

## John Paul II and the Renewal of Thomism

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A DECADE AGO, my colleague Gerald A. McCool published a book on the internal evolution of neo-Thomism in which he contended that the revival initiated by Leo XIII had exploded in different directions and self-destructed. Convinced that a posteriori Thomism was unable to sustain the Kantian critique, Joseph Maréchal and his disciples constructed an aprioristic Transcendental Thomism, which eventually became a separate system—a system severely criticized or rejected by the majority of Thomists. McCool's book concludes with the judgment: "The history of the neo-Thomist movement, whose *magna charta* was *Aeterni Patris*, reached its end at the Second Vatican Council."<sup>1</sup>

A glance at the contemporary philosophical and theological literature, however, indicates that Father McCool's obituary was at least premature. Aidan Nichols, in his *Discovering Aquinas*, admits that for various reasons Thomism experienced a period of decline after the middle of the twentieth century. "Only in the pontificate of John Paul II," he writes, "did it bounce back to the point that some now speak of a Fourth Scholasticism, a new Thomistic renaissance."<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive surveys of contemporary Thomism by authors such as Brian J. Shanley,<sup>3</sup> Fergus Kerr,<sup>4</sup> and John F. X. Knasas,<sup>5</sup> all published within the past year, indicate that it is

<sup>1</sup> Gerald A. McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 230.

<sup>2</sup> Aidan Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas: An Introduction to His Life, Work, and Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 142.

<sup>3</sup> Brian J. Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Dordrecht, Holland: Kluwer, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> John F. X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

very much alive. The Aristotelian Thomism associated with the River Forest School of Dominicans in Chicago and the faculty of Fribourg in Switzerland still has its proponents.<sup>6</sup> Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson, the founders of existential Thomism, have fathered a generation of able disciples. But many other schools of Thomism must be taken into account: for example, the neo-Platonizing participation metaphysics of Cornelio Fabro and Louis Geiger, the actualist Thomism of Joseph de Finance, the personalist Thomism of W. Norris Clarke, the ethical intuitionism of John Finnis, the existential phenomenology of Edward Schillebeeckx, the virtue-ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre, and the postmodernist Thomism of radical orthodoxy being disseminated by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock.

A number of voices are admonishing us not to forget that St. Thomas was, as Thomas O'Meara puts it, "first and always a theologian."<sup>7</sup> Nichols speaks of the need to integrate the philosophy of Aquinas "more thoroughly within an essentially theological vision."<sup>8</sup> Gilles Emery has presented a thorough analysis of St. Thomas's doctrine of the Trinity; Rudi Te Velde has studied his metaphysics of creation; Matthew Levering has expounded the Angelic Doctor's Christology with a strong emphasis on his biblical sources. Servais Pinckaers has shown the biblical and patristic grounding of his moral theology. Jean-Pierre Torrell presents him primarily as a spiritual master, whose spirituality was richly Trinitarian.<sup>9</sup>

Many recent interpreters of St. Thomas place him in conversation with later thinkers. The transcendental Thomists reinterpreted him in the light of Kant; Gustav Siewerth, Bernhard Welte, and more recently Jean-Luc Marion, seek to show that St. Thomas overcame the weaknesses of what Martin Heidegger called western ontotheology. Still others, like Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, Victor Preller, and John Haldane relate St. Thomas to Anglo-American analytic philosophy, thereby launching a new movement called "analytic Thomism."

It is not uncommon to expound the Angelic Doctor in the context of contemporary ecumenical and interreligious currents. Otto Hermann Pesch and Eugene Rogers place him in conversation, respectively, with

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Georges Cottier, *Le Désir de Dieu: Sur les traces de saint Thomas* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas Theologian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), xi.

<sup>8</sup> Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

Luther and Barth. David Burrell and Joseph DiNoia read him as a precursor of the contemporary dialogue among world religions.

However many be its varieties, and whatever be the labels attached to them, there can be no doubt about the vibrancy of Thomism in the world today. Thomas Aquinas continues to inspire countless philosophers and theologians, whether as their chief mentor or as one of the major influences on their thought. Although each school may tend to look upon itself as the true or superior Thomism, a rigid cult of Thomistic orthodoxy is undesirable. We may concede, of course, that some philosophers adhere more closely to the explicit teaching of St. Thomas, whereas others, drawing on a variety of sources, deliberately modify his thought in order to address questions that he himself neglected or did not solve to their satisfaction. Bold experiments should be encouraged, but their results must be critically appraised lest the tradition become unraveled and its patrimony squandered.

