

Retrieval of Roman Catholic Theological Heritage Beyond Contemporary Presentism

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Abstract

On 13 September 2025, Pope Leo XIV addressed the Pontifical Academy of Theology, advocating for a renewed focus on “a theology of wisdom.” According to the pontiff, it was a model of theology that was “developed by the great Fathers and Masters of antiquity,” through which, in “docility to the Spirit,” they were able “to unite faith and reason, reflection, prayer, and practice.” Interestingly, Henri de Lubac, whose book *Surnaturel* (1946) is commonly regarded as one of the major works that typified theological *ressourcement*, in the first half of the 20th century, advocated for a return to “the golden age of Medieval thought” to restore the climate of “mystery” that was a core characteristic of Patristic theology. Regrettably, Catholic theology after Vatican II, largely influenced by theological *ressourcement*, seems to view some earlier theological systems as of little importance. This research upholds the view that the inability or reluctance of contemporary theological presentism to go beyond the conceptual boundaries of theological *ressourcement*, for the most part through the binoculars of *la nouvelle théologie*, and a considerable accompanying disregard for scholastic theology impoverish the broad, complex, and rich heritage of Catholic theological tradition.

Keywords: Roman Catholic Church; theology; scholasticism; Neo-Scholasticism; Franciscans; Dominicans

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Introduction

Unarguably, one of the remarkable developments in ancient Christianity was the attraction of gifted thinkers in the Roman Empire. Like their counterparts in the empire, early Christian intellectuals appreciated debates, appealed to evidence, and experience. They were not afraid to use reason to weigh, judge, interpret, and explain what was held to be true (Wilken 2003,164). In other words, as for the Christian community, as shown by the laborious intellectual enterprise of its thinkers, thinking was and is part of believing. This much is evident in the writing of St. Augustine: “No one believes anything unless one first thought it believable... Everything that is believed is believed after being preceded by thought... Not everyone who thinks believes, since many think in order not to believe, but everyone who believes thinks, thinks in believing, and believes in thinking” (cited in Wilken 2003,165).

The above citation shows that belief is a crucial element in Christian discourse. It is understandable why Joseph Ratzinger, a prominent contemporary Catholic theologian, emphasises the importance of faith in the life of any serious theologian. He references notable believing theologians such as Johann Adam Möhler, John Henry Newman, Matthias Joseph Scheeben, Antonio Rosmini, Romano Guardini, Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, and Hans Urs von Balthasar (Ratzinger 1995,97). According to Ratzinger, the voice of theology is inherently linked to the voice of faith and is directed towards it because theology is fundamentally an interpretation of faith and must remain as such, for it to stay relevant to the church community. It naturally follows that while theology allows for a variety of schools of thought, faith itself remains united because plurality is the domain of theology, not of faith, even though doctrinal expressions may evolve (Ratzinger 1995,93). St. Vincent of Lérins (died c. 445) already hinted at this theological truth in the fifth century with his principle enunciated in *Commonitorium* (434): “Christian doctrine follows the law of progress. It is consolidated through the years, expanded over time, and refined with age” (cited in Guarino 2025). In the same token, as if to challenge his own principle, he also warned that a respected teacher, whether a doctor, bishop, or martyr, should not be trusted if he diverges from the Church’s consensus (Guarino 2025).

The history of Catholic theological heritage, in many ways, can be seen as a history of diverse theological views that reflect the differences and commonalities of each era. Throughout this history, there has generally been no shortage of controversy and, in some cases, even strong criticism, along with dependence on church authorities to settle theological disputes. For example, during the Pelagian controversy and the related debates involving St. Augustine, it was long thought that Vincent of Lérins addressed this principle to St. Augustine based on their differing views on grace and free will: “What all men have at all times and everywhere believed must be regarded as true” (cited in Ghellinck 1912). Prosper, a close friend of St. Augustine, also defended the bishop of Hippo by writing his “*Responsiones ad capitula objectionum Vincentianarum*” (Ghellinck 1912). Showing maturity and fairness in debate, the

disagreements between the bishop of Hippo and the monk from Gaul over grace and free will did not stop Vincent from including St. Augustine's thoughts on the Trinity and Incarnation among his collected works on those theological issues (Guarino 2025). The debate between St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure about the focus of theology remains an important issue in the history of medieval thought. Their opposing views stemmed from differences in methodology and ideas about the goals of theology. While Aquinas saw theology as a science of speculation, Bonaventure, within the Franciscan tradition, saw it as a science of practice. Despite their differences in theological approach, both agreed that the true subject of theology was God himself (Ratzinger 1987,318, 321). Both outstanding medieval theologians represented two distinct traditions, drawing deeply from the rich theological repertoire handed down by the Church Fathers. They subscribed to the view of their milieu, as articulated by Peter of Blois (1130–1211), that “One does not go from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge without rereading with ever more ardent love the works of the Ancients” (Heather 2023,520).

In the decades after the Second Vatican Council, a powerful wave of change seemed to sweep through contemporary Catholic theological circles, threatening to dismiss old theologies, especially the neo-scholastic strands, as outdated. Walter Kasper, in his 1987 book, *Theology and Church*, clearly expressed the view of post-conciliar theology regarding Neo-Scholasticism: “There is no doubt that the outstanding event in Catholic theology of our century is the surmounting of neo-scholasticism” (cited in Kerr 2007, vii). Even before Kasper, Marie-Dominique Chenu had celebrated what he saw as the neo-scholastic defeat at Vatican II, and the supposed removal of the spirit of the 18th-century rationalism from Catholic theology (Kerr 2007,29). The unfortunate result of this triumphalism during the post-Vatican II years was not merely the loss of old theological manuals but also the disappearance of valuable wisdom and knowledge “that went down the memory hole along with the handbooks” (Root 2024). This was possible because, as Michael Root has sadly pointed out: “Any work done in a scholastic vein between 1850 and 1950 was consigned to oblivion, unassigned to and unread by students of theology” (Root 2024). In this act of wilful forgetfulness, Root also notes that, except for St. John Henry Newman, post-conciliar theology students appear to have been taught to overlook, as it were, theological works written between the death of St. Thomas Aquinas in 1274 and the major theological trends of the 1920s and 1930s. The result, once again, was a narrower mindset towards authentic and historical sources that could have enhanced contemporary Catholic theological discussion (Root 2024).

