

THOMISM AND THE NEW THEOLOGY*



THAT World War II would bring with it, not merely great changes in the material fortunes of many nations, but also radical changes in the world of thought, was something which could have been foreseen by a glance at the history of human thought throughout the ages. Even before the outbreak of hostilities it was evident that the great civil universities of Europe were in the grip of philosophies which were anti-christian in character, derived as they were from Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Engels. Once the frontiers of Europe were opened for inspection after the liberation it soon became clear that a new factor had arrived on the scene. This was a new philosophy, difficult to define, even by those who taught it, but nevertheless of great influence, especially in France. This new philosophy was given the name of Existentialism. Now, it is also a fact of history that few philosophies come into being without having an influence, sooner or later, on the science of Theology, and so it was natural that the theologian should wait, with a certain degree of apprehension, the result of the impact of these philosophies, especially Existentialism, on Catholic thought. This was even more important in the present case, since a flourishing school of Catholic existentialists already existed in France and in some other countries.

By the year 1946 controversies in several ecclesiastical reviews made it quite clear that the apprehensions were more than justified.¹ In that same year, in the course of two Allocutions, one to the General Chapter of the Friars Preachers and the other to the Jesuits, the Pope himself made some references to

* This article was written and accepted for publication prior to the appearance of the recent papal encyclical, *Humani Generis*. Hence, the author makes no reference to that important document but his article gains significance in the light of the Holy Father's words.—ED.

¹ Cf. M. Labourdette, O.P. "La Théologie et ses sources," *Revue Thomiste*, 56 (1946), 353-371, and J. Daniélou, "Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse," *Etudes*, 249 (April, 1946).

what he called a "new theology."² He pointed out that, while questions hitherto in dispute among Catholic theologians were still important and by no means to be neglected, nevertheless, the modern problem which confronts all theologians, no matter to what "school" they belong, is the defense of the very foundations of the perennial philosophy and theology, foundations which every intellect calling itself Catholic both recognizes and venerates. The very centre of the problem touches upon the intimate relations between the human intellect and that faith which has been revealed to man by God. How far is the intellect capable of penetrating into those truths in order to deduce from them, by a process of reasoning, other truths which are connected with them? Above all, what is the value of such conclusion? In his Allocution to the Jesuits the Pope mentioned the new theology by name: "There is a good deal of talk (but without the necessary clarity of concept), about a 'new theology,' which must be in constant transformation, following the example of all other things in the world, which are in a constant state of flux and movement, without ever reaching their term. If we were to accept such an opinion what would become of the unchangeable dogmas of the Catholic Faith; and what would become of the unity and stability of that Faith?"

In spite of these words of warning so solemnly delivered by the Vicar of Christ, discussion and controversy still continued, and on the twenty-third of November, 1949, the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, speaking to a packed audience in the Barceló cinema, Madrid, declared that European Idealism as a philosophical system had been overcome and superseded by another and a more modern system, so too had Aristotelianism. He then continued: "I am able to announce to you that the Roman, Catholic, Apostolic Church is about to relinquish both Aristotelianism and Thomism; and that a new theology is being forged which is in close relationship with that of the Greek Fathers."³

² Cf. *Act. Apost. Sed.*, 38 (1946), 384-388.

³ Reported in *YA*, 24th Nov. 1949.

In spite of all that has been said and written about this new theology there is still no very clear idea of its basic doctrines, even though several of its chief proponents are now well known to us all.⁴ The historical centre of the movement is in France, with some repercussions in other countries, such as England and Spain, where the movement has been hailed as *the* contribution of this century to modern thought. However, the partisans of this new theology make it very difficult for us to detect their basic doctrines, for the simple reason that they do not seem to be very interested in constructing a definite system or method of theology. Rather they spend most of their time and energies in attacking the old traditional system, their basic argument being that it is to the advantage of the Church in modern times to adopt more modern methods of approach, and especially modern philosophies, in order to present the truths of the faith in a way which will appeal to ordinary people. In order to make their position clearer we shall endeavour, in the course of this article, to study some at least of the main doctrines put forward by these new theologians, especially those which seem to have some connection with the warning given by the Holy Father in his two Allocutions already mentioned.

The term "new theology" has, as we shall see, no very fixed content. The phrase can mean something which all Catholic theologians worthy of the name must reject, or it can be applied to certain tendencies which, although they may be dangerous if carried too far, may occupy a legitimate place in Catholic theology. One thing however is quite certain, namely that this new movement can not be separated from what M. Maritain has called the "New Christianity,"⁵ which according to him is bound to make itself felt in the present age, and which will be characterized by an attempt to bring the doctrines of the Church into line with the times in which we live. We might

⁴ Cf. Br. de Solages, "Pour l'honneur de la Théologie," in *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclesiastique*, 48 (1947), 65-84, in which the names of the principal supporters of the new theology are given.

⁵ Cf. J. Maritain, *Humanisme Intégral*, pp. 139 and 146.

say of the new theology that it attempts to form one of the integral elements in the new christianity. The partisans of this movement are preoccupied with the "man in the street" as we know him today. He has to be won over to Christ and to the true Church, and yet he has been brought up on the basis of a rationalistic and idealistic philosophy which has effectively sealed his mind against any approach along the old traditional lines. Scholastic philosophy will never make any impression upon him for the simple reason that he does not understand the terms and the concepts which it uses. The same must therefore be said of a theology which makes use of the traditional Scholasticism for its presentation or development. That is the real problem which confronts the theologian of today, and the whole question at issue between the new theologians and the traditional Thomist is how it can best be solved. Confronted with this problem the partisans of the new theology have attempted a solution, but that solution is proposed in two very different ways which can not, by any means, receive the same criticism, as we shall see.

