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# Engaging the Neo-Thomist Revival: Considerations and Consequences for Theology and the Church

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*Neo-Thomism, the reading of Thomas Aquinas that became the dominant Catholic theological school in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was eclipsed during the Second Vatican Council but has recently seen a resurgence on the American scene, in terms of both publications and influence among the church hierarchy. This article explores that resurgence in terms of the history of neo-Thomism, the important texts that have come out of this new movement, and signs of its influence on the bishops. In so doing, it critiques the movement for failing to learn the lessons of its fall from favor—in particular, that it has relied on claims to orthodoxy based on authority rather than the power of its own arguments. This article thus argues that theologians should pay careful attention to this movement both to reassert the validity and importance of more contemporary theological methods and to encourage neo-Thomists themselves to develop a greater appreciation of methodological pluralism and reliance on the strength of arguments.*

**Keywords:** Neo-Thomism, Vatican II, theological method, systematic theology, theologians and church authorities, ecclesiology, twentieth-century theology, *Ressourcement*

## Introduction

Neo-Thomism, a reading of Thomas Aquinas through the tradition of commentators that gained influence in Catholic theology in the late nineteenth century in large part as a result of the influence of Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris,* was the dominant movement in Catholic theology, particularly as espoused by the church hierarchy, during the first half of the twentieth century, leading up to the Second Vatican

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Council.[1] It was widely believed to have been "defeated" irrevocably at the council itself, with the most influential *periti*, such as Karl Rahner and Yves Congar, representing and thus ensuring the triumph of the new theological movements that had arisen since the early 1940s. Without the hierarchical support upon which it once relied, the movement seemingly died out in the face of the triumph of its opponents on many key issues, particularly theological method and the relationship between nature and grace. On this narrative, the remaining strains of a more conservative Catholic theology emerged after the conclusion of the council and the *Communio/Concilium* split, influenced by the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, the later Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope John Paul II's teaching on human sexuality and the body.[2]

Yet in the last decade, beginning roughly in 2005, the neo-Thomist movement has seen a resurgence both in literary output and, arguably, in influence among the church hierarchy, particularly in the United States. This article contends that this movement must be taken seriously by theologians who do not share its point of view, because it makes claims and can exercise influence in ways that represent a serious challenge to the way Catholic academic theology has been done since Vatican II. This is particularly the case on the issues of the relationship between nature and grace and of the legitimate spectrum of methodological pluralism within theology. I wish to argue that the new neo-Thomism has exhibited an openness to methodological pluralism in the form of postliberal theological approaches but has tended to deny the legitimacy of other methods in strong terms and in connection with the aforementioned views on nature and grace. A new case must be made for why this dimension of neo-Thomism—its tendency to become a totalizing discourse that denies legitimate methodological pluralism in theology—is problematic, precisely in order to preserve the legacy of Rahner, Congar, Henri de Lubac, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and others who challenged it in the first place.

I will begin by establishing, in dialogue with sympathetic and unsympathetic sources, what exactly neo-Thomism is—that is, what its methods are, and what its most distinctive claims are. Then, I will survey the literature of

[1] Gerald McCool, SJ, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 8.

[2] Fergus Kerr gives such an interpretation in *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), particularly in his conclusion: "The new emphasis on the doctrine of nuptiality as the key to authentic Catholic self-understanding includes a reaffirmation of the traditional belief in the unbreakable link between the unitive and the procreative in marital love-making" (221). Thomas Joseph White, OP, gives a similar interpretation to a different end in "The Tridentine Genius of Vatican II," *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 11, no. 1 (2013): 9.

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the contemporary revival movement, centering on Lawrence Feingold's *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters*, which is arguably the single most influential book produced by the resurgent neo-Thomism. Finally, I will analyze some methodological issues within the new neo-Thomism that, along with its alliance with postliberal trajectories in theology, have been reflected in broader debates about theological method and in discussions between theologians and bishops.

