

## THE LOSS OF METAPHYSICS

*Bernard of Chartres used to say that we are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller, but because they raise us up and their great stature adds to ours.*

John of Salisbury (c.1115-1180), *The Metalogicon*, bk III, ch.4

### What Is It?

The term *metaphysics* derives from an accident of history. Aristotle [384-322 BC] wrote a number of works. His editors categorised them after his death. *A number of treatises were placed immediately 'after the Physics'... from which their title Metaphysics is derived. This work is not a single finished work, but a collection of treatises composed by Aristotle at different times...*<sup>1</sup> The accident was a happy one for in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle dealt with being at the highest level of formal abstraction—and the term *metaphysics* has become synonymous with first philosophy.

The first hurdle for the student of metaphysics in the English tongue is one of terminology. In English there is no unambiguous term for its subject—*being*, in Latin, *ens*. The word 'being' can mean a number of things, including: existence, life, substance, nature, or something that exists. The *being* which is the subject of metaphysics is that act whereby some thing exists, abstracted from here and now, abstracted from any particular category, or quality, of thing. Some have tried to use the word *existence* to convey this reality but it is inadequate. Dr Austin Woodbury, quondam Regent of Sydney's Aquinas Academy in the 1950s and 1960s, preferred the term *be*, rather than *being*. He reasoned—

*talk*, is the act exercised by a talker; *jump* is the act exercised by a jumper; so, *be* is the act exercised by a be-er (or a *being*, as our clumsy English language puts it). Rather than say of a thing that it exists, we should say that it 'bes'.

What is metaphysics?

Here is a typical opening sentence in the consideration of the metaphysical doctrine of causality—

*Of every thing that exists, there are four causes. Not one only, or two, or three, but four. There are no less than four; there are no more.*

Any person who makes an assertion such as this in the modern world is looked at askance. He is regarded as dogmatic, or opinionated, or as not having checked all available sources, or as trying to impose his world view on others. He finds himself peppered with any number of other criticisms. For one cannot be permitted to be so certain about anything in a world where uncertainty reigns. Yet the statement is true.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Preface, pp.viii-ix, *Aristotle's Metaphysics, Everyman*, London, 1979, ed. by John Warrington.

And for many centuries all the western world knew the statement to be true. But its truth is hidden from the modern world for it has lost all sense of the metaphysical.

There are two fundamental problems about being that exercised Greek thought some 450 years before Christ.

The *first* problem was that of the universal. Let us take an example: how is it that this thing, a dog, is at the same time both one and many. This quality, 'dog-ness', is found in this dog, *Fido*. Yet it is also found in all these other dogs, *Lassie* and *Shep* and *Collie* and *Buttons*, and so on. What is this universal quality, 'dog-ness', that they all share? Is it something real? Is there somewhere (as Plato was to maintain) a really existing universal dog of whose existence *Fido* and *Lassie* and all the others are but reflections? Or is it only a name we give to all these individual things, or something that exists only in our minds?

The *second* problem is associated with the first. It involves the constant change which is the condition of our existence. Nothing seems ever to be stable. Was Heraclitus [c.545-480 BC] right when he said that nothing ever remains the same with itself for an instant, that *we never step into the same river twice*? Is reality, as Heraclitus argued, nothing but pure change, pure BECOME?<sup>2</sup>

Or, on the contrary, was Parmenides [c.515-440 BC] right when he said that all change is illusory, that in truth being is unchangeable. *What is*, he is reported as having said, *is uncreated and imperishable, for it is entire, immovable and without end. It was not in the past, nor shall it be, since it is now, all at once, one, continuous... How could what exists thereafter perish? And how could it come into existence?* For Parmenides, there was no possible mid point between be and be-not. The testimony of the senses that change occurred in the midst of reality should be ignored. Reality was pure BE.

Now, clearly, both were wrong. Heraclitus failed to concede the existence of certain realities which were quite unchangeable, such as the natures of things. Individual dogs might come and go, but that curious thing 'dog-ness' was quite fixed. Parmenides on the other hand failed to concede the changes which took place around him every moment of the day. Of the two, Heraclitus may be said to have preferred the evidence of his senses, Parmenides the conclusions of his intellect.

The solution to these dilemmas was not provided until the arrival of Aristotle who taught that we must distinguish between a thing and its nature. Things are, each of them, singulars; the nature they share (eg, dog-ness) is something universal. He taught<sup>3</sup>—

- The universal is not simply a common name or a concept, but a reality which exists as singular in the physical world, but as universal in mind. This dog, *Fido*, exemplifies in this singular instance the reality of the universal which is multiplied, but never exhausted, by the millions of other really existing dogs. Human knowledge, he

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<sup>2</sup> The reader will recognise the Heraclitean mentality in Darwinian evolutionary theory.

<sup>3</sup> *Physics* Bk I, II; *Metaphysics* Bk I, chs. v, ix.

taught, is of universals<sup>4</sup>. When we define something, it is the universal characteristic of the thing, its nature, that we define<sup>5</sup>.