Both solutions imply, even if they do not state it in so many words, the rejection of the Aristotelio-Thomistic philosophy as a fitting instrument for use in theology and its substitution by other more modern forms of philosophical thought. One solution has, however, gone too far, and has denied the scientific value of those deductions made from the revealed principles of the faith with the aid of reason as an instrument. The earlier writings of Fr. Chénu and Fr. Charlier contain a summary of this extreme solution. According to Chénu, the source of all theology is the vital life of the Church in its members, which can not be separated from history, the deciding factor in all theology. Thus, strictly speaking, theology is the life of the members of the Church, rather than a series of conclusions drawn from revealed data with the aid of reason. Charlier added to this statement the conclusion that the strict theological deduction as the result of a scientific use of human reason is therefore impossible, since it would suppose that reason could attain to a true understanding of the truths of

faith. Theology, as such, is therefore reduced to a simple explanation of revealed truth in terms which need not necessarily have a permanent value, but which can, and indeed should, change with time and according to the demands of circumstances. This doctrine was far too dangerous to pass unchecked, and in 1942 the Holy Office banned the writings in which it appeared.⁶

In spite of this condemnation and the strong warning of the Holy Father in the Allocutions already mentioned, the same type of solution was proposed in a slightly more benign form in articles in *Reviews* and especially in some of the publications in the series, *Sources Chrétiennes* as well as in the Collection *Théologie* and *Unam Sanctam*. Once again the subtle attack on Scholasticism was evident, and it would be as well to point out at once that the focal point of this attack was not merely Thomism as such. There are different theories on certain matters pertaining to theology inside the Church and many things are open to free discussion, but up to the present all systems have attempted to base their solutions and conclusions on the solid rock of the perennial truth. It is that very foundation, wherever it may be found, which is under attack from the new theology. At the same time, the main enemy is, as always, Thomism, partly because it is the one system which has a completely coherent philosophical basis, and also because many other systems existing in the Church today are not entirely free from the taint of humanism and even of nominalism. This fact becomes very clear if we compare two articles written on the subject of the new theology, one by Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange in *Angelicum* and the other by Fr. Perego in *Ciencia y Fe*.⁷ The former sees the new theology as a dangerous innovation which strikes at the very roots of the faith itself, and which is, therefore, to be condemned. The latter, while by no means agreeing entirely with this new system, tries to lay much more emphasis on the reasons for its appearance at this point in the

⁶ M. D. Chénu, *Une Ecole de Théologie*, Le Saulchoir, 1937; L. Charlier, *Essai sur le problème théologique*, 1938.

⁷ *Angelicum*, 1946, pp. 126-145, and *Ciencia y Fe*, 1949, pp. 7-30.

history of civilization. The aim of the new theologians is primarily apologetic, i. e., an attempt to approach the modern mind by a direct use of modern methods, adapting for that purpose philosophical terms and concepts which are in more common use among present-day philosophers in an endeavour to break down the prejudice against Scholasticism and all that it implies. This divergence in the criticism of the new theology shows us more plainly than anything else the difficulty of obtaining any clear notion of what is really implied by this movement, a difficulty which is increased by the fact that many of those theologians who do attempt to criticise this new movement are themselves followers of systems which have departed from the clear lines of true Thomistic thought.

Thus it is clear that the main contention of the partisans of this new movement is that theology, to remain alive, must move with the times. At the same time, they are very careful to repeat all the fundamental propositions of traditional theology almost as if there was no intention of making any attack against it. This is very true of such writers as Frs. de Lubac, Daniélou, Rahner and Br. de Solages, all of whom are undoubtedly at the very centre of this movement.

Their main accusation seems to be that traditional theology is out of touch with reality because it takes little or no account of modern methods and philosophical systems, and thus fails in its main object, i. e., to present to the modern world a reasonable explanation of the doctrine of Christ. This is especially true, in their opinion, of neo-Thomism, which is a sterile movement, destined to have little or no effect on the modern world. As one of these theologians expresses it, "*Quand l'esprit évolue, une vérité immuable ne se maintient que grâce à une évolution simultanée et corrélative de toutes les notions, maintenant entre elles un même rapport. Une théologie qui ne serait pas actuelle serait une théologie fausse.*"⁸ According to such teachers traditional theology, with its foundations in Aristotelianism, has lost during the centuries which followed St. Thomas, a mass of notions, ideas, and even methods of expounding the faith

⁸ H. Bouillard, *Conversion et Grace chez S. Thomas D'Aquin*, pp. 219, sq.

which were well known to the Fathers of the Church, some of which have been taken over by the leaders of contemporary non-Catholic thought. Such ideas and methods must be recovered if any approach is to be made to the modern world, and they must be incorporated into theology, even if that means rejecting Aristotelianism or even Thomism as we understand it today.

The partisans of the new theology accuse the defenders of the traditional methods of being ignorant of that dramatic world, the human individual with all his anxieties and experiences, while they wander about in a world of the abstract and the speculative. St. Thomas himself—so they assert—were he alive today, would be the first to recognize the importance of a new method of approach, and so would do all that he could to find one which would bring Catholic teaching into the foreground once more. Small wonder then that the traditional theologians have made a counter-accusation against the new theology that it has its philosophical basis in idealism and in voluntarism, being descended in a direct line through Plotinus, Bruno, Kant, Schelling, and Hegel in the remote past, and from Von Humbolt, Nietzsche, Weber and Heidegger in more recent years. Perhaps such a statement takes the criticism of the philosophical angle of the new theology a little too far, but certainly it would be quite true to say that the partisans of the new movement are seeking their metaphysics outside Thomism, and with bad results up to the present.

It is perfectly true to say that St. Thomas himself was the author of a “new theology”; one glance at the history of Thomism from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries is enough to justify this remark. It is also true that Thomism, far from being a dead thing, is necessarily vital, in the sense that much progress is made and new light is continually being thrown on the mysteries of the faith by means of the theological conclusion strictly so called, that is to say, from one premise containing a revealed truth and another which contains a truth known for certain by human reason. St. Thomas would have been the last to assert that Thomism had reached its term with

the last of his writings. On the contrary, he himself was always on the lookout for new angles of approach to the many questions which needed solution in his own day. However, the position taken up by the adherents of this new theology is far different from that which St. Thomas adopted. Perhaps we shall be able to see this a little more clearly if we consider for a moment the position they adopt with regard to revelation.