## I. What, Exactly, Is Neo-Thomism?

Almost two generations of theologians have come of age since the Second Vatican Council. This generation has known "neo-Thomism" largely as a term referring to what came before the renewal of theology in and around the council.[3] "Neo-Thomism" thus has functioned as a stand-in for a kind of manualist or system theology, closely aligned with the hierarchical structure of the church, that fostered a narrow interpretation of the work of Thomas Aquinas and, indeed, of the purpose of theology in general. This generalization contains some truth (though not necessarily in its entirety, as manualism was a more diverse phenomenon, particularly within Jesuit contexts), but for the purposes of this study I think it is worth examining, in dialogue with several historical accounts, where this movement came from and what shaped its priorities. This, in turn, will be helpful in establishing what its present-day advocates are seeking, and what intellectual sources they value as an aid in this project, in support of a sympathetic critique of some aspects of that effort.

As Fergus Kerr has skillfully demonstrated, the term "Thomism" itself is a fraught one, with many claiming (both now and in the past) to represent the true and accurate interpretation of the great thirteenth-century theologian.[4] Even today there are numerous schools of Thomism, whose thinkers sympathetically cite one another on occasion while possessing very different hermeneutical lenses on Thomas.[5] The school of thought commonly referred to as "neo-Thomism," which in certain iterations goes under the related name of

[3] The term is also sometimes used to refer to thinkers such as Rahner who rely on Thomas, as opposed to "Neo-Augustinians" such as Joseph Ratzinger. Massimo Faggioli describes the outlines of such a usage in *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), 75–83.

[4] Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Rival Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) gives a good overview of these issues.

[5] William Portier deals with some of these issues in "Thomist Resurgence," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 494–504, his extensive review of Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*.

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"Aristotelico-Thomism," has its roots in the sixteenth century and had its greatest flowering of influence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### *Scholastic Roots*

Neo-Thomism—and indeed the rediscovery of Thomas Aquinas that led to his exaltation by the church hierarchy as the greatest of theologians—has its more immediate roots in what Gerald McCool has called the "second scholasticism," that is, the revival, instigated particularly among the Dominicans, of Aquinas and his theological methodologies, over and against what were seen as the excesses of late medieval nominalism.[6] This renewed focus on Aquinas resulted in a tradition of commentaries, which would replace the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard with Aquinas' second *Summa,* the *Summa Theologiae,* as the work upon which to comment during doctoral studies, and a systematization in the form of programs of study in theology inspired by Aquinas.[7]

The reemphasis on Aquinas born out of the second Scholasticism was by no means unitary; indeed, it bore within itself the seeds of later theological divisions. In particular, the Jesuits took Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) as their main interpreter of Aquinas, while the Dominicans preferred John Capréolus (ca. 1380–1444), Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469–1534), and John of St. Thomas (1589–1644) as the privileged commentators. These thinkers, little known outside the neo-Thomist tradition, except for Cajetan (who is known mostly for his polemics against Protestantism and his role in debates about nature and grace), take on for the neo-Thomists an authoritative position as interpreters of Aquinas, and thus it is worth giving a brief sketch of their historical contributions and the tradition of interpretation that they founded.

John Capréolus was a Dominican who, in the words of the contemporary neo-Thomist Romanus Cessario, "emerged as the champion of a small, anti-revisionist movement that, in effect, became a nucleus" of later Thomism.[8] His major contribution was a commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, entitled *The Books of Arguments in Defense of the Theology of Saint Thomas*.[9] As the title would indicate, Capréolus used the platform of the traditional commentary to launch what Cessario calls "the first

[6] McCool, *The Neo-Thomists*, 23.

[7] Ibid., 26.

[8] Romanus Cessario, OP, *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 59.

[9] Ibid., 60.

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comprehensive presentation of Thomist theology."[10] He thus stands out as a seminal figure, the primary advocate, within Thomas' own medieval milieu, for a view of Aquinas that would later gain many more followers.[11]

The major shift that takes place with Capréolus, according to Bernard McGinn, is one away from the view of Saint Thomas of theology as *sacra doctrina* to one where "theology is a science of conclusions."[12] Related to this idea was an emphasis on metaphysics, which has been interpreted variously as an elaboration of themes and ideas already found in Thomas himself or, alternatively, as a betrayal of Thomas.[13] Capréolus was also notably willing to rearrange ideas from the *Summa* to suit what he found to be a more adequate ordering of theological and moral questions, often hearkening back to that of the *Sentences.*[14]

Cajetan (Thomas de Vio) was a Dominican and an important thinker of the Reformation period, known for his critiques of Luther in particular. His most important work for the purposes of this study, however, is his commentary on Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae.* This work became most famous for what Cessario calls its "quasi-official" status by being included in the so-called Leonine Edition of the *Summa* commissioned by Pope Leo XIII.[15] For the neo-Thomist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, then, Cajetan had an authoritative place in the interpretation of Aquinas on the basis of both his position in the tradition and the status given to his commentary by the Leonine Edition.

