

CHAPTER FOUR

Thomism and the Second Vatican Council

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The history of the modern Neo-Thomist movement, whose *magna charta* was *Aeterni Patris*, reached its end at the Second Vatican Council.¹ This was not supposed to happen.

The Preparation of the Second Vatican Council

Two texts prepared for Vatican II by the Commission for Studies and Seminaries would have confirmed the preeminent role of St. Thomas Aquinas in Catholic education. The first, entitled *De sacrorum alumnis formandis*,² set out a two-year program in philosophy “to teach seminarians how to use the light of reason to examine truths about the nature of things and about human life and to provide the immediate preparation for the study of theology.” “Scholastic philosophy in all its parts,” it said, “is to be transmitted according to the principles and method of St. Thomas Aquinas so that the students acquire his complete and coherent synthesis by solid and accurate study of his chief arguments,” obsolete and trivial questions being omitted and “the more subtle questions” left for higher studies. Students were also to be introduced into a critical study of modern philosophical systems, particularly those influential in their own countries. The four-year program in theology in all its parts was to be offered “according to the principles of St. Thomas.”

The Commission's second text, *De obsequio erga Ecclesiae magisterium in tradendis disciplinis sacris*, had three chapters: Fundamental Notions; How to Teach Sacred Scripture; Maintaining the Doctrine of St. Thomas.³ The five short paragraphs of the last chapter say that the Church has adopted Thomas' doctrine as its own; that the Council solemnly endorses this choice and orders philosophers and theologians closely to study his doctrine and all who have a teaching role from the Church to faithfully adhere to it; that these measures do not take away from the wisdom of other Catholic teachers but provide a "guide and example," particularly because of Aquinas' use of the sources and his defense of the rights of reason; that the universal authority of Thomas is to be understood dynamically so that his method, principles, and doctrine enable philosophers and theologians to deal with new discoveries and questions; and that the choice of Aquinas, now confirmed by the Council, applies not only to ecclesiastical teachers but also to teachers in universities and other schools, and indeed is to be extended to the faithful themselves, particularly to those who engage in any apostolic functions.

Often lengthy notes cite without qualification Roman statements from Leo XIII on. One note exegetes in detail c. 1366 § 2 of the *Code of Canon Law*, that professors of philosophy and theology carefully follow Thomas' "method, doctrine, and principles." His *method* meant scholastic method — that is, strictly argumentative or syllogistic forms — and this was no general endorsement of scholasticism but only of one that rests on his principles; his *doctrine* was so authoritative that the Church endorses any other teacher's or saint's doctrine only "to the degree that the latter agrees with the principles of Aquinas or is in no way opposed to them"; his *principles*, finally, were to be taken, not simply as opinions, but as bases for investigation, departures from which, especially in metaphysics, could only cause harm. These principles were expressed in the famous *Twenty-four Theses* issued by the Congregation for Studies in 1914; the preparatory Commission proposed revising these theses, extending them into the realms of ethics, natural law, economics, politics, and so on, and drawing up a similar list of principles for speculative and practical theology.

Three pages of addenda completed the chapter. These vindicated Thomist principles in philosophy: the ability of the human mind to know the truth, the epistemological and metaphysical first principles (contradiction, totality, excluded middle, causality, and finality), the ability of natural reason to prove the existence and essential character of God, Creator and last end of all things, and the grounds of morality in the first principles of the natural law. The basic theological principles invoked concerned the sources of revelation, the epistemology of faith, the authority of the pope, and the relation between nature and grace.

This chapter on Aquinas reflects the concerns which its chief author, Fr. Cornelio Fabro, the author of important works on participation in the thought of Thomas and a professor in the philosophical faculty at the Lateran, had expressed in his proposals for the conciliar agenda.⁴ Fabro's *votum* rehearsed the problems caused in Catholic schools in the nineteenth century by the principle of immanence, which had led in the opposite directions of fideistic irrationalism and absolute rationalism, Kant being the *praecursor et dux infestus* of both tendencies. The popes had responded to these dangers negatively by condemning the errors and positively by calling Catholic thinkers back to the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. After a rapid review of papal endorsements of his thought, Fabro argued the need for the Council to confirm them, since Catholics were once again in similar danger. There was

an endless "confusion of tongues," especially among cultured lay people and young priests who choose to breathe a new air and either do not know or reject the sober way of Thomistic metaphysics. The danger is real; a split can be seen in the life of the Church today, between two ways, one for clerics in seminaries, who are required to follow Thomism, the other for lay Catholics who often are allowed to follow the principle and method of immanence.

The situation is almost the same as that faced by Vatican I: "the same broad acceptance of the principle and method of

immanence; the same denial of the value and capacity of natural reason; the same denial of the distinction and the harmony between faith and reason; almost the same irrational and rationalistic tendencies, though under other names; the same struggle against and at times open opposition to Thomistic doctrine.” Fabro therefore proposed, first, that the solemn *magisterium* issue another document against those “who say that people who begin from idealist principles and methods can better save Christian truth than Thomistic philosophy can”; second, that the prescription of the *Code* be completed and extended to Catholic universities and faculties and to all other institutions of higher education; and, third, that the *Twenty-four Theses* be revived and studied further.