Post-Vatican II theology has a predilection for the proliferation of approaches and resources, as well as the multiplication of contexts and perspectives (Murray 2007,272). On account of such a penchant, the classical works of bygone epochs have gone into a theological oblivion. The objective of this research is to make a case against the seemingly theological “forgetting” that is born of reaction. Using a historical approach, it provides a circumscribed overview of some key figures in the history of Catholic theology from the Early Middle Ages to the late 19th century. It will firstly consider

some early medieval scholastic forebearers. This will be followed by a bird's-eye glance at the flowering and new centres of Catholic theology during the post-Tridentine era. The final part examines modernity and theological discourse in the light of Neo-Scholastic rebirth in the 19th century and the emergence of Thomism as its trademark.

Medieval Theological Progenitors

As is well documented, the end of the patristic era historically coincided with the collapse of the classical Greco-Roman culture, which had served as a unifying cultural force that strengthened the shared identity between the western and eastern parts of the Roman Empire. Theologically, the 8th century marked the dividing line between the patristic and medieval eras. The deaths of St. John Damascene in the East and Bede the Venerable in the West are generally seen as signalling the conclusion of the patristic period (Mondin 1996a,7). What later became known as “scholastic theology” did not develop suddenly. It resulted from a prolonged process of evolution that began with the creation of educational institutions separate from monastic schools and the introduction of new academic disciplines such as logic, natural science, and metaphysics. Over time, it developed its own unique traits that set it apart from patristic theology. Within their cultural ambience, both medieval culture and scholastic theology were essential parts of a world vision focused on God as the Teacher who teaches human beings what is necessary for their lives, whether in the intellectual and moral orders or in the juridical and institutional orders. In this regard, scholastic theology was developed and operated within the general optics of medieval *respublica Christiana* (Christian republic) and played an important role in it (Mondin 1996a,8–9).

The scholastic era spanned over seven centuries, from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries. A substantial number of theologians stamped their imprints on medieval theology as it evolved in its earliest beginnings through its golden age of flowering in the 13th century and subsequent decline in the 14th and 15th centuries. The 13th century could be described as belonging to the Franciscan and Dominican orders for their prodigious advancement of *fides quaerens intellectum* (already broadly conceived by St. Anselm). It was the basic principle of medieval speculation (Gilson 1936[2009],5). Theologians in the Franciscan intellectual tradition led the way as a preceding generation of thinkers before the coming of St. Bonaventure in the Franciscan tradition, St. Albert the Great, and St. Thomas Aquinas in the Dominican school of thought. This historical fact often seems to have been lost owing to the dominant figure of Aquinas, who, without a doubt, is considered the epitome of scholastic theology. It is worth recalling that the intellectual pioneers in the Franciscan tradition, such as Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168–1253), Roger Bacon [*Doctor mirabilis*] (c. 1220–1292), Alexander of Hales (c. 1170/85–1245), and John of La Rochelle (c. 1190–1245), laid the foundational work for their successors (Nieuwenhove 2022,199). Most importantly, their groundbreaking innovations in Christology, Trinitarian theology, as well as their treatises on the intricate relation between faith and reason, prepared the ground for further articulations by Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus (Nieuwenhove 2022,199).

Although Grosseteste was not himself a Franciscan, his association with the order at its school of theology at Oxford afforded him the platform and opportunity to play an important role in shaping the intellectual and spiritual development of the Franciscan tradition in the 13th century (Logan 2013,204). He played a dual role as a philosopher and a theologian. As a philosopher, he was one of the first Latin scholars to engage systematically in the study of Aristotle and the first to translate Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* into Latin, which helped open Aristotle's moral philosophy to Western thinkers (Nieuwenhove 2022,202). As for his theological works, Grosseteste drew widely from both Western and Eastern sources. They included St. Augustine, Boethius, St. Anselm of Canterbury, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux in the western tradition, and, much later in his life, from the eastern tradition, particularly St. Basil the Great, St. John of Damascus, and Pseudo-Dionysius (Lewis and Polloni 2024). Aside from his *Hexaëmeron*, in which he explores the issue of the eternity of the world in rebuttal of Aristotle (Lewis and Polloni 2024), one of Grosseteste's most significant contributions to medieval theology was his emphasis on the role of desire in shaping the intellect's horizon.

In this regard, he agreed with Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Thierry, and Thomas Gallus in positing that the scope of mental vision and the scope of the soul are dictated by the limits of affection. According to Richard Southern, from Grosseteste's standpoint, "the mind's range of vision cannot extend beyond its range of love" (as cited in Nieuwenhove 2022,207). His theology was also Christocentric, encompassing *sapientia* (wisdom) and *scientia sacra* (sacred science), distinguishing it from other disciplines as it aimed to facilitate a "return" to Christ. It was this Christocentrism of theological thought that Grosseteste bequeathed most outstandingly to his Franciscan disciples, which is more uniquely present in the thought of St. Bonaventure (Nieuwenhove 2022,204).

Paradoxically, St. Francis once lamented that certain friars were "being seduced by a curious quest for learning" (Logan 2013,203). This did not prevent his order from increasingly adopting an intellectual approach, especially as they began recruiting masters of theology from medieval universities. One such example was Alexander of Hales (1185–1245), who joined the order in 1226. He was by far the most prominent Parisian theologian of his generation (Logan 2013,204), and like Grosseteste, he influenced the theological views of numerous Franciscans for many years. Alexander of Hales was an expert on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. His commentaries on the *Sentences* helped him establish a coherent economy of salvation, specifically about life after death and the importance of the sacraments of confession, extreme unction, the Mass, and praying for the dead (Heather 2023,529). He was the inventor of using Lombard's *Sentences* as a primary tool of theological education rather than the Bible only (Nieuwenhove 2022,205). Known to his contemporaries as *Doctor Irrefragabilis* (Impossible to Refute), his *Schola Fratrum Minorum* in Paris served as a foundation for the philosophical and theological education of his successors, as documented in *Summa Fratris Alexander* (The Summa of Brother Alexander), also called *Summa Halensis* (Britannica Editors 2025). This extensive work was the result of collective efforts by

Alexander, John of La Rochelle, and their colleagues. Their goal was to articulate a systematic and unique Franciscan theological tradition on key Christian doctrines (Nieuwenhove 2022,220; Britannica Editors 2025). According to Rik Van Nieuwenhove, this massive Franciscan *Summa Theologiae* is largely and gravely overlooked (Nieuwenhove 2022,220). The work is divided into four parts: (1) God as Unity and Trinity; (2) creation and the Fall; (3) the Incarnation; and (4) the Sacraments. The final part, especially the section on the sacraments, remained unfinished at the deaths of Alexander and John of La Rochelle. It was later completed by William of Melitona [Middleton] (died c. 1260), in collaboration with other friars, at the encouragement of Pope Alexander IV (1254–1261). William’s major work, *Quaestiones de sacramentis*, and the thoughts of St. Bonaventure on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving heavily influenced this last section (Nieuwenhove 2022,221; New Catholic Encyclopedia 2025). Overall, the *Summa Halensis* can be seen as a continuation of Alexander’s earlier work, *Quaestiones disputatae antequam esset frater* (*Questions Before Becoming a Brother*). It covered a broad spectrum of theological issues, from Christ’s knowledge and prophecy to the Trinity, sacraments, and the nature of God’s knowledge and the heavens (Nieuwenhove 2022,220).