When God speaks to man and communicates to him divine mysteries it is the fact which is revealed, and not the logical proposition in which that fact is presented to us. Consequently, very different philosophical systems can and indeed should be used to express that divine revelation and to explain it to the people for whom it is intended, who are not all theologians by any means. The supernatural virtue of faith which is given to us by God in order that we may believe the truths which He has revealed is essentially a vital thing, part, that is to say, of our lives, and as such it can not be separated from the age in which we live. Only in a very secondary way is it concerned with those formal propositions under whose form the faith is presented to us. Faith will thus give birth to theology, because the truths of faith are expressed in words and concepts taken from philosophical systems, but since those philosophies will naturally tend to evolve according to the needs of the times it follows that theology too will be in a state of constant evolution. However, the real progress in the development of revealed truth is to be found, not in the use of philosophical terms or logical propositions and reasonings, but in an ever growing penetration into the truths of faith by a deeper and more vital Christian life.⁹ Since the life of the individual as a Christian and a member of the Mystical Body can not be separated from the age in which he lives, it will be natural and even necessary to adopt the terms and the concepts familiar to modern thought in order to express the truths of faith in such a way that they will be intelligible and attractive to those outside the true Church who are groping their way towards the knowledge and the love of God.

⁹ Clearly, this is very closely allied to Blondel's definition of truth as *adaequatio realis mentis et vitae*.

Such, very briefly, is the position taken up by the new theologians with regard to the relation between revelation and theology as a science; and to our way of thinking it outlines a problem which will have to be faced by all theologians, and especially by Thomists. Needless to say, such a position, like most errors, contains a germ of truth, which makes it all the more dangerous. That divine revelation is, above all, a communication of certain divine facts can have a perfectly legitimate meaning for the orthodox theologian, and above all for the Thomist, but to make such a statement the basis of a theological system which derides (there is no other word) the theological conclusion, is a very great mistake. However, it is not, by any means the only mistake made by the partisans of the new theology, because their root error goes ever so much deeper, consisting as it does in a false interpretation of the relationship between faith and reason. To go too deeply into this question would lead us further afield than the purpose of this article warrants, but at the same time a brief statement of the Thomist position in this matter will help to bring out even more clearly the implications and the dangers of these new theories.

St. Thomas' view of this problem of the relation between faith and reason which gives rise to the science of theology was both deep and clear and is admirably set out and defended by John of St. Thomas.¹⁰ Theology is a true science, indeed it is the most noble of the sciences, worthy in every way of the name of *sapientia*. The principles upon which it relies in its evolution and in its investigations are those divine facts which have been revealed by God. However, as a science, those divinely revealed principles do not form its proper object, that is the rôle of the conclusions which are drawn from them with the help of human reason. Such a statement, which seems so clear to us now, was a real revolution when it was first made. The object of the *science* of theology is the theological conclusion strictly so called. Now, in order to deduce these conclusions

¹⁰ *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 1; cf. John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Theologicus*, *in loco*.

from revealed truth there is need of a fitting instrument with which to work. Sometimes this instrument takes the form of another revealed truth, while at other times it is a truth which is known to human reason by its own unaided efforts. Now, obviously, the minor premise which contains another revealed truth will have far greater influence on the conclusion than one which contains a truth known to human reason alone. But, and here is the crux of the whole question, even though the human truth occupies an inferior position, that of a mere instrument, the revealed truth in the major premise does exercise a great influence on that human instrument. That is why St. Thomas speaks of these natural truths which are so used in theology as the "handmaidens" of that science, in the sense that theology, as a true science, makes use of these human truths for its major purpose, which is to explain revealed truth in human language, so far as that is possible.

The position of the new theologians is very different from that of Aquinas. Their idea is that the theological reasoning consists in using the revealed truth in order to draw out the full latent content contained in the human truths, the contrary, in fact, of the Thomist position. This is a logical conclusion which follows from their vitalistic attitude towards truth and especially from their statements that the theological conclusion strictly so called has little or no value.¹¹ It also follows from their teaching with regard to the evolution, necessarily connected with contemporary history, through which theology must pass if it is to remain alive and to play an effective part in the modern world. As one of the partisans of the new theology expresses it, "*L'histoire manifeste donc à la fois la relativité des notions, des schèmes où la théologie prends corps, et l'affirmation permanente qui les domine. Elle fait connaître la condition temporelle de la théologie et, en même temps, offre aux regards de la foi l'affirmation absolue, la Parole divine qui s'y est incarnée.*"¹² Thus the human reasoning which changes according to the dictates of its historical evolution and the

¹¹ Cf. the two works by M. Chénu and L. Charlier already quoted in note 6.

¹² *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas D'Aquin*, by Henri Bouillard, p. 221.

necessities of the times, uses the permanent element, which is the divine truth, as an instrument to develop and present its latent content.

Thus the central problem which confronts us here is quite simply one of two contrary ways of considering the relation between revelation and reason. Either reason is the instrument in the development of revealed truth or the revealed truth is the instrument of reason. It is our opinion that, unless the fact which we have mentioned before of the great influence of the revealed truths on the natural truth which is used as an instrument in their full development is understood and clearly brought to light, then this fundamental error in the new theology will never be completely overcome. For that reason it is useful to notice that the same conclusion could have been reached by a consideration of the rôle of the middle term in the theological syllogism, which in one case—that of the major premise—is a revealed truth, and in the other minor premise, a truth of human reason. In order that this middle term in the minor premise may have exactly the same sense as that which it has in the major premise, thus avoiding four terms in the syllogism, it must of necessity have the “approval,” as it were, of the revealed truth. If we examine it carefully we shall see that it is just this approval which gives to the theological conclusion its full force as an element in the expression of divine revelation and which also brings to light the rôle of human truth as an instrument in theology.