There was a close relationship between the schemas of the Commission on Studies and Seminaries and a text prepared by the Theological Commission, *De deposito fide pure custodiendo*.⁵ The early chapters of this schema, which in short paragraphs discuss basic epistemological and metaphysical principles, proofs for the existence of God, creation and evolution, and revelation and faith, resemble the typical introduction into scholastic philosophy and theology offered in seminaries in the pre-conciliar period. The subcommission that prepared this text was chaired by Fr. Luigi Ciappi, O.P., *Magister Sacri Palatii*, who while the work was in progress stated that Vatican II would follow earlier councils in acknowledging the authority of Aquinas “as witness *par excellence* of the theological tradition, indeed as the most prolific, clearest, and safest exponent of the Church’s teaching.”⁶

That things would not go well with these explicit and implicit canonizations of Aquinas became clear even before the Council opened. Even the fairly sober text on the formation of seminarians was criticized when it came before the Central Commission. Cardinal Frings said that other methods had been developed in both dogmatic and positive theology, that it was not clear how strictly the “principles” of Aquinas were to be understood, and that he saw no reason why his doctrine should be favored over those of other great theologians venerated in various religious orders. Cardinal Döpfner proposed changes in the text to make sure those other theologians were not neglected. Fr. Agostino

Sépinski, Minister General of the Franciscans, made a similar criticism of the exclusive mention of St. Thomas, adding to it concerns about how the decree would be received by oriental Catholics, the Orthodox, Protestants, and Africans and Asians. Cardinal Ruffini, on the other hand, agreed that "St. Thomas should be considered *princeps* in philosophy (and in theology) also because he has been commended as such by nearly eighty Supreme Pontiffs."

The chapter on Aquinas in the other text of the Commission on Studies and Seminaries was severely criticized by Cardinals Micara, Döpfner, Léger, and Bea, and by Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh and Father Sépinski: it ran the danger of imposing "philosophy by decree"; it inevitably reduced all other doctors of the Church to second rank, ignored the traditions of the Christian East, and came close to restricting the Church's tradition to St. Thomas; Thomism is not intelligible in non-Western cultures and should not be expected to offer easy solutions to modern problems; by omitting the qualifications the popes had insisted on, the text exaggerated the binding force of the papal recommendations and in particular of the *Twenty-four Theses* and so would greatly restrict the freedom of Catholic thinkers. Only Cardinals Ruffini and Browne had kind words for the text, the former again invoking papal approval, the latter maintaining that Thomist metaphysics was the only one the Church had declared to be fully valid and that no other philosophy was as able to set out the *praeambula fidei*. Despite the criticisms, the chapter was only slightly revised.⁸

The original version of the Theological Commission's schema, *De deposito fidei*, did not fare much better in the Central Commission. St. Thomas was not himself explicitly at issue now, but several members criticized the exclusively philosophical basis for the arguments in the early chapters, which they thought inappropriate in a text for an ecumenical council, which should use biblical and theological arguments, and was likely to be unconvincing to people trained in other philosophies. In reply, Cardinal Browne once again appealed to the Church's endorsement of Aquinas' thought, particularly his metaphysics, "the wisdom of human intellect and reason itself, suitable for the whole human race. . . . Call this metaphysics into question, and everything changes." Cardinal Ottaviani defended his Commission's text:

If the first principles themselves are perverted, then reason is finished, the faith is finished; I am astonished to hear defenses of the position of some Catholics who have other views of the first principles; we have reached the terrible condition that some Catholics are denying the demonstrative force of the fundamental principles.⁹

The Theological Commission's text on the deposit of faith was among the documents that were sent to the bishops in the summer of 1962. In general, that Commission's texts were intended to confirm, with the authority of an ecumenical council, the main emphases and condemnations of the ordinary teaching of the modern popes.¹⁰ Implicitly, they would also confirm the neo-Thomist philosophy and theology that underlay that teaching and were used to explain and justify it. The Council was expected to reconfirm in particular the suspicions of modern critical methods, of the turn to the subject, and of a new sense of history that had been expressed particularly in Pius X's condemnation of "Modernism" in *Lamentabili* and *Pascendi* and in Pius XII's warnings against "la nouvelle théologie" in *Humani Generis*. The documents prepared by the Commission for Studies and Seminaries would provide a practical reinforcement of this purpose by reconfirming the privileged place assigned to Thomism.

