

NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE AND THEOLOGY

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is characteristic of the errors or doctrinal deviations of modern times in religious matters that they are fundamental and of a certain universality. In other ages, error was circumscribed to one dogma or another: for example, concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ, concerning the existence of original sin, concerning the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar, or concerning the admission of the saints to the clear vision of God before the end of the world and the universal judgement.

But in our times, error tends to be much more profound and many-sided.

The Hermesianism and Güntherianism of the last century attacked the fundamental bases of the Catholic faith and of all dogma, by radically falsifying the notion of the faith and by reducing all Christian revelation to a body of doctrine that was substantially natural and philosophical. Everything was essentially transformed and left at the mercy of the vicissitudes of human philosophy: from the notion of God and of the Most Holy Trinity to the notion of man, passing through the Incarnation, the Redemption, justification, the Sacraments, eternal life, and all the other truths of Christianity.

The same thing happened with the Modernist crisis at the beginning of our century, which St. Pius X called the compendium of all heresies: *Omnium haereseon collectum* (Encyclical *Pascendi*, Denz. no. 2105). It invaded the entire Christian religion, subjecting it to a radical transformation according to the laws of vital evolution, which consists in pure change.

Away with all intellectualism, because the intellect is radically incapable of perceiving reality as it is in itself. In its place, total agnosticism must be set. The only way of access to the truth is life and its meaning in its continuous flowing, but without ever departing from it, since it is essentially immanent. Revelation, the faith, all the dogmas are nothing more than more or less conscious and transfigured experiences of our religious experience. The so-called dogmatic formulae lack all value and all absolute truth: they are mere symbols or images of the objects of our faith, created by our religious sense and completely relative to it, after the manner of interpreters and vehicles thereof. They are essentially provisional and of a purely relative value.

There neither exists nor can there exist an absolute truth. Everything is pure change, like life itself. For this reason, what we call truth changes according to the tenor of life. The Christian religion, with all its dogmas and beliefs, cannot live otherwise than in our life and in conformity

with it; that is to say, in pure immanence, mere change, and continuous transforming evolution.

To conceive of it in another manner and to insist on abstracting it from that consubstantial condition, immobilising it, as the Catholic Church does, is a course that would lead it to failure and to death. That is to say, either it adapts and accommodates itself to the rhythm of life, or it ceases to live, to be actual, to be true.

For this reason, the Modernists advocated a *nouvelle théologie*, in conformity with these postulates of the New Philosophy, which reigned in those days, and which some of them carried aloft as a banner of recruitment and of combat under that very title: *Philosophie Nouvelle*.

St. Pius X himself underscored this kinship and anticipated the name of *nouvelle théologie*: “*ipsi vero, veteri ad hunc finem theologia sublata, novam invehere contendunt, quae philosophorum delirationibus obsecundet*” (Encyclical *Pascendi*, Denz. no. 2086).

II. THE NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE

A. Its Content

Something similar occurs with the so-called *nouvelle théologie*. The first to call it such, as far as I know, was Fr. Gillet, Master General of the Dominicans, in a circular letter on studies addressed to his Order in 1943. [*Tr.* The first was actually Fr. Pietro Parente in *L'Osservatore Romano*. (1942, February 9–10)] “The malaise—he says—that currently weighs upon theology and that disquiets many theologians comes precisely from this: that is, from the imprudence with which certain young men speak of the contact that must be established in our day between theological science and the modern sciences. They speak of this as if the future not only of theology but of the Christian religion itself depended upon it. Although they do not yet pronounce the name of *nouvelle théologie*, they do not tire, however, of speaking of a *new orientation of theology*. And in its name they bitterly throw in the face of the traditional theologians their supposed immobilisation in the past, their enclosure in their theological system as in an ivory tower with no windows to the outside and no breathable air within, their endless spinning in the cylinder of their syllogisms—something like a squirrel in its cage—their failure to concern themselves with the problems of our time, their obstinate ignoring of the advances of history and of criticism; in a word, their clinging to scholastic formulae as to planks of salvation, out of fear of being swept away by the ever-rising waves of facts and new ideas” (pp. 52–53).