- Being, (or as Dr Woodbury would put it, *be*) when carefully analysed, reveals two aspects of itself, *can-be-ness* and *does-be-ness*. Isaac Newton is (*does-be*) an astronomer; young Jack is not, but *can be*, an astronomer. Whereas, *Toby*, young Jack's dog, neither is, nor can be, an astronomer. It follows that there is something in young Jack which is not in his dog. This *can-be-ness* is called *potency*. The *does-be-ness* is called actuality, or *act*. Potency is a sort of midway point between non-existence and existence, between be-not and be.

The influence of Aristotle waned. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD under the influence of Christianity intellectual life in the western world again reached a pitch where active minds were concerned to try and solve the problem of universals. Through the workings of Divine Providence translations of Aristotle's works, and commentaries on them by Arab Mohammedan philosophers, came to the attention of thinkers at the new centres of learning, the universities of Europe.

The Church's greatest mind, the Dominican Friar, St Thomas Aquinas [1225-1274], refined and reformed the thought of Aristotle. He took the Aristotelian distinction between potency and act to a sublime height when he extended it to the most fundamental issue that concerns any thing—its very existence. *What* something is (its essence) and *that* something is (its *ens*, or existence), St Thomas taught, are really distinct and this distinction, *de ente et essentia*, is the most fundamental of all distinctions.

This is the way St Thomas's exalting of the distinction is explained by Fr Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, doyen of teachers of St Thomas's thought at the Pontifical Athenaeum of St Thomas, known universally as *The Angelicum*, in the mid twentieth century—

*Nothing has actuality except by existence. It is that which actuates all things, even their forms; it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received, but rather as the received to the receiver.*<sup>6</sup>

In other words, every thing on the earth is a receiver of this most fundamental reality, *ens*, existence, *be*.

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Metaphysics reveals the shallowness of the modern world view and the transitoriness and evanescence of worldly considerations. But it reveals, too, the majesty of creation and the almost infinite order that characterises it. To adapt words Belloc once applied to the

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, Bk XIII, ch.x.

<sup>5</sup> *Metaphysics*, Bk VII, ch.xi.

<sup>6</sup> *God, His Existence And His Nature*, R. Garrigou-Lagrange O.P., transl. from Fifth French Edition, London, 1955, Volume II, Epilogue, p.553, where the author quotes from St Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, qq. 4, art. 1, ad 3, and 7, art. 1

Catholic Church—it provides the possession of perspective in the survey of the world. A grasp of metaphysics is essential when we come to deal with the great problems that confront us, especially the moral problems. Ignorance of metaphysics leaves us floundering.

### **How Did It Come To Be Lost?**

From the time of St Thomas, the Catholic Church was the repository, the protector and nourisher, of his metaphysics. The rest of the world depended on the Church and on her teachers of philosophy for the spread of its beneficent influence. That influence was conveyed to priests and to religious in Catholic seminaries. These in turn passed it on to the Catholic faithful who, acting as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, consistent with the teaching of their Church's Founder<sup>7</sup>, spread that influence throughout the whole of society.

The loss of metaphysics to the world came about through the disobedience of Catholic clergy and laity to the teachings of successive Popes. Though it had begun in the nineteenth century, this disobedience occurred chiefly in the twentieth.

From the time of the Council of Trent at least, the Church had insisted on adherence to the teaching of St Thomas. In particular, the Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII (from 1878 to 1958) insisted that students for the priesthood and religious life should be taught in the tradition of St Thomas<sup>8</sup>. They warned of the perils of departing from his sound philosophy<sup>9</sup>. Bishops, seminary heads and associated clergy disobeyed them—secretively, systematically, trenchantly—exposing the minds of their young charges to the erroneous thinking of modern philosophers. The formation of the priests who were ordained, and the religious who were formed, in this atmosphere of disorder was defective.

Theology is founded on sound philosophy. Get your philosophy wrong and your theology goes awry too. These young priests and religious were deprived of the

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<sup>7</sup> cf. *Matthew* 5: 13, 14

<sup>8</sup> Leo XIII in *Aeterni Patris* [4.8.1879]; Pius X in *Pascendi* [8.9.1907] and in motu proprio *Sacrorum antistitum* [1.9.1910] and motu proprio *Doctoris Angelici* [29.6.1914]; Benedict XV in CIC 1917, canon 1366 § 2; Pius XI in *Studiorum Duce*m [29.6.1923]; Pius XII in *Humani Generis* [12.8.1950].

<sup>9</sup> Thus Leo XIII in *Aeterni Patris*: *Now, as the Apostle warns us, it is by philosophy and vain deceit (Col. 2:8) that the minds of Christ's faithful are most often deceived and purity of Faith is corrupted among men... Since it is natural in fact, for man to take his own reasoning faculties as a guide for his actions, it so happens that the defects of mind easily seduce those of the will. Under the impulse of the 'Reformers' of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, man began to philosophise without any regard for the Faith and each one granted the other full liberty to allow the mind to wander as it liked and according to its natural bent. The result, of course, was that philosophical systems multiplied. Those multiple systems resting simply on the authority and judgment of each particular thinker have but a shifting basis... and can only produce a shaky philosophy without consistency. And Pius XII in *Humani Generis* warned (in n. 32) of those who extol other philosophies of all kinds... by which they seem to imply that any kind of philosophy or theory, with a few additions and corrections if need be, can be reconciled with Catholic dogma. No Catholic can doubt how false this is, especially where there is question of those fictitious theories they call immanentism or idealism or materialism, whether historic or dialectic, or even existentialism, whether atheistic or simply the type that denies the validity of the reason in the field of metaphysics.*