Theology, in the 12th century, with the audacity of Peter Abelard (1079–1142), and the rationalism of Alain of Lille (1128–1203), suffused with mysticism, had timidly begun to evolve as an autonomous scientific discipline (Mondin 1996a,237). That evolution occurred with a shift regarding the notional framework of theology. It moved from the spiritual understanding of the faith, which was the major hallmark of patristic theology, to a sort of “Christian rationalism.” The Fathers emphasised the mystical character of theology much more than theology’s technical methodology. Theirs was more of a contemplative than a speculative theology (Chenu 2002[1959],25). The shift in theological notion became more evident with time in the Middle Ages. It was foreshadowed in the thoughts of Berengarius of Tours (999–1088) and further carried on in Abelard and St. Anselm. Consequently, theology during the Middle Ages increasingly became less a contemplation of mysteries and more a dialectical adventure in which “symbolic inclusions” became “dialectical antithesis” (Komonchak 1990,589–590). Abelard and his teeming students in their pursuit of science and culture were disparagingly dismissed by Rupert of Deutz (1075–1129) as “merchants of science” (Chenu 2002[1959],17). But to his credit, Abelard moved theology out of its monastic enclosure and took it into the classroom, that is, into the neutrality of the academe. This, perhaps, may explain the anger of Bernard of Clairvaux towards Abelard as well as his loathing and disapproval of Abelard’s theological enterprise (Ratzinger 1987,322).

Abelard’s recourse to classical learning, especially dialectic, to explore key questions of Christian doctrine, such as the Trinity, as evidenced in his *Theologia Christiana*, although condemned by the Synod of Soissons in 1121, launched a new phase for medieval theology (Heather 2023,518). While Abelard used the term “*Theologia*” to refer to *sacra doctrina* or *sacra eruditio*, Alain, for his part, sought to establish precise rules for theological science, even though neither of them clearly enunciated what that

theological science entailed (Mondin 1996a,244). This was where Roger Bacon's ingenuity was displayed. As a defender of the theological, philosophical, and scientific tradition of Grosseteste, Roger recognised theology as a science, which at the same time needed the assistance of other sciences to elucidate, defend, and promote Scripture and Revelation. As far as Roger was concerned, *scientia experimentalis* furnishes its findings and knowledge to the other sciences, and ultimately to theology as the "mistress of sciences." For this reason, as posited by Roger, "without experience nothing can be sufficiently known" (Nieuwenhove 2022,216–217). This position of Roger is hardly surprising because it occasioned his disagreement with the theologians of his time, whom he accused of not employing other sciences in their interpretation of the scriptures (Nieuwenhove 2022,217).

As noted elsewhere, to the merit of the Franciscan tradition, except for Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, many of the most important 13th and 14th-century thinkers were Franciscans. They included Bonaventure, John Duns Scotus, Peter Aureoli, and William of Ockham (Nieuwenhove 2022,182). They prepared the way for the greater systematisation of theological thinking in subsequent centuries, although the predominant theological strand on the eve of Trent was unquestionably the *via moderna* of nominalism, which was the occasion for fierce counterattacks between the Franciscans and Dominicans in Italy. Specifically, the quarrel bordered on the correct interpretation of Duns Scotus vis-à-vis St. Thomas Aquinas concerning the natural and supernatural ends of man. It was at this time that the Franciscans in Padua produced the first editions of the works of Duns Scotus and the Dominicans in nearby Vicenza, published their *Liber propugnatorius*. The two opposing sides were led by Antonio Trombetta for the Franciscans and Cajetan (Tommaso de Vio) for the Dominicans. The controversy over Scotus's views significantly sapped the theological energy of both groups and constituted a major distraction (De Lubac 2000[1969],126–127). It was within that context that Erasmus of Rotterdam (died 1536) directed his sharpest criticism against theologians whom he accused of relying more on the philosophy of Aristotle and other "scientific thinkers" instead of abiding by "the philosophy of Christ" (O'Malley 2006,105). With the threats posed by the Protestant Reformers, the Council of Trent, when finally convoked, was determined, among other things, to give clear, solid, and rational bases to Catholic faith and doctrine without leaving room for theological and philosophical quibbling (Mondin 1996b,259).

A New Flowering with New Centres

According to Jean Delumeau, the Council of Trent (1545–1563) divided the history of Catholic confession into two distinct periods: before and after Trent (Delumeau 1977,4). Theologically, while the High Middle Ages, especially the 13th century, were associated with the Franciscans, the period before Trent in the 16th century was dominated by the Dominicans. The shift in theological leadership coincided with a move from the centre of influence in Paris (France) to new centres in Salamanca (Spain) and Rome (Italy). It likewise occurred almost simultaneously with the founding of the Jesuits by St. Ignatius of Loyola in 1540. Notably, France, which had served as the

theological capital of Catholic theology for three centuries, experienced a theological decline, while the Protestant Reformation led to the practical disappearance of English and German voices from Catholic theology for a long period (Mondin 1996b,259). France initially remained a theological centre of repute because the earliest initiators of the scholastic revival during the Renaissance were French and Italian Dominicans, and later by their German and Spanish confreres. It evolved under Spanish influence and eventually transformed into Baroque Scholasticism by the Jesuits (Novotný 2009,220). The Spanish phase was driven by the Dominican friar, Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546). He synthesised Thomistic teaching, enriching it with elements of nominalism and humanism without necessarily compromising the essential tenets of the Angelic Doctor (Novotný 2009,220).