Pius XII made this his own in his Allocution of 17 September 1946 to the Jesuit Fathers of the twenty-ninth elective Congregation. “Let no one move what is immutable. Much has been said, and not always justly, of the *nouvelle théologie*, which must always change along with everything else in incessant movement: always on the way and never arriving; *semper itura, nunquam perventura*. If such an opinion were to prevail, what would become of the Catholic dogmas, which must never be changed?; what of the unity and the perpetual stability of our

faith?" (AAS 38 [1946] 384–385).

And from that date the movement represented by certain new theological tendencies and attitudes, which have taken place particularly in France, has been known by this name. But I shall be excused from naming particular names or groups, something not always easy or sufficiently verified, so as not to expose myself to failing in justice and in charity. [*Tr.* Alas!]

Instead, I am going to broaden the perspective of these new tendencies, which fall within the ambit of an innovating movement much more extensive within the Catholic Church, with ramifications in Austria and Germany, and which have on various occasions provoked the intervention of the Ecclesiastical Magisterium, in addition to the famous Encyclical *Humani generis*. All of this falls within the designation of *nouvelle théologie*, taken in a somewhat broader sense, although what is commonly so called may be the most dangerous and characteristic.

This innovating movement proceeds from a certain fact and from a rigorous examination of conscience.

The certain fact is the estrangement, which in many cases reaches apostasy, of the intellectuals and of the working masses from the faith and from Christian practices: the world is departing from Christ, is de-Christianised, is paganised.

Who is at fault for this? What is the cause of this anguishing and deplorable phenomenon? The world moves, perfects itself, develops in every direction: in technology, in culture, in well-being and standard of living, in the social and political order. The Church, on the contrary, with its faith, with its dogmas, and with its theology, remains immobile and enclosed within itself, separated from the world and removed from the earthly life of men. The world is escaping from the Church, because the Church isolates itself from the world and does not adapt to it.

Therein lies the root of the evil. A rectification on the part of the Church is therefore necessary. It is necessary to renew from top to bottom, to adapt to the march of the world, to update, to modernise substantially. Only on this condition will the presence of the Church in the world and its re-Christianisation be achieved.

Dogmatic formulae possess no more than a purely relative value. There are no words or human concepts capable of adequately expressing the divine realities that are the content of the dogmas. They are no more than more or less felicitous approximations. Every dogmatic formula is merely provisional. Even the words of Scripture by which revelation is transmitted to us. And with all the more reason those employed by the Councils and by the Popes. They are valid for their time, for the epoch in which they were proposed and promulgated, not for later epochs, and much less for all time.

Thus, for example, the dogma of the Trinity was expressed in terms of *nature* and of *person*, the same as the dogma of the Incarnation of the Word; or in terms of *substance*, such as the divinity or consubstantiality of the Son, and the Eucharistic presence by means of transubstantiation. All of them antiquated terms or notions, which today lack meaning and are understood by no one.

The same occurs with the formulae or notions of *habit* and *disposition*, of *form* and *matter*, of *cause* and *effect*, of *principal* and *instrumental* cause, and other similar ones employed particularly by the Council of Trent to express the dogmas of justification and of the Sacraments. Aristotelian and scholastic notions, which today have lost all their value. To insist on preserving them at all costs is to render the dogmas expressed by them unintelligible and unacceptable to modern minds.

A substitution by other modern ones, taken from the philosophy of today, is therefore necessary, so that modern man may understand and accept them. Nothing of qualities and forms, of substances and persons, but life and action. Grace is life and movement of the spirit; and the Eucharist, an efficacious symbol of the spiritual presence of Christ in our life. There is no such change or total conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the whole substance of the body of Christ, nor of the whole substance of the wine into the whole substance of His blood. Eucharistic transubstantiation is inadmissible in modern philosophy and science.

Neither was God personally present in Palestine after the Incarnation of the Word: the Incarnation is nothing more than an efficacious symbol of the spiritual presence of God manifested there in the first century of our era.

The causality of the Sacraments is a pseudo-problem, because they are nothing but pure symbols of grace.