equipment to cope with the challenges to their faith and to the faith of those placed in their care. They brought to their tasks a measure of ignorance and incompetence from which their predecessors had not suffered. Given the disturbance to the psyche arising from the flourishing of secular ideologies in and after the 1960s, it was inevitable that there would occur a growing mood of disillusionment among students for the priesthood, and amongst young priests and religious over the philosophical inadequacy of the reasons advanced to ground their faith. This mood gathered momentum with the upheaval in priestly and religious life precipitated by the Second Vatican Council.

The Council's admonitions about the philosophical studies of students for the priesthood were weak, to say the least. The Council Fathers said—

*Philosophy should be taught in such a way that students will be led to acquire a solid and coherent understanding of man, of the world, and of God. Basing themselves on a philosophic heritage which is perennially valid, students should also be conversant with contemporary philosophical investigations, especially those exercising special influence in their own country, and with recent scientific progress...*<sup>10</sup>

The philosophy of St Thomas is not mentioned here other than obliquely in the expression *a philosophic heritage which is perennially valid*, a paraphrase, apparently, of words used by Pius XII in *Humani Generis*, n.29—*that sound philosophy which has long been, as it were, a patrimony handed down by earlier Christian ages...*<sup>11</sup> True, St Thomas is mentioned in the following paragraph in respect of the study of Dogmatic Theology. He is also mentioned in *Gravissimum Educationis* [On Christian Education] n.10. But nowhere in the Council documents is there any focus on the critical importance of metaphysics as the foundation of a rational understanding of the Catholic faith. This is illustrated by a formal question put to the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities two months after the publication of *Optatum Totius*—*What is the proper and concrete meaning of the words 'a philosophical heritage which is perennially valid' which occur in n.15 of the Decree Optatum Totius...?*<sup>12</sup>

The influence of the disobedient was in the ascendant. Their students now promoted the cause of modern philosophy. The damage to the Church which flowed from this influence during the Council and afterwards was to be profound.

Since Vatican II there have effectively been two Popes, Paul VI and John Paul II. Paul VI was a graduate of the Angelicum. From time to time he expressed his admiration for St Thomas's teaching, most notably in his Apostolic Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae* [20.11.1974] to Fr Vincent De Couesnongle, Master General of the Dominican Order,

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<sup>10</sup> *Optatum Totius* (Decree on Priestly Formation), para 15.

<sup>11</sup> *...sana illa philosophia imbuta, quae veluti patrimonium iam dudum exstat a superioribus christianis aetatibus traditum...* [AAS 42:561 at 571]

<sup>12</sup> Sacred Congregation for Seminaries and Universities, *Private Reply*, 20.12.1965, reprinted in *Canon Law Digest*, 6 (1963-1967) 252.

commemorating the 700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of St Thomas.<sup>13</sup> However, Paul VI took no practical steps to ensure that moves against the teaching of the philosophy of St Thomas in seminaries and schools were circumvented.

John Paul II followed in the steps of Paul VI. His position is peculiar because of his involvement with Phenomenology. I will return to him in the last section of this paper. To complete this section, it suffices to show how the devaluation of the importance of St Thomas's metaphysics in the Documents of Vatican II was confirmed.

The Apostolic Constitution on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties which followed the Council was long in coming. The Constitution, *Sapientia Christiana*, was not published until 25<sup>th</sup> May 1979. Cardinal Garrone, then Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, said this on its publication—

*This document had been signed by Pope Paul VI and was to have been published on 15 August 1978: at that moment Paul VI was already dead. His successor had intended to make it public as soon as possible; the date chosen was 8 December, but on that date John Paul I had passed away. Finally Pope John Paul II, in his turn, who was a member of the Sacred Congregation for all the time in which the text was being prepared and who, as is known, has always dedicated the greatest interest to high theological studies, decided that the Constitution which was to bear his signature, after having been carefully revised by him, would be published on Easter Day, 15 April 1979.*

*Rarely must a document of this kind have known such vicissitudes ...*<sup>14</sup>

These vicissitudes reflected the disturbances to the philosophical foundations of Catholic Tertiary education the document would entrench. The relevant provisions of the Constitution run as follows—

*Article 79*

*1. An Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy has the aim of investigating philosophical problems according to scientific methodology, basing itself on a heritage of perennially valid philosophy.(24) It has to search for solutions in the light of natural reason and, furthermore, it has to demonstrate their consistency with the Christian view of the world, of man, and of God, placing in a proper light the relationship between philosophy and theology.*

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*Article 80*

*In the teaching of philosophy, the relevant norms should be observed which are contained in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (25) and in other recent documents of the Holy See concerning academic studies (26).*

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<sup>13</sup> This Apostolic Letter is reproduced on the website [superflumina.org](http://superflumina.org) sub nom. *Paul VI On St Thomas Aquinas*

<sup>14</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition., 4.6.1979, p.12

