for its integral parts; but as there is a real distinction between subject-of-existence and extended-into-parts, between the persevering support of successive quantities and these quantities in succession, substance is not really identical with quantity. Faith teaches us that in the Holy Eucharist the substance of bread disappears, but not its quantity. Quantity, therefore, is a genuine accident. [*Contra Gentiles*, lib. 4 cap. 65; *Super Sent.*, lib. 1 d. 37 q. 2 a. 1 ad 3; *Super Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 30 q. 2 a. 1]

Thesis XI.

Quantitate signata materia principium est individuationis, id est, numericæ distinctionis, quæ in puris spiritibus esse non potest, unius individui ab alio in eadem natura specifica.

Matter as subjected to quantity is the principle of individuation or numerical distinction—impossible among pure spirits—whereby individuals of the same species are distinct from each other.

Commentary: The principle of individuation cannot be the essence, for Peter is not humanity; nor some extrinsic mode added to the composite substance, for this mode, if accidental, cannot constitute an individual which is a substance and substantially differs from other individuals, and, if substantial, cannot be received but into some already constituted individual substance; nor the existence, for existence actualizes, does not modify reality and is received, moreover, into a substance which is an individual substance. Though that principle must be intrinsic to the substance, it is not the form, because form is a principle of specific and common unity rather than of numerical multiplicity and incommunicability. This principle is matter. Yet not matter of itself, since of itself it is undetermined and capable of being in this and that individual, while the principle of individuation is a determining principle, and renders the subject incommunicable. Matter, as subjected to quantity, is such a principle. For, as related to quantity, it is conceived as divisible into homogeneous parts, and, as related to this quantity, it is conceived as incapable of some other quantity, and, then, as incommunicable to anything else related to different quantity. It is because pure spirits are not

composed of matter and form, but are simple forms, Actuality only which exhausts by itself all the perfection of the essential order, that they cannot be multiplied in the same species: the individuals, indeed, would differ on account of their form, and a difference on the part of the form makes a difference in the species. [*Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 92 et cap. 93; *Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 50 a. 4; *De ente et essentia*, cap. 2]

Thesis XII.

Eadem efficitur quantitate ut corpus circumscriptive sit in loco, et in uno tantum loco de quacumque potentia per hunc modum esse possit.

It is also quantity that makes a body to be circumscriptively in one place and to be incapable, by any means, of such a presence in any other place.

Commentary: Since quantity makes a body to be extended, and, thus, to have its parts outside of each other, it makes the whole body to occupy some place so that each part of the body occupies a different portion of the place. We have, therefore, some commensuration of the dimensions of the body with the dimensions of the place; and this we call a circumspective presence. But just on account of this commensuration quantity makes a body to be incapable of circumscriptive presence in more than one place; for the dimensions of the body are equal, not greater than the dimensions of the first place, and, since those dimensions are exhausted by this place, it is not possible for the same body to occupy simultaneously a second place. This impossibility is, therefore, a metaphysical one: not even by a miracle can we conceive of any such bilocation. [*Summa Theologiæ*, III^a q. 75; *Super Sent.*, lib. 4 d. 10 q. 1 a. 3]

PSYCHOLOGY

Thesis XIII.

Corpora dividuntur bifariam: quædam enim sunt viventia, quædam expertia vitæ. In viventibus, ut in eodem subiecto pars movens et pars mota per se habeantur, forma substantialis, animæ nomine designata, requirit organicam dispositionem, seu partes heterogeneas.

Bodies are divided into two classes: some are living, others without life. In living bodies, in order to have intrinsically a moving part and a moved part in the same subject, the substantial form, called the soul, requires an organic disposition, or heterogeneous parts.

Commentary: Not all bodies are endowed with life: but some are. As living bodies, they have within themselves the principle and the term of their movement. This is to be understood, not as if the whole body, or one and the same part of the body, were both the mover and the moved, but that by nature one part is ordained to give and another part to receive the motion. The different parts, then, must be arranged into some hierarchy, and must be coordinated, not only as regards the whole, but even with respect to each other: all the parts, accordingly, cannot be homogeneous. The soul, substantially informing the organism, informs all the parts, and each of them according to the function each has in the whole. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 18 a. 1 et a. 2 et q. 75 a. 1; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 97; *Senten De anima*]

Thesis XIV.

Vegetalis et sensilis ordinis animæ nequaquam per se subsistunt, nec per se producuntur, sed sunt tantummodo ut principium quo vivens est et vivit, et cum a materia se totis dependeant, corrupto composito, eo ipso per accidens corrumpuntur.

Souls of the vegetative and sensitive order, properly speaking, do not subsist and are not produced, but merely exist and are produced as a principle whereby the living thing exists and lives. Since they depend entirely on matter, at the dissolution

of the compound, they are indirectly destroyed.

Commentary: The substantial form does not subsist in the organic bodies of plants and irrational animals, because it has no operation independent of matter; it is but a principle of substance. A principle, however, that, in giving matter the complement wanted by matter for making up the compound—which properly exists and lives—is called the principle of existence and life. Its relation to production and destruction has been previously explained. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 75 a. 3 et q. 90 a. 2; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 80 et cap. 82]

Thesis XV.

Contra, per se subsistit anima humana, quæ, cum subiecto sufficienter disposito potest infundi, a Deo creatur, et sua natura incorruptibilis est atque immortalis.

On the contrary, the human soul subsists by itself, and is created by God when it can be infused into a sufficiently disposed subject, and is incorruptible and immortal by nature.

Commentary: The human soul, independent of material conditions for some of its operations, is by itself a simple and complete substance. It is, then, produced from nothing, or created, and created by God, as we shall see. Naturally ordained to inform the human body, it is created when infused into the body. But, since the reception of any form presupposes a convenient disposition in the receiving matter, the infusion of the human soul implies a sufficient disposition of the human body. Such a disposition is not likely to be found in a body recently formed: vegetative and sensible souls would precede the human soul, as the servants precede the master for preparing a lodging worthy of him. Being simple, the human soul cannot be directly destroyed. Being subsisting, it can neither be destroyed indirectly upon the destruction of the compound. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 75 a. 2 et q. 90 et q. 118; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 83 ff.; *De potentia*, q. 3 a. 2; *Sententia De anima*, a. 14]

Thesis XVI.

Eadem anima rationalis ita unitur corpori, ut sit eiusdem forma substantialis unica, et per ipsam habet homo ut sit homo et animal et vivens et corpus et substantia et ens. Tribuit igitur anima homini omnem gradum perfectionis essentialem; insuper communicat corpori actum essendi quo ipsa est.

This same rational soul is so united to the body as to be its single substantial form. By it man is man, and animal, and living, and body, and substance, and being. Soul, therefore, gives man every essential degree of perfection. It communicates to the body, furthermore, the act of existence whereby itself exists.

Commentary: Every one is aware of the intrinsic and mutual influence, which exists in man between body and soul. Their union is not accidental. Body and soul come together as two constituent principles of a single nature, that of man. The human soul, the substantial form of body, gives matter, the substantial potentiality of soul, the first substantial act. By itself, then, it informs and determines the undetermined matter to a particular species. It gives to the compound all the perfection, which is implied in this species. And it is subsisting; it communicates its existence directly to the compound, indirectly to the body. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 76; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 56 et cap. 68 et cap. 69 et cap. 70 et cap. 71; *Sententia De anima*, a. 1; *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 3]

Thesis XVII.

Duplicis ordinis facultates, organicæ et inorganicæ, ex anima humana per naturalem resultantiam emanant: priores, ad quas sensus pertinet, in composito subiectantur, posteriores in anima sola. Est igitur intellectus facultas ab organo intrinsece independens.