The so-called divine Persons are different symbols of the life of God pouring itself out upon ours. Life, movement, evolution: that is what is essential in the Christian religion and in its dogmas. And since life in its vertiginous movement is composed of contrary, though complementary, facets, in the same way the dogmas admit contrary and opposed formulae, which in reality complement one another. For this reason theology can and must today employ all modern forms of thought to express the truths of the faith, even though they seem the most opposed, because all of them are complementary and equally valid.

Particularly useful for this purpose is the idea of continuous and universal ascending evolution, from the atom to Christ and all the way to God. In one of the series of leaflets that some of these theologians had circulated through French seminaries and formation houses, the following could be read: "If we Christians want Christ to retain the qualities that establish His power and our adoration, the best way, not to say the only way, is to admit to their ultimate consequences the most modern ideas about evolution."

Under the combined pressure of science and philosophy, the world increasingly imposes itself on our experience and on our thought as a connected and coherent system of activities that gradually rise towards freedom and consciousness.

The only satisfactory interpretation of this process is to consider it as irreversible and convergent. In this way, there is drawn before our sight a Universal Cosmic Centre, to which everything converges, in which everything is felt, and in which everything is harmonised.

Now then: it is at this physical pole of universal evolution that the fullness of Christ must be placed and recognised... Thus, the evolution, by discovering before the world this sublime height, makes Christ possible, and He in His turn, by giving a meaning to the world of all beings, makes the evolution possible.

We are perfectly aware of the vertigo that this idea can produce; but, imagining so great a marvel, we do nothing other than translate into terms of physical reality the juridical formulae in which the Church deposited its faith... We have, then, embarked without hesitation on the only course capable of making our faith progress and, consequently, of safeguarding it.

Catholicism had disappointed us at the first encounter by its narrow perspectives on the world and by its incomprehension of the capital importance of matter. But now we recognise that, given the incarnation of God, we cannot save ourselves except by forming part of the universe. And for the same reason, *our deepest pantheist aspirations* find themselves satisfied, secured, and guided. The world around us becomes divine.

A general convergence of all religions towards a universal Christ, who in the end gives satisfaction to all of them: such seems to us to be the only possible way for the conversion of the world to Christ, and the only imaginable form for a religion of the future (cited by R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle*, in *Angelicum* 23 [1946], pp. 137–138).

Matter evolves and is transformed into organic life, organic life into human life, human life into Christian life, Christian life into Christ, and Christ into God. All these stages are nothing more than moments of a necessary, ascending, and universal evolution. But neither Christ nor God are something individual and personal, but rather collective and universal: the universal Christ, in whom converges the evolution of the religious sentiment of all humanity.

The world, consequently, has no absolute beginning. Creation from nothing is incompatible with the certain and demonstrated doctrine of universal evolution. At most, it might be conceded that God evolves in the world as in a necessary emanation of His love; but without providence and without foreknowledge.

From this follows polygenism, inasmuch as the evolution necessary from simple animal to man is not circumscribed to one individual or to one couple, Adam and Eve, but rather by necessity must extend to many in all parts of the earth, whether simultaneously, or successively, and independently of one another. An evolution that affects the whole man, both as to the body and as to the soul.

Soul and body, spirit and matter, do not differ essentially, but rather are different moments of one and the same evolutionary movement. The so-called angels likewise are not something individual and distinct from matter, but rather a collective name that we give to a moment of the ascending evolution.

Consequently, Adam and Eve, of whom Sacred Scripture and the Councils of the Church speak to us, are not two particular persons, but a collective name for the first couples that appeared

across the whole face of the earth.

This being conceded, a radical change of the notion of original sin becomes indispensable. It is not a personal sin of the first couple. Nor is it transmitted by generation to the other men who descend from them. It is simply the lack of certain men who have particularly influenced humanity. Or else it signifies only the primitive and rudimentary state of the hominids who first appeared on the earth. But it denies all relationship of dependence between that sin and death.