Footnote 24 refers to *Optatam Totius* n.15 mentioned above; footnote 25 to an earlier passage in the same document and to the passage in *Gravissimum Educationis* n.10 already referred to. Footnote 26 cites Paul VI's letter on St. Thomas Aquinas, *Lumen Ecclesiae*, of November 20, 1974, and a Circular letter of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education to all Ordinaries of the Church throughout the world, *On the Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*, of January 20, 1972. Paul VI's Letter is a fine tribute to St Thomas and his doctrine. The Circular Letter revealed only too clearly the problems which had begun to emerge in seminaries. It detailed the problems with modern culture and the loss of the sense of transcendence in the world but it failed to address the cause, the permissions which had allowed seminaries to become caught up in this mundane intellectual upheaval. Nor did it offer solutions. Instead, it made ineffectual recommendations—

*In every case it is a good thing to wish to obtain the highest possible level; but... we must be realistic and avoid the fault of 'perfectionism'. In the difficulties of the present time, each seminary must come to realise what is possible, taking into account the concrete situation and the local resources, without attempting a completely perfect ideal...*<sup>15</sup>

Given this advice, its appeal to St Thomas was hardly convincing—

*The Council wished that the teaching of philosophy in seminaries should not leave out the riches of past thought which have been handed down but should also be open to accepting the riches which modern thought continually brings forth. In this sense the repeated recommendations of the Church about the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas remain fully justified and still valid...*<sup>16</sup>

The norms mandated in *Sapientia Christiana* replaced those instituted by Pius XI in his Apostolic Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus* of 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1931. Pius XI had there directed that Pontifical Universities impart—

*the full and coherent synthesis of philosophy according to the method and the principles of St Thomas Aquinas; in the light of his teaching, moreover, the different systems of the other philosophers are to be examined and judged.*<sup>17</sup>

Those directions reflected the norms which had been set forth by Pius X and Benedict XV in Canon 1366 § 2 of the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*—

*Professors shall treat studies in rational philosophy and theology and the education of students in these disciplines wholly according to the reasoning, doctrine and principles of the Angelic Doctor, and hold to them religiously.*

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<sup>15</sup> English Translation in Canon Law Digest 9 (1978-1981) 807 at 816.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 820

<sup>17</sup> *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, 24.5.1931, art. 29: [AAS 23:253]

The 1983 *Code*, in contrast, reflects the ambivalence manifested in *Sapientia Christiana*, in canon 251—

*Philosophical formation must be based on the philosophical heritage that is perennially valid, and it is also to take account of philosophical investigations over the course of time. It is to be so given that it furthers the human formation of the students, sharpens their mental edge and makes them more fitted to engage in theological studies.*

In their commentary on this provision, the editors of the University of Navarra/St Paul University *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, say—

*The Code Commission... in reporting on the revision of this canon, explained the meaning of this expression in the following words: "There is no explicit reference to Thomistic philosophy as was requested by certain consultative bodies, because it is already indicated in the classical expression 'patrimonio philosophico perenniter valido'."*<sup>18</sup>

The effect in the Church of the teaching of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council (influenced as they were by *periti* infatuated with modern philosophy) the failure of Paul VI to follow up his words with executive action, and, as will be shown, a pontiff, John Paul II, whose acknowledgement of the Church's debt to St Thomas was always qualified by his preoccupation with modern philosophy, was a loss of conviction about the Church's age long insistence on adherence to the metaphysics of St Thomas. That insistence was removed from the substance of the Church's essential teaching documents and relegated to footnotes.

With subjectivism comes a certain blindness. Its practitioners do not comprehend just how critical it is that philosophy, which underlies all other studies, be fixed, that it be sound and that it be certain. In vain did Pius X say in *Pascendi: let Professors remember that they cannot set St. Thomas aside, especially in metaphysical questions, without grave detriment* [n.45]. Pius, the only saint among Popes in 400 years, foresaw clearly the perils which could afflict God's Holy Church should modern philosophy be given free rein.

### **The Fundamental Causes Of Its Loss**

All heresies suffer from the same defect. Their proponents know better than God and His Holy Church. This better (and higher) knowledge has a generic name—*gnosticism*. The peculiar heresy, the peculiar version of gnosticism, which gave impetus to the flight from metaphysics and from reason is called *Modernism*. It was condemned comprehensively by Pope Pius X<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, E. Caparros, M. Thériault, J. Thorn, editors, Wilson & Lafleur Limitee, Montreal, 1993, p.216

<sup>19</sup> *Pascendi*, 8.9.1907 and the syllabus of Modernist errors, *Lamentabili Sane*, 3.7.1907



### *Modernism*

Modernism taught—and teaches today, for it is all around us—that the Church's assertions that God is utterly transcendent, and truth objective, are false. Truth, according to its followers, is subjective and personal, and so is religion. Modernism seeks, then, to substitute for the objective and supernatural in religion, the subjective and the natural. But it does not do so blatantly. The attacks on scripture, the endeavours to change the liturgy by inserting so-called 'inclusive' language; the bowing to the demands of Feminism; the soft peddling on, or silence about, the Church's teachings on contraception and abortion—all these and more besides, are elements of the Modernist attack. It is spoiling and disobedient towards the Church and its laws.