Our question relates to our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. Can he be classified as a Thomist, and if so, to what school or variety of Thomism does he belong? Did he encourage the revival of Thomism, and if so, what initiatives did he recommend? To find answers to these questions it will be helpful, I believe, to distinguish three phases in his career: the student, the professor, and the pastor.

### **The Student**

After studying in an underground seminary in Poland, the young Father Wojtyla was sent for his doctoral studies to the Athenaeum of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome, known as the Angelicum. There he wrote his doctoral dissertation under the direction of a great pillar of Thomist orthodoxy, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange. In his dissertation he indulged his attachment to Carmelite spirituality by writing on the theology of faith according to St. John of the Cross.<sup>10</sup> He agreed with the Spanish mystic that faith was not capable of effecting the union of the soul with God unless perfected by charity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In an appendix Father Wojtyla sought to demonstrate that this position of the great Carmelite was in conformity with the doctrine of St. Thomas. He was able to find quotations that amply supported his thesis. But in comparison with Wojtyla's writings after Vatican II, which I shall mention later, the treatment of faith in this book is narrowly intellectualist. The object of faith, he says, is divine truth mediated through propositions. In this perspective it is not difficult to demonstrate that faith alone

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<sup>10</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Faith according to St. John of the Cross* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981).

is unable to unite the soul to God and that it must be supplemented by charity. One may suspect, however, that Wojtyła could have affirmed a closer relationship between faith and charity if he had drawn on what St. Thomas had to say about *credere in Deum*. In these texts Aquinas depicts faith as a dynamic, grace-filled movement toward union with God.

Perhaps Wojtyła, working under the supervision of Garrigou-Lagrange, was not yet familiar with the ground-breaking research of Pierre Rousselot and others into St. Thomas's views on the manner in which the act of faith is illuminated by divine grace and charity, which give faith the eyes it needs to discern its object.<sup>11</sup> However that may be, it is only fair to recognize that St. Thomas was not the primary object of the dissertation, which focuses directly on John of the Cross.

Back in Poland, Wojtyła soon composed a second dissertation (his *Habilitationsschrift*) on the ethical phenomenology of Max Scheler.<sup>12</sup> Again, as in the prior dissertation, St. Thomas is present, providing standards by which to judge the adequacy of Scheler's system. Scheler, he concluded, erred in describing values as mere objects of emotional experience and in denying them any foundation in reality. Recourse to classical philosophy could remedy this defect and supply a more adequate account of actual ethical experience. Meaningful choices, according to Wojtyła, have to be grounded in epistemological realism. The truth of things in the real order should be the basis for judging whether our choices are right or wrong. This realism of the moral judgment will be a pillar of his teaching as pope.

It would be wrong to minimize Wojtyła's debt to Scheler. Scheler taught him the importance of moral sentiments and, above all, the irreducible distinctiveness of the personal subject. In his thesis and in several articles growing out of it, Wojtyła began to mediate between Thomism and contemporary systems of thought, as he did thereafter.

### The Professor

When Wojtyła became a professor at the University of Lublin in 1954, he joined a faculty with a strong orientation to Thomistic personalism—a school of thought that differed notably from that of Garrigou-Lagrange

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990)—a translation of two essays first published in 1910 and some additional materials published in 1914 and 1920.

<sup>12</sup> For discussion of this work, see Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 54–82; Jaroslaw Kupchak, *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 10–24.

and showed the influence of French Catholic personalists, including Maurice Blondel, Emmanuel Mounier, and Gabriel Marcel.<sup>13</sup>

As a professor at Lublin, Wojtyla delivered a series of “Lublin Lectures” in which he explicitly compared the systems of Aquinas, Kant, and Scheler.<sup>14</sup> Like Aquinas, and unlike the other two, Wojtyla found it impossible to account for experience of moral responsibility without reference to the intellectually perceived good as the object of the will. In these Lublin Lectures, “he clearly follows the existential Thomism of Gilson.”<sup>15</sup> He contended that perfection consists primarily in actual existence, and only secondarily in that which satisfies the natural aspirations of a particular agent. In an essay from this period he declares: “The Aristotelian concept of the good, which placed the primary emphasis on teleology underwent a reconstruction in Thomas’ view, which gave priority to the aspect of existence, such that Thomas’ concept of the good may properly be called existential.”<sup>16</sup>