The Spanish phase produced a formidable group. More than 60 theology professors from the theological powerhouse in Salamanca actively participated in Trent. Among them were Domingo de Soto (1494–1560) and Melchor Cano (1509–1560) (Mondin 1996b,259; Delumeau 1977,40). A younger peer of theirs, Domingo Bañez, followed in their theological footsteps and emerged “as a figure of unprecedented distinction in scholastic Spain” (Volz 1907). As Salamanca became the theological centre for the Dominicans and Carmelites, Rome became a hub for Jesuit theological studies. Thanks to the relentless efforts and depth of the Roman school represented by the Jesuits, the eternal city acquired an influential theological position that it never held during the Medieval and Renaissance periods (Mondin 1996b,259).

The Collegio Romano (Roman College) of the Jesuits, apart from its reputation for its respected mathematicians and astronomers, helped raise the theological prestige of Rome as a new centre of Catholic theology due to its erudite professors of scholastic theology and metaphysics (O’Malley 2006,228). It had among its ranks such figures as Christopher Clavius (1528–1599), praised as “the Euclid of his century,” and Giovanni Battista Tolomei, who even applied mathematical methods to philosophical and theological issues (Novotný 2009,223, 230). Worth noting is the difference in orientation between the Salamanca and Roman schools in their respective approaches to Thomas Aquinas. While Salamanca adhered strictly and faithfully to Aquinas in its theological orientation, Rome, under the leadership of the Jesuits, drew inspiration from Aquinas and made references to him with greater freedom, and sensibly kept a distance from some of his metaphysical positions (Mondin 1996b,285,292). The Jesuits leaned strongly towards nominalism and empiricism (Novotný 2009,220). What later came to be referred to as “Baroque Scholasticism” in 1928 by Karl Eschweiler had its roots in the sixteenth century. It had Francisco Suárez as its “father,” and its “crowning point,” whom Pope Pius V called the “eminent and pious theologian,” and Pope Alexander VII honoured him as “the prince of theologians” for the versatility of his theological knowledge, systematic and methodological rigor, and profundity of his thought (Mora 1953,536; Mondin 1996b,285, 292, 303; Novotný 2009,220).

The emergence of new theological centres led to a revitalisation of scholasticism, specifically the Thomistic brand of it. He became the most revered theologian of the period, to the extent that even the Jesuits regarded themselves as “Thomists.” Interestingly, the General Congregation of the Jesuits in 1593 instructed Jesuit theologians to adhere strictly to the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. Second Scholasticism, as distinguished from the first Scholasticism of the Middle Ages, was unmistakably Thomistic and generally referred to as the “Golden age of Thomism.” According to Battista Mondin, “in no other epoch of the history of theology, whether before or after Trent, had St. Thomas monopolised Catholic theology as in this period” (Mondin 1996b,259). Not altogether surprising, the ascendancy of St. Thomas Aquinas in Catholic theology was at the expense of St. Augustine and Peter Lombard (Delumeau 1977,41). This occurred especially after Aquinas was declared a doctor of the Church by Pope Pius V in 1567. Thereafter, his *Summa Theologiae* effectively dethroned Lombard’s *Sentences* as a major theological text (Rober 2015,265). As for St. Augustine, he was not completely displaced by Aquinas. He was rather rediscovered in some form, mostly in confrontation with Protestants over his views on justification, grace, free will, and predestination.

Importantly, the rediscovery of the bishop of Hippo did not occur in isolation. It happened in the same epoch that four Eastern Fathers were first recognised by the Western Church as “Doctors of the Church.” The fathers in question were Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom. Their designation as “Doctors of the Church” appeared in the *Breviarium Pianum*, promulgated in 1568 by Pope Pius V. It was also during this time that Marguerin de la Bigne (died 1585) started publishing the first volumes of *Bibliotheca Sanctorum Patrum*, which contributed immensely to patristic studies and renewed interest in church fathers (Mondin 1996b,260, 263). The revitalisation of scholasticism in its Thomistic hues as a major development of the epoch, ushered in a golden age of Catholic theology in the post-Tridentine era and ended in the first half of the 17th century with the deaths of Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), Jacques-Davy Duperron (1556–1621), Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), Francis de Sales (1567–1622), and Leonardus Lessius (1554–1623) (Delumeau 1977,41). Given the preponderance of theologians and their numerous works at the time, an admirer of theirs was said to have remarked in 1646: “Never have there been so many theologians!” (Delumeau 1977,4).

Contrary to the common misconception about it, Baroque Scholasticism never lacked in vitality in its dynamic efforts to absorb the past and to reconcile present contentions (Mora 1953,535). To be numbered among the great theologians of the era is also Francisco de Toledo (1532–1596), the first Jesuit cardinal, who was closely involved in the Baius controversy in its second phase. He was a student of Domingo de Soto and later taught theology for more than 30 years at the Roman College. His commentary on the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas was only published in 1869 under the editorship of Joseph Paria. Described as “a man of rare qualities,” one of his major contributions

is the conciliation between Thomas and Scotus in the assertion that “intuitive understanding of God is necessary for beatitude” (De Lubac 2000[1969],138).

As post-Tridentine theology was culturally dominated by the Spaniards, with the notable exception of Bellarmine, an Italian Jesuit, it was, thematically, an anthropological theology. It mirrored the mind of the council on the question of grace and free will. They were such important issues that Domingo de Soto wrote his treatise, *De natura et gratia*, during the interval between the sixth and seventh sessions of the council. It was published in Venice in 1547 and dedicated to the conciliar fathers of Trent (De Lubac 2000[1969],124). Post-Tridentine theology endeavoured to remain within the boundaries between two extremes: the excessive anthropocentrism of humanism and the anthropological pessimism of Protestantism (Mondin 1996b,262). Nevertheless, the *via media* of Trent, in turn, occasioned a controversy in Catholic theology, which, like the one over Duns Scotus, occupied the attention of many theologians of the period and equally sapped their energy. The bone of contention was first over the interpretation of the council’s decree on justification, in which the council exerted considerable effort to maintain a delicate balance between grace and human responsibility. The theological disagreement that emerged was the *De Auxiliis* controversy between the Jesuits and the Dominicans in Spain (O’Malley 2013,254).

Another controversy also centred on the relationship between nature and grace, especially as taught by St. Augustine and adapted or reformulated by St. Thomas. Their positions were interpreted differently by Michael Baius (1513–1589) and Cornelius Jansenius (1585–1638). Although the positions of Augustine and Thomas had been variously commented upon by theologians in the past and remained essentially fluid, the thorny issue took a different turn and reached a boiling point in the controversies over Baius and Jansenius (Dupré 2000, ix). The *Roman Catechism*, published in 1566, soon after the Council of Trent, is a key example of scholastic influence on the council, alongside the nature-and-grace question. It was prepared by Thomist theologians at the request of the conciliar fathers and patterned after the “Large Catechism” of Martin Luther as well as the “Large Catechism” of St. Peter Canisius (1521–1597) (O’Malley 2013,263). The first draft was presented to St. Charles Borromeo and was finally revised by Cardinal Guglielmo Sirleto (1514–1585).