Faculties of a twofold order, organic and inorganic, naturally spring from the human soul. The subject of the organic, to which sense belongs, is the compound. The subject of the inorganic is the soul alone. The intellect, then, is a faculty intrinsically independent of any organ.

Commentary: The immediate principles of operation are distinct from the soul: they are accidents, as the operations themselves. But their root is the soul, for they are vital faculties, and the soul is the principle of life. They are divided into two classes, according to the mode in which they spring from the human soul; subsisting by itself, and the form of body. In the latter case we have those faculties whose act is performed by means of bodily organs. Not only the vegetative faculties, but the sensitive likewise, are among them; for their object is extended. As organic faculties, they have for their subject the animated organism, which is neither the soul alone, nor the body alone, but the compound. There are some other faculties whose operations are far above matter, and, accordingly, cannot be subjected in the organism, even as animated: they are termed inorganic and are subjected in the soul alone. Intellect is such a faculty. Though extrinsically dependent on the imagination and indirectly on the organism, it is intrinsically independent of them. [*Summa Theologiae*, I^o q. 77 et q. 78 et q. 79; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 72; *Sententia De anima*, a. 12 ff.; *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 11]

Thesis XVIII.

Immaterialitatem necessario sequitur intellectualitas, et ita quidem ut secundum gradus elongationis a materia, sint quoque gradus intellectualitatis. Adæquatum intellectionis obiectum est communiter ipsum ens; proprium vero intellectus humani in præsentī statu unionis, quidditatibus abstractis a conditionibus materialibus continetur.

Intellectuality necessarily follows immateriality, and in such a manner that the degree of intellectuality is in proportion to the remoteness from matter. The adequate object of intellection is being as such; but the proper object of the human intellect, in the present state of union, is restricted to the essences abstracted from material conditions.

Commentary: Intellectuality means ability to reproduce in oneself the forms of the objects known, without any injury to the proper form. Matter determines forms to be but in this individual: no form can be known except as abstracted from matter; no subject

can be intelligent except as independent of matter. A greater intellectuality corresponds to a greater immateriality, and, since matter stands for potentiality, to a greater act. In the summit of intellectuality the Pure Actuality is fixed; next, the Actuality mixed with Potentiality in the order of existence; then, the Actuality mixed with Potentiality in the very order of essence. A form cannot be reproduced except in so far as it is. Being is knowable in itself, and everything is knowable in so far as it is being. Still, the mode of operation is according to the mode of being, and since the being of our soul, in the present condition, communicates with the body, the connatural object of our knowledge is now the forms taken from the matter. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 14 a. 1 et q. 74 a. 7 et q. 89 a. 1 et a. 2; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 59 et cap. 72 et lib. 4 cap. 2]

Thesis XIX.

Cognitionem ergo accipimus a rebus sensibilibus. Cum autem sensibile non sit intelligibile in actu, præter intellectum formaliter intelligentem, admittenda est in anima virtus activa, quæ species intelligibiles a phantasmatis abstrahat.

We, therefore, receive our knowledge from sensible things. But since no sensible thing is actually intelligible, besides the intellect which is properly intelligent we must admit in the soul an active power which abstracts the intelligible forms from the phantasms.

Commentary: Our knowledge proceeds, at present, from sensible things. This gives a reason for the union of soul and body. Upon the injury of some organs our mental operation becomes impossible; nor is it by chance that this is associated with sensible images. A sensible image, however, is not intelligible; for intelligible means immaterial. The intellect, which properly understands is a passive faculty: it receives the intelligible forms, and does not make the forms to be intelligible. The abstractive faculty, notwithstanding, belongs to the soul alone, for it brings its object to the realm of the immaterial. It is, moreover, an intellectual faculty, for its function is to make something intelligible. It is called the active intellect. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 79 a. 3 et a. 4 et q. 85 a. 6 et a. 7; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap.

Thesis XX.

Per has species directe universalia cognoscimus; singularia sensu attingimus, tum etiam intellectu per conversionem ad phantasmata; ad cognitionem vero spiritualium per analogiam ascendimus.

Through these species we directly know the universal; the singular we know by the senses, and also by the intellect through a conversion to the phantasms; we rise by analogy to the knowledge of the spiritual.

Commentary: Since matter individualizes the forms, the forms become universal when abstracted from matter: it is the universal, then, we know directly. The singular implies material conditions and is known directly by the senses, dependent on matter themselves, and indirectly by the intellect, which, in taking the universal from the individuals, perceives the individuals, which offer the universal. Starting from the material abstracted essences we arrive at the nature of pure spirits. We affirm of those spirits some positive perfections noticed in the inferior beings, and these we affirm of them in a higher degree, while we deny of them some, or all, the imperfections to which those perfections were associated in the material objects. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 85 et q. 86 et q. 87 et q. 88]

Thesis XXI.

Intellectum sequitur, non præcedit, voluntas, quæ necessario appetit id quod sibi præsentatur tamquam bonum ex omni parte explens appetitum, sed inter plura bona, quæ iudicio mutabili appetenda proponuntur, libere eligit. Sequitur proinde electio iudicium practicum ultimum; at quod sit ultimum, voluntas efficit.

The will follows, does not precede, the intellect; it necessarily desires that which is offered to it as a good which entirely satisfies the appetite; it freely chooses among several good things that are proposed as desirable by the wavering judgment. Election, then, follows the last practical judgment; still, it is the will which determines it to be the last.

Commentary: Will is not prior but posterior to the intellect, in dignity, in origin, in acting. The posteriority in acting is chiefly intended here. Every act of the will is preceded by an act of the intellect; for the act of the will is a rational inclination, and while inclination follows a form, rational inclination follows the intellectually apprehended form. The intellect, in presenting to the will some apprehended good, moves it as to the specification of its act. If the presented good is the absolute or universal good, the will desires it of necessity. If it is good mixed with evil, relative or particular good, it is partially attractive and partially repulsive. The will may desire it, or may not. Once the intellect has settled on the practical excellency of some particular good, the will must accept such an object. Yet, it is the will, which freely committed itself to the determination of the intellect; it is the will, which freely sustained the intellect in its unilateral consideration; and it is the will, which freely wants the process not to be submitted to a further revision. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 82 et q. 83; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 72 ff.; *De veritate*, q. 22 a. 5; *De malo*, q. 11]

THEODICY

Thesis XXII.

Deum esse neque immediata intuitione percipimus, neque a priori demonstramus, sed utique a posteriori, hoc est, per ea quæ facta sunt, ducto argumento ab effectibus ad causam: videlicet, a rebus quæ moventur ad sui motus principium et primum motorem immobilem; a processu rerum mundanarum e causis inter se subordinatis, ad primam causam incausatam; a corruptilibus quæ æqualiter se habent ad esse et non esse, ad ens absolute necessarium; ab iis quæ 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.

That God exists we do not know by immediate intuition, nor do we demonstrate it a priori, but certainly a posteriori, that is, by things which are made, arguing from effect to cause.

Namely, from things, which are in movement and cannot be the adequate principle of their motion, to the first mover immovable; from the procession of worldly things from causes, which are subordinated to each other, to the first uncaused cause; from corruptible things, which are indifferent alike to being and non-being, to the absolutely necessary being; from things, which, according to their limited perfection of existence, life, intelligence, are more or less perfect in their being, their life, their intelligence, to Him who is intelligent, living, and being in the highest degree; finally, from the order, which exists in the universe, to the existence of a separate intelligence which ordained, disposed, and directs things to their end.