In the theory of universal ascending evolution, there is no room for or meaning in original sin, which would be a fall and a retrogression of all humanity (Joseph-Charles Lefèbvre [*Tr.* raised to the purple by John XXIII], *Rapport doctrinal* presented on 30 April 1957 at the plenary Assembly of the French Episcopate, p. 20).

Furthermore: the existence of all truly personal sin is denied. One does not offend an impersonal or improvident God. He does not concern Himself with us, nor does He know the interior of our hearts. On the other hand, psychoanalysis has demonstrated that man is not master of his propensities nor of the corresponding acts that we call sins, but rather follows them necessarily. There is, then, no true individual responsibility and no true guilt.

The notion of personal sin must be replaced by the idea of collective sin; that is to say, of the sin of the world, which consists in the social injustice of some men against others or of some classes against others. And this sin is removed **by the class struggle unto the total triumph of socialism and of communism**, not by the Redemption of Christ or by the Sacrament of Penance, **which** have nothing to do here. **Just as** baptism too has no importance or value whatsoever, since there is no such thing as true original or personal sin (*ibid.*, pp. 20–21, 47).

The same fate befalls the dogmas of the hereafter. What matters is the present life, not the future life. Particularly, the dogma of eternal hell must be suppressed, once the existence of truly personal sins has been denied.

The great mystery of Christianity is not the Trinity nor the Redemption, but the Incarnation, which does not precisely signify the assumption of the human nature of Christ by the Person of the Word, to which it is hypostatically united, but the mere presence of Christians among other men (*ibid.*, pp. 20–21).

What is called supernatural grace does not differ essentially from nature. The universal ascending evolution of nature leads us to it necessarily. It is nothing more than a higher humanism, a moment of humanism in full development and evolution. For this reason it must at least be said that grace is necessarily postulated and demanded by the nature of the intellectual being. The state of pure nature is radically impossible. God Himself could not create man or the angel in that state, but rather necessarily had to destine him and raise him to the supernatural order and to the right of enjoying eternal life.

On the other hand, it denies the need for any mortification, because our nature is not vitiated or fallen by any truly such sin; nor is it necessary to avoid the dangers of sinning, or to repent,

or to confess. One must look God in the face: no servility or kneeling before Him in our prayers; man must preserve his dignity before God (*ibid.*, p. 19).

Man and Christianity have arrived at adult age. They can no longer be considered as wards and minors before men or before God. Why ask God for any favour, when what today seems unattainable to us will be conquered tomorrow by technology? It is in technology that we must place our trust, not in the omnipotence of God, who is of no use to us (*ibid.*, p. 23).

The hierarchical Church has no right to impose dogmas or precepts against the freedom of thought and the autonomy of conscience. It must give an account of its interventions and enter into dialogue with the faithful in order to reach an agreement. The absolute objectivism of Vatican determinations is radically alien and opposed to our age and to our most elementary rights (*ibid.*, p. 38).

The ordinary faithful, the laity, must be heard in the Church and take part in its government, just as in its sacrificial worship, since they are true and authentic priests. Between them and the so-called ordained priests, there is no essential difference, but only a difference of pure nuance (*ibid.*, p. 50). The time has come to create a theology of the laity.

And all of them must offer together and as a team the sacrifice of the Mass, not in isolation and separately, since the Mass is a sacral rite essentially communitarian; and without any concern for preparation or for thanksgiving, which would be a kind of insult to the substantial and objective sanctity of the said rite. It is what they call the *concelebration* of the *collegial* Priesthood, not a personal one (*ibid.*, 149. Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947. AAS 39 [1947] 553). But some add that the Christ there present and immolated is not the same One who lived among us and died nailed to a cross; that is to say, the historical Christ, but another Christ, idealised and spiritualised, or, as they say, “pneumatic” (*ibid.*, 579).

Those same who wish to carry the reform of the Liturgy to improbable extremes suppress, without further ado and on their own authority, the use of all the texts of the Old Testament and of the Latin language, replacing it with the vernacular (*ibid.*, p. 545). And they think that the Sacrifice has no value unless it is ratified by the faithful people.