St. Thomas at the Council

The frustration of these intentions at the Council's first session is well known. After a discussion and overwhelmingly positive vote on the schema on the Liturgy, the theological drama of the first session was concentrated on a schema on the sources of revelation. Vigorous criticisms of this text led to a vote which revealed that nearly two-thirds of the conciliar fathers desired a fundamental revision of the text, and Pope John XXIII ordered it remanded to a mixed commission. The orientations of the Council were now set. The vote on the liturgical schema revealed the pastoral concerns of the bishops; the vote on the doctrinal text revealed that they did not wish to produce texts that simply

repeated in neo-scholastic language the teachings of recent popes. Over the next three years, the bishops would elaborate texts that departed from the traditional language and choose instead a rhetoric closer to the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, and the liturgy to express a far more positive, organic, and ecumenically sensitive statement of the faith. The text on the deposit of revelation never reached the Council floor, and little of its content appears in the final conciliar texts, and then only in quite different form. This transformation of purpose and of language greatly reduced the presence of St. Thomas in the doctrinal texts, a diminishment that was debated when at its third session the Council took up the question of priestly formation.¹¹

The text the bishops debated had already been considerably altered.¹² It now recommended a greater integration and harmony between philosophy and theology and spoke rather vaguely of "philosophical disciplines" and of "the principles of the perennial philosophy," with no special mention of St. Thomas. Individual dogmatic treatises should begin with the Bible, "the soul of theology," and then study the Fathers and the development of the dogma. The speculative effort should then be carried on "with St. Thomas as teacher," while the liturgical and vital dimensions of the dogma and the challenge of communicating it to contemporaries should not be neglected. The diminishment of the role assigned to St. Thomas in this text is confirmed by the omission of the chapter specifically devoted to him in the preparatory Commission's other text.

A vigorous debate occurred when this revised text came to the Council floor.¹³ Cardinal Ruffini reminded the fathers of the eighty popes who had recommended St. Thomas as the *dux studiorum*, the last of these being Paul VI, who had echoed the *Code's* reference to Aquinas' method, principles, and doctrine, words which the Cardinal asked be restored to the text.¹⁴ It did not detract from other great Doctors to insist that students and teachers should not lightly disagree with so great a man: "He still will be of great help in detecting and refuting new errors." On the other hand, Cardinal Léger did not wish to retain even the phrase "perennial philosophy," which he thought both ambiguous, because of the great differences among scholastic philosophies, and

contrary to the very nature of philosophy, which, as St. Thomas himself had noted, is not based on authority but on a study of reality. There would be problems if so-called scholastic philosophy were simply imposed on non-Western regions. As for the paragraph on theology, Léger was pleased that it did not delay over St. Thomas and thus promote “an immoderate exclusivism. *Vae homini unius libri! Vae Ecclesiae unius doctoris!*” He proposed that the text be revised to refer to Thomas as “a teacher and example for all those who study the theological sciences”; by this he meant that “the system or doctrine of St. Thomas is not to be imposed; instead he is to be proposed as, in his scientific and spiritual attitude, a brilliant example of investigation and creativity in theological matters, as one who adapted the science of his times to the Church’s benefit.”

Archbishop Dino Staffa, secretary of the Congregation for Seminaries and Universities, then intervened with lengthy remarks that largely urged the points of the discarded chapter on St. Thomas. He began by mocking those who urged that dialogue with contemporaries required the Church to set aside its heritage of scholastic philosophy and theology in favor of “new language, adapted to new times, new mores, new systems of philosophy.” He urged the bishops to recall the basic principles needed in order to discern the true from the false in what is new and thus promote genuine progress. The Church’s defense of the faith required “the certain and objective validity of the fundamental principles of reason and philosophy.” Staffa’s notes supplied copious references to St. Thomas’ works and recalled the *Twenty-four Theses* and other papal commendations. Thomist doctrine does not “deduce its conclusions from the always perfectible instruments and experiments of science but borrows its principles from common experience from which, by right reason, it derives certain immutable metaphysical truths.” To the argument that Thomism was Western and thus alien to other cultures, Staffa replied that truth is independent of the area in which it is discovered and can be communicated everywhere else. The only question was whether the Thomist system corresponds to the demands of human reason; if it does, then it transcends the distinction between West and East. “The doctrine of the Common Doctor not only is not an

element that divides East and West, it constitutes a universal and necessary basis for uniting those who love the truth."

Intervening a few days later on the schema on Catholic education, the Master General of the Dominicans, Aniceto Fernandez, responded to Cardinal Léger's comments. To the criticism of the weakness of arguments from authority, he replied that here the authority "is not the authority of Thomas alone but of the Magisterium of the Church itself which again and again commends and prescribes him, and therefore it is of a much higher order." St. Thomas' doctrine should be accepted because "it speaks the truth about the basic metaphysical and theological principles and structures, as is clear to anyone who honestly seeks and studies the truth of natural and supernatural realities." Since commendation of Aquinas was compatible with acknowledging truth wherever it may be found, "it is unjust and illogical to conclude that it makes the Church a Church of a single Doctor." Finally, it was not enough to say that Thomas provides an example of study and of adaptation to his own times; besides his admirable habits, Thomas also

transmitted objectively true and eternally valid doctrine. . . . But if the doctrine for which he himself sweated and exhausted all his strength were false and to be abandoned, then his magisterial authority would be merely verbal, unreal, and it would only be equivocally and mockingly that he could be called a master, like the Pharisees about whom St. John Chrysostom wittily said: "They call Jesus a master, but they do not wish to be disciples."