In the articles on ethics that Karol Wojtyla wrote as a professor he clearly identifies himself as a Thomist and a personalist. He accepts from St. Thomas the idea that the human person, as a free and rational subject, is responsible to make decisions with reference to truth, which is the measure of the human mind. But from contemporary personalism he derives a phenomenology of experience that received little emphasis in the writings of St. Thomas. In one of his few critical remarks about St. Thomas, Wojtyla distances himself from the objectivism of the master:

[W]hen it comes to analyzing consciousness and self-consciousness—there seems to be no place for it in St. Thomas’ objectivistic view of reality. In any case, that in which the person’s subjectivity is most apparent is presented by St. Thomas in an exclusively—or almost exclusively—objective way. He shows us the particular faculties, both spiritual and sensory, thanks to which the whole of human consciousness and

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<sup>13</sup> For information on the philosophical faculty at Lublin, see George Huntston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 144–51; also Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 27–28.

<sup>14</sup> These lectures, consisting of notes and synopses intended for class, were not originally intended for publication, but they have appeared both in German and in Polish since Wojtyla became pope.

<sup>15</sup> Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Person & Community: Selected Essays* (New York: Peter Lange, 1993), 74. A similar point is made by W. Norris Clarke in his “Two Perspectives on the Meaning of ‘Good’” in Stephen Schwartz and Fritz Wenisch, eds., *Values and Human Experience: Essays in Honor of Balduin Schwartz* (New York: Peter Lange, 1999), 121–26, esp. 125.

self-consciousness—the human personality in the psychological and moral sense—takes shape, but that is also where he stops. Thus St. Thomas gives us an excellent view of the objective existence and activity of the person, but it would be difficult to speak in his view of the lived experiences of the person.<sup>17</sup>

This enrichment of Thomism by closer attention to the experiential and subjective dimensions bears abundant fruits in Wojtyła's early book, *Love and Responsibility*.<sup>18</sup> Here he gives an analysis of sexual desire based on the account of the passions of the soul and concupiscence in St. Thomas as well as on conversations with young married couples. From Aquinas he takes over the idea that love is ordered to that which is objectively true and good. He formulates a personalistic norm to the effect that one may never use other persons simply as means to an end. This principle sounds very much like Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, but whereas Kant argued formalistically from a postulate of practical reason, Wojtyła grounds this principle in the metaphysical insight that the person has inviolable intrinsic dignity.

Wojtyła's ethical norm stands in some tension with the eudaemonism commonly attributed to Aristotle and St. Thomas, that is to say, the idea that morality consists in a movement toward the happiness that we were made to seek.<sup>19</sup> Wojtyła does not deny that human beings have a divinely given desire for happiness, but he cautions against using this desire as an excuse for treating other persons as mere means to our own self-perfection. He propounds what he calls "the law of *ecstasis*" or "the law of the gift": that human beings cannot fulfill themselves except in giving themselves generously to others.<sup>20</sup>

In both *Love and Responsibility* and his next work, *The Acting Person*, Wojtyła attempts to build a philosophy of the human person by analyzing

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<sup>17</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 170–71. See also Wojtyła's critique of the Boethian definition of the person in his article "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," *ibid.*, 209–17.

<sup>18</sup> Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981).

<sup>19</sup> Seifert attributes to Wojtyła and Wojtyła's disciple Tadeusz Styczen a fundamental disagreement with the eudaemonistic ethical systems of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Josef Seifert, "Karol Cardinal Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II) as Philosopher and the Cracow/Lublin School of Philosophy," *Aletheia* 2 (1981): 130–99, at 184–85.

<sup>20</sup> On the "law of the gift," see George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II* (New York: Harper/Collins, 1999), 136–37 and the other pages indicated in Weigel's index.

the phenomenon of human agency.<sup>21</sup> Holding fast to the objective realism of Thomistic metaphysics, he enriches it with a phenomenology of emotion and affectivity that owes something to authors such as Scheler.