Cajetan notably was one of the key formulators of what would become one of neo-Thomism's most controversial positions—its view of nature and grace. This view theorized the existence of a "pure nature" by which there could have been a kind of internal beatitude to human life without the gift of God's grace.[16] While Cajetan did not originate this position, his influence would lead to its construal as part of Thomism, and indeed of Catholic

[10] Ibid., 61.

[11] For a thoroughgoing introduction to Capréolus and his legacy, see Romanus Cessario, OP, and Kevin White, "Translators' Introduction," in *John Capréolus, On the Virtues* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), xxvii–xxxv.

[12] Bernard McGinn, *Thomas Aquinas's "Summa theologiae": A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 138.

[13] Charles D. Robertson examines these ideas while coming down on the former side in "John Capréolus: Prince of Thomists or Corruptor of Thomism?" *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 12, no. 3 (2014): 837–61.

[14] Mark D. Jordan, "The *Summa*'s Reform of Moral Teaching," in *Contemplating Aquinas*, ed. Fergus Kerr, OP (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 49.

[15] Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, 67–8.

[16] Henri de Lubac describes this process in *Augustinianism and Modern Theology,* trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 114.

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orthodoxy itself. Parallel to the same view within neo-Thomism was the positioning of philosophy and theology as parallel disciplines, connected by the *preambula fidei,* that is, philosophical demonstrations of truths of faith such as the existence of God.[17]

John of St. Thomas (also known by his family name, John Poinsot), in Cessario's words, "best exemplifies the Thomist propensity for combining affective theology with brilliant philosophical analysis."[18] His most famous work, the *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, became a standard textbook of Thomistic philosophy.[19] Its companion work, in Thomistic theology, was to remain unfinished.[20] In comparison with much of the commentary tradition, John "writes in relative independence of the text that prompts the discussion," according to Ralph McInerny, and thus gives "a kind of *tour de monde* survey of what others have said on the question before launching into his own solution."[21]

John constitutes the "last major figure" of the second Scholasticism,[22] and his *Cursus* would acquire "downright canonical importance" over time for the neo-Thomist movement.[23] Given his importance to the neo-Thomist movement, Poinsot is a rather neglected figure in the literature surrounding Scholasticism. However, he has acquired an audience outside the neo-Thomist mainstream as a result of his work on semiotics, concerning which a number of articles have appeared in recent decades.[24] For neo-Thomists, however, particularly in the Dominican tradition, he occupies a central place in the movement's history.[25]

These three figures, then, constitute the historical core of the neo-Thomist movement, those figures upon whom contemporary neo-Thomists most rely when seeking authoritative interpretation of Thomas. Also noteworthy in this

[17] Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 26–32.

[18] Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, 74.

[19] Ibid., 76.

[20] McGinn, *Thomas Aquinas's "Summa theologiae,"* 158.

[21] Ralph McInerny, preface to John of St. Thomas, *Introduction to the "Summa Theologiae" of Thomas Aquinas* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2004), ix.

[22] Ibid., vi.

[23] Ulrich G. Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*, trans. Michael G. Miller (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 291.

[24] See John Deely, *Descartes and Poinsot: The Crossroad of Signs and Ideas* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2008); Frank Nuessel, "Poinsot and Semiotics," *Semiotica* 185 (2011): 263–77.

[25] Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, and Reception,* trans. Benedict M. Guevin, OSB (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 103: "John of St. Thomas's genius and his place in history guarantee him a preeminent position in spreading Thomas's work."