Commentary: Since the proper object of our intellect is the essences of material things, it is clear we have no immediate intuition of God's spiritual essence, and, consequently, neither of His existence. Since the notion we have of His essence is an abstract notion, the existence implied in that notion belongs to the essential order and in no way to the actual. Still, we can demonstrate His existence with a rigorous demonstration, which goes from the effects to their ultimate cause. St. Thomas furnishes five proofs, already classical. Things are in movement; whatsoever is moved is moved by something else; above the moved-movers is some immovable-mover. Things are efficient causes of others; they are not the efficient cause of themselves; outside the caused-causes is some uncaused-cause. Some beings did not always exist, some will not always exist: their existence is not essential to them; above beings, which do not exist of necessity, is a necessary being. Things are more or less perfect than others; the less perfect has not in itself the reason of that perfection; above things, which are limited in their perfection is some being supremely perfect. Things which lack intelligence act for some end; an intelligent being only could adapt and direct them to this end; there is an universal governing intelligence. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^o q. 2; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 12 et cap. 31 et lib. 3 cap. 10 et cap. 11; *De veritate*, q. 1 et q. 10; *De potentia*, q. 4 et q. 7]

Thesis XXIII.

Divina Essentia, per hoc quod exercitæ actualitati ipsius esse identificatur, seu per hoc quod est ipsum Esse subsistens, in sua veluti metaphysica ratione bene nobis constituta proponitur, et per hoc idem rationem nobis exhibet suæ infinitatis in perfectione.

The Divine Essence is well proposed to us as constituted in its metaphysical concept by its identity with the exercised actuality of its existence, or, in other terms, as the very subsisting being; and by the same token it exhibits to us the reason of its infinity in perfection.

Commentary: Nothing in the Divine Essence itself can have the character of a constituent, for the Divine Essence is most simple. It is only according to our mode of understanding that we may ask which among the different perfections attributed to God is conceived as first, so as to distinguish God from creatures and to give ground to all the other divine perfections. That first perfection is the real identity of essence and existence: the subsisting being. By that God is distinct from creatures. In that is based any other perfection belonging to Him; for existence means act, and existence which is not received into essence means act without potentiality, perfection without limits. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 4 a. 2 et q. 13 a. 11; *Super Sent.*, lib. 1 d. 8 q. 1]

Thesis XXIV.

Ipsa igitur puritate sui esse, a finitis omnibus rebus secernitur Deus. Inde infertur primo, mundum nonnisi per creationem a Deo procedere potuisse; deinde virtutem creativam, qua per se primo attingitur ens in quantum ens, nec miraculose ulli finitæ naturæ esse communicabilem; nullum denique creatum agens in esse cuiuscumque effectus influere, nisi motione accepta a prima causa.

By the very purity of His being God is, therefore, distinguished from all finite beings. Hence, in the first place, it is inferred that the world could not have proceeded from God except through creation; secondly, that the creative power, which directly ‘affects being as being,’ cannot be communicated, even miraculously, to any finite nature; and,

finally, that no created agent exercises any influence on the being of any effect except through a motion received from the first cause.

Commentary: God's essence is God's existence; God is distinct from creatures whose essence is potentiality for existence. The world proceeds from God as the contingent from the necessary being. It proceeds by means of creation, for no emanation is possible in the pure act. Since creation implies the production of being from non-being, it is contradictory to suppose a creature exercising any causality in creation; it could not exercise that causality which belongs to the principal cause, for being is an universal effect, above the proportion consequently of any particular cause; not that causality which belongs to the instrumental cause, for there is nothing presupposed to creation upon which the instrument could exercise its efficiency. Finally, since every agent, by its act, moves toward the effect, this movement cannot be conceived independently of the first mover. The agent depends on God for its existence, for its powers, for the conservation of that existence and of these powers. It depends also on God for the very exercise of these powers. Because in exercising these powers the agent passes from Potentiality to Actuality, its faculties do not move except in so far as they are moved; there must be a motion coming from the immovable mover. This motion is received into the agent previously to the agent's motion; it is properly called *premotion*. And since it moves the agent to the exercise of its powers, it is properly called *physical premotion*. [*Summa Theologiæ*, I^a q. 44 et q. 45 et q. 105; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 6 et cap. 7 et cap. 8 et cap. 9 et cap. 10 et cap. 11 et cap. 12 et cap. 13 et cap. 14 et cap. 15 et lib. 3 cap. 6 et cap. 7 et cap. 8 et cap. 9 et lib. 4 cap. 44; *De potentia*, q. 3 a. 7]

These are the theses Catholic professors must teach. They are the foundation upon which all the philosophical teaching must be based. And if professors recommend to their students any textbook that does not correspond to these theses, they must point that out. Because Catholic professors are reminded not only that "they cannot set St. Thomas aside, however slightly, especially in

Metaphysics, without grave detriment,”⁴ but also that “they did not receive the faculty of teaching to communicate to their pupils their own opinions, but to impart to them the doctrines most approved by the Church.”⁵

4 Motu Proprio “*Sacrorum antistitum*,” September 1, 1910.

5 Motu Proprio “*Doctoris Angelici*,” June 29, 1914.

Appendix 2: The Structure of the Encyclical *Humani Generis*¹

Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.

The primary generator of the errors indicated in the Encyclical.

We do not try to do here a simple analysis of this pontifical document of 12 August 1950, to number the damaging tendencies of which he speaks, and also less to cite those which were admitted according to a diverse gradation.

We do try to stress the principle error from which all the others derive and, through the force of the contrast, to show which is the fundamental truth that permits avoiding these deviations, as Providence does not permit errors if not for putting the Truth in better light, as in a *chiaroscuro*; so too it does not permit evil and sometimes great evils, if not for a superior good that we will discover perfectly only in heaven.

Now, philosophically and theologically examining this Encyclical, one sees that the fundamental error from this condemnation is philosophical relativism, which leads to dogmatic relativism, from which necessarily derives a whole complex of deviations recorded here.

I - Contemporary relativism and the various dogmas

The principle error condemned by the Encyclical is *relativism*, according to which human knowledge does not ever have a *real, absolute, and immutable value*, but only a relative value. And this means various things according to the theory of knowledge that is admitted.

From where does this relativism, that has had its influence in these recent times in certain Catholic environments, originate? It

1 Translated from: Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “La struttura dell’Enciclica Humani Generis,” in *La sintesi tomistica* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1953), 541–54.

derives as much from empiricism or positivism as from Kantianism and from the evolutionary idealism of Hegel.

Empiricism does not see the essential difference and the immense distance between the intellect and the senses, between the idea and the image, between judgment and the empirical association, and by this it strongly reduces the value of the first notions of being, of unity, of truth, of goodness, of substance, of cause and the value of the first correlative principles of identity, of contradiction, of causality, etc. According to empiricism these principles do not have an absolute necessity and are simply empirical associations confirmed by heredity, nor do they exceed the order of phenomena. The principle of causality would affirm only that each phenomenon supposes an antecedent phenomenon, but it does not allow us to raise ourselves up to certain knowledge of the existence of the first cause beyond the phenomenal order.

Kantianism is opposed, it is true, to empiricism inasmuch as it recognizes the necessity of first principles, but according to this system the principles are only subjective laws of our mind, which come from us applied to phenomena, but they do not allow us to raise ourselves up beyond some phenomena themselves. From this point of view according to the Kantian system the existence of God can be proved only with a moral proof founded on the indemonstrable postulates of practical reason, whose proof gives us only an *objectively insufficient certainty*.

Therefore one cannot admit the traditional definition of truth according to Kantianism, which on the contrary all the dogmas suppose. One cannot say: «*Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*», because the truth would not be the conformity of our judgment with being and with its immutable laws of contradiction, of causality, etc., but one would need to content himself with saying that *the truth is the conformity of our judgment with the subjective exigencies of moral action*, expressed by indemonstrable postulates of practical reason. One does not give an objectively founded metaphysical certainty, but only an objectively sufficient moral and practical certainty. One does not escape from relativism.