We know that, according to St. Thomas, the instrument has a double activity, i. e., its own, which is attributed to its personal activity in the forming of the effect, and also another power which it receives from that cause which uses it as an instrument. Thus, in the theological conclusion we are not dealing with a series of probabilities, but with strict conclusions in the form of judgments which correspond to the ontological truth virtually contained in the revealed principles. This doctrine has been very clearly expressed by John of St. Thomas, when he said: “*Praemissa naturalis consideratur dupliciter. Primo secundum quod praecise naturalis est, et sic ex hac parte*

*non concurrat nisi ministerialiter. . . . Alio modo consideratur praemissa naturalis ut conjuncta praemissae supernaturali de fide, scilicet ut ab ea elevatur quia approbatur et corrigitur ab ipsa, et eius certitudinem participat: et hoc modo etiam praemissa naturalis concurrat non principaliter, et per se, sed sub altiori lumine.”*¹³

From all these various angles we reach one and the same conclusion, namely that it is the truth of faith which plays the active part in the theological process of reasoning, using the natural truth to develop the latent content in revelation, and using it as a strict instrument in the Thomist sense of that word. For this reason those theological conclusions are more certain than any merely natural truth could ever be, because they are reduced, in their final analysis, to a higher principle than natural reason, one which is supernatural and divine, which colours all that is human in the theological process, giving it a new and a supernatural value. It is this divine element in theology which unifies everything, even the speculative and the practical aspects of it.¹⁴ Because the new theology has failed to appreciate this truth with regard to the theological conclusion it has also failed to realize the rôle of the merely human truth as an instrument of faith.

Clearly, these principles have a very great importance when we come to consider the attacks delivered against Thomism by the partisans of the new theology. Far from being a mere development of rationalism, as they assert, Thomism is, at one and the same time, realistic and objective in its outlook. For this reason the present Holy Father, in an address to the assembled students of the seminaries, institutes, and colleges of Rome, both seculars and regulars, stressed once again the teaching of the *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, as well as that of the *Code of Canon Law*, and then added: “Be full of devotion, therefore, blessed sons, and of enthusiasm for St. Thomas: bend all your efforts to grasp his lucid doctrine, embrace wholeheartedly whatever clearly belongs to it and is safely regarded

¹³ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Theologicus*, I, q. 1, a. 6.

¹⁴ Cf. John of St. Thomas, in I, Disp. 2, a. 10.

as essential to it.”¹⁵ In the light of such clear direction from the Holy See what are we to think of the action of these new theologians who wish to substitute for Thomism the terms, concepts, and principles of a new and fluid philosophy which, as they themselves confess, will pass in the course of time as others have done before it? To quote once more the words of one of the new theologians, “*Quand l'esprit évolue, une vérité immuable ne se maintient que grâce à une évolution simultanée et corrélative de toutes les notions, maintenant entres elles un même rapport. Une théologie qui ne serait actuelle serait une théologie fausse.*”¹⁶

Does it not also follow from what we have said above about the theological conclusion and the place in it of the human element that, when the Church uses certain philosophical terms in her dogmatic definitions, she is really exercising her infallible judgment with regard to the value of such terms to express the inner meaning of divinely revealed truth? She is in no way subordinating herself to those terms, as some seem inclined to think; on the contrary, she is using them to express her meaning, and so they no longer belong to the purely human or natural order, but receive a supernatural approval from those very same divine truths which they serve to express. That is the main reason why we, as Thomists, insist on the perennial aspect of the philosophy of Aquinas, something which will remain and be a vital element in the world long after other systems have faded into history. Speaking of this aspect of Thomism, M. Maritain says: “It can, therefore, claim to be abiding and permanent in the sense that, before Aristotle and St. Thomas had given it scientific formulation as a systematic philosophy, it existed from the dawn of history in germ, and in the pre-philosophic state, as an instinct of the understanding and a natural knowledge of the first principles of reason, and ever since its foundation as a system has remained firm and progressive, a powerful and living tradition, while all other philosophies have been born and have died in their turn.”¹⁷

¹⁵ *Act. Apost. Sed.*, 31-245.

¹⁶ Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas D'Aquin*, p. 219.

¹⁷ *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 100.

We are now asked to accept, in exchange for this solid foundation, the fluid concepts of a new philosophy, destined to change with time—we are told—like everything else in this fluid world. This, to our way of thinking, is not merely unreasonable but also very dangerous.

There are certain basic philosophical concepts which cannot be abandoned without danger to our faith. St. Thomas saw this very clearly in connection with certain notions such as that of subsistence as included in Conciliar decrees and definitions, in particular those of the Second Council of Constantinople. It is absolutely necessary to retain this metaphysical concept in exactly the same sense in which it is understood by the Thomist, as the foundation of the psychological and moral personality if we are to hope to avoid falling into the heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches. We are not told what is to happen to these ontological notions and concepts were Thomism to be abandoned in favour of a new theology and philosophy, but we can guess! For that reason we can not accept the statement of the new theology that such metaphysical notions included in Conciliar decrees have no permanent value, and can be substituted by others without any danger to the abiding principles of the faith itself. Thus, speaking of the notion of formal cause as introduced into the decrees on Justification in the Council of Trent, Bouillard says: “*On se demandera peut-être s’il est encore possible de considérer comme contingentes les notions impliquées dans les définitions conciliaires? Ne serait-ce pas compromettre le caractère irréformable de ces définitions? Le Concile de Trente, par exemple, a employé, dans son enseignement sur la justification, la notion de cause formelle. N’a-t-il pas, par le fait même, consacré cet emploi et conféré à la notion de grace-forme un caractère définitif? — Nullement. Il n’était certainement pas dans l’intention du Concile de canoniser une notion aristotélicienne, ni même une notion théologique conçue sous l’influence d’Aristote. . . . Il a utilisé à cette fin des notions communes dans la théologie du temps. Mais on peut leur substituer d’autres sans modifier le sens de son enseignement.*”¹⁸

¹⁸ H. Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas D’Aquin*, pp. 221-222.

This doctrine alone would be sufficient to justify scepticism with regard to the new theology and its fundamental tenets, because we should not forget that we are being asked to substitute for the clear metaphysical notions of Aquinas the fluid concepts of modern philosophies, and it is very difficult indeed for us to see how that can be done without harm to the unchangeable doctrines of the faith. A simple application of what has been quoted above about the notion of the formal cause to other concepts such as those of relation, person, nature, and substance as they are to be found in the writings of modern philosophers only serves to increase our sense of apprehension. However, we shall leave this point for more detailed and positive criticism on another occasion, but before doing so a word must be said about the connection between the revealed truth as such and the formal proposition of that truth, i. e. the dogma of faith.