Modernism proceeds insidiously, never proclaiming its doctrines clearly, but insinuating them by the way it uses Catholic terminology. It uses the words of the Church, but uses them in a way which is different from the Church's usage so they infer the Modernist view. It is subtle and poisonous.

All heresies are gnostic in the sense that their followers know better than the Church. All the ancient heresies asserted some particular knowledge which made them superior to the truths of Catholicism. The secret that drives the followers of Modernism is more universal, they know *that all assertions of transcendence are nothing but a cover for purely natural explanations*. Whatever the errors of the ancient heresies, Modernism embraces them all. It was for this reason that St Pius X labelled Modernism *the synthesis of all heresies*.

### *Descartes*

Modernism has its source in modern philosophy and the spirit which animates all modern philosophy, *subjectivism*. According to subjectivism, what matters is not *reality*, but *what I think about reality*.

The first philosopher to cut himself adrift from reality was René Descartes [1596-1650]. His aphorism *cogito ergo sum*<sup>20</sup> encapsulates the step he took. It is the reverse of common sense which is—*I am, and therefore I think*. There can be no thinking unless first there is a thinker. *Do* follows *be*, not the other way round.

Once place yourself, rather than reality, at the centre of philosophy and you are stuck on a merry-go-round from which there is no escape. For you cannot be sure, in the end, whether the whole of the apparent world is anything but a figment of your own imagination, or something constructed by your own intellect. The realist observing the changing patterns of modern philosophy from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century through to the present day is struck by the attempts of each successive philosopher to justify *his* brand of subjectivism by measuring it against reality. He always finds some source of complaint with the thought of his predecessors and moves to develop a variant of his own. In due course this variant itself becomes the subject of attack by his successors.

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<sup>20</sup> 'I think therefore I am.'

### *Luther and Disobedience*

Martin Luther [1483-1546] led the revolt against the Church founded by God. He asserted, and all his followers have maintained, that the authority of that Church, which was the authority of God, should be refused in favour of the authority of the believer. It was inevitable that this refusal of acceptance of the authority of Almighty God should have its effects elsewhere. Italian theologian, Romano Amerio, has described the process—

*Luther... places both the Bible and its meaning in the hands of the individual believer, rejects any mediating role for the Church, entrusts everything to the individual's private lights and replaces the authority of an institution by an immediacy of feeling which prevails over all else... The liveliness of an individual's impressions is called 'faith' and declared to be an immediate gift of grace. The supremacy of this individual conscience removes the foundation of all the articles of faith, because they stand or fall according to whether the individual conscience assents to, or dissents from them... [I]t is no longer the divine authority of the Church which guarantees them, but subjective individual impressions... It is not the thing which demands assent, but assent which gives value to the thing. If then, by an internal logic, this criticism of divine authority as a theological principle becomes a criticism of the authority of reason as a philosophical principle, that is no more than might have been expected...<sup>21</sup>*

You cannot get out into the real world unless you admit your utter reliance on reality, and, inevitably, on the Author of all reality, God. The modern philosopher suffers the same problem as the Protestant. It may be summarised in one word—*submission*. The Protestant will not submit himself to God's authority: he knows better. The modern philosopher will not submit himself to the authority of reason<sup>22</sup>. *He knows better!*

### **What Has Taken Its Place?**

Nature abhors a vacuum. Men will think speculatively, as well as practically. If sound principle is abdicated, they will look elsewhere. What has taken the place of metaphysics in the Church, as in the world, are the uncertainties which attend upon modern philosophy.

### *Inductive Logic*

Metaphysics inclines its students to think analytically, that is, *deductively*. It takes a principle and concludes to the effects that flow from that principle. St Thomas's analysis of *cause* is an example. It may be paraphrased as follows—*A cause is that which exercises influence unto the be (ens, existence) of a thing dependent in regard to its be. But a thing may be dependent in regard to its be in one of four ways: in its form, in its matter, in the agent which produces it, and in the end for which the agent acts.* He

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<sup>21</sup> Romano Amerio, *Iota Unum*, [translated from 2nd Italian edition by Fr John P. Parsons], Sarto House, Kansas City, 1996, p.p 23-25.

<sup>22</sup> The proper formal object of the intellect is the quiddity (the 'whatness') of real things, that is, of reality. Thus, reality is the measure of reason.

demonstrates this fourfold dependence in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*<sup>23</sup> and in a notable passage in his *Summa Theologiae*<sup>24</sup> where he shows that to this fourfold dependence corresponds the four causes: formal; material; efficient and final. The conclusion is absolutely certain, *because the effect argued to is contained in the principle.*

In contrast, the modern world, under the influence of modern philosophy, prefers to think *inductively*—proceeding in the opposite direction, from effect to cause. This is the modus of all science. It notes certain phenomena, such as—*this material boils at 100 degrees centigrade; it freezes at 0 degrees centigrade*—it concludes to a cause of these effects: *this material is water.* But its conclusions do not enjoy absolute certitude. The material might, possibly, be something other than water. A scientific theory is conditional on further information not disproving its thesis. The scientific theory of evolution, for instance, despite all the support it receives from scientists, remains just that, a theory. But from a philosophical point of view, evolution is nonsense. Why? Because it reduces all causality to one cause only, the material cause.