And then *Hegel* says: If one cannot prove with objectively

sufficient certainty the existence of God really and essentially distinct from the world, it is better to say that God is made in the humanity that keeps evolving itself and in the mind of the men that passes continually from one thesis to an antithesis, then to a superior synthesis, and so on. According to the diverse movements of evolution, today the thesis is true, tomorrow it will be the true antithesis, the day after tomorrow the synthesis, and it will always be like so. *There cannot be immutable truth*, because God, supreme truth, is made in us and will not ever be actuated in full, as becoming cannot stop itself. This last proposition is the first of those that are condemned by the Syllabus of Pius IX.

Contrary to the principles of identity, of contradiction and of causality, to become is for itself its proper reason, without a superior cause. *In this ascending creative evolution, the more perfect is always produced by the less perfect*, which is evidently impossible. It is the universal confusion of being with non-being in becoming without cause, confusion of the true with the false, of the good with the evil, of the just with the unjust, as Pius IX affirms in the beginning of the Syllabus (Denzig., n. 1701).

These three relativist systems—empiricism, Kantianism and Hegelian idealism—have unfortunately distanced many intellectual people from their salvation. One cannot joke with the «one necessary».

For how much it can appear surprising, this relativism has influence on some theologians to the point that one of them, Guenther, in the XIX century, said that the Church is infallible when she defines a dogma, but it is an *infallibility relative* to the current state of science and philosophy at the moment of its definition. Under this aspect Guenther put in doubt the immutability of the definitions of the Council of Trent, maintaining that one cannot affirm if that Council one day can be substituted by a *definitive* enunciation of the ministers of Christianity.

This dogmatic relativism appeared again at the epoch of modernism, as the Encyclical «Pascendi» of 1907 demonstrates. And it has tended always to appear more in some of the sages of the «new theology», in which it is said that *the notions used in*

the conciliar definitions in the long run grow old, they are not anymore conformed to the progress of science and philosophy, and then *they need to be substituted* by other «equivalent» declarations, but these are equally unstable. For example, the definition of the Council of Trent regarding sanctifying grace, that it is the formal cause of justification, was a good formula at the time of the Council of Trent, but today it would need to be modified. But from saying this to saying that today it is no longer true, the distance is great. Under this aspect on earth there would be only provisional formulæ.

So too often is *the evidence in need* of the principle of causality, which is the foundation of the traditional proofs of the existence of God, as if a *free choice* were necessary for admitting the ontological value and absolute necessity of this principle, and that it would take from the proofs their truly demonstrative efficacy. Finally the *traditional definition of truth* is said «chimerical»: «*Adaequatio rei et intellectus*», the conformity of judgment with extra-mental being and with its immutable laws, and one wants to «substitute for it» this new definition: *Conformitas mentis et vitae*, the conformity of our judgment with life and with its subjective exigencies, and this leads to an «*insufficiently objective certainty*» regarding the existence of God, as in the proof proposed by Kant.

Some have even maintained that Jesus Christ did not teach a *doctrine*, but that he only affirmed with his life and with his death *this fact*, namely that God loves humanity and wants our salvation. But if Jesus did not teach a doctrine, how could he have said: «My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me» (John, VII, 16). «Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away» (Mark, XIII, 31)? If one does not speak of the *teaching of Revelation*, how could one even speak of the teaching of the Church for proposing to us and infallibly explaining to us the *revealed doctrine*?

Contemporary relativism in the religious field is apparent especially in the applications to the following questions: creation of the first man, the notion of the supernatural, the mystery of the Incarnation, of the Redemption and of the Eucharist.

Some writers have proposed the following question: Although the Holy Scripture, all the Tradition and the Councils consider *Adam* as *an individual name*, could he not be considered instead as *a collective name* and through conforming oneself greater to the theory of evolution to say that humanity did not start with a first individual man, but with many men, with thousands of men, wherever first superior beings sufficiently evolved could produce with a certain concourse of God a human embryo? This would certainly require, they come to tell us, a notable modification of the Council of Trent regarding *the original sin*, but why could the Church not correct herself? Even this is a clear consequence of relativism.

It is even maintained that *the supernatural life* of the grace granted to man *is not gratuitous* in the sense that it is commonly taught, and that God could not have created man without giving him a supernatural end, namely eternal life, the beatific vision. The grace would not be truly gratuitous as the name makes one to think. God has needed for himself the granting it to us.

Even the mystery of the *Incarnation* was proposed by some as *a moment of the evolution*, inasmuch as we say that the souls, even so tied to the senses and to the animal life, have needed some of the influence of the universal Christ, of the cosmic Christ, head of humanity that preceded by many thousands of years the progress of the world.

Moreover even *the new interpretation of the original sin* and of sin in general as offense to God requires that the current teaching of the Church about the mystery of the *Redemption* be modified.

And finally it has been proposed to understand the real presence of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist not insisting anymore on the old notion of substance and not speaking anymore of *transubstantiation* in the ontological sense of the word. It is affirmed that it suffices to say that «the consecrated bread and wine became *the efficacious symbol* of the sacrifice of Christ and of his spiritual presence; it changed their religious being». Symbolism, this, very similar to that admitted by Calvin for the Eucharist.

Somebody proposed one of these innovations without accounting

for those proposed by others. Now that the Encyclical has collected them into one single panorama, one sees better the radical principle from which they proceed, namely *relativism* accentuated by an *historicism* that sees only the becoming, from an *existentialism* that does not see the essence of things, but only their existence, and from a wanted «*irenicism*», that seems to believe in the reconciliation of things contradictory among themselves.

II - What does the Encyclical say regarding these diverse problems?

It not only puts us on guard against dangerous tendencies, but also condemns many errors, so recognizing the legitimate liberty of the sciences in their proper fields.

First of all what does it tell us regarding *relativism* in the philosophical field and then in that of dogma? It tells us that «it falls to reason to demonstrate with certainty the existence of God, personal and one; to prove beyond doubt from divine signs the very foundations of the Christian faith (III, 1). «But reason can perform these functions safely and well only when properly trained, that is, when imbued with that sound philosophy which has long been, as it were, a patrimony handed down by earlier Christian ages, and which moreover possesses an authority of an even higher order, since the Teaching Authority of the Church, in the light of divine revelation itself, has weighed its fundamental tenets, which have been elaborated and defined little by little by men of great genius. For this philosophy, acknowledged and accepted by the Church, safeguards the genuine validity of human knowledge, the unshakable metaphysical principles of sufficient reason, causality, and finality, and finally the mind's ability to attain certain and unchangeable truth».

Among the first principles of reason, St. Thomas with Aristotle (*Metaphys.*, bk. III, c. 4 ff) elucidates *the evidence in need of the principle of contradiction* founded on the opposition between intelligible and non-intelligible being. St. Thomas constantly says that *the intelligible being is the first object known by the intellect*, as the colored is the object proper to sight and sound is the proper object of hearing. When the sensible object is presented, while

the sight affirms *the colored being* inasmuch as *colored*, the intellect affirms as *being, namely that it is*, and that it opposes itself to nothing.

Furthermore against absolute evolutionism it is above all evident and certain that *the more perfect cannot be produced by the less perfect*. One cannot imagine a greater absurdity than saying that the intellect of the greatest geniuses and the goodness of the major saints originates from a material and blind fatality, or from a confused and senseless idea, which would be the lowest grade of intellectual life.

The principle of causality is the most certain foundation of the traditional proofs of the existence of God, and the proofs are likewise objectively founded.