But, returning to the theme of the Church, they distinguish and oppose two Churches: one exterior, visible, hierarchical, juridical, social; the other interior, invisible, spiritual, of charity (Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici corporis*, 29 June 1943. AAS 35 [1943] 224–225). The true Church of Christ is the latter, not the former, which is usually full of stains and defects. What matters least for salvation is the exterior rite of baptism and being incorporated into that juridical Church. Its very Magisterium is subject to caution. The Encyclicals and other pontifical documents, and *a fortiori* those of the Bishops, express simply the opinion or the Vatican point of view, which is not necessarily the most correct and which does not compel assent or bind consciences.

Some think the Church should involve itself in all the temporal affairs of this world, seduced by a kind of temporal messianism (*Rapport*, p. 32); others advocate a total inhibition, being

opposed to all confessionality in civil and social affairs.

The theological virtues are substantially disfigured. Faith does not rest on the infallible word of God, but on the inescapable force of universal ascending evolution. It is faith on the march towards new conquests and new dogmas. Thirty years ago, in 1924, the following proposition was defended and propagated in the diocese of Quimper (France), condemned by the Church and later adopted by the adherents of the *nouvelle théologie*: “Even after having received and professed the faith, man must not rest in the dogmas of religion or assent to them in a fixed and immovable manner, but must be possessed by a continual anxiety and anguish to progress always towards other truths; that is, evolving in new directions, and even correcting and amending what he formerly believed” (Proposition 12, from those condemned by the Holy Office on 1 December 1924, apud Descoqs, S.J., *Theodicea*, vol. I, p. 150).

Hope is not oriented towards the conquest of eternal life through the continuous and ardent exercise of good works done in the grace of God, overcoming and surmounting all manner of obstacles of sins and temptations, but rather is enclosed in a pure humanism with merely earthly aspirations, or at least not sufficiently detached from them, as if the Kingdom of Heaven were to be given in addition to those who primarily seek the goods of this world (*Rapport*, p. 23).

I shall never forget the impression made on me by one of these gentlemen when, in the course of conversation, the topic of this virtue came up, and upon my underlining its capital importance as a virtue proper to wayfarers and combatants for gaining the crown of eternal life, he interrupted me in astonishment: “But does hope serve any purpose?” That poor man, whose office was presided over by a portrait of Karl Marx, publicly apostatised a few months later from the Christian religion.

And theological charity has been turned into a mere feeling of human sympathy, of pure philanthropy, of material beneficence, going so far as to compare the charity of Christians with the charity of the Communists, giving preference to that of the latter (*ibid.*, p. 15).

That same charity arrives at such indulgence with the enemies of Christianity and at such severity with the Church and its faithful servants, that all the faults and all the responsibilities for the present malaise are attributed to the Church and to its theologians, while all the good qualities and dispositions are entirely on the part of the dissidents. We must close the distances, they repeat ceaselessly, setting aside everything that divides, in order to make the Christian religion acceptable. It is the tactic of irenism in the service of ecumenism. A minimum of coincidence suffices, even if it be of a purely material nature. Union of all with all: with the schismatics, with Protestants of every shade, with the Mohammedans, with the socialists, and even with the godless or communists (p. 46).

As can be seen, this renovating and reformist movement, within which the so-called *nouvelle théologie* is found, extends to everything: to faith and to morals, to dogma and to morality, to the essentially doctrinal and to the purely disciplinary. Not that all coincide in everything, or that

the affirmations or negations follow an organic plan. Rather, they are frequently antagonistic. It is a multiform and many-sided movement.

But all agree on a common aspiration: to vitalise the Christian religion, to make it present everywhere and acceptable without difficulty by all, to be up to date and, if possible, in the vanguard, to suppress once and for all the accursed inferiority complex that weighs upon Catholics. Everything modern and current must be embraced, after having thrown overboard everything antiquated and useless, however venerable it may appear. Everything that smacks of scholasticism must be cast off without compassion or ceremony as something definitively past, whether in philosophy or in theology. In its place, the ideas and concerns of the contemporary philosophies of evolutionism, of relativism, of vitalism, of existentialism, of historicism must be fearlessly assumed. And our faith and our morality must be translated into them: in a word, our life as Christians.