### *Subjectivism*

Subjectivism is the curse of the age, the ground in which all ideology flourishes. Feminism, Secular Humanism, Marxism, Existentialism and the like, have no basis which will bear rigorous intellectual analysis, yet millions adopt their tenets and live their lives under them, suffering the consequences of doing so and thinking that these must be borne. These ideologies<sup>25</sup> pretend to give reasons to justify moral perversions like contraception, abortion, in vitro fertilisation, experimentation on human embryos, homosexual behaviour and the sexual perversion of children.

Subjectivism is the source of that phenomenon of the modern world, political correctness. *Political correctness* is a communal attitude of mind exercised by a substantial body of the citizenry endorsing, without rational analysis, a standard in respect of some social or moral issue and vigorously opposing any argument, or anyone arguing, against that standard. Political correctness is founded in emotion. It is perhaps the most telling manifestation of a society's inability to think, or better, of the substitution in a society of emotion for thought. There is a sentence in Amerio's analysis of the effects of Luther's revolt against the authority of God and His Church which summarises political correctness perfectly—*It is not the thing which demands assent, but assent which gives value to the thing.* The body of the citizenry say that it must be, therefore it must be so!

### **The Effects Of The Loss**

Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage [*Genesis 25: 33*]. So also, when they discarded metaphysics did those disobedient bishops and seminary heads sell the Church's patrimony for a mess of pottage—modern philosophy. And as Esau suffered over his loss [*Genesis 27: 36 et seq.*] so the members of Christ's Church have suffered ever since over this betrayal of principle.

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<sup>23</sup> *In II Physics*, Lect. 10, n.240

<sup>24</sup> *Summa Theologiae* I, q.104, art. 1 *Whether creatures need to be kept in being by God.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ideologies* because each flows from the idea of some thinker rather than from reality.

What is not understood is that these failures have had their effect throughout the Church *from bottom to top*. The priests so defectively formed between the 1940s and the 1990s became the bishops and cardinals of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. These have not addressed the problem—indeed most of them would deny there was a problem—*because they are themselves part of the problem*.

### *John Paul II*

Karol Wojtyła began his studies for the priesthood in the underground seminary of Warsaw. Italian philosopher, Rocco Buttiglione, a friend of the late Pope, wrote a history of Wojtyła's thought. He says in that work—*Wojtyła was entrusted to the care of Reverend Kazimierz Klosoka... [who] had him read his first work on metaphysics, Ontologia czyli Metafizyka, a treatise by Kazimierz Wais. This book, which reflects the influence of transcendental Thomism, the School of Louvain which attempted to reconcile Kant and St Thomas, is still famous among Polish students, largely for its nearly insuperable difficulty.*<sup>26</sup> This revelation, that Wojtyła's first gaze at metaphysics was through the eyes of a subjectivist commentator, is critical in understanding all that followed in the mind of the future Pope.

After seminary training conducted in spartan conditions under Nazi occupation in Cracow, Karol Wojtyła was ordained on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1946 by the heroic Archbishop of Cracow, Adamo Sapieha, whom Pius XII had elevated to the Cardinalate earlier the same year. Cardinal Sapieha sent him to Rome to study theology at the Angelicum where he came under the influence of Garrigou-Lagrange. Buttiglione remarks: *It is interesting to note that the main objection which Father Garrigou-Lagrange made to Wojtyła's work concerned the fact that he refused to use the term Object in relation to God.*<sup>27</sup>

In January 1947 Fr Wojtyła wrote of St Thomas to a friend: *His entire philosophy is so marvellously beautiful, so delightful, and at the same time, so uncomplicated... But I still have far to travel before I hit upon my own philosophy*<sup>28</sup>. What else could make clearer that, for all his studies, Fr Wojtyła had not made St Thomas's metaphysics his own?

He successfully defended his doctoral thesis, *The Doctrine of Faith according to St John of the Cross*, in June 1948 but his doctorate was conferred in the December following not by the Angelicum but by the Polish Catholic Jagiellonian University.

Fr Wojtyła's second doctoral thesis followed his release from pastoral duties between 1951 and 1958. According to George Weigel, the late Pope's biographer, Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak, de facto successor of Cardinal Sapieha, directed him to return to academic life so as to qualify him to lecture at university level. At the instance of a Professor of Theology at the Jagiellonian University, Fr Ignacy Rozycki, Fr Wojtyła conducted lengthy studies in personalism, existentialism and phenomenology. He

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<sup>26</sup> Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: the thought of the man who became Pope John Paul II*, transl. by Paolo Guietti and Francesca Murphy, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1997, p.31

<sup>27</sup> Buttiglione, op. cit., p.35, footnote 22.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in *Pope John Paul II, An Authorised Biography*, Lord Longford, New York, 1982, p.54.

immersed himself in subjectivism, absorbing the works of Max Buber, Gabriel Marcel and Max Scheler amongst others. The thesis he subsequently produced was accepted in November 1953 by the Theological Faculty of the Catholic University of Lublin<sup>29</sup> in Poland.