The Encyclical «*Humani generis*» adds (III): «[Some] say that this philosophy upholds the erroneous notion that *there can be a metaphysic that is absolutely true...* [T]hey seem to imply that any kind of philosophy or theory, with a few additions and corrections if need be, can be reconciled with Catholic dogma. No Catholic can doubt how false this is».

Sometimes it is said that one needs to baptize the modern philosophical systems like St. Thomas did with the Aristotelean system. But to do this there are two necessary things. One would need first of all to have the genius of St. Thomas and then he would need that the philosophical systems have a soul. A system that is founded entirely on a false principle cannot be baptized.

This judgment on the relativism in philosophy is completed by this important observation (III): «[I]t is one thing to admit the power of the dispositions of the will in helping reason to gain a more certain and firm knowledge of moral truths; it is quite another thing to say [*viz.*, “One cannot say...”], as in the Italian of G.-L.’s version —Tr.], as these innovators do, indiscriminately mingling cognition and act of will, *that the appetitive and affective faculties have a certain power of understanding*, and that man, since he cannot by using his reason decide with certainty what is true and is to be accepted, turns to his will, by which he freely chooses among opposite opinions». One would arrive at, so to say, (*ibid.*) that «[theodicy cannot] *prove with*

certitude anything about God [...] but rather to show that [this truth is] perfectly consistent with the necessities of life» to avoid desperation and preserve the hope of salvation.

thereby the traditional definition of truth as conformity of our judgment with extra-mental reality would not be preserved, but only as conformity with the subjective exigencies of life and action.

So the Encyclical speaks regarding relativism in philosophy.

* * *

But it is less explicit regarding *dogmatic relativism*. Here one reads (II, 2): «It is evident from what We have already said, that such tentatives not only lead to what they call dogmatic relativism, but that they actually contain it. The *contempt of doctrine* commonly taught and of the terms in which it is expressed strongly favor it... [T]he things that have been composed through common effort by Catholic teachers over the course of the centuries to bring about some understanding of dogma are certainly not based on any such weak foundation. These things are based on principles and notions deduced from a true knowledge of created things. In the process of deducing, this knowledge, like a star, gave enlightenment to the human mind through the Church. Hence it is not astonishing that *some of these notions have not only been used by the Ecumenical Councils, but even sanctioned by them, so that it is wrong to depart from them*. Hence to neglect, or to reject, or to devalue so many and such great resources which have been conceived, expressed and perfected so often by the age-old work of men endowed with no common talent and holiness, working under the vigilant supervision of the holy magisterium and with the light and leadership of the Holy Ghost in order to state the truths of the faith ever more accurately, to do this so that these things may be replaced by conjectural notions and by some formless and unstable tenets of a new philosophy, tenets which, like the flowers of the field, are in existence today and die tomorrow; *this is supreme imprudence and something that would make dogma itself a reed shaken by the wind*. The contempt for terms and notions habitually used by scholastic theologians leads of itself to

the weakening of what they call speculative theology, a discipline which these men consider devoid of true certitude because it is based on theological reasoning».

All this clearly shows what the Church thinks about relativism in philosophy and also in theology relative to dogma itself.

* * *

What does it tell us of the application of relativism to the most discussed questions in these recent times?

1) *What does it say regarding the creation of the first man?* - Can one admit that Adam is not an individual name, but a collective name that does not indicate simply the first man, but thousands of first men, wherever some sufficiently evolved primal beings have produced with a certain concourse with God a human embryo? In other words, can one substitute *polygenism* with *monogenism*?

The Encyclical responds (IV): «For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. *Now it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with what the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own*». Regarding this error, «Some — the Encyclical says above — also question [...] whether matter and spirit differ essentially».

The Encyclical (IV, end) maintains that «*the first eleven chapters of Genesis, although properly speaking not conforming to the historical method used by the best Greek and Latin writers or by competent authors of our time, do nevertheless pertain to history in a true sense, which however must be further studied and determined by exegetes; the same chapters, (the Letter points out), in simple and metaphorical language adapted to the mentality of a people but little cultured, both state the principal truths which are fundamental for our salvation, and also give a popular description of the origin of the human race and the*

chosen people».

2) - Does one need to preserve *the traditional notion of the supernatural* and of the *gratuitousness* of the elevation of man to the life of grace, that it is the seed of eternal life? The Encyclical (II, end) responds with great precision: «*Others destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision*». In this case grace is not strictly gratuitous, though the name itself designates the gratuitousness. There is no longer nature in the true sense of the word, nor therefore supernatural strictly so-called.

3) - What must one think of the innovations related to the notion of original sin and to the mystery of the Redemption? The Encyclical says (ibid.): «*Disregarding the Council of Trent, some pervert the very concept of original sin, along with the concept of sin in general as an offense against God, as well as the idea of satisfaction performed for us by Christ*».

4) - What must one finally think of the innovations of some exponents of the new theology *regarding the Eucharist*? The Holy Father responds (ibid.): «*Some even say that the doctrine of transubstantiation, based on an antiquated philosophic notion of substance, should be so modified that the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist be reduced to a kind of symbolism, whereby the consecrated species would be merely efficacious signs of the spiritual presence of Christ and of His intimate union with the faithful members of His Mystical Body*».

The Council of Trent that has defined infallibly the transubstantiation speaks in a manner completely different.

The Pope adds (ibid.): «*Some reduce to a meaningless formula the necessity of belonging to the true Church in order to gain eternal salvation*».

«These and like errors, it is clear — the Encyclical concludes — have crept in among certain of Our sons who are deceived by imprudent zeal for souls or by false science. To them We are compelled with grief to repeat once again truths already well known, and to point out with solicitude clear errors and dangers of error.»

To prescribe the remedy the Holy Father (III) recalls that a return to the doctrine of St. Thomas is needed: «If one considers all this well, he will easily see why the Church demands that future priests be instructed in philosophy “*according to the method, doctrine, and principles of the Angelic Doctor,*” since, as we well know from the experience of 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».

All this shows us that the Saviour did not only affirm the fact that God loves men, but that He taught a doctrine, when he said: «Vos me vocatis magister, et bene dicitis, sum etenim» (John, XIII, 13): «Cælum et terra transibunt, verba autem mea non præteribunt» (Mark, XIII, 31).

Revelation was given to us *per modum magisterii*, as word of God, as revealed doctrine about God, his nature, his infinite perfections, the free creation, our gratuitous ordination to the supernatural end, the beatific vision, and about the means for attaining it. This teaching of Revelation is the foundation of the teachings of the Church which defend the integrity of the faith.

* * *

What does one need to conclude?

First of all that the Encyclical is not contented with putting us on guard against dangerous *tendencies*, but condemns also some *errors*, especially philosophical and dogmatic relativism and many of the consequences that derive therefrom, particularly the error that warps the true notion of the gratuitousness of the supernatural and the polygenetic hypothesis, which is irreconcilable with the faith.

The Church certainly admits that there is a progress in the intelligence of dogma through always more explicit definitions, but she defends the immutability of the dogma, which is known always more explicitly, although remaining always the same.

Some have objected regarding polygenism: It seems that the

Church does not recognize the liberty of science, which instead is necessary for its progress.