It matters little that many of these contributions may seem antagonistic and incompatible with the Tradition of the Church. These are scholastic scruples that have been ordered to stand down. In reality, they integrate and complement one another all the more, the more opposed and contrary they seem, because all of it is fused in life. Nothing is fixed and immutable. The abstract and intellectualist metaphysics of essences has definitively passed. Truth is not something fixed and eternal. It is not the speculative adequation of the intellect to reality. That is chimerical and without any foundation. Truth is rather the real adequation of the mind and of life, which changes essentially according to the tenor of each one's life. Since there is, then, no truth that is fixed and definitively acquired, the formulae with which the dogmas of the faith are expressed and translated can scarcely enjoy immutability and fixity.

Such is, in substance and in broad strokes, the meaning and the content of the *nouvelle théologie*, condemned by Pius XII on various occasions, especially in his Encyclical *Humani generis*, of 12 August 1950.

B. Its Evaluation

What are we to think of this *nouvelle théologie*? What value does it have? Undoubtedly the intention of many of these new theologians, not all of them, to what it seems, was upright and good. To conquer the world for Christ, to make the Christian religion valued everywhere, to revive more deeply and authentically our faith.

But the tactics and the methods employed have been false and imprudent.

In the first place, because of the lack of philosophical and theological preparation of the new theologians. They know little and poorly the authentic and traditional theology, the same as the perennial philosophy. The idea they have formed of them is a bad caricature. They judge them through some anodyne manual that they have poorly digested. They are unacquainted with the great authors. I personally know several of these gentlemen and have conversed with them. They

know nothing but how to mock what they ignore and ridicule what they do not understand.

It is not something past and outworn of the scholastics to say that what knows and philosophises is the intellect, not the will and not mere sentiment. Neither is it to think that the intellect is made for the truth, and that it is capable in many cases of issuing judgements conformable to reality, as occurs, for example, in the so-called axioms or first principles: of contradiction, of identity, of sufficient reason, of efficient and final causality, the same as the dictates of synderesis. All these judgements not only are conformed to reality, but are so necessarily, in such a way that the intellect cannot, inwardly and sincerely, doubt or deny them, because they impose themselves by their very nature, although verbally and by a mere play of the imagination man may challenge and reject them.

Truth, as conformity of the judgement to reality, is inseparable from these first principles and propositions, and consequently fixed, immutable, and perfectly accessible to man. And the same can be said of all other judgements or propositions necessarily connected with them and apprehended as such. Despite our ignorance, many are the truths that we naturally know, without any fear of error, but rather with full security and certainty. This is not specifically Aristotelian or scholastic philosophy: it is simple nature and good sense.

And the same can be said of the notions of substance and accident, of person and nature, of cause and effect, of essence and existence, which, although refined and explained by Aristotle and by the scholastics, are fundamentally pre-philosophical and naturally obvious to the intellect. On the other hand, it is not so with the convoluted and twisted ideas employed by the greater part of the contemporary relativist and immanentist, idealist and vitalist, existentialist and historicist philosophies. Why, then, distrust the former, out of distrust of the intellect, in order to throw oneself into the arms of the latter, without any guarantee whatsoever?

Pius XII, in his Encyclical *Humani generis*, underscored the absolute value of those notions not only for what they possess by nature, but for what they have by way of the approval of the Ecclesiastical Magisterium, which has adopted them to formulate the dogmas of the faith; whereas the notions of those other philosophies, which deny all metaphysical and immutable truth, are not susceptible of expressing the fixed and unshakeable truth of the same.

All the more so because many of the theories that those theologians employ are not certain or proven, but rather highly debatable and, at times, the mere fruit of unbridled imaginations; for example, the theory of universal ascending evolution from nature to grace and from the atom to Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, it is evident from the Acts of the Ecumenical Councils that the Church has never embarked upon dogmatic formulae of a strictly philosophical coinage. And it is strange that the new theologians should throw in the face of the Council of Trent the charge of having scholasticised dogma, when its Acts reveal quite the contrary.