Although not officially classified as one of the documents of Trent, it nonetheless articulated in clearer terms one of the council’s objectives. As underscored in The *Roman Catechism*, it was conceived as a “doctrinal explanation capable of completing the theological instructions of priests” on doctrines upheld as traditional by the council (De Lubac 2000 [1969], 132–133). Its importance was such that, three hundred years later, Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) still recommended the *Roman Catechism* to the French clergy and called it “a golden book” that was “remarkable for its doctrinal richness and accuracy” (De Lubac 2000[1969],133). Glossing over the Counter-Reformation controversies, the *Roman Catechism* may safely be said to have reflected the theological backgrounds of its authors, which harmoniously blended the Thomistic,

the Scotist (thought of John Duns Scotus), and the Jesuit traditions that gave post-Tridentine Catholicism its Baroque Scholasticism (Novotný 2009,224). For someone like Joseph Kleutgen (1811–1883), one of the Jesuit founders of Neo-Thomism in the later part of the 19th century, the “old” scholastic method, associated with traditional Catholic theology, reached its full development in the post-Reformation scholasticism of Melchor Cano, Juan de Lugo, Francisco Vasquez, and Francisco Suárez (McCool 1977,9). Of course, quite naturally, post-Tridentine Scholasticism was far from being unitary in approach and orientation particularly concerning the interpretation of Aquinas. While the Jesuits took Suárez as their best interpreter of the Angelic Doctor, the Dominicans extolled John Capréolus, Thomas de Vio Cajetan, and John of Thomas as the best interpreters of the thoughts of the same Aquinas (Rober 2015,266). Their differences aside, in the final analysis, as surmised by José F. Mora, the Counter-Reformation as a whole may be said not to have been “*primarily* an affair of philosophy” but “*primarily* a matter of *faith* and corresponding theological formulas” (Mora 1953,529). The reason for this assertion lies in the fact that faith was “the ultimate nucleus of the life and work of the men who centred around the movement of Reformation and Counter-Reformation.” Faith was “the body which nourished the philosophical thought of the period” (Mora 1953,530, 533).

Modernity and Theological Discourse

Paul Tillich describes the Enlightenment as one of the greatest of all revolutions in western history because of its fundamental principle on the autonomy of reason in every individual human being (Tillich 1967,27). In Immanuel Kant’s definition, which Tillich references, “Aufklärung” as Kant calls it, had as its essence the liberation of man from the state of immaturity through the free use of reason. The claim about the autonomy of reason in humans, as envisioned by the men of the Enlightenment, had both theoretical and practical implications for knowledge, scientific inquiry, politics, and even religion, since all these areas needed to be approached from the basis of the autonomy of reason (Tillich 1967,24–25). The Enlightenment, as the third phase of the modern era, was highly imbued with secularisation that distinguished it from Humanism and the Renaissance. Unlike the Enlightenment, the criticisms of Humanism and Renaissance of the medieval world and scholasticism were substantially within the Christian vision of man, the world, and history. With the Enlightenment and its focus on the autonomy of man, there was a strong breakaway from Christianity and a clear separation between philosophy and theology. It first led to the “dogmatic” positions of the rationalists and, subsequently, to the scepticism of the empiricists (Mondin 1996b,424–425). It also led to Kantian agnosticism, which “allowed no communication between God and human beings, except indirectly through the slender filament of moral experience” (Daly 2011,92).

The Enlightenment and its accompanying secularisation represent the culminating point of modernity, is much more than a chronological concept because it changed the way that man and the world are conceived. In this sense, the honour goes to Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), who first identified subjectivity and freedom as two main pillars of

modernity. From the Hegelian point of view, subjectivity and freedom mean autonomy in action and the right to subject everything to rational criticism (Mondin 1996b,425). With the liberation offered by Enlightenment thinkers, man perceived himself as the author of his thoughts and responsible for his actions. The autoreferential to man and the seemingly “emancipation” from religious impositions left limited space for theology. Its deductive arguments appeared enfeebled in the face of scientific inductive answers to earthly questions. In a broader perspective, modernity posed formidable challenges to Western Christianity that may be categorised as three revolutions: (1) scientific revolution; (2) revolution in critical thought, especially philosophical and historical inquiries as dictated by the Enlightenment; and (3) political revolution, typified by the French Revolution, and the subsequent proliferation of “liberal ideas” (Daly 2011,91). In such a hostile atmosphere, many theologians in all Christian churches, both Catholics and Protestants, faced the call of the 18th and 19th-century Enlightenment, particularly as it concerned historical criticism, and for a new approach to the foundations of Christianity (Kannengiesser 1991,133). Despite the many hostilities of the Enlightenment directed against it, theology, mainly in its Protestant brand, sought to reassert itself by adopting the epistemological methods of the Enlightenment thinkers. The way was led by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who is generally regarded as the father of modern Protestant theology. He rejected Kantian religious moralism while positing human experience as the veritable starting point for theology. The result is the removal of theology from the arena of science, so that theological attention should focus on human religious experience, and not on metaphysics (Tillich 1967,91; Daly 2011,93). Christianity, from the Schleiermacher standpoint, is the “greatest manifestation in history of man’s religious response to the absolute and by this very fact is the ultimate expression of the self-communication of God to humanity in history” (White 2023,26).