In the end, the Council's *Decree on Priestly Formation* (*Optatam Totius*) was content with general references. Paragraph 15 referred simply to "the permanently valid philosophical heritage" on which students should be led to base themselves while not neglecting contemporary philosophical investigations and recent scientific progress. Paragraph 17 retained the brief phrase "*S. Thoma magistro*" with reference to speculation in theology. The revised *Code of Canon Law* repeated this phrase in c. 252 §3;

but after the Council, the Congregation for Seminaries and Universities explained that the phrase “perennially valid” in #15 referred to “the principles of St. Thomas.”¹⁵

The only other commendation of St. Thomas in the final texts of the Council appears in the *Decree on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis)*, where, speaking of the role of Catholic universities in promoting harmony between faith and reason, the Council said: “The Church pursues such a goal after the manner of her most illustrious teachers, especially St. Thomas Aquinas” (#10). Although the following paragraph was devoted explicitly to ecclesiastical faculties of theology, it made no special mention of Aquinas and spoke simply about communicating “the treasure of Christian wisdom handed down by our ancestors” (#11).

Historical Context

As Father McCool indicated, the Second Vatican Council thus effectively brought to an end one moment in the history of the modern Thomist revival. As his works make clear, the hope expressed by Pope Leo XIII that a return to Aquinas would provide Catholic intellectuals a common basis on which to join in a unified effort to return Western society and culture to its Christian roots was to be disappointed. The problem was not only in the difficulties of returning to the Middle Ages for a response to the distinctive problems of the modern world; it was also that there was such disagreement as to what Thomism is.¹⁶ The twentieth century would see a variety of “Thomisms”: those of Gardeil, Maritain, Gilson, Rousselot and Maréchal, Rahner and Lonergan, Mercier and the Louvain school, Garrigou-Lagrange, and Chenu, not to mention the Suarezian Thomism that reigned among Jesuits in the early decades of the century, what de Lubac calls “the mongrel Thomism” of *Action Française*, and the “paleo-Thomism” that Van Steenberghen says reigned in Rome among “Thomists of the strict observance.”¹⁷ Differences among them were not minor, nor always pacific.

In addition to the historical, hermeneutical, metaphysical, epistemological, and theological differences among the Thomists, there was also the problem that, particularly after the crisis of

“Modernism,” Thomism was invoked and imposed in the manner that Cardinal Micara feared would be dismissed as “philosophy by decree.” The larger context, of course, was the over-inflation of the principle of authority that Yves Congar described as characteristic of the Church’s response to the challenges of the Reformation, to the Enlightenment, and to the political revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁸ It is not reductionism to consider the revival of Thomism and its high endorsement by Leo XIII an intrinsic element of this response; in Rome it was not perceived as odd to impose by way of authority a certain way of reading Thomas. And this was to lead to troubles for many of the major figures in twentieth-century neo-Thomism.

The two neuralgic issues were those of the Modernist crisis: history and experience. *Aeterni Patris* had stimulated the effort to produce critical editions of the works of Aquinas and of other major medieval scholastics as well as first-rate historical reconstructions of the intellectual world within which Aquinas had worked. These showed, first, the genuine diversity in medieval thought, which made it impossible to see Aquinas as the simple spokesman of a common philosophy and theology, and, second, that later commentators on his thought had not always been faithful to him. Tensions inevitably arose between those whose Thomism was largely mediated by the great commentators and those who were claiming to have discovered his real thought and to be carrying it forward into the present. One may, for example, contrast the attitudes of Maritain and of Gilson toward the tradition of commentaries and recall Garrigou-Lagrange’s resistance to the establishment of a chair of historical studies at the Angelicum.

The contrast between Maritain and Gilson was less troubling in Rome than the implications drawn for clerical studies by another great historian of Thomas and the Middle Ages, M.-D. Chenu. Preferring an approach close to that of the *Annales* school of historiography, which placed great emphasis on the historical, social, political, cultural, and religious setting within which Aquinas had worked, Chenu was struck by certain features of Thomas’ effort: it was part of the exciting social and intellectual movements initiated by “the renaissance of the twelfth century”;

it engaged seriously and critically the challenges posed by newly translated works of Aristotle and his Arabic commentators; it drew its spiritual strength and inspiration from grass-roots developments in the life of the Church, particularly the evangelical movements of the new Mendicant Orders. Chenu extolled the spiritual roots of Aquinas' achievement, his courage in addressing the intellectual challenges, his respect for the autonomy of other sciences, his relevance to his own time. On every one of these points he argued that the Thomist tradition had fallen far short, and he drew sharp contrasts between the vital creativity of Thomas himself and those who claimed to represent him today, particularly in Rome. What was passing for Thomist philosophy and theology had very little in common with the method, inspiration, and thought of Aquinas himself.¹⁹