That there is an intimate relation between the revealed truth and the dogma as proposed by the Church for our belief is something which is perfectly clear to everyone. However, it is evident that the new theologians have misunderstood that relationship, or at least have fixed their attention on one aspect of it to the neglect of others. The logical proposition is related to the mystery of faith which it expresses just as the logical assertion is related to the thing which is stated in it. In other words, so far as the Church is concerned the dogma is only the external expression in words of her intimate judgment of revealed truth. It is a proposition expressing a truth and formulated by a Teacher who is infallible in things which pertain to faith or morals. Therefore the logical expression in words of any truth of faith is something more than a mere external expression of Christian experience (that is the modernist view); it is the act of the official teaching Church. It is very important not to forget this fact.

Insofar, then, as the dogma is contained in a logical proposition, it is something complex; whereas the mystery itself which is proposed for our belief is something simple. This means, in actual practice, that we do, in fact, believe the

mystery which is proposed to us, not the logical proposition, but at the same time, that proposition is the medium through which we believe the mystery, and therefore it must express that mystery adequately, especially when it is proposed to us by the infallible Church. This doctrine is nothing more than an application, not of logical formulae which have no real meaning, but of common sense. The formal, logical proposition has no value except as an expression of the inward thought. Simple examples of this fact could be given in abundance, but one will suffice. The phrase, "man is a rational animal" is a logical proposition which is expected to express in words the nature of man. If one agrees with that proposition he can do so from various aspects. To any Christian that phrase should imply that man is a composite being, made up of two parts, the body and the soul. But the proposition could also be subscribed to by a rationalist who does not believe in the soul at all, as a spiritual entity. Are we, therefore, to say that both the Christian and the rationalist believe in the same basic reality behind the words of this logical proposition? By no means. In other words, the phrase "rational animal" must have a very definite philosophical content which in one case is agreed to and in the other is denied. It is our contention that the same thing is true with regard to those basic philosophical concepts which are connected with certain Conciliar decrees and definitions, and which must be retained in their full metaphysical meaning if the faith is not to have, as its basis, shifting sand instead of firm rock!

We have already observed that it is very difficult to give a systematic outline of the doctrines of the new theology, and that for several reasons. In the first place, the partisans of this movement are far too occupied with their revolt against traditional Thomism to spend much time in the building up of a system. Moreover, they are very shy and elusive, so much so that it is often difficult to diagnose this tendency in any particular author. Anyone who has read the works of Fr. Ives de Montcheuil, especially chapters nine and ten of his *Leçons sur le Christ*, will be able to appreciate something at least of

this difficulty. For that reason it is neither possible nor indeed quite fair to attempt to give a complete list of authors who may be regarded as partisans of this new movement. Rather we have to be on the watch for tendencies, hints, obscurities, many of which are admirably hidden behind a smoke-screen of statements which seem, at first sight, to reflect the pure traditional theology, but which in fact do nothing of the kind. This is very noticeable in such writers as Frs. de Lubac and Daniélou. From even a brief glance at their principal works it is at once clear that they are at pains to hide anything which might be regarded as new or startling in their expositions under the outward appearance of complete agreement with all the traditional formulae of theology. They claim to be among the most faithful disciples of St. Thomas whose main task is to set his doctrines in the framework of history. Their works abound in quotations from the writings of Aquinas, although some of his principal commentators are conspicuous by their absence! They recognize, without exception, the full Catholic doctrine with regard to the supernatural nature of such elements in the spiritual life as grace, the beatific vision, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and the infused virtues, but they differ very much from the Thomist position in their exposition of the whole relationship between the natural and the supernatural. This difference can be clearly seen in their treatment of that very difficult question of the natural desire for supernatural beatitude, especially as it is outlined in Fr. de Lubac's now-famous book *Surnaturel*. We are not concerned here with a complete criticism of that work because that has already been done by authors far more competent to judge of its merits and de-merits than we are.¹⁹ Our task is somewhat simpler in its scope, because it is concerned with the foundation which lies behind the doctrine expressed in that book.

As a preliminary observation it should be noted that it is not correct to say that St. Thomas makes only rare use of the word "supernatural," a statement, by the way, which is by no

¹⁹ Cf. the admirable article by C. Boyer, S. J., "Nature pure et Surnaturel dans le Surnaturel de P. de Lubac," *Gregorianum*, 18 (1947), pp. 379, sq.

means exclusive to Fr. de Lubac. The truth of the matter is that both the word itself in its full meaning and also the synonyms for it occur frequently in the writings of Aquinas, especially in the *Summa*, the *Quaestiones Disputatae* and in the single question *De virtutibus in Communi*.²⁰

Far more dangerous and false, however, is the interpretation which de Lubac gives to this term "supernatural" and which he attributes to St. Thomas, i. e., that it is not used in direct contrast to "natural," but rather to signify anything which lies over and beyond the merely natural powers of any creature. This definition, apart from the fact that it is not even etymologically correct, lies at the root of all the teaching contained in this book. Obviously, with the aid of such a definition, in which "supernatural" really means "superhuman," the author is able to find in St. Thomas' teaching justification for his theory that there is, in the natural order, an inefficacious but *absolute* desire for the beatific vision of God face to face and as He is in Himself, since man has no other ultimate end but this vision, in the present order. Since this desire is natural, and therefore something which is placed by God Himself in man's human nature, it does not have the effect of making God depend on man (for it is His free gift), nor can it produce in us any right to the beatific vision, to grace, or the infused virtues. Thus the gratuitous nature of these gifts is saved, but at the cost of not a little effort on the part of the author.

There can be little doubt that a theory such as this, especially if it is carried to its logical conclusions, does tend to destroy the complete distinction between the natural and the supernatural, in spite of all the author may say to the contrary. It also seems clear that, even if this explanation of the meaning of the terms "natural" and "supernatural" preserves what we may call, for want of a better term, the "juridical" gratuitousness of grace, the infused virtues, and the beatific vision, it is very difficult to see how it can preserve at the same time their theological and ontological gratuitousness. In order to

²⁰ Cf. for example, Art. 10 of this Question, also the articles by R. W. Meagher in the *Clergy Review*, Jan. 1948.

appreciate this point, which is all-important in this controversy about the nature of the new theology, it is necessary to see clearly what is implied in the *absolute* desire of which de Lubac speaks.