On the Catholic side, a century before Schleiermacher, Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) and Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) inaugurated modern Christian apologetics, defending the legitimacy and intelligibility of the Christian faith against vicious attacks from deists, free thinkers, and atheists. Pascal and Malebranche fall within the chronological frame of modernity. Both lived between the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the Congress of Vienna (1815), a period during which, due to “the irruption” or “affirmation” of modernity, Catholic theology found itself in a prolonged state of hibernation (Mondin 1996b,427). However, that is not the whole truth, because the revival of faith eventually led to a revival of theological reason. As Mora has made clear, for the theologians of modern times at the inception of the 17th century, reason became not only a method to make explicit what was already explicit; it was ultimately the frame within which theological questions of the time obtained their proper meaning. As would later be the case in the late 19th century with Neo-Scholasticism, so also in the early modern period, scholasticism was adopted as “one way of answering the fundamental problems of modern times” (Mora 1953,534–535). In the philosophical and theological climate of the epoch, there were outstanding theologians whose works left a mark on the third phase of scholasticism. One such theologian was Denys Petau

(1583–1652). He made numerous references to Scripture, Tradition, and the Church Fathers in his theological writings. The theological thought of Petau experienced a rebirth in the 19th century, as evident in the works of John Henry Newman, Johann Adam Möhler, Matthias Joseph Scheeben, and Theodore de Régnon. Luis Thomassin (1619–1695) followed Petau’s example in using Scripture, Tradition, and the Church Fathers as sources of theology. One distinctive feature of Thomassin’s thought is shown in his *Prolegomena*, where theology is presented as a divine science that requires both mind and heart: *theologia mentis et cordis*. In this aspect, he was closer to the Franciscan school than to St. Thomas Aquinas. Petau and Thomassin are considered the creators of historical or positive theology (Mondin 1996b, 490–492). Scheeben’s idea of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit bears the marks of inspiration from Petau and Thomassin. Also, Maurice de la Taille’s outstanding work on the sacrifice of the Mass, *Mysterium Fidei* (1940), was greatly enriched by his copious references to the Church Fathers, on the example of Petau and Thomassin (Root 2024).

Historically, the Council of Trent exerted a profound influence on the development of modern Roman Catholicism over the course of three centuries. The situation was slightly different in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as the Catholic Church confronted the challenges of modernity. In doing so, Roman Catholicism took on distinctive new characteristics that marked it apart from previous Tridentine Catholicism. One of those characteristics was the increased centralisation of Catholic life in Rome and around the figure of the pope. It is through the purview of that historical context that the First Vatican Council (1869–1870) and its definition of papal infallibility are best appreciated as strong Catholic pushbacks against the totalising ideologies of the modern state in Europe, and the antagonistic liberal intellectuals who sought to submerge the church and religion to the state. The major interlocutor at Vatican I was not Protestantism but modern secularism that ensued with the rise of post-Napoleonic European states that predicated their politics and political importance upon the purgation of all religious influences in national life and public culture (White 2013, 13). As Rome became the true nerve centre of Catholicism in its strong pushback against overbearing secular states, it equally sought to take charge of the direction of Catholic thought. It claimed the authority to intervene not only in society at large, but especially in theology and philosophy. According to Joseph Komonchak, Rome’s claim over the intellectual life of the church was unprecedented in outreach and scope (Komonchak 1997, 357, 374). Against the background of the Conventions of the Theologians of Germany, first held in 1848, Pope Pius IX, in a letter of 21 December 1863, to Archbishop Gregor von Scherr, asserted the right and authority of ecclesiastical hierarchy “to oversee and direct the teaching of theological matters” (Pius IX 1863).

This was at the inception of 19th-century Neo-Scholasticism, more specifically, the Neo-Thomistic brand, which would eventually hold sway in Catholic theology before its decline much later in the second half of the 20th century, with the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. It is generally assumed that Neo-Thomism, as the preferred brand of scholasticism, began to acquire much of its relevance and dominance in

contemporary theology from the 1840s, in the wake of Pope Pius IX's harsh critiques of modernity. It then advanced progressively from being one of the strong positions among others within Neo-Scholasticism to become the preferred and dominant theological position, essentially through pontifical fiat in the approval of Pope Leo XIII with the publication of *Aeterni Patris* in 1879 (Rober 2015,268–269). Within the historical context of modern Catholicism's battle with an aggressive secular society and its multifarious challenges, as well as the Catholic Church's adaptation that led to some forms of rapprochement with the same hostile society, Roman Catholicism of that epoch was adequately served by what Joseph Komonchak calls "a domesticated theology" (Komonchak 1990,579). It was a theology under the closest supervision and tightest control of the church hierarchy. As an academic discipline, "domesticated theology" was taken very seriously within the Catholic subculture, to the extent that its language, methods, and theological controversies were peculiar to Catholic theologians of the time (Komonchak 1990,579). Its primary concern was the orderly presentation and defence of Catholic belief in Aristotelian categories through the vehicle of the thoughts of Aquinas (Murray 2007,271). That said, it is also true that the story of modern Catholicism and its theology is much more complex than is often recognised. It did not always evolve through combative struggles with the anti-Christian spirit of modern liberalism (Murray 2007,268). The fact is contrary to the common assumption that the preoccupation of its theology was all about "situating Christianity on the intellectual horizon of the day" by "doing battle with modern philosophy in order to secure a crucial metaphysical claim" (Reno 2013). The binary of a two-phase narrative of modern Catholicism is not sufficient to tell the story of a complex historical reality. This is why Komonchak cautions against the use of such terms as "ghetto Catholicism" and "siege mentality." They are inappropriate and pejorative adjectives with negative connotations in the description of Catholicism, which showed great vibrancy in diverse areas, especially during the pontificate of Leo XIII, which sought to meet the challenges of an aggressive secular society (Komonchak 1997,363).

The aphorism that people are children of their time aptly describes Catholic intellectuals in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. They had to contend with three thrusts that dominated 19th-century thought, personified differently by the followers of Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel. Post-Kantians posed a major challenge to Christianity as a revealed religion with their naturalistic and reductionistic explanations of religion, morality, and even humanity (Ford 2007,7). According to David F. Ford, post-Kantians' thought left its mark on 20th-century conceptions of religion. The same is true of Schleiermacher, whom Ford describes as the principal creative sponsor of the whole revisionist and liberal enterprise. As for Hegel, the 19th-century shift towards more historical and process-oriented approaches to understanding reality bears his unmistakable seal. The Hegelian historical-critical method was further developed by David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874) and reached its zenith in him. Strauss dismissed as "mythical" any information about the life of Jesus that he judged not as historical (Ford 2007,9–10). His controversial two-volume work, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835–1836), along with Johannes Weiss's *Jesus's*

Proclamation of the Kingdom of God (1892) and liberal Protestant theology, had a remote formative influence on some Catholic intellectuals who came under heavy ecclesiastical sanctions during the Modernism crisis in the first half of the 20th century (Daly 2011,97). The traditional Catholic approach to theology is that theology in its strict Christian perspective, exists in and from faith. It means that the purely scientific and critical/historical approaches would imply a certain form of impoverishment of theology. The impoverishment is in the form of two tendencies in contemporary theology that are geared towards the reduction of theology to two disciplines: (1) philosophy of religion, that is, an attempt to place Christianity at par with other world religions; and (2) to make the whole Christian theological heritage become the historical analysis of relevant historical texts (Ratzinger 1987,327–328). The implicit danger in these two tendencies is the reversion of Christianity itself to the general domain of the historical sciences, leading ultimately to the destruction of the distinctive Christian element and its submersion to the general deposit of the history of religion (Ratzinger 1987,328). Ever since its emergence, the Hegelian preference for the rational and historical reconsideration of key Christian doctrines has continued to shape theological discourse in many ways (Ford 2007,10).