Instead it is clear the *Encyclical recognizes perfectly the legitimate liberty of the sciences*, when one remains faithful in his own environment to its certain principles and to its method. To convince oneself of this it is sufficient to read in the Encyclical itself the preceding paragraph regarding polygenism. That paragraph, about the origin of the body of the first man, does not reject the hypothesis of evolution, to preserve this, that namely God only could have created the spiritual and immortal soul of the first man, and that it was a very special intervention of Providence because in an animal embryo *the superior disposition* required by the creation of the human soul appeared. An animal of a species inferior to man cannot, in fact, *through its own virtue*, give to the embryo that from which proceeds *a superior disposition to that of its species*. Otherwise the more would be produced by the less and the more perfect would be produced by the less perfect, and there would be greater perfection in the effect that is not in the cause, contrarily to the principle of causality. Instead of limiting the liberty of the science, the Encyclical encourages its progress and invites to study closely the errors to see the small part of truth that there may still be and to see where the deviation is precisely found. Sometimes in certain very manifest errors there is also an indirect proof of the truth that they reject. So Hegelian evolutionism, which admits a universal becoming without a superior cause and *a God that is made and that will not ever be, is a an indirect proof of the existence of the true God*, because Hegel cannot deny the true God without also denying the real value of the principles of contradiction and of causality. Likewise today the universal desperation and nausea to which atheistic existentialism leads are *an indirect proof of the value of Christian hope*. These indirect proofs are precious in their own way. They are like some formulated confessions from the conscience of the major adversaries, as when Proudon and Clemenceau were speaking of the grandness of the Church from their little fight.

* * *

It is also objected: But the Encyclical reminds us, almost as if we

had forgotten it, of the importance of the *logical principles* of contradiction and of sufficient reason that almost nobody denies.

The response to this objection is also easy. The Encyclical recalls the importance of these principles not only as *logical laws of our mind*, but also as *immutable laws of the extra-mental reality*. It recalls that *their real value*, ontological and transcendent, is *absolutely certain*, while instead phenomenism and especially subjectivism deny it. Through natural intelligence a square circle or a triangular ellipse are not only unimaginable and inconceivable, but also *unfeasible* outside the mind.

To understand the sense and the importance of the Encyclical it would be necessary to reflect one good time seriously and profoundly at what the proper object of natural intelligence is, whose object is very superior, is immensely superior to that of the external and internal senses like the imagination. While the senses perceive only *sensible* external and internal *phenomena*, natural intelligence perceives the *intelligible being of sensible things* and the *immutable laws of being* and of the extra-mental reality, whose laws again come deepened by *ontology* or by general metaphysics. Now ontology, which has for its object the *extra-mental being*, differs essentially from *logic*, because logic has for its object beings of reason, that is conceivable, but it is unfeasible out of the mind, as e.g. the laws of the syllogism.

Ontology also differs essentially from the positive and experimental sciences that study phenomena and their phenomenological laws.

They who do not comprehend the importance of this Encyclical, confuse more or less metaphysics with logic: for them St. Thomas is not other than a great logician, and outside of logic they do not see, as befalls nominalists and positivists, that progress of the positive sciences which the Encyclical, they say, retards. In reality the Encyclical recalls the real and absolute value of the first principles of natural intelligence, that metaphysics then deepens. Now without these principles every certainty would disappear.

«*No being can at the same time exist and not exist*» or also, as one reads in the Gospel: «*That which is, is; that which is not, is*

not». It is the fundamental law of reality. Therefore the theologians who doubt the real value of the principle of contradiction respond to Kant: «*But maybe Kant can at the same time be Kant and not be him?*»

It was also said that the Encyclical supposed the philosophy of being, but that does not go against those who admit the philosophy of the good.

It is easy to respond to that the *good* supposes the *true*, otherwise it is not a true good, and the true consists in affirming *that which is* and denying that which is not.

* * *

The Encyclical «*Humani generis*» reminds us therefore, as it says, *of the truth well known*, the fundamental importance of what is today disregarded. In other words, it recalls what cannot be ignored, namely the fundamental truths without some of which one completely mistakes the path and brings others outside of the truth with the pretense of illuminating them. It is the *unum necessarium* that is indispensable to the life of the soul in time and in eternity.

It is forgotten that the most elementary truths, like the principle of causality and the *Pater* in the order of Faith, are the most vital, the profoundest and the highest truths. But to realize it one needs to meditate on it and put it in practice. His Eminence the Archbishop of Florence refers in a pastoral letter, regarding religious ignorance, the fact of an Italian count who, close to death, heard his wife recite near to him with profound contemplation the *Pater noster*, and he told her: «Have you composed yourself, Countess, this prayer?». She had frequently recited it mechanically, and had not yet understood the profound meaning.

The Encyclical reminds us therefore of the truths of whose profundity we forget. Before criticizing these grand traditional doctrines, as Kant, Hegel and their successors have done, *one needs to be well sure of having understood them*.

If one truly sincerely searches to understand them well, we will be largely recompensed and will remain marveled of the good

with which the supreme Pastor speaks to us in this Encyclical.

In they who search for the truth and who pray to be illuminated, the well noted word takes place: «*You would not search for me, if you have not already found me*».

The grave and solemn warnings of the Magisterium of the Church are given to us in the name of Christ in truth and in charity. This truth not only liberates us from errors and from doubt, but also unities to God the minds, the hearts and the wills in the peace of Christ, of which we have much need in the worldly conflict that is not yet finished. One deigns the Lord to give it to us through the means of Mary Immaculate, for the glory of his name and for the good of all.

Appendix 3: Biography of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange

A Saint in Heaven¹

Who was the greatest theologian of the twentieth century? Many, seduced by the glamour of personality (which obtains even among theologians), would answer Karl Rahner SJ. But some who know how ferociously certain pre-Vatican II thinkers were buried by the liberals and reformers would look elsewhere entirely. One who loomed like a giant was Père Garrigou-Lagrange OP who is now being slowly rediscovered, not least by Fr. Aidan Nichols OP who has accepted a new lectureship at Oxford University in part to reassess his work. Here **Fr. Thomas Crean OP** introduces Garrigou-Lagrange's life and thought.

John Henry Newman, in his *Plain and Parochial Sermons*, said

1 Thomas Crean, "A Saint in Heaven," *Mass of Ages*, August 2006, <http://web.archive.org/web/20100918195214/http://www.latin-mass-society.org/2006/garrigou.html>, <http://www.latin-mass-society.org/2006/garrigou.html>.

this: “Great saints, great events, great privileges, like the everlasting mountains, grow as we recede from them.” As we leave behind the twentieth century it becomes easier for us to see who the great men of that time within the Church truly were, and any list of such men would surely include the French Dominican theologian, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. Father Garrigou-Lagrange’s works would once have been highly esteemed by seminarians and theologians alike; after the Second Vatican Council they fell largely into neglect, but more recently there have been some small signs that he is being read again, e.g. a new book published by an American Dominican introducing his life and work, and the inclusion of his name among the lecture topics scheduled for this coming year at Oxford University.

So who was this man, described rudely enough by the novelist François Mauriac as “that sacred monster of Thomism,” but by Pope Paul VI as “this illustrious theologian, faithful servant of the Church and of the Holy See”? (The phrase “monstre sacré” is not easy to translate. It may be used colloquially of a ‘legendary’ media personality, such as a film star. Used of a theologian it was certainly meant ironically. I am grateful to Mr. Brian Sudlow for supplying this information.)

Absolute truth

Gontran-Marie Garrigou-Lagrange was born in 1877 into a solid Catholic family living in the south-west of France. In 1896 he began studies in medicine at the university of Bordeaux, but whilst there he read a book by the Catholic philosopher Ernest Hello which changed the direction of his life. Years later Fr. Garrigou described the impression this one book made upon him: “I glimpsed how the doctrine of the Catholic Church is the absolute Truth about God, about His inner life, and about man, his origins and his supernatural destiny. As if in an instant of time, I saw how this doctrine is not simply ‘the best we can put forward based on our present knowledge,’ but the absolute truth which shall not pass away...”