In *The Acting Person* Wojtyła brings the Angelic Doctor into dialogue with Marxism—a system that he considered flawed in its understanding of the human person. Against the materialist determinism of the Marxists he affirms the freedom, transcendence, and creativity of the person. Like St. Thomas, he contends that society should promote the common good without overriding the individual rights of its citizens. To reconcile the good of the whole community with that of its members, he argues that individual persons fulfill themselves as free and voluntary agents by participation in the life and benefits of the wider community. The community may indeed require sacrifices, but in so doing it may still be serving the true good of its individual members. In this way Wojtyła is able to mount a critique not only of socialist totalitarianism, but also of free-market individualism and anarchist alienation. Personal participation should be a safeguard against all three of these deviations. Already at this stage, we may conclude, his reliance on St. Thomas was by no means exclusive.

### The Pastor

The Second Vatican Council initiated a new phase in the thinking of Bishop Wojtyła. He became deeply involved in the life of the Church and in the relationship between the Church and modern culture. The Council compelled him to deal with a multitude of characteristically modern questions. As a pastor he had to speak to the Catholic faithful and to the world in rather general terms without employing the technical language of the philosopher. His tasks as a bishop, and later as pope, have limited his opportunities for engaging in the kind of research and speculation associated with academic philosophy.

The profound mark that Vatican II made on the thought of Bishop Wojtyła is evident in *Sources of Renewal*, a commentary on the Council documents written for the archdiocesan synod of Cracow in 1971.<sup>22</sup> This work gives few evidences of the author's Thomistic background. He develops a theology of faith in which intellectual assent is still essential, but the emphasis is primarily on personal commitment. The Council, he contends, calls upon the faithful to enrich their faith by a more personal and responsible engagement in living as Christians in the contemporary world.

<sup>21</sup> Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, *Sources of Renewal: the Implementation of Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

Shortly before becoming pope, Cardinal Wojtyła preached a Lenten retreat to the papal household and the Roman curia. At one point in these sermons he discusses what he calls the metaphysical key to the understanding and interpretation of reality. Not surprisingly, he finds it in the character of God as absolute and necessary being—*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. But he adds that in contemporary thinking the Absolute has lost its appeal. Phenomenology and existentialism prefer to show that the God of philosophy is first and foremost a Person, a divine Thou.<sup>23</sup> He thus seeks to enrich existential Thomism with insights from modern personalism.

Since becoming pope, Wojtyła has written one work that directly records his personal thinking on a wide range of philosophical and religious topics. This work, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, contains two chapters on the existence of God that may be seen as a test case for the author's Thomism.<sup>24</sup> In the first of these chapters he adverts to the Angelic Doctor's discussion of the question *An Deus sit?* at the beginning of the *Summa theologiae*, and says that it is unfortunate that this masterpiece has been somewhat neglected in our time. But in the following chapter, where he discusses the proofs for God, he takes a very different line from the "five ways" of the master. He argues not from movement and causality, or from contingency or degrees of perfection, or from design and finality in nature, but from the human person's search for the meaning and purpose of his own existence. Man recognizes himself, says John Paul, as an ethical and religious being. For philosophers of dialogue such as Buber and Lévinas, he notes, the path to God lies through the experience of coexistence in community. He does not develop the proof, but he says enough to show that his personalist and communitarian approach diverges from traditional Thomism. The metaphysics of being becomes in his thought a metaphysics of persons in community.

A stronger case for the Thomism of the present pope can be made from the address he gave in 1979, just after the beginning of his pontificate, commemorating the centenary of Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. Here he firmly espouses an "existential" Thomism. The philosophy of St. Thomas, he writes, "is a philosophy of being, that is, of the 'act of existing' (*actus essendi*) whose transcendental value paves the most direct way to rise to the knowledge of subsisting Being and pure Act, namely to God. On account of this we can even call this philosophy: the philosophy of the

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<sup>23</sup> Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 14.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1994), 27–36.



proclamation of being, a chant in praise of what exists.”<sup>25</sup> The pope then recalls that according to St. Thomas, the name “person” designates that which is most perfect in the whole of nature.<sup>26</sup> Later in the article he describes metaphysics as a distinct branch of knowledge that studies the whole of reality under the aspect of being (*sub ratione entis*). Precisely because of this transcendental openness, he says, the follower of St. Thomas is open to the truth of all philosophical systems, and can enter into dialogue with them. St. Thomas himself, he recalls, taught that the philosopher ought to look at what is said, not at the person who said it.