Given the almost unstoppable encroachment of post-Kantian and Hegelian influences into theology, the Roman Catholic hierarchy could not stand idle and watch without intervention. One of the first in the series of official interventions was Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864). Adolf von Harnack interpreted it as a declaration of war against his generation (Ratzinger 1987,381). Two official documents that shaped the development and contours of Catholic theology for almost a century were unquestionably *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council (1870) and *Aeterni Patris* by Pope Leo XIII. As Gerald McCool has insightfully surmised, when linked together, the influence of both documents on Catholic intellectual tradition demonstrated a substantial and impressive concrete decision by the highest authorities of the Catholic Church. They greatly shaped the history and development of Catholic theology until the Second Vatican Council (McCool 1977,1). *Dei Filius* established the parameters and patterns of Catholic theology's understanding of its own place and history from the outset of the Enlightenment. Its stipulations were reinforced in *Aeterni Patris* regarding the method by which Catholic positive and speculative theology should work to retrieve its essential and peculiar Catholic doctrinal tradition and to coherently present that tradition to the modern world as it engages in dialogue with modern culture (McCool 1977,1–2). Pope Leo XIII's official adoption of St. Thomas Aquinas in *Aeterni Patris*, with the intention of guiding the church's philosophical and theological instruction in its educational institutions, was bound to provoke an internal crisis among competing theological schools of thought.

Notable among these was the Tübingen School, whose epistemology, metaphysics, and approach to theology differed fundamentally from those of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Neo-Thomistic theologians. Despite the diversities within their own ranks, the Tübingen theologians were, to a large extent, united in their hope to infuse new life into Catholic

theology by imitating the philosophical intuitions and historical-critical methodologies of the various strands of their contemporary German Romantic and idealist thinkers (Dietrich and Himes 1997,11; Nichols 1986,17). It is in this regard that the 19th-century Tübingen theologians are said to have bequeathed to their 20th-century successors two main legacies: (1) a commitment to the Catholic tradition in its historical fullness and integrity; and (2) a generous but critically propensity to philosophical and cultural openness (Nichols 1986,18). There was equally Italian ontologism, on the other side of the opposite spectrum, represented chiefly by Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855) and Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852) (McCool 1977,5). Sadly, Matteo Liberatore (1810–1892), an avowed Neo-Thomist, played a key role in the 1849 ecclesiastical condemnation of the “ontologism” of Rosmini who was accused of “subjectivism” for his pioneering attempts to construct a Christian philosophy that would be adapted to modernity (Schmutz 2018).

Most of the Roman contemporaries of the Tübingen theologians and the Italian ontologists were the founders of Neo-Scholasticism and the Neo-Thomism that followed it. Their stronghold was the Gregorian University in Rome after the restoration of the Society of Jesus in 1814 by Pope Pius VII. They were spurred on by the new *Ratio Studiorum* (1830–1831), promulgated in 1832 by Jan Philipp Roothaan (superior general of the Jesuits, and commonly seen as “the second founder” of the order). The primary goal of the *Ratio Studiorum* was to reassert traditional Jesuit education as opposed to new trends and liberal ideas. Another handy instrument was *La Civiltà Cattolica*, founded in 1850 by Carlo Maria Curci. It became a powerful new tool and an important journalistic organ for disseminating a strongly surging Neo-Scholasticism (Mondin 1996b,227; Schmutz 2018). Before the era of Jesuit dominance, the way was paved by precursors such as the Dominican philosopher and theologian Salvatore Roselli (1722–1748). His rejection of the philosophy of Descartes, especially its subjectivism, served as the basis for the 19th-century reconstruction of Thomism (New Catholic Encyclopedia 2026). Another figure in the revival of Thomism was Vincenzo Buzzetti (1777–1824). He was convinced that it was impossible for anyone who studied the thoughts of St. Thomas to become a revolutionary (Komonchak 1997,375). Some of the Jesuit neo-scholastics were associated with him. There was also Gaetano Sanseverino (1811–1865). He staked out his intellectual career on the restoration of Christian philosophy by which he meant scholastic philosophy, and essentially, that of Aquinas (Benini 1912). Among the Italian Jesuits, Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio (1793–1862) may be described as their neo-scholastic “grandfather,” as everyone was either formed in his school of thought or was indirectly associated with it. Even Gioacchino Pecci, who later became Pope Leo XIII, was once a student of Taparelli (Schmutz 2018). As far as Taparelli was concerned, metaphysical and moral questions did not admit neutrality because sooner or later, those questions would produce their effects in the world of practice (Komonchak 1997.375).

Regrettably, the Neo-Scholastic theologians have suffered from extensive misrepresentation and mischaracterisation in the history of Catholic theology. The

asperities began with the emergence of *la nouvelle théologie* and became accentuated after Vatican II. One reason for this misfortune is the bishops' rejection at Vatican II of the curial prepared schema on divine revelation. That rejection is often taken as signalling the end of the presumptive authority and influence of neo-scholastic theology over intellectual life in the post-Vatican II church (Reno 2013). It has since been the object of heavy criticism and accusations such as "inability to deal with "history," a "fortress mentality," and a closed metaphysical system with no room for "experience" (Reno 2013; Mondin 1996b,224–225). According to R.R. Reno, those criticisms were formulated during the theological struggles in mid-20th-century Catholicism that have been uncritically repeated over time (Reno 2013). Despite such criticisms, a close reading of the works of the men who laid the groundwork for contemporary Neo-Scholasticism reveals the depth and versatility of their great theological prowess. After all, as a Catholic theology deeply immersed in the great philosophical and theological heritage of the Catholic Church, Neo-Scholasticism provided important support to the church's Magisterium and was carried out in collaboration with the same Magisterium. For example, Joseph Kleutgen is credited with drafting the final version of *Dei Filius* that was adopted by the bishops at Vatican I (McCool 1977,2). Kleutgen is also said to have worked with Matteo Liberatore in the drafting of *Aeterni Patris* (Rober 2015,269). Placing themselves at the service of the popes, Neo-Scholastic theologians provided the Catholic Church with credible theological weapons against its modern adversaries, whether they be intellectuals or European statesmen (Mondin 1996c,231). It must be remembered, as noted by Jacob Schmutz, that the central points of the contention over modernity had much more to do with politico-theological issues than with metaphysical questions (Schmutz 2018). Herein, Leo XIII initiated the series of doctrinal encyclicals, a practice that was carried forward by his successors, through which they oversaw and guided the intellectual life of Catholics. Subsequently, it became customary for Catholics to look to the popes for regular and authoritative guidance on intellectual engagement with the non-Catholic world (Komonchak 1997,376).