It is not surprising that the defenders of Roman Thomism were not pleased. Shortly after Chenu's little book on *Le Saulchoir* was privately circulated, he was called to Rome and forced to make amends by signing a set of ten propositions that reveal both the stunning incomprehension of his Roman readers and the concerns that drove their criticism.²⁰ Soon after, the Magister Sacri Palatii, Mariano Cordovani, O.P., included a caricature of Chenu's views among the "vaporous theories" to which he counterposed the reasons why Leo XIII had so exalted Aquinas who, Cordovani said, "so respected and demonstrated the rights of reason and of faith that reason cannot ascend higher and faith cannot ask for greater help from reason."²¹ When Chenu's book and the work of his student, L. Charlier, *Essai sur le problème théologique*, were placed on the Index in 1942, an authoritative article of comment recalled the critique and contempt the Modernists had displayed toward scholasticism and toward the methods of St. Thomas and his commentators.²²

After the hiatus of the Second World War, the tensions erupted again in the controversy over what its critics called "la nouvelle théologie." More or less explicitly included in this dispute were the interpretation of Thomas' anthropology and the fidelity of the later commentators to his thought on the end of man, the notion and method of theology, the relationship between biblical and patristic thought and scholastic theology, the adequacy of scholastic

philosophy and theology to contemporary questions, and the value to be ascribed to classical concepts. In the midst of the debate, Henri de Lubac offered a self-defense that pointed the issue of fidelity to St. Thomas:

As the rules of the Society demand of me and as its whole tradition recommends, I am quite in favor of a certain freedom in our adherence to the teaching of St. Thomas. On the other hand, I believe that, apart from points which the Church fixes as necessary to the faith, it is a serious distortion to try to impose philosophical theses by authority, as a sort of new Credo.²³

I also believe that one whole contemporary Thomist school — not the only one, thank God — is quite far from the spirit of St. Thomas (and often from his letter also); that those who display the most intransigent zeal for Thomism are not the most legitimate heirs of the great Doctor; that St. Thomas still offers us not only his teaching but also his example, and that the one cannot be understood without the other. I believe that a certain narrow and sectarian Thomism, which is chiefly responsible for the disaffection of many towards St. Thomas and scholasticism, is a considerable obstacle to the real knowledge of the Catholic Tradition as well as to the action of the Church in the world today. I stress this last point: a teaching that closes minds and shows itself to be anti-apostolic, as “safe” as it may claim to be, cannot be, even doctrinally, a sound teaching.²⁴

This debate was brought to a halt, of course, by *Humani Generis*, the encyclical in which Pius XII sided with the critics of “la nouvelle théologie,” pointedly included contempt for scholastic philosophy and theology among “some false opinions which threaten to undermine the foundations of Catholic doctrine,” and

urged the need in theology for the perennial philosophy that “safeguards the genuine validity of human knowledge, the unshakable metaphysical principles of sufficient reason, causality, and finality, and finally the mind’s ability to attain certain and unchangeable truth.”²⁵

And it was not only theologians who came under suspicion. Throughout the 1950s, the Holy Office was preparing to condemn Jacques Maritain’s political views, an action prevented, it seems, only by the death of Pius XII.²⁶ A month after *Humani Generis* appeared, two congresses were held in Rome, an International Scholastic Congress, followed immediately by the Third International Thomistic Congress.²⁷ Toward the end of the first congress, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange accosted Etienne Gilson: “M. le Professeur,” he said, “you speak of the avatars of metaphysics in your recent work; this is very dangerous and I intend to criticize you on the matter next Monday at the Thomist congress.” When Gilson threatened to leave the congress, the matter was dropped and the critique was never made.

On the first day of the Thomist congress, Fernand van Steenberghe gave a talk on Aquinas’ five proofs for the existence of God in which he repeated criticisms he had already made elsewhere. At the end of his talk, Fr. Charles Boyer, S.J., secretary of the Congress, before introducing the next speaker, delivered a short refutation of van Steenberghe that ended with the comment: “Therefore, the objections of the honored Professor are worthless.” Confronted by van Steenberghe, Boyer explained, “I couldn’t let your talk pass without reacting; I saw Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange displaying his anger in the hall; he would have left the congress if I had not intervened. Your talk was too negative.” Garrigou-Lagrange, when approached by van Steenberghe, said:

I didn’t understand your talk. . . . I thought I was hearing a young man of twenty years who had just read St. Thomas for the first time. . . . I prayed for you to St. Thomas last night. You have to repair this. Write some articles on St. Thomas’ proofs in order to dissipate this unfortunate impression. Otherwise people will end up

doubting the value of your historical works. You know I love Louvain. . . . But look at Lottin's presentation at the Scholastic Congress; he didn't understand St. Thomas. And De Raeymaeker here this morning: if we have to talk about participation in connection with the principle of causality, where are we going?