To this intuition the young university student would remain faithful for the remaining sixty-eight years of his life.

Medical studies abandoned, Gontran-Marie entered the French

Dominicans at the age of twenty, and received the religious name Reginald. (Blessed Reginald of Orleans was a contemporary of St Dominic: our Lady appeared to him in a vision, cured him of a mortal sickness and gave to him a white scapular that thereupon became part of the Dominican habit.) Friar Reginald had the good fortune to receive his initial training from Dominicans committed to implementing Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris*, the document that insisted upon the unique place of St Thomas Aquinas in philosophy and theology. It was by studying the angelic doctor that the young Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange nourished the conviction that had brought him to the cloister: the unchangeableness of revealed truth.

His superiors clearly perceived his abilities, for after ordination in 1902 Fr. Reginald was enrolled for further philosophical studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. It was a mark of the trust that his superiors placed in him that he was sent to so aggressively secular an environment while still a young priest. Among his lecturers were Henri Bergson, Emile Durkheim, and the not yet excommunicated Alfred Loisy, 'father of Modernism.' His fellow students included the future philosopher Jacques Maritain, not yet a Catholic and indeed driven almost to despair by the prevailing nihilism of the great French university. Father Garrigou's relations with Maritain were later to be both fruitful and troubled.

In 1906, Fr. Reginald was assigned to teach philosophy at Le Saulchoir, the house of studies of the French Dominicans. His pedagogic skill was such that in 1909, at the age of thirty-two, he was sent to teach at the Dominican University in Rome, the Angelicum. Here he remained for the next fifty years, teaching three courses: Aristotle, apologetics and spiritual theology. He had the gift of making the most difficult subjects clear, and of showing how sound philosophy and revealed truth fit together in a wonderful harmony. Father Garrigou clearly loved his work: one of his students remembered him exclaiming, "I could teach Aristotle for three hundred years and never grow tired!" He also possessed what is perhaps the rarer gift of communicating his own zest for a subject to his listeners, for his lectures, abstract though they were, were not dull affairs. One student paints this portrait of Fr. Garrigou lecturing: "His small eyes were filled

with mischief and laughter, his body was constantly moving, his face was able to assume attitudes of horror, anger, irony, indignation and wonder.”

The watchman

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange was by nature and conviction a controversialist. He believed that the theologian’s task was not simply to teach Catholic doctrine but also to be, in the scriptural phrase, a watchman, on guard against whatever might undermine it. In the spirit of St Pius X and his encyclical *Pascendi*, published in 1907, Fr. Garrigou considered that the greatest threat to the Catholic faith was what is called ‘Modernism’ – that confused effort, made sometimes with good intentions and sometimes with bad, to ‘reinterpret’ Catholic doctrines in line with prevailing trends in history, philosophy and the natural sciences. Into the combat with Modernism he entered with vigor, attacking not people but errors, and desiring to lead those in error back to the integral truth of the Catholic Faith.

Two of the ‘great names’ of the day with whom Garrigou-Lagrange crossed swords early on were his former professor Henri Bergson and Maurice Blondel. Bergson, now almost forgotten, was then a greatly celebrated Jewish philosopher who seemed to many Catholics a useful ally in the struggle against materialism. Father Garrigou showed that Bergson’s writings were incompatible with the Catholic belief that by our concepts we can grasp the unchanging natures of things, and thus can form dogmas that will never need to be revised. In the end Bergson was brought, in part by Garrigou’s efforts, to the very brink of the Catholic Church, though he died unbaptized.

Blondel was another widely-fêted philosopher who was a Catholic. His explanation of how only Christianity could fulfill the deepest human longings compromised what is called ‘the supernatural order’: the fact that God by sanctifying grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit raises us infinitely beyond anything that our nature itself requires. For Fr. Garrigou, the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders was of the essence of Christianity – he loved to quote a dictum of St Thomas Aquinas, that “the smallest amount of grace in one person is greater than

the whole of creation.” One child with a baptized soul is of more value than all the angelic hierarchies, naturally considered. It was because Blondel’s ideas threatened to undermine this distinction that Garrigou-Lagrange resisted them. In so doing he anticipated the teaching that Pope Pius XII was later to issue in the encyclical, *Humani Generis*.

In his defense of Catholic doctrine according to the principles of St Thomas, Fr. Garrigou was greatly aided by Jacques Maritain. Maritain, originally from a markedly anti-clerical family, entered the Church in 1906 and was to become the most brilliant Thomist philosopher of the twentieth century, dying in 1973. Between the two wars, Garrigou-Lagrange and Maritain organized the ‘Thomist Study Circles.’ These were groups of laymen committed to the spiritual life who studied St Thomas and the Thomist tradition, and who met once a year for a five-day retreat preached by Fr. Garrigou at the Maritains’ house in Meudon. The study circles were highly successful, and Meudon became a seed-bed of vocations. The young Yves Congar, who was later to write somewhat bitterly about Garrigou-Lagrange, was present at some of the retreats preached by the Dominican friar at Meudon, and later recalled: “He made a profound impression on me. Some of his sermons filled me with enthusiasm and greatly satisfied me by their clarity, their rigor, their breadth and their spirit of faith.”

Throughout this period Garrigou-Lagrange’s reputation grew and became international. His lectures at the Angelicum on the spiritual life were particularly in demand. According to one author they became “one of the unofficial tourist sites for theologically-minded visitors to Rome,” attracting students from other universities and even experienced priests who wished to learn more about spiritual direction. (Father Garrigou himself was a sought-after spiritual director, valued alike for his knowledge, his firmness and his compassion.)

Call to holiness

It is perhaps in this field of mystical, or spiritual, theology that Garrigou’s most original work was done. As early as 1917, a special professorship in ‘ascetical and mystical theology’ had been created for him at the Angelicum, the first of its kind

anywhere in the world. His great achievement was to synthesize the highly abstract writings of St Thomas Aquinas with the 'experiential' writings of St John of the Cross, showing how they are in perfect harmony with each other. The one describes the spiritual life from the point of view, so to speak, of God, analyzing the manifold graces that He gives to the soul to bring it into union with Himself; the other describes the same process from the point of view of man, showing the 'attitudes' that a faithful soul should adopt at various stages of the spiritual journey. It must have been particularly pleasing for Fr. Garrigou when St John of the Cross, whose orthodoxy had once been doubted by some writers, was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius XI.

The other great theme of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's spiritual theology was the universality of God's call to the mystical life. He argued convincingly that while the more dramatic mystical phenomena such as visions and locutions are obviously reserved to a few, all the baptized are invited not just to a life of virtue, but to a life of close union with God in prayer. This union is in the most proper sense of the word mystical, since it is founded on the gifts of the Holy Ghost and on our sharing in God's own life by sanctifying grace. He went so far as to say that the transforming union as described by such saints as St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila was simply the full flowering of the grace of baptism. At the same time, Fr. Garrigou's writings contain useful warnings against abusing this doctrine, for he often points out that any so-called mysticism not based on the practice of the virtues and on meditation on Christ and His Passion is an illusion.

The role of university professor naturally brought with it the obligation of supervising doctoral students. It is said that Garrigou considered his best student to have been his fellow French Dominican, Marie-Dominique Chenu. Chenu's later career, however, must have been a disappointment to his mentor, for he went on to distance himself from the kind of Thomism traditionally practised in the Dominican Order in favor of a far more 'historical' approach to the subject. Fr. Garrigou, however, was always less interested in historical questions of who influenced whom than in discovering where truth in itself lay. It

also seems unlikely that Garrigou would have been impressed by Chenu's involvement in the 'worker-priest movement.' Another doctoral student of Father Garrigou's, and one destined for an even more prominent role in the Church than Chenu, was a young Polish priest named Karol Wojtyła. Under Garrigou-Lagrange's direction the future Pope wrote a thesis on 'The meaning of Faith in the Writings of St John of the Cross.'