In the concluding section of his address at the Angelicum John Paul II spoke of Thomas the theologian. For Aquinas as for himself, Christ is the way for all men. In his sojourn among men and in his return to the Father, Christ sets the path for humanity and the Church. In this connection the pope alludes to the doctrine of his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, regarding the need for man and the Church to follow the route traced by the Lord himself (14).

Once again, in addressing an International Thomistic Congress in 1990, the pope manifested his personalist and anthropological appropriation of St. Thomas, whom he describes as “*doctor humanitatis*.” Surveying the principal points of the treatise “*De homine*” in the *Summa theologiae*, he finds the key to the Angelic Doctor’s anthropology and ethics in the theocentrism whereby human life is understood as a movement of the rational creature back to God. He took the occasion, also, to extol the moderation and charity of St. Thomas as a model for those engaged in the evangelization of cultures today.<sup>27</sup>

The majority of Pope John Paul’s speeches and official documents dealt with practical questions never addressed, at least in depth, by St. Thomas. Perhaps for this reason they contain relatively few references to the Angelic Doctor, and even those few references often cite him a representative of the general teaching of the Church. John Paul evidently felt that in writing as pope he could not appropriately enter into questions disputed within the Schools. As his preferred authorities he cited Holy Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the Councils, and earlier popes.

But several notable exceptions must be mentioned. John Paul II spoke very personally in the set of General Audience talks later collected as the

<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, “Perennial Philosophy of St. Thomas for the Youth of Our Times,” *Angelicum* 57 (1980): 133–46; quotation from 140.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 141, referring to the text: “Persona significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura, scilicet subsistens in rationali natura,” *ST I*, q. 29, a. 3.

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, Allocution to Thomistic Congress of September 29, 1990, *AAS* 83 (1991): 404–10.

book, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*. The book is, in essence, a development of the nuptial theology of the body already sketched in *Love and Responsibility*, amplifying it with far greater attention to the scriptural foundations. Here, for instance, he grounds human dignity in the teaching of Genesis that man was created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27).<sup>28</sup> St. Thomas is not a major source but is cited here and there. The pope mentions both him and Scheler in his treatment of the passions of the soul, such as sensual desire and shame.<sup>29</sup> He also argues that the hylomorphic anthropology of St. Thomas supports the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body in a way that Platonist dualism fails to do.<sup>30</sup>

Among the fourteen encyclicals of John Paul II, two stand out, in my opinion, for the prominence they give to the thinking of St. Thomas. I shall accordingly focus my remarks on these two, *Veritatis Splendor* and *Fides et Ratio*.

In *Veritatis Splendor* John Paul II reaffirms the line of ethical thought established in his articles as professor. He explicitly invokes the authority of St. Thomas in maintaining that natural law is a participation in the eternal law of God (§§41–44). Although he speaks of natural law and divine law, he avoids all legalism. He accepts from St. Thomas the idea of natural law as the light of natural reason imprinted upon our minds by God.<sup>31</sup> This law, he teaches, has divine providence as its source and beatitude as its goal. It must be gratefully received as a help for participating in the divine life through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

The “new law” of the gospel, for the pope as for St. Thomas, consists primarily of interior acts empowered by the Holy Spirit (§24). The encyclical quotes St. Thomas on the subjective obligation to follow even an erroneous conscience (§63) and follows his teaching on the moral evaluation of acts in terms of intention, object, and circumstances (§78). On the ground that the morality of the human act depends primarily on the object chosen, he uses St. Thomas to refute modern errors such as utilitarianism, proportionalism, and theories that unduly emphasize the fundamental option.

The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* is at root an appeal to philosophers to take up with courage their original sapiential task. The very name “philosophy,” he recalls, signifies love of wisdom. Like St. Thomas, the pope recognizes that both philosophy and theology are concerned with wisdom, but

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), 448–53.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 97, 200.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, §42, quoting *ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 2.

they are distinct, inasmuch as philosophy proceeds by natural reason whereas theology seeks wisdom with the help of God's word, accepted in faith. The pope's position is in the end more dialectical than that usually attributed to the Angelic Doctor. He sees reason as oriented to a wisdom that surpasses its grasp and therefore as naturally ordered to receive guidance from beyond itself. Faith, consequently, is not a burden imposed upon reason but is reason itself perfected by the higher light of revelation. The pope goes so far as to say that faith and reason are interior to each other (§17) and that the relationship between them is circular (§73).