When van Steenberghe's talk was published, some of his critical remarks were muted and two pages of response to his criticisms were added — all without his knowledge.

Now all this, which might be savored but should not be dismissed as mere gossip, was also not simply a scholarly dispute among various interpreters of St. Thomas Aquinas. A certain Thomism appeared to have degenerated into an ideology.²⁸ Maritain, Gilson, van Steenberghe, de Raeymaeker, and Lottin were scholars of the first rank, whose often strong disagreements seldom led to the severing of friendly relations. But Boyer and Garrigou-Lagrange were also closely linked with Vatican congregations, and when they were critical, it was not paranoia to feel the threat of the Holy Office and the Index of Prohibited Books.²⁹ They had led the Roman charge against "la nouvelle théologie," universally believed to have been censured in *Humani Generis*. The atmosphere may be illustrated by the actions of Fr. Louis Janssens, S.J., who even before the encyclical appeared had already acted against the Jesuits of Fourvière and would soon write a letter to the Society of Jesus, asserting that Jesuits were among the encyclical's unnamed targets and asking for "perfect submission" to the encyclical, including its prescriptions on scholastic philosophy and "the method, teaching, and principles of the Angelic Doctor."³⁰ The 1950s would see other disciplinary actions taken against French Dominicans and the American Jesuit, John Courtney Murray.

This context illumines the pre-conciliar and the conciliar discussion of St. Thomas. The drafts prepared by the Commission for Studies and Seminaries repeated and even exaggerated the forceful endorsements of Aquinas by various Roman authorities over the previous ninety years. The texts would have given conciliar

validation not only to a necessary philosophical preparation for theological studies, but to quite specific interpretations of the epistemological and metaphysical principles of the required philosophy, which then were to serve as the controlling criteria for both philosophy and theology. Revision and additions to the *Twenty-four Theses* would have widened the range of imposed philosophical and theological principles and extended the obligation to follow them, beyond seminaries and ecclesiastical faculties, also to other educational and apostolic institutions. In its turn, the Theological Commission's doctrinal texts would have given conciliar authority to the philosophical and theological principles thought to underlie *Humani Generis*' rejection of "la nouvelle théologie" and its allegedly historicist and relativistic proponents, among whom, as he was told, was Henri de Lubac, a consulter to the Theological Commission.

It could be argued that the diminished presence of St. Thomas in the final texts of Vatican II was due less to any lack of appreciation of Aquinas' genius and accomplishment than to reactions to what de Lubac called "the narrow and sectarian Thomism" imposed as an integral part of a quite modern, untraditional ecclesiastical and intellectual system. The criticisms of that Thomism both in the Central Preparatory Commission and on the Council floor echoed the desire, long expressed and long frustrated, to combat an interpretation of papal commendations of Thomas that relegated other great figures in the Tradition to a second rank and reduced Thomism itself to a set of determinate principles. Also audible in the criticisms of the prepared drafts was a desire to overturn or at least to mitigate the system of control over Catholic intellectual life that had used St. Thomas, or its interpretation of him, as a nearly all-sufficient criterion, often crudely applied.

Fr. Congar described the dramatic encounter at the Council in terms of two figures of St. Thomas. On the one hand, there was "St. Thomas" as a symbol of "prefabricated abstractions and solutions," of "categories and conclusions" formed and repeated one after the other. On the other, there was St. Thomas as "a master of thought who helps us to structure our minds, a master of honesty, rigor, and respect for every particle of truth," who

“spent his life in search of new texts, in having new translations made of the Greeks and Arabs, in dialoguing (and not flabbily!) with all the ‘heretics’ of his time, with all those, inside and outside the Church, who disagreed with him.” “The Council was right,” Congar concluded; “it is less that we should be repeating his theses than that we should go to school with him, after which we should set to work with whatever strength we have, but in his spirit and relying on him.” While the Council’s references to St. Thomas, either in text or in notes, were fewer than many people might have desired, Congar argued that “it could be shown that St. Thomas, the *Doctor communis*, furnished the writers of the dogmatic texts of Vatican II with the bases and the structure of their thought.”³¹ What ended at Vatican II, at least by the Council’s intention, was the ideologically driven reign of one of the many forms of neo-Thomism. What happened to St. Thomas and to “Thomism” after the Council is, of course, another story, which will have to be told elsewhere.

Notes

1. Gerald A. McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 230.

2. See *Acta et Documenta Concilio oecumenico Vaticano II apparando. Series secunda (praeparatoria)*, II/II (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1967), 756-65, hereafter cited as *ADP*.

3. See *ADP*, II/IV (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1968), 157-73.

4. Cornelio Fabro, “De doctrina S. Thomae in scholis catholicis promovenda,” *Acta et Documenta*, IV/II/1 (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1967), 177-89. The Lateran’s *vota* included three similar proposals from the theological faculty: H. Degl’Innocenti, “De doctrina S. Thomae Aquinatis magis in dies amanda atque tradenda” (415-20), G. Giannini, “De actualitate doctrinae S. Thomae Aquinatis ad rem metaphysicam quod attinet” (420-24); J. Motylewski, “De recta methodo docendi scientias auxiliares philosophicas ad mentem S. Thomae Aquinatis in scholis catholicis instauranda” (425-27).