Since he has given us the usual traditional meaning for the inefficacious desire, i. e., one in which the means to attain it are lacking in nature, we may presume that, when he speaks of such a desire as being absolute, as opposed to conditional, he is also using that term in its traditional sense. An absolute desire, then, is one which is concerned with some good which is in proportion to the nature, such as the desire which the soul has after death for reunion with the body, or the desire which a blind man can have for the sense of sight. Even though *per accidens* such a desire may be incapable of realization in fact, it is not therefore a vain desire, nor does it cease to be natural. Bañez, with his usual penetration and clarity of thought, explains this, and defends the doctrine that such a desire is natural in spite of the fact that it either can not be, or may never be, realized at all.²¹ The reason he gives is both simple and conclusive. Since such desires have been realized *de facto* in certain individuals of the species, they can be lawfully desired by others of the same species. Some persons have, in fact, the gift of sight, and so it is natural for a man born blind to desire that gift, even though there may be no power in nature which is capable of giving him that gift. Such is the usual explanation given to this term "absolute desire," and it is the one which Fr. de Lubac seems to accept. In that case, there is only one conclusion which can be drawn from his opinion, namely, that, although juridically the supernatural under all its aspects is a free gift of God, nevertheless, man can still have a desire for the face to face vision of God which although inefficacious, is still in proportion to his nature.

Now, it should be kept in mind that Fr. de Lubac in thinking about a desire which has for its object not God, as the Author of Nature, but as He is in Himself, something which is of its nature supernatural. Nor are we able to defend this

²¹ Cf. Bañez, in I, q. 76, a. 1.

opinion on the grounds that he is speaking of the natural power which is in all creatures to correspond with the activity of the First Cause, either in the natural or in the supernatural order, because such a *potentia obedientialis* is entirely passive, and thus on the part of the nature of the creature there does not and can not correspond to it any intention, tendency, inclination, or natural desire; it is a mere passivity under the Almighty Hand of God. If then this natural desire is to mean anything at all in the sense in which it is proposed by the author of *Surnaturel* it must surely imply that the end in view—the beatific vision—is, in some way or other, in proportion to human nature. It would appear that such an opinion does not, and can not, preserve effectively the complete distinction between the natural and the supernatural orders, and that consequently, it can not preserve intact the gratuitousness of grace, at least metaphysically. We can see Fr. de Lubac's point when he insists that, since this natural desire is in itself something which God has implanted in man's nature, it is a free gift and so does not force God to give man grace, at least juridically. But surely that is not enough to justify an absolute desire which may never be fulfilled? Also what are we to think of the state of pure nature? Are we to deny all possibility to such a state—a solution which would seem the only logical conclusion to be drawn from Fr. de Lubac's views? If so then we shall have to condemn not only such theologians as Bañez, John of St. Thomas, and Cajetan, but also Aquinas himself.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the true meaning which must be given to this natural desire for beatitude as expressed in the writings of St. Thomas. There is an admirable study of this question by Fr. Manuel Cuervo, O. P. which, to our way of thinking, expounds the only explanation of it which will answer all difficulties and objections. Our purpose is somewhat easier to accomplish than that, because we are only concerned with this matter insofar as it provides a medium for some of the basic teachings of the new theologians. The more one reads of their writings the more clear it becomes that they have little positive to offer, and that their main

objects are to discredit the Scholastic tradition and to replace it with modern systems. For that reason their writings are directed towards demonstrating that, even in Aquinas, we can find the same basic evolution in doctrine, together with the fact that he, too, is tied hand and foot to the problems, methods, and lines of thought of his time. For that reason, their main points of attack against Thomism deal with such things as the exact nature of Theology as a science, with special emphasis on its practical aspect in relation to modern philosophical systems, especially the existential philosophy of Heidegger, Jaspers, and Gabriel Marcel, nature and super-nature in all its aspects, and finally—perhaps the most discussed question of all, and one which is full of traps for the unwary—the evolution of theology in the light of history. Thus, for example, in his book on *The Drama of Atheistic Humanism*, Fr. de Lubac seems to imply that, as against the attacks of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Comte, the true prophets of a genuine return to Christianity are to be found among such writers as Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, who alone are capable of understanding the contemporary world in which they lived. I suppose that, in our own day, he would claim that role for a Barth or a Berdyaev rather than for any Catholic philosopher, tinged with the Scholastic tradition! Speaking of Péguy's writings and influence he says: "May that be primarily the endeavour of those among us who are believers; may they show themselves more at pains to live by the mystery than eager to defend its formulas or impose the hard outer crust of it; and the world, impelled by its instinct to live, will follow in their footsteps."²²

However, it must not be supposed that the only ones the new theologians have any respect for are the modern philosophers; they are also very fond of the Greek Fathers, and in this they have done a great service by making simple translations of their main works available in French. However, the purpose behind that action was not quite as innocent as it may seem at first sight, as we can see from the introduction to the *Collection* written by Fr. Daniélou. There it is plain that the idea first

²² *The Drama of Atheistic Humanism*, by Henri de Lubac.

mooted a century ago is still active, i. e., that there are two different currents in tradition, that of the Latins and that of the Greeks. The view of the new theologians is that the Church will have to get back to the methods of the Greek Fathers, especially to those notions which have been taken over by the modern non-Catholic philosophers, notions and terms which, so they maintain, the Church has lost through being tied excessively to Thomism in all its forms.

First of all, the doctrine of the "two currents" in tradition is gradually losing favour, owing to the serious criticism directed against it by Froget and Galtier. Also it is not very obvious that the modern world really has adopted anything from the Greeks with the possible exception of the "eclecticism" of Clement of Alexandria. Nor is it at all certain that the Church would gain by a return to either the methods or the terminology of the Greeks at the expense of Thomism. In some cases, the method of approach adopted by the Greek Fathers led them into difficulties which were not solved satisfactorily until the time of Aquinas. We have a typical example of this in their approach to the whole question of the Blessed Trinity. Their method was that of the earlier *Symbola Fidei*, the order of which they followed exactly in their catechetical instructions, being more concerned with proving the divinity of each Person rather than with questions affecting the unity of Nature. This naturally led to the difficulty of explaining in any satisfactory way how it is that, while the Father is called the Creator in the Creeds, still the Gospel of St. John, speaking of the Son, says, *Omnia per Ipsum facta sunt*.