George Weigel says that Wojtyla synthesised there the metaphysical realism of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and the sensitivity to human experience of Scheler's phenomenology.<sup>30</sup> The verb he employs recalls the *thesis-antithesis-synthesis* of the Hegelian dialectic where the *synthesis* always entails the compromise of one or of both of the earlier two terms. Inevitably, Karol Wojtyla's *synthesis* of realism and subjectivism brought with it the compromise of realism. There is no better illustration of this than appears in the following criticism of Wojtyla's definitive statement of his philosophy, *Person And Act* [known also in English as *The Acting Person*], published in 1969 after he became a Cardinal. Professor Stanislaw Kowalczyk of the Catholic University of Lublin, where Karol Wojtyla taught, gave this judgement—

*Wojtyla recalls the classic adage agere sequitur esse [do follows be]... but he interprets it differently from Thomism. The latter explains the acting of a man by what he is. Person And Act proposes the inverse explanation, that the being of a man is explained by his actions. This is the road traced by Descartes, borrowed in our days by phenomenology and existentialism.<sup>31</sup>*

There is a sense in which a man is the product of his own actions. We are not mere pawns, victims of an inevitable fate: we work out our own destiny. But this consideration occurs in the area of *morals*, not in the make up of our essential being. A man has first to exist before he can improve himself. *Do follows be*. According to Cardinal Wojtyla's philosophy, however, *be follows do*. His proposal turns metaphysics on its head.

With his election as Pope in October 1978, Karol Wojtyla addressed, from time to time, the question of the place of St Thomas in the life of the Church. He did so in his Address to the International Pontifical Athenaeum (*The Angelicum*) on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1979. His Address to the VIIIth International Thomistic Congress the following year (13<sup>th</sup> September 1980) in tribute to Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*<sup>32</sup>, was outstanding—a studied and erudite exposition of the moderate realism of St Thomas's metaphysics, of the primacy of objective reality, of St Thomas's approach to truth and error, his profound courtesy towards opponents, his deference in all things to revelation and the voice of the Church, and of the place of man in God's creation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing a System of Christian Ethics on the Basis of the System of Max Scheler.*

<sup>30</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, New York, 2001, pp. 128-9

<sup>31</sup> This analysis is exposed by Stanislaw Kowalczyk in *Personnalisme polonais contemporain*, in *Divus Thomas*, 1985, p.63. The work is quoted in Abbé Daniel Le Roux, *Peter, Lovest Thou Me?*, op. cit. p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> *Method and Doctrine of St Thomas in dialogue with modern culture*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edn., 20.10.1980, pp. 9-11. This Congress was dedicated to the study of the origin and content of the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of Leo XIII and its implementation by Leo's successors.

<sup>33</sup> A copy of this Address is reproduced on this website sub nom. *Pope John Paul II on St Thomas Aquinas.*

Yet it must be understood of Karol Wojtyla that although he had studied and understood St Thomas's teaching and could expound it and quote from it ad libitum, *he did not embrace it*. He did not accept that the great edifice of thought expounded by the Angelic Doctor and adopted by the Church down the centuries provides the only rational and completely satisfying explanation for the universe and all it contains.

It was inevitable that the long years of his pontificate would work changes in the late Pope's thinking. The preoccupations of his early writings were largely missing from *Fides Et Ratio* [14.9.1998], his encyclical on the relationship between faith and reason. There he expressed reservations about modern philosophy and insisted that truth was universal. He condemned Modernism, at least implicitly, and praised fulsomely the philosophy of St Thomas. Yet he remained agnostic about whether there existed one true philosophy.

This moved him to write: *The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonise any one particular philosophy in preference to others.*<sup>34</sup> The authority he gives for this proposition is Pope Pius XII in *Humani Generis* [12.8.1950] AAS 42:566. A study of the text cited fails, however, to reveal any support for the assertion. In fact that text—indeed the whole thrust of Pius XII's encyclical—supports the very contrary proposition<sup>35</sup>. Moreover in making this assertion, John Paul II ignored explicit teaching by two of his predecessors to the contrary. In his encyclical on St Dominic, *Fausto Appetente Die*, [29.6.1921], Pope Benedict XV wrote that St Dominic's Order *acquired new lustre when the Church declared the teaching of Thomas to be her own...*<sup>36</sup> And Pius XI taught, in his encyclical *Studiorum Ducem* [29.1.1923] at n.11—

*We so heartily approve the magnificent tribute of praise bestowed upon this most divine genius that We consider that Thomas should be called not only the Angelic, but also the Common or Universal Doctor of the Church; for the Church has adopted his philosophy for her own, as innumerable documents of every kind attest.*