5. This text in its final form, as printed to be part of the agenda of the first session of the Council, can be found in *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, I/IV (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1971), 654-94, hereafter cited as *AS*.

6. Luigi Ciappi, "Le attese della teologia di fronte al Concilio Vaticano II," *Divinitas* 5 (1961): 494-502, at 501. In another pre-conciliar essay, Ciappi said that theologians were expecting the Council to confirm "the value and role of theology as the true and proper science of divine revelation. We are speaking, of course, of scholastic theology and first of all of St. Thomas' theology" ("Che cosa la Teologia si attende dal Concilio," *Sacra Doctrina* 6 [1961]: 89-107, at 105).

7. See the discussion in *ADP*, II/II, 768-82.

8. For the discussion and vote at the Central Commission, see *ADP*, II/IV, 173-220, and Antonino Indelicato, *Difendere la dottrina o annunciare l'Evangelo: Il dibattito nella Commissione centrale preparatoria del Vaticano II* (Genoa: Marietti, 1992), 268-71.

9. For these exchanges, see *ADP*, II/II (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1967), 282-96.

10. This is how Ciappi expressed his views and hopes for the Council: "that the solutions to many contemporary problems given by the most recent Pontiffs, and especially by Pius XII, will be confirmed, strengthened, and perfected" ("Le attese della teologia," 500).

11. In the *Index et Concordance: Vatican II*, ed. H. Tardif and G. Pelloquin (Paris: Ed. Ouvrières, 1969) 39, I find 30 citations of St. Thomas: 15 in *Lumen Gentium*; 6 in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*; 4 in *Ad Gentes*; 4 in *Gaudium et Spes*, and 1 in *Dei Verbum*. This places him second to Augustine, who is cited 51 times.

12. The text pertinent to this discussion is in *AS*, III/VII (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1975), 544-47.

13. For the interventions summarized here, see *AS*, III/VII, 705-23; III/VIII (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1976), 14-18, 408-13.

14. Similarly, Cardinal Bacci argued that to ignore these papal prescriptions would "place this Council not only above the Roman Pontiffs but against the Roman Pontiff."

15. See *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, ed. James A. Coriden et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 186.

16. See McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism* and *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994); and Géry Prouvost, *Thomas d'Aquin et les thomismes: Essai sur l'histoire des thomismes* (Paris: du Cerf, 1996).

17. See Henri de Lubac, "La grand famille des 'Thomistes,'" in *Lettres de M. Etienne Gilson adressées au P. Henri de Lubac et commentées par celui-ci* (Paris: du Cerf, 1986), 181-204, on which see Fernand van Steenberghen, "Les lettres d'Etienne Gilson au P. de Lubac," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 87 (1989): 323-31 and "Comment être thomiste aujourd'hui?" *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 85 (1987): 187-97.

18. Yves Congar, "L'ecclésiologie, de la Révolution française au Concile du Vatican, sous le signe de l'affirmation de l'autorité," in *L'ecclésiologie au XIXe siècle* (Paris: du Cerf, 1960), 77-114.

19. Chenu's views were provocatively expressed in a little work originally published for internal Dominican use in 1937, recently reprinted as *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir* (Paris: du Cerf, 1985). For a study of the development of his thought, see Henry Donneaud, "M.-D. Chenu et 'La théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle,'" in *Mémoire dominicaine* 4 (1994): 139-75.

20. Since these have never appeared in English, I translate the propositions as given in *Une école de théologie*:

- (1) Dogmatic formulas state absolute and immutable truth.
- (2) True and certain propositions, whether in philosophy or in theology, are firm and not at all fragile.
- (3) Sacred Tradition does not create new truths; one must instead firmly maintain that the deposit of revelation, that is, the complex of divinely revealed truths, was closed at the death of the last apostle.
- (4) Sacred Theology is not some spirituality which has found instruments adequate to its religious experience; it is rather a true science, by God's blessing acquired through study, whose principles are the articles of faith as well as all the revealed truths to which the theologian adheres by at least unformed divine faith.
- (5) The various theological systems are not simultaneously true, at least with regard to points on which they disagree.
- (6) It is a glorious thing that the Church considers the system of St. Thomas to be quite orthodox, that is, quite in conformity with the truths of faith.
- (7) It is necessary to demonstrate theological truths by Sacred Scripture and Tradition and to explain their nature and intimate meaning by the principles and doctrine of St. Thomas.
- (8) Although properly a theologian, St. Thomas was also properly a philosopher; for that reason his philosophy does not depend for its intelligibility and truth on his theology, and it states truths that are absolute and not merely relative.
- (9) It is quite necessary for a theologian, in his scientific work, to make use of the metaphysics of St. Thomas and diligently to follow the rules of dialectics.
- (10) In speaking about other writers and doctors one

should use respectful moderation in one's style of speech and writing, even when they are found to be defective on some matters. (35)