Expressly the Fathers of that Council, in discussing paragraph by paragraph and word by

word the draft decrees, struck out without compassion the phrases and terms that savoured of the scholastic, in order to replace them with others more common and natural, although perfectly chiselled and weighed by the same Fathers. And if on occasion they admitted them, they immediately gave their explanation in other equivalent terms of common usage: for example, concerning the word transubstantiation, matter and form of the Sacraments, causality of the same, disposition and form of justification, and other similar ones. But always with the utmost moderation and discretion. For this reason they did not admit the terms of quality and habit, despite their being very apt for expressing sanctifying grace and the virtues, and despite their being currently used by the theologians of those times.

And the same occurs with the dogmatic formulae of the Vatican Council, discussed, chiselled, and weighed meticulously to the point of near scruple. Those formulae are humanly of the most careful and considered kind. That the grace and the charism of infallibility which the teaching Church enjoys for preserving, expressing, or formulating the truths revealed by God does not dispense with human work, nor does it annul it, but rather demands it and provokes it, while at the same time directing and perfecting it. The living Magisterium of the Church, infallibly assisted by the Holy Ghost, who is the Spirit of Truth, knows exactly and infallibly the truths of the faith and their authentic meaning. For this reason it is in unique and unsurpassable conditions for knowing and being able to express with appropriate and unequivocal terms these same truths. He who perceives an idea clearly and accurately also expresses himself with clarity and precision. Moreover, the holy teaching Church has at its disposal the special assistance of the Holy Ghost and the consequent charism of infallibility, not only for knowing the truths of the deposit of faith, but also for choosing the terms and the propositions with which to formulate and expound them to men.

Not all words are equally apt for this purpose. There are some that are positively inept and unacceptable, such as those formulae with the technical sense of certain philosophies that are atheist or radically lay, which deny or exclude all divinity and all religion. So it occurs with atheist existentialism and vitalism, with historical materialism, and with materialist and pantheist evolutionism. To pour the truths of the faith into the formulae of those philosophies is to corrupt and substantially falsify them, in addition to making them essentially fickle and unstable, like a reed shaken by the wind.

The new theologians have not perceived that danger or, rather, that impossibility and radical ineptitude; and that is why they have been wrong from start to finish.

There is no room for the substitution of the formulae defined by the Church with others taken at random from contemporary philosophies and assumed without discretion or competence by these new theologians. That is not to vitalise the faith or to make it prosper, but to falsify it and to corrupt it substantially.

As the Vatican Council teaches against the Hermesians and Güntherians, “the doctrine of

the faith revealed by God is not a philosophical system invented by men and capable of being corrected or perfected by them, but a divine deposit delivered by Christ to His Church so that it may guard it faithfully, and infallibly declare it. For this reason, the meaning of the dogmas that the Church gave them in defining them must always be preserved intact, it never being permitted to depart from it, even under the name and pretext of a higher and more perfect understanding. Let the knowledge of all and of each one of the faithful grow, then, and develop, but always in its own kind; that is, in the same dogma and in the same sense" (Denz. no. 1800).

In the second place, the tactic of attracting the masses, the intellectuals, and those belonging to other sects or religions could not be more mistaken. Under the pretext of charity and of irenism, one falls into religious indifferentism and the Catholic creed is mutilated to the point of being unrecognisable. A Catholicism without dogmas and without morality is not the religion founded by Jesus Christ. To try to attract them in this way is in reality to deceive them. In fact, the result has been counterproductive.

The most sincere and sound who have taken part in the ecumenist colloquia have declared that, in order to enter a Catholicism decapitated and falsified, they preferred to stay where they were. It sounds, at the very least, naïve, the saying of one of these irenists: the Catholic Church would acquire certain very important qualities that it lacks. The Lutheran would contribute a deeper sense of the gratuity of grace; the Calvinist, a more intimate contact with the Bible; the Anglican, a greater liturgical austerity; and the Slavs and Muslims, a more vivid feeling for mysticism.

In the third place, as the French Bishops rightly observe in their latest Doctrinal Report on the current currents of thought and action in certain Catholic sectors of France, those who allow themselves to be carried along by these ideas reveal a lack of the spirit of God, of the spirit of faith, of the spirit of Christ, of the spirit of the Church: in a word, of the supernatural spirit, enclosing themselves in a pseudo-humanism that is naturalist and morbid.