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context are the Carmelites of Salamanca, who produced an important commentary on the *Summa* following the approach of John of St. Thomas.[26] This epoch following the Council of Trent culminated in two controversies, the *de auxiliis* controversy about nature and grace and the Jansenist controversy.[27] Given the refusal of the Holy See in the *de auxiliis* controversy to endorse any one school of thought, there followed a period of relative quiet in Catholic theological controversy.[28]

### *Nineteenth-Century Revival*

Within the relative theological pluralism that constituted Catholic theology between the conclusion of the *de auxiliis* controversy and Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris,* the movement that would become known as neo-Thomism began as one school of thought among others, and not necessarily the most dominant one in Rome or elsewhere.[29] This began to change after the 1840s with Pius IX's critiques of modernity, in which, according to McCool, "the climate was favorable for an aggressive attack on modern philosophy and upon the theological systems structured by it."[30] Such an attack was supplied by the neo-Thomists, who argued that "all the modern systems were intrinsically unsatisfactory," and that thus "they could not be corrected from within; they would have to be replaced."[31] The attack came on the ground of epistemology and method, so that "the theologian who knew the epistemology and metaphysics of St. Thomas could construct a necessary, certain, and critical scientific theology."[32] All of this, of course, was fair game for intellectual debate, as would be the broader claim that "only one system of Catholic theology was possible. This system was neo-Thomism."[33]

Neo-Thomism moved from one strongly argued position among others to dominance with the publication of Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879. Leo, born Gioacchino Pecci, had been an advocate for the neo-Thomist movement since his youth, as had his brother Giuseppe.[34] The drafters of

[26] Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, 76.
[27] Ibid., 78.
[28] Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology,* 323.
[29] Cessario details the efforts to instantiate Thomism in the Roman College during the 1820s in *A Short History of Thomism*, 85.
[30] Gerald McCool, SJ, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 86. McCool later notes that by 1870 "almost every major force in Catholic theology had been condemned except Scholasticism" (132).
[31] McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*, 138.
[32] Ibid., 141.
[33] Ibid., 35.
[34] Ibid., 226.

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this encyclical included the prominent neo-Thomists Matteo Liberatore and Joseph Kleutgen.[35] After a prologue sketching the importance of philosophy to the defense of faith and the history of theology (praising many of the Church Fathers, particularly Augustine, as well as Bonaventure together with Aquinas), Leo builds up to the argument that "reason, borne on the wings of Thomas to its human height, can scarcely rise higher, while faith could scarcely expect more or stronger aids from reason than those which she has already obtained through Thomas."[36] He thus proposes, in the light of the many errors of modern times and thought, that it would be better for society if "a more wholesome doctrine were taught in the universities and high schools—one more in conformity with the teaching of the Church, such as is contained in the works of Thomas Aquinas."[37] He furthermore specifically urges those seeking to instill these teaching of Aquinas to "be ye watchful that the doctrine of Thomas be drawn from his own fountains, or at least from those rivulets which, derived from the very fount, have thus far flowed, according to the established agreement of learned men, pure and clear."[38] Given the context of Leo's long association with the neo-Thomists and the encyclical's frequent allusions to the Dominican Order as stewards of the teachings of Aquinas, this statement should be read as a clear endorsement of the neo-Thomist approach, one further demonstrated by the inclusion of Cajetan's commentary in the Leonine Edition of the *Summa*.

The result of *Aeterni Patris* was a consolidation of neo-Thomism as the official philosophical and theological system of the church, with the Gregorian University in Rome, thanks to a housecleaning by Leo, as its new flagship. Yet, as McCool puts it, the new faculty were "seminary professors rather than creative philosophers and theologians, whose output mostly consisted of Scholastic manuals rather than original thought."[39] The emphasis, even among the better representatives of this approach, tended to be on metaphysics and speculative theology rather than scripture, history, and the other areas of theology.[40] The problem thus created was of a closed philosophical and theological system, convinced of its own correctness grounded in a certain

[35] Ibid., 228.

[36] Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, 4 August 4, 1879, §18, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris_en.html.

[37] Ibid., §28.

[38] Ibid., §31.

[39] McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*, 238.

[40] Ibid., 239.

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reading of a six-hundred-year-old figure, and further convinced that it offered a remedy for what ailed modernity.