Also, since the doctrine of appropriation was little known to them, it followed naturally that they had great difficulty in explaining the common action of the three divine Persons in all the *ad extra* operations. It is interesting to notice that some of these very same difficulties have already reappeared in the writings of the new theologians, especially in certain questions related to the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the soul. Really desperate attempts are being made to establish some personal relationship of each divine Person to the individual

soul in the state of grace, based on some peculiar operation of each Person. Some have not hesitated to speak of a "hypostatic union" between the Holy Ghost and the soul in grace, a statement which, apart from its theological absurdity, has already been refuted by Aquinas and by John of St. Thomas! Who dares to suggest that a general return to these methods would be to the advantage of the Church in modern times?

Everything points to the fact that the most desperate battles between the new theology and traditional Thomism will be waged in the fields of apologetics and mystical theology. Our generation has already witnessed great changes of method in the field of apologetics. Where before it was necessary to engage in active controversy on different points of Catholic dogma, nowadays the essential need is to bring home to the man in the street those fundamental truths which theologians call the *preambula fidei*, as well as the social teaching of the Church. This is particularly true in France at the present time, and undoubtedly accounts for the preoccupation of the ecclesiastical authorities there with new methods of approach to all those souls under their care, many of whom have no active religion, even though they may have been baptized in the Catholic faith. In England the same basic problem exists, but viewed from a slightly different aspect, namely, that of the possibility of some kind of cooperation between the various protestant sects and the Catholic body. A glance at the recent correspondence in the *Times* on the subject of "Catholicism Today" shows that there is a growing realization of the power of the Catholic Church, together with a vague feeling that something should be done about it. As one leader-writer in the *Times* puts it, "There is a widespread demand from Protestants and from some Catholics for a renewal of exploratory discussions on dogma and worship, though there certainly does not seem to be sufficient agreement between the Churches' views on their rights and jurisdiction to justify formal negotiation."²³

The Holy See has recently issued a directive on this matter

²³ Cf. *Catholicism Today*, a collection of the correspondence mentioned above (Times Pub. Co., London, 1949).

which serves to make certain essential points quite clear. We shall have to wait some time before we see any definite results. However, all these problems have brought to the front rank of controversy the arguments put forward by the new theologians for a change in the apologetic method which will serve to bring it into line with the needs of the moment. Some theologians have sought to use this argument as a justification for the adoption of terms and concepts taken from contemporary philosophies, not all of them existential in character. Others have shown their sympathy for the movement by a reaction against what they term "too much Scholasticism" in the normal method of approach, not seeming to understand that any attempt to find a common basis for discussion between Catholics and their opponents must have, as its starting point, certain clear-cut notions and definitions. Any other method is bound to lead to confusion sooner or later, and will thus only serve to widen the gap between us instead of bridging it. The notions of modern philosophies other than the Neo-scholastic are anything but clear and well-defined; it is for that very reason that they have found their way into the modern systems, being left vague deliberately. The real difficulty behind all this lies in the fact that most people outside the Church suffer from an almost complete incapacity for logical thought. Their basis for argument is sentiment rather than reason. What is not so generally recognized, however, is the fact that this incapacity is a direct result of those modern philosophies which we are now asked to adopt and to baptize—an impossible task. How can we ever expect to reconcile a materialistic philosophy, with its theories of the dependence of the spiritual on the material with Catholic thought in all its branches? Or, to take a more modern example still, how are we to bring together the extreme voluntarism of the existential theories and that basic intellectualism which is part of our Catholic spiritual formation and our Thomist tradition?

We are perfectly willing to grant that new methods must be developed which will meet the needs of our time, but we are not prepared to admit that there is any need to go outside the

traditional Thomism to discover those methods. Just as the true Scholastic tradition is much more easily understood if it is related to the general history of thought, so modern philosophies must be studied in relation to modern history. Although metaphysical thought and truth is, as such, independent of time, the accidents of thought, such as methods of presentation and the particular difficulties which have to be solved, are certainly affected by history. The Catholic philosopher and theologian must be conversant with this "personal coefficient" of modern thought. He must be ready to prove that Thomism is fully capable of dealing with such modern questions, and also he must be able to combat the idea that Thomism is just an ingenious dialectic, manufactured in order to bolster up a particular brand of truth or an individual faith. If that were all that the new theology demanded then we would have no difficulty in agreeing with it. But that is not the question at issue as they who support this new movement see it. They wish to adapt modern philosophies in order to make them an instrument of theology for the expression of Christian thought, and it is this idea which has led them into a very dangerous position so far as the traditional theologian is concerned.

The Thomist position is simple. There are certain basic lines within which we must work, and those lines will be found in the traditional doctrines of Thomism, which is no mere speculative theology and philosophy, but one which is deeply rooted in all that is best and most lasting in human experience. One excellent result of the new theology has been an increase in the study of traditional Thomism from the historical as well as the theological point of view, with rather startling results as far as the new theologians are concerned, because they have occasionally found themselves defeated, and indeed at times utterly routed, on this, their chosen battle ground.

In the realm of mystical theology and spirituality there are vast possibilities for the development of the doctrines of the new theology and its method, and we can only conclude that such opportunities have not been grasped fully up to now because the attention of its partisans has been directed else-

where.²⁴ Mysticism tends to regard itself as essentially an experimental and *a posteriori* science, rather than an *a priori* one, and thus separates itself as much as possible from the supervision of dogmatic theology as such. We can expect to see this tendency increase rather than decrease, and there lies a very real danger which the traditional theologian must be fully prepared to meet.

Once spirituality is effectively separated from dogma, then any aberration is possible, as we know only too well from bitter experience. Every attempt must be made to bring to the fore those great mystical principles of Aquinas, fully in harmony with dogmatic theology and a logical consequence of it, in such a way that any attack along the lines we have just mentioned will be defeated before it has time to develop. Mysticism has always proved to be a fertile breeding ground for new ideas and modes of expression, simply because the mystic finds great difficulty in confining his experiences within the bounds of human language, especially the cold, hard terminology of dogmatic theology. Sometimes, indeed, these human expressions of mystical experience do not seem to fit into the framework of Scholastic theology, and when the theologian objects to them on those grounds he is told that the mystic *lives* these vital experiences, and consequently, is the person best qualified to express their theological content, a statement which is often far from the truth.