The conclusion seems to be more in line with Henri de Lubac's position than with those of Maritain, Gilson, and other well-known Thomists.<sup>32</sup> Like de Lubac, Wojtyła picks up the Augustinian theme of the soul driven by a hunger for the divine. This hunger, he sometimes suggests, is due to the workings of grace and gives rise to a kind of implicit faith that may, under some conditions, suffice for salvation.<sup>33</sup> In an earlier work he alluded to "anonymous Christians"—a term that had been popularized by Karl Rahner.<sup>34</sup>

In the course of *Fides et Ratio* the pope praises St. Thomas as a "guide and model" for theological studies and as "an authentic model for all who seek the truth" (§78). But he also recalls that "the Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others" (§49). Rather than insisting on Thomas alone as the master, he is content to depict him as one of the great triad of medieval doctors, the other two being Anselm and Bonaventure (§74).

Readers familiar with the previous writings of the pope will find an interesting confirmation of his existential Thomism in the following paragraph:

If the *intellectus fidei* is to integrate all the wealth of the theological tradition, it must turn to the philosophy of being, which should be able to propose anew the problem of being—and this in harmony with the

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<sup>32</sup> I have worked out this comparison in greater detail in my article "Can Philosophy Be Christian?" in D. R. Foster and J. Koterski, eds., *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought Essays on "Fides et Ratio"* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 3–21.

<sup>33</sup> In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul II says that in the ethical and religious systems of Asia and Australia there are many who have implicit faith in Christ and are reached by Christ's redemptive action (83).

<sup>34</sup> In *Sources of Renewal*, 130–31, while discussing *Lumen gentium* §16, Cardinal Wojtyła asks whether those who strive by God's grace to live a good life but do not explicitly believe in God might be "anonymous Christians"—a term commonly associated with Karl Rahner.

demands and insights of the entire philosophical tradition. . . . Set within the Christian metaphysical tradition, the philosophy of being is a dynamic philosophy which views reality in its ontological, causal, and communicative structures. It is strong and enduring because it is based upon the very act of being itself, which allows a full and comprehensive openness to reality as a whole, surpassing every limit in order to reach the One who brings all things to fulfillment. [§97]

This paragraph of *Fides et Ratio* echoes and builds on the pope's remarks on the centenary of *Aeterni Patris*, mentioned above.<sup>35</sup>

In a longer essay it would be necessary to examine a number of other themes in the thought of John Paul II, and see to what extent they conform to the ideas of St. Thomas. His theology of work, set forth in *Laborem exercens* and in a number of his shorter speeches, made much of the Thomistic linkage between existence and action and the further distinction between immanent and transient action. As a personalist, the pope preferred to look on work as an action capable of perfecting the agent precisely as subject. Thomistic themes could be likewise detected in the pope's reflections on culture, leisure, and art.

In his ecclesiology John Paul II made sparing use of St. Thomas, as might be expected because St. Thomas has no formal treatise on the Church. But the pope's vision of the Church was generally in line with that of St. Thomas, who saw it as the assembly of the faithful (*congregatio fidelium*) brought about by the grace of Christ and hence as a mystical communion.<sup>36</sup> John Paul, however, combined this perspective with the Vatican II vision of the Church not simply as communion but rather as the sacrament of communion.<sup>37</sup>

In his teaching on the Eucharist John Paul II followed St. Thomas by strongly emphasizing the real presence of Christ in the consecrated elements and by defining the ordained priest primarily in terms of the power to consecrate in the person of Christ, the head of the Church.<sup>38</sup> For him, as for the Angelic Doctor, the Eucharist was the summit of the

<sup>35</sup> A footnote in *Fides et Ratio* here refers to the pope's 1979 allocution on the centenary of *Aeterni Patris*, discussed above. I agree with the remark of Knasas: "No doubt should exist that *Fides et Ratio* is referring to Aquinas' central metaphysical notion of *actus essendi*"; *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, xix–xx.

<sup>36</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 43–44; idem, "The Church according to Thomas Aquinas," in *A Church to Believe In* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 149–69.