The inadequacies of this system set up by *Aeterni Patris* and its implementations flared up notably in the so-called modernist controversy under Leo's successor, Pope Pius X. Neo-Thomists figured into this affair mainly as its prosecutors and beneficiaries, but it exposed a discontent among theologians (and even lay philosophers like Maurice Blondel) about the intellectual system being offered by the church hierarchy and official theologians and its ability to speak to the modern world.[41] The heavy-handed response also further underlined that the intellectual and juridical foundations of neo-Thomism as an officially approved system increasingly rested on arguments from authority, either of Saint Thomas and his commentators or the pope and bishops, rather than on the ultimate intellectual validity of their ideas.[42]

The intellectual interest in Thomas Aquinas and medieval theology that was stirred up by Leo XIII and *Aeterni Patris* proved, somewhat ironically, to bear within itself the intellectual undoing of the system that initially benefited from it the most.[43] This transformation began with the works of Pierre Rousselot, who explored Thomistic epistemology as well as nature and grace in ways that challenged the neo-Thomist orthodoxy.[44] Rousselot's work *The Eyes of Faith* in particular inspired a minor theological controversy as a result of its arguments about nature and grace, which seemed to undercut the neo-Thomist insistence on a pure nature.[45] His untimely death in World

[41] Marvin O'Connell argues in his essential history of the modernist controversy, *Critics on Trial* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 39, that "an intellectual movement rooted in the central importance of texts six centuries old appeared distressingly static to those contemporaries of Leo XIII for whom history had become a vital and relentless process of development."

[42] As Aidan Nichols, OP, explains in *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2008), 8, "Roman Neo-Thomism from the pontificate of Pius X onwards, being framed as it was in terms of a response to Modernism, inevitably became associated with the mechanisms of doctrinal control put in place by the encyclical [condemning modernism]."

[43] John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 62: "Thus began the powerful Neo-Thomist movement in Catholicism. Although it started as a conservative movement, it sparked Catholic research into the philosophies and theologies of medieval Scholasticism and led to results unexpected by its originators."

[44] These projects are carried out respectively in *Intellectualism,* trans. Andrew Tallon (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999) and *The Eyes of Faith,* trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990).

[45] Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith*, 34: "In the final analysis the essence of natural being consists in its essential aptitude to serve as a means for created spirits to ascend to God, their final end."

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War I cut this project short, but he had laid the groundwork for a new school of Thomism.

Rousselot's work continued in that of his disciple Joseph Maréchal, who pushed forward arguments that would become better known in the "Transcendental Thomism" of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan.[46] Meanwhile, the French layman Étienne Gilson began research into medieval Scholasticism that might be called a "quest for the historical Thomas," a move to rediscover Aquinas in his intellectual milieu through his own writings (as opposed to reliance on commentators) and situated among other contemporaries (mostly notably Bonaventure), rather than viewing him simply as the exalted *doctor communis*.[47] Concomitant with this was a focus on the Augustinian and Dionysian elements of his work rather than the Aristotelian. Within fifty years of its instantiation as the official philosophy and theology of the church, then, neo-Thomism was under significant critique from philosophers and theologians who claimed Thomas Aquinas and other medieval Scholastics as their inspiration but also sought to speak to the contemporary context in a different manner. These efforts tended to meet with fierce resistance, particularly insofar as they were pursued by priests and religious (as opposed to the layman Gilson, who as such was immune from the standard ecclesial modes of censuring theologians, and who also tended to position his ideas as philosophical). But they continued to build momentum.

In the early 1940s two volumes appeared that, in retrospect, constituted the beginning of the end of neo-Thomism as a dominant intellectual system. First, in 1937, the Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu published *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*, calling for a new theological method.[48] This method, rooted in historical inquiries much like that of Gilson, was very different from that of the neo-Thomists, particularly coming out of a Dominican context.[49] Second, in 1946 the Jesuit Henri de Lubac published

[46] Gerald McCool describes this approach in *From Unity to Pluralism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 91.

[47] This approach is laid out most clearly in his Gifford Lectures, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy,* trans. A. H. C. Downes (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).

[48] Jürgen Mettepenningen explains in *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 50, that this work was not intended for publication but rather as an explanation of the school's approach to teaching philosophy and theology.

[49] Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology*, 51: "This perspective is ultimately an undisguised criticism of Scholasticism. Chenu dismisses the latter as a closed system, the principles of which give rise to nothing more than concepts."

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*Surnaturel*, a discussion of nature and grace that parted ways with the neo-Thomists and accused them of misreading Aquinas through the accretions of the commentators.[50] De Lubac read Aquinas primarily as an Augustinian and thus drew very different conclusions than those of the