The changes and adaptations to the new times that must be made are not for those theologians to demand, dictate, or impose, but rather for the ecclesiastical Hierarchy, which is what must govern the Church. And in fact we have been witnessing in recent years very many transcendental adaptations of discipline, of liturgy, and of pastoral practice to the conditions of present-day life, although without falling into the exaggerations of some apostles of the kerygmic and of the living Gospel.

III. TRUE AND AUTHENTIC THEOLOGY

True theology, as the science of the faith and of Christian morals, is immersed in the faith and in the theological virtues. It breathes a supernatural atmosphere. It never loses contact with faith and with charity. It is not a science divided into distinct genera or species, like philosophy or the human sciences. It is a formal irradiation and participation in the very science of God, which is not divided or atomised, but embraces everything in its transcendent unity.

Dogma and morality, asceticism and mysticism, patrology and pastoral theology, exegesis and symbology are one single and unique specific theology. Theology surpasses and transcends the categories of the purely human and natural sciences. It is not properly speculative or practical, but rather contemplative and affective at the same time, *per modum unius*, knowledge and life being fused within it. The vitality of theology, like the vitality of the theological faith, is directed rather upward, towards God, towards eternal life of which it is an anticipation and a gleam, than downward, towards terrestrial and animal life in which we in reality groan, not in order to teach us to supernaturalise and divinise it.

And the same occurs with knowledge. It uses as an instrument and springboard all the human sciences, though not taken raw, as they come from the quarries or from the fountains of the philosophers and the sages, but elaborated and distilled in its own workshops and refineries, where they are given the meaning of God, of Christ, of the faith. For this reason it does not embark upon just any philosophy, ancient or modern, but solely upon the Christian philosophy, the philosophy according to Christ, as Benedict XV beautifully called it (*Motu proprio Non multo post*, 31 December 1914. AAS 7 [1915], 6–7).

The true theologian, just as the [First] Vatican Council describes him, carrying always before him the torch of the faith, seeks the intelligence and the explanation of the mysteries, which the faith proposes to him, with diligence, with love, and with sobriety, *sedulo, pie et sobrie*. For which purpose he employs fundamentally two paths: one, the comparison of some mysteries with others and with the final end of man, in which all converge; the other, the comparison of the same with solidly established truths of the natural order, as so many analogies, which enable us to catch a glimpse of them in some way (Denz. no. 1796). But without ever losing the sense of mystery, or pretending to comprehend them perfectly. That clear and full vision is not of the theology of this life, but of that which will succeed in heaven.

The vitality of theology, like that of all living beings, does not consist in departing from its sources and principles, but in not separating from them, in being always in contact with them, in drinking and nourishing itself from them to the full. The sciences must never lose contact with experience, which is their source; history must always keep its gaze fixed on the document, which gives it being; philosophy needs always to return to the crystalline water of its principles so as not to drown of thirst. Theology equally has need of nourishing itself from its principles and saturating itself with them.

And those principles and sources of authentic theology are the truths, the articles of the faith, contained in Sacred Scripture and in divine Tradition, and proposed infallibly and authentically by the living Magisterium of the Church. The vital principle of theology is in divine revelation, in the faith; not in human reason or in the sciences or philosophy invented by it.

For this reason, theology worthy of the name has more of the divine than of the human, more of faith than of reason, of illumination or irradiation of the science of God than of illustration of

the science of men; that is to say, of philosophy in its broadest sense. Scholastic theology itself, so despised and maligned by the new theologians, has this markedly divine and supernatural character, above all in its principal representatives, such as a St. Albert the Great, a St. Thomas Aquinas, and a St. Bonaventure.

The *nouvelle théologie*, on the contrary, has inverted the values, going in tow of some modern and deceitful philosophies, and de-Christianising itself with them, after having abandoned the true sources of authentic theology. It is a tragic irony to call living and renewed theology that which, by separating itself from its vital principle, walks along the paths of death.