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<sup>34</sup> n. 49

<sup>35</sup> Thus, a few paragraphs further on, [*Humani Generis* nn. 29 & 31] Pius XII says: *It is well known how highly the Church regards human reason, for it falls to reason to demonstrate [the truths which are the foundation for the Christian faith] ... But reason can perform these functions safely and well only when properly trained, that is, when imbued with that sound philosophy which has long been, as it were, a patrimony handed down by earlier Christian ages... For this philosophy, acknowledged and accepted by the Church, safeguards the genuine validity of human knowledge, the unshakeable metaphysical principles of sufficient reason, causality and finality, and finally the mind's ability to attain certain and unchangeable truth... If one considers all this well, he will easily see why the Church demands that future priests be instructed in philosophy according to the method, doctrine and principles of the Angelic Doctor, since, as we well know from the experience of centuries, the method of Aquinas is singularly pre-eminent both for teaching students and for bringing truth to light; his doctrine is in harmony with divine revelation, and is most effective both for safeguarding the foundation of the faith and for reaping, safely and usefully, the fruits of sound progress.*

<sup>36</sup> AAS 13:332

The Church has always in the past moved to address imminent evils. So Pius XI on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1937, dealt with the errors of National Socialism in his encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* and, less than a week later, on 19<sup>th</sup> March, he addressed the evils of Communism in *Divini Redemptoris*. In the same way Pius XII addressed Chinese Communism in his encyclical *Ad Apostolorum Principis* on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1958.

It cannot be coincidence that with the loss of the influence of metaphysics in the Church there has grown an apparent inability in the Vatican to deal with certain fundamental problems. These can be categorised as arising from gnosticism, from philosophy and from ideology.

*Gnosticism*—there has been no encyclical to follow up Leo XIII's condemnations of Freemasonry which appeared in *Humanum Genus* [20.4.1884], in *Dall'alto Dell'apostolico Seggio* [15.10.1890], in *Custodi Di Quella Fede* [8.12.1892] and in *Inimica Vis* of the same date. Yet Freemasonry is flourishing as never before and the rotten fruit produced by Freemasonry, which Leo XIII details at length in his encyclicals, are all around us. The heresy of Modernism, exposed by Pius X in *Pascendi* in 1907, is rampant in the Church today yet, one hundred years on, no encyclical has drawn attention to its extent or to the persistence of its pernicious influence.

*Philosophy*—Darwinian evolutionary theory dominates the modern mind. Yet Darwin's ideas are only the working out at the physical and biological levels of the philosophical evolutionary theory of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Spencer's theory is fundamentally flawed and cannot survive metaphysics' explication of the doctrine of causality mentioned earlier in this article. Yet there has been no criticism of the theory from the Vatican since Pius XII in *Humani Generis* 55 years ago.

*Ideology*—there has been no systematic critique and exposure of twin errors whose influence, great in the modern world, has percolated into Church institutions and into educational programs, namely, Secular Humanism and Marxism. Perhaps the most outstanding instance of this inability of the Vatican to deal with fundamental problems has been the failure to provide a systematic criticism of the ideology which has done the greatest harm in the Church and in the world in the last 30 years, namely, Feminism.

In a world demonstrably worse than it was in 1950, how far we are from a categorising of current errors such as Pius XII set forth in *Humani Generis* and an admonition such as his—

*We charge the Bishops and the Superiors General of Religious orders, binding them most seriously in conscience to take most diligent care that such opinions be not advanced in schools, in conferences or in writings of any kind, and that they not be taught in any manner whatsoever to the clergy or the faithful.*<sup>37</sup>

In every age there is a certain type of thinker attracted to philosophy. Philosophy needs a mind which, as St Thomas says, is concerned with *mirandum*—wonder. Poets, he says,

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<sup>37</sup> *Humani Generis* n. 41

have a similar facility. There is in such souls a yearning for the infinite, for ultimate intellectual solutions. Yet the tools which would enable those solutions to be discovered by such minds are hidden from them.

### **What Is To Be Done?**

It is vital for the life of the Church that her philosophers return to the metaphysics of St Thomas. One can agree with Pope Paul VI when, in urging all those who wished to form a mature judgement in the matter of philosophical studies, he adopted the words of Pius XI—

*'Go to Thomas'!*<sup>38</sup> *Obtain and read his works, not simply to find safe nourishment in his rich intellectual treasures but also, and especially, to gain a personal grasp of the sublimity, abundance and importance of the doctrine contained therein.*<sup>39</sup>

But there is a practical problem. The sheer immensity of St Thomas's undertaking is likely to intimidate the beginner and prevent him even embarking on the task. Metaphysics is an intricate science, with its own scientific terminology. Who is going to teach it? Who is going to convey to modern pupils the doctrines of causality; of potency and act; of essence and existence; of matter and form; of substance and accident; and the great intellectual revelation of the Thomistic theory of knowledge? Who is going to train these pupils in the use of the marvellous instrument of Aristotelian logic?

It is an essential condition of the resurrection of metaphysics that there be teachers, themselves metaphysicians, to convey these fundamentals to students for the priesthood and the religious life. This can only occur if the Church embarks on a renaissance of Thomistic studies after the example given by her great predecessors, Leo XIII and Pius XI.

In the view of this commentator, this should be one of the chief tasks of Pope Benedict XVI.

Michael Baker

20<sup>th</sup> July 2005—*Anniversary of death of Leo XIII*

[Second anniversary of the establishment of [superflumina.org](http://superflumina.org)]

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<sup>38</sup> Pius XI, *Studiorum Duce*: AAS 15:323

<sup>39</sup> *Lumen Ecclesiae* n. 3