Kingship of Christ

The disaster of world war in 1939 brought a special, personal suffering to Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange: estrangement from Maritain. When France fell, Fr. Garrigou, in common with many Frenchmen, continued to recognize Marshal Pétain, the hero of the Great War, as the rightful head of state. It followed that Charles de Gaulle was a mere rebellious soldier attempting to usurp authority. Father Garrigou did not shrink from publicly stating the logical conclusion: objectively speaking, to support de Gaulle was a mortal sin. But Maritain was a Gaullist, and made radio broadcasts from America in favor of the Free French.

This practical disagreement was matched by a theoretical one: Maritain had come to advocate a 'pluralist' model of society, in which adherents of different religions or of none would be granted equal freedom of expression and of public practice; a shared 'sense of human brotherhood' would be enough, he argued, to create a basically just society. Garrigou-Lagrange considered that Maritain was compromising the social doctrine of the Church by his writings on this subject, and also that he was overly optimistic about the spiritual state of those outside the Church. He wrote a solemn letter to Maritain asking him to change course, but Maritain, despite the great esteem he had for Fr. Garrigou as a theologian and as a man of prayer, refused to do so. The friendship between the two men was wounded, and could not be healed, or not in this life.

After the war Fr. Garrigou continued to teach in Rome. Over the years, his lecture notes were turned into an impressive array of books, the more technical ones being published in Latin and the more popular ones in French. In particular he commented on St Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, taking his place in the line

of the great commentators on that work, a line that stretches back to the Middle Ages. All the time, he was conscious, like Pope Pius XII, of how the dangerous tendencies against which he had striven in the days of St Pius X were still alive in the Church, threatening to undermine the integrity of doctrine. A famous article of his, called, 'Where is the New Theology Headed?' was written shortly after World War II. It contains this shrewd comment about Catholics who were unwittingly harming the Catholic cause: "They go to 'the masters of modern thought' because they want to convert them to the faith, and they finish by being converted by them." An interesting remark, perhaps, for these days of inter-religious dialogue.

No portrait of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange would be complete without reference to his religious life. For if he was an internationally renowned professor (and a feared opponent), he was above all a friar of the Order of Preachers. He was known, in fact, for his fidelity to the regular life. Although dispensations from the choral office were readily available in the Dominican Order for someone with his teaching load, Fr. Reginald was habitually present in choir. He would have gladly echoed a remark made by St John Bosco to his religious: "Liturgy is our entertainment." We are told that he was very modest in matters of food and drink and that he felt that it was hardly compatible with religious poverty to smoke. His 'cell' at the Angelicum was the most spartan in the priory, with no ornamentation, and a bed that was, in the words of one contemporary, "a pallet and a mattress so thin that it was virtually just an empty sack." It was not that he had no attraction for the things of the senses – as a young man he had learned to love the music of Beethoven, a love that remained with him through life. Yet – as he taught generations of Roman students – asceticism is a permanent necessity in this life, both because our fallen nature inclines us to sin, and also because we have to be made capable of the infinite good which is God.

Father Garrigou liked to emphasize that there is no incompatibility between external works such as teaching, preaching and retreat-giving and the monastic life that he had learned to live within the cloister. Following a dictum of St Thomas, he would remark that a friar's external activity should

flow “from an abundance of contemplation,” especially from liturgical prayer, mental prayer and above all the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. He was always troubled when anyone seemed to rank action more highly than contemplation, or spoke of the latter as a mere means to an end. He liked to emphasize that contemplation is an end in itself, a higher good, from the fullness of which preaching comes forth. To explain this idea, he would use the analogy of the Incarnation of the Word and man’s redemption. From all eternity God willed the Incarnation, not as a means subordinated to our redemption, but as a greater good, from which our redemption would, so to speak, overflow.

In short, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange was not only a master of spiritual theology: he lived what he taught. Yet if his vocation lay principally in what are called ‘the spiritual works of mercy,’ he did not forget the corporal ones. In his room he kept a box with the inscription, ‘*Pour mes pauvres,*’ and into this he would invite his many visitors to put alms. When it was full he might be seen doing the rounds of the city of Rome, distributing the contents to the poor.

Final years

Father Garrigou had worked in various capacities for the Holy Office from the days of Benedict XV onwards, and in the late 1950s Pope John XXIII invited him to join the theological commission that was preparing documents for the Second Vatican Council. But by this time his strength was failing, and he had to decline. He gave his last lecture at the Angelicum shortly before Christmas, 1959. For the next five years Friar Reginald lived in a serene decline of his mental faculties. As his mind and his eyes failed, this great theologian who had once written so subtly of potentiality and act, of sufficient and efficacious grace, of the inner life of God and the glory of Heaven, would remain in his bare cell or in the priory church, praying his Rosary and awaiting his own *transitus*. He died on 15 February 1964, the feast of one of the greatest of Dominican mystics, Blessed Henry Suso.

Unanswerable questions are the most fascinating. What would Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange have said, what would he have done, if he had lived a little longer with his faculties intact? What

would he have thought of the Second Vatican Council, and of the liturgical reform? Might he, like his confrère Roger-Thomas Calmel, have become an early ally of Archbishop Lefebvre in the struggle to maintain orthodoxy? Or would he perhaps, like Cardinal Ottaviani, have spoken once and then resigned himself and the Church to God? Who shall say? A merciful Providence spared him all such puzzles: he had fought the good fight long enough, and he was called home.

Let the last word be given to Jacques Maritain. In 1937 Maritain recorded in his diary a disagreement which he had had with Fr. Garrigou over the Spanish Civil War. Years later, when Maritain published his diaries, the following note was appended to the passage in question: “This great theologian, little versed in the things of the world, had an admirably candid heart, which God finally purified by a long and very painful physical trial, a cross of complete annihilation, which he had expected and had accepted in advance. I pray to him now with the saints in heaven.”

Suggested Reading

I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness for this article to a recent book by an American Dominican, Fr. Richard Peddicord, entitled, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism*. As far as I know, it is the only book that has been written expressly on Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange’s life and legacy.² It is published by St Augustine’s Press.

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange wrote 28 books and over 600 articles. His best-known work of mystical theology is the two-volume study, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*. This is in effect a *summa* of his research in this field.³ Many people, laymen, religious and priests, have found it very valuable. It has

2 Another is: Aidan Nichols, *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2008).

3 His more philosophical *summa* could be considered his *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, trans. Patrick Cummins (St. Louis, Mo.: Herder, 1950),
<http://www.ewtn.com/library/THEOLOGY/REALITY.HTM>. This is also reprinted by TAN Books.

recently been reprinted in English by TAN Books.

For those interested in apologetics, *De Revelatione* is an austere masterpiece. It was in large part translated into English in 1926 by Thomas Walshe under the title, *The Principles of Catholic Apologetics*. A companion work, though more philosophical in content, is *God: His Existence and Nature*, published originally by St Louis. The same publishing house produced translations (from Latin) of Fr. Garrigou's commentaries on the *Summa Theologiæ* of St Thomas.

TAN Books have also reprinted various other of the more 'popular' works of Garrigou-Lagrange, including *The Mother of our Saviour* and *Everlasting Life*. These are full of solid doctrine, whilst also being suitable for devotional use.

Finally, there is a work called *The Last Writings of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange*, published in 1969 by the New City Press. This contains retreat talks given by Fr. Reginald in his last years.

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