<sup>37</sup> See Avery Dulles, "The Ecclesiology of John Paul II," an appendix to the latest edition of *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 219–41.

<sup>38</sup> The views of Pope John Paul II on the Eucharist are most conveniently accessible in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003).

spiritual life and the goal of all the sacraments. Like St. Thomas, he regarded the Eucharist as the effective sign of the unity of the Church; he also followed St. Thomas in his deep devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the practice of Eucharistic adoration, even outside of Holy Mass. But the pope by no means limited himself to reproducing the ideas of St. Thomas on the Eucharist. Warning against contemporary tendencies to reduce the Eucharist to a communal meal, he emphasized the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist in terms that probably owe more to the Council of Trent than to St. Thomas.

### **Conclusion**

John Paul II in his years as a student and professor became deeply attached to St. Thomas as his master in theology and philosophy alike. As pope he retained this preference but refrained from imposing Thomism as a requirement for all Catholic philosophers. He was content to exact from Catholic philosophers a metaphysical realism that acknowledged antecedent reality as the norm of truth and one validity of transempirical or metaphysical judgments.

The pope's own Thomism was not, for the most part, an academician's exposition of the texts of St. Thomas and still less a historian's review of past and current interpretations of the master. As a pastor John Paul used St. Thomas among other sources for evaluating and criticizing contemporary movements that are favorable or harmful to the spiritual life of Catholics. In particular, he criticized the shortcomings of phenomenology, Marxism, utilitarianism, and libertarian theories of freedom with the help of the Angelic Doctor.

What kind of Thomism should we attribute to this pope? It is, like all Thomism, a metaphysical realism; it upholds the capacity of the human mind to know reality in its full range, ascending even to the highest peaks of transcendence through the ways of causality, negation, and eminence. Unlike certain essentialist versions, Wojtyła's Thomism was existential insofar as it put the accent on actuality, as did Gilson, for example. More than this, it was a personalist Thomism, securely grounded in the Thomist principle that being at its most perfect is necessarily personal.

In his writings since Vatican II, our author came close to transcendental Thomism at certain points, for example, in holding that all men and women, even without explicit belief in God or Christ, can have implicit faith, which manifests itself in a sincere search for ultimate truth and goodness. This view is consonant with his acute sense of the universal presence of the Holy Spirit, who inspires authentic prayer and worship among people of many different religions.

John Paul II's potential contribution to the renewal of Thomism, the theme of the present conference, may be summarized under seven recommendations, which recapitulate points already made in this essay.

1. The student should be at home in the tradition of *philosophia perennis*, the broad stream of metaphysical inquiry launched by Plato and Aristotle, perfected by the Church Fathers with the light of biblical revelation, and continued by the great Scholastics of the Middle Ages and their followers in recent centuries.
2. Acceptance of this tradition will lead to metaphysical realism, which consists in recognizing the openness of the mind to reality as a whole, including the transcendent and the divine.
3. The primacy of the act of existing is a precious insight from St. Thomas that must not be lost. By focusing on existence as the root of all perfection, transcending all particular participations or essences, the mind finds liberation from the limitations of finite being and the capacity to rise to the Pure Act of subsistent being that is none other than God.
4. Following St. Thomas, we are able to acknowledge the person as that which is most perfect in all reality—free, rational, self-determining, and responsible. The person is incommunicably individual. Subjectivity, perceived from within through living experience, cannot be reduced to the objective knowability of things or natures.
5. The contemporary Thomist must not be enslaved to the letter of the Master, but must be ready to go beyond him in profiting from modern insights and addressing contemporary questions.
6. The Thomist of our time should be prepared to enter into non-polemical dialogue with other systems of thought, including even those which, like Marxism, are deterministic and atheistic. But authentic Thomism will always be on guard against a false conciliatory approach or a syncretism that would corrupt its own proper principles.
7. The Thomist should not hesitate to look to divine revelation as an indispensable help for achieving the full and coherent wisdom to which the human mind is naturally oriented. Wojtyła, like St. Thomas, recognizes the distinction between the disciplines of philosophy and theology. But they and their disciples will not

allow themselves to be imprisoned by methodological frontiers. They will seek integral wisdom, supplementing natural knowledge with revealed truth, and assimilating revelation with the aid of philosophical wisdom. **N&V**

