

***The structure of the encyclical
"Humani Generis"***

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Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange's "[Where is the
New Theology Leading Us?](#)"

Please [email me](#) with errors you might
find or questions that you might have.

*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 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
judgement 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 judgement with
the subjective exigencies of moral action*,
expressed by indemonstrable postulates of
practical reason. One does not give an
objectively founded metaphysical

certainly, 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 \(Denzing., n. 1701\)](#).

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 formulae.

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 judgement 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 concurrence 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 *realitivism* 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-intellegible 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 judgement 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.

In this way the traditional definition of truth as conformity of our judgement 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.

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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 benedicitis, sum etenim» (John, XIII, 13): «Caelum et terra transibunt, verba autem mea non praeteribunt» (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.

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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 phenomenalism 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 for example 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.

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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.

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