The penchant towards presentism in contemporary theology appears to obscure the great insights of Neo-Scholastic theology. One danger of theological presentism is its tendency to treat the theological past as somehow irrelevant. Michael Roots observes that this has led to the neglect of several important theologians and their works published over the past several centuries. Roots considers such inattention or negligence as a great handicap in the post-*la nouvelle théologie* of *ressourcement* (Roots 2024), led first by the French Dominicans in the early 1930s and later by the French Jesuits from the 1940s (Schelkens et al. 2013, 123–124). As far back as 1946, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange in *La nouvelle théologie où-t-elle?*, energetically pushed back against Henri Bouillard's axiom: "A theology which is not current will be a false theology." This axiom is a direct citation from Bouillard's book, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (1943) (cited in Garrigou-Lagrange 1946). It surely cannot be the case that works by outstanding Neo-Scholastic theologians such as Carlo Passaglia (1812–1887), Johann Baptist Franzelin (1816–1887), or even Matteo Liberatore and Joseph Kleutgen, may automatically become "false" or "irrelevant" just because they are no longer "current."

A similar observation can be made about Giovanni Perrone (1794–1876), celebrated as one of the principal architects of the restoration of Catholic theology in the mid-19th century. His *Praelectiones theologicae* was published in nine volumes between 1835 and 1842 (Mondin 1996b,228). There are also the works of Tommaso Maria Zigliara (1833–1893), which, on account of his originality in the interpretation of Aquinas, became one of the principal channels for the diffusion of the thought of Aquinas (Mondin 1996b,231–232). As for Passaglia and Franzelin, they were known in their time as defenders of a more historical-philological approach to Christian theology. Kleutgen's *Philosophie der Vorzeit* (1860–1863) was a philosophical and theological bestseller after its publication (Schmutz 2008). Although the historical deficiencies in the conceptual framework of Kleutgen's thought may be disregarded, his conception of theology as a science of individual nature and the eternal triune God who is the source and end of nature remains essentially valid (McCool 1977,9). This key point connects them to the fundamental principle that runs through Catholic theology, which Gerhard Müller identifies as the perception of an inner ordering that directs all created things towards God as their origin and purpose (Müller 2023,54).

This fundamental principle that all created things are ordered towards God holds the key connecting old and contemporary Catholic theological traditions. Perhaps, the rediscovery of the patristic and medieval paradox of mystery and the supernatural in theology could help to bring about “a theology of wisdom” and a greater appreciation of Catholic theological patrimony. The sense of mystery and the supernatural is common to de Lubac and Ratzinger, as encapsulated in their eucharistic ecclesiology and their reverence for the Eucharist as the live wire of theology. De Lubac, in a letter of 3 April 1932, to Maurice Blondel, wondered, “How can a conscious spirit be anything other than an absolute desire for God?” (cited in Milbank 2007,76). According to John Milbank, the core of de Lubac's theological belief is predicated upon this paradox: “there is no spiritual, intelligent being (angelic or human) that is not ordered by grace to the beatific vision: that is, to be deified” (Milbank 2007,76). This paradox, fed by the desire for deification, is at the heart of the eucharistic liturgy. This much is crystal clear in de Lubac's book, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, which first appeared in a limited version in 1938. It is generally considered a key textbook of Catholic theology of the 20th century (Kerr 2007,71). De Lubac, in *Catholicism*, calls the Eucharist the “Sacrament of sacraments” and “the consummation, as it were, of the spiritual life and the goal of all the sacraments” because it “contains the whole mystery of our salvation” (de Lubac 1988[1950],88–89). It is for similar reasons that Ratzinger always insisted that “real liturgy implies that God responds and reveals how we can worship him.” Accordingly, liturgy does not spring from human imagination or creativity, for it “implies a real relationship with the Another, who reveals himself to us and gives our existence a new direction” (Ratzinger 2018,36). The Eucharist has held a special place of importance for Ratzinger in his theology. The centrality of the Eucharist was already evident right from the time of his doctoral thesis, “People and House of God in Augustine's Doctrine of the Church,” which was highly imbued with St. Bonaventure's theology of history and revelation. The epigraph of that doctoral thesis,

“We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread,” already indicated his theological direction (Horn and Pfnür 2003,7). It is not surprising, therefore, that eucharistic ecclesiology is regarded as Ratzinger’s greatest contribution to Catholic theology (Mondin 1997,754). As far as Ratzinger was concerned, the faith of the theologian locates him or her among fellow believers since what the theologian teaches “springs from his personal journey of faith and understanding and locates him in the shared journey of the Church” (cited in Kerr 2007,183).

Conclusion

The long history of Catholic theology exhibits a dialectical movement, with numerous tapestries woven into a rich and broad tradition. It embodies a plurality of views because it is a living and creative tradition. Its aliveness and creativity account for the inner theological tensions within the large and complex corpus of Catholic theology, which spans a wide spectrum of theological methods and perspectives. The inner tensions of polarities and the propensity for conflict are natural constitutive realities of any living organism. In the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, “Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict” (cited in Murray 2007,269). In the course of its long history of internal fermentation, the diverse theological traditions within the larger Catholic theological tradition, with their methodologies and orientations, and different periods in time, have interanimated and complemented each other. The interlocutors themselves may not have been conscious of this interanimation and complementarity. With this understanding, it is the submission of this research that contemporary theological presentism may benefit a great deal from the Roman Catholic theological past, whether it be Scholasticism, Neo-Scholasticism, or Neo-Thomism. They, alongside patristics, constitute the core of Catholic theological heritage. It does not negate the fact that contemporary theology is equally a valuable part of that same rich and complex heritage. Regarding the theological import of Vatican II, there is no denying the obvious that it ushered in and favoured methodological pluralism in theology, but that pluralism is not about a total discontinuity with the great theological past and, certainly, not about its obliteration. This historical veracity of Vatican II must be kept in view to avoid any theological misrepresentation of that council, whose catchword, “aggiornamento,” was meant to renew and reinvigorate.

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