21. Mariano Cordovani, "Per la vitalità della teologia cattolica," *Angelicum* 17 (1940): 133-46.

22. Pietro Parente, "Nuove tendenze teologiche," *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 9-10, 1942; republished in Latin in *Periodica* 31 (1942): 184-88. For good accounts of the whole affair, see Etienne Fouilloux, "Le Saulchoir en procès (1937-1942)," in *Une école de théologie*, 37-59; R. Guelluy, "Les antécédents de l'Encyclique 'Humani Generis' dans les sanctions romaines de 1942: Chenu, Charlier, Draguet," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 81 (1986): 421-97; and E. Fouilloux, "Autour d'une mise à l'Index," in *Marie-Dominique Chenu: Moyen-âge et modernité, Les Cahiers du Centre d'études du Saulchoir*, vol. 5 (Paris: Le Centre d'études du Saulchoir, 1997), 25-56.

23. That de Lubac was not exaggerating here can be illustrated by an incident in 1956, described by Gilson in *Lettres de M. Etienne Gilson*, 75-76, and by Laurence K. Shook, *Etienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), 330-31, 354-55. Charles Boyer invited Gilson to prepare a paper for a special issue of *Doctor Communis*. One of the themes the Roman Jesuit suggested was that "fundamental philosophy is necessary for all," necessary, presumably, for salvation. Gilson, on Thomist grounds, denied the proposition; see "Sur deux thèmes de réflexion," *Doctor Communis* 10 (1957): 155-64.

24. Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993) 269-70. Father McCool has described the clash of Thomisms in the crisis over "la nouvelle théologie" in *From Unity to Pluralism*, 200-33. For an excellent study of an important moment in the debate, see Etienne Fouilloux, "Dialogue théologique? (1946-1948)," in *Saint Thomas au XXe siècle: Colloque du centenaire de la "Revue thomiste" (1893-1993)* (Paris: Ed. Saint-Paul, 1994), 153-95.

25. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42 (1950): 571-72.

26. The documentation, found in the papers of Rosaire Gagnebet, is discussed in Etienne Fouilloux, "Du rôle des théologiens au début de Vatican II: Un point de vue romain," in *Cristianesimo nella Storia: Saggi in onore di Giuseppe Alberigo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), 289-90, and by Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Silencing of John Courtney Murray," in *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, 698-701.

27. For the incidents that follow, see van Steenberghe, "Un incident révélateur au Congrès thomiste de 1950," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 84 (1989): 386-87, which also cites other accounts.

28. This term would not have been thought too strong by Gilson, who, in *Les tribulations de Sophie*, wrote "When I went to Russia in 1919, the St. Thomas of the place was called Karl Marx. . . . I am sometimes frightened to think that certain people think that the situation of Thomism in the Church is analogous to that of Marxism in communist countries. If this were so, it would be really terrible and intolerable to me; but isn't it really so?" (cited in *Lettres de M. Etienne Gilson*, 88). In the same volume, de Lubac, referring to the incidents at the Thomist Congress in 1950, speaks of the need to distinguish between "academic discussion and diktat" (187); the same maneuvers were described by a correspondent of van Steenberghen as "the Muscovite habits of Fr. Boyer and Co."; see van Steenberghen, "Un incident révélateur," 386-87.

29. Garrigou-Lagrance thought himself authorized to invoke even graver fears, capping forty years of critique of Maurice Blondel with the threat that the aging philosopher would have a lengthy Purgatory if he did not retract his definition of truth. For documentation of this well-known threat, see *Lettres de M. Etienne Gilson*, 85.

30. For the French original of this letter, see *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu*, 12/1 (1951): 47-72; an English translation can be found in *Woodstock Letters* 80 (1951): 291-319.

31. Yves Congar, "La théologie au Concile: Le 'théologiser' du Concile," in *Situation et taches présentes de la théologie* (Paris: du Cerf, 1967), 51-56. Joseph Ratzinger might disagree with this last comment. Writing ten years after the Council began, he described the theology "that made the Council possible and shaped it" as "a theology and a piety that is constructed on the basis of Holy Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and the great liturgical heritage of the whole Church. At the Council this theology succeeded in nourishing faith not only on the thinking of the last hundred years but on the great stream of the whole tradition in order to make it richer and more alive, simpler and more open"; see "Zehn Jahre nach Konzilsbeginn — wo stehen wir," *Dogma und Verkündigung* (München: Erich Wewel Verlag, 1973), 433-41. It would be an interesting study to compare, without simplifying things, the interpretations and evaluations of the Council and especially of the post-conciliar decades given by Thomistically inclined and trained theologians to those given by theologians whose intellectual affections move more spontaneously in the direction of the Bible and the Fathers, especially St. Augustine.