Sooner or later, then, we may expect repercussions of the new theology in mysticism and in writings on spirituality in general. Just as there have been new definitions of truth proposed from the vitalistic point of view, so we shall see new descriptions of grace, the infused virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. This applies especially to the virtue of faith and to its act, because of the intimate connection between them and the whole question of conversion to the true faith and with revealed truth as such. The traditional view which describes

²⁴ This does not mean to say that no attempt has been made to introduce these new theories into spirituality. Cf. for example, J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, also H. de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum* (F. Aubier, Paris).

grace as a spiritual accident operating like a new nature which not only lifts man up to a supernatural level but which also forms the remote principle of all his supernatural activity is already being decried as too rationalistic, anthropomorphic, and unintelligible. Such attacks will continue, unless we, as Thomists, are prepared to bring out the real value of such concepts as applied to theology and show the permanent truth which lies behind them.

From the point of view of the Thomist, then, there can be only one valid method of defence against the inroads of the new theology, and that will have to come through a revival of all that is best in the Thomist tradition. If this new movement serves as a stimulus to bring about that renaissance—and there are already obvious signs of this—then we shall have no cause to lament its appearance at this period in the history of the Church.

Undoubtedly, this movement contains an element of truth, since *nulla porro falsa doctrina est quae non aliqua vera intermisceat*, and in that sense we must be prepared to learn from it. In the first place, every effort should be made to bring even the most sublime doctrines of the faith down to the intellectual level of all men, no matter of what creed, race, or state of life. This has been the great preoccupation of theologians throughout the ages, as witness the efforts of Justin, the Alexandrian school, Augustine, and Aquinas. Secondly, we have something to learn from contemporary philosophies, because all that they contain of truth is but a reflection of the one, supreme divine truth, and so can help us to penetrate more deeply into the secrets of revelation. They can also help us, especially if studied in relation to contemporary history, to understand the wounds from which the modern mind is suffering, and so provide the remedies more quickly and more easily. We must, as the Holy Father has told us, hold up a friendly hand to all, which does not mean that we must accept blindly all that these modern philosophies teach us, even less that we should reject in their favour the traditional Thomism; quite the reverse. We must learn to judge the findings and the postulates of the

moderns in the light of those perennial principles which come down to us as our greatest inheritance from the days of Aquinas. Obviously, the problem is one which needs a prompt solution if Thomism is to regain its place in the world of thought.

Both as a philosophy and as a theology Thomism is essentially a vital system which develops within certain well-defined lines. St. Thomas would be the first to support any such development, but not at the cost of the fundamentals on which the whole system rests. New methods of approach and new applications of the perennial principles can certainly be found within the framework of Thomism which, because of their basis in eternal truth, will stand the test of time. Thus, for example, it could be stated and proved that St. Thomas is the greatest of the existentialists, a fact which can not be denied and which becomes all the more clear once we destroy for ever the false notion that all he achieved was the "baptism" of Aristotle. He transformed the whole system of Aristotelian philosophy by giving to it the one unifying principle which alone could bring it to its full perfection as the instrument of theology. This unifying principle was that of existence, having its source in revelation, which shows us a God who is the transcendent, self-existing Being, who gives to all creatures everything that they have and are. Thus, there is no need to go outside Thomism to find a truly existential philosophy; on the contrary, the intellectual realism of Aquinas is the best antidote for the excessive voluntarism of the non-Catholic existentialists such as Kierkegaard and Sartre. Above all we need to bring to the fore the great principles of Thomistic metaphysics, with special attention to the question of the metaphysical method as opposed to the methods and the limitations of the natural sciences. In this way we shall be in a position to make it clear that Thomism is always in intimate contact with experience, since its principles are based on a rational interpretation of that experience, which means that it is tied to facts just as much as the natural sciences, but on a different level.

The picture of natural science as an exact demonstration based on observation, and of metaphysics as an affair of mere

words and abstractions, with little or no real meaning, a picture which has influenced the new theologians not a little, is altogether false. A glance at the proofs which St. Thomas offers for the existence of God is sufficient to show us how closely metaphysics is connected with the every-day facts of experience. Natural science, which is also concerned with these same facts, deals with them insofar as they are governed by certain stable laws, while metaphysics seeks to attain to some knowledge of their ultimate causes. Consequently, there will always be a constant element in the findings of metaphysics which will be true in all ages of the world's history. To state, as the new theologians do, that metaphysical systems must, of necessity, change with the times is to assert that this constant element in all human experience is really in a state of flux, a statement which is not only self-contradictory but also contrary to the facts as we know them.

We can all agree, I think, that the major problem of our day is not one of mere politics, or even of sociology. It lies in the field of the metaphysical, and ultimately in theology. However, we can not agree with the new theologians when they state that the only solution to this problem is the adaptation of the modern philosophies to a theological end, even though that might mean the rejection of Thomism. The vast majority of these modern systems seek a foundation in an exaggerated view of the importance of the individual and of the scope of natural science, together with a vain attempt to by-pass philosophical thought by the use of methods which, however useful they might be in natural science, are quite useless in the realms of the metaphysical. The struggle at the present time is one of the re-assertion of the rights of man in relation to the family, to society, and to God, and that struggle will only be won by a return to the clear synthesis of all that is best in man's thought which we call Thomism. It will certainly not be achieved by any hotch-potch adaptation of those modern systems which are the real cause of the whole crisis.

Our duty, vis-à-vis the new theology, is then quite clear. Not only have we to defend the basic principles of Thomism

wherever and whenever they are attacked, but also we have to present those principles in such a way that we re-educate our generation in the art of metaphysical and theological reasoning along those lines. These principles must not be allowed to stagnate, but should be brought up to date in their modern applications. If, to a certain degree, we have been careless about this in the past, there is still time for us to remedy the error, and if this task is faced with courage and determination, then we shall see Thomism make its full contribution both to the modern needs and also to those of God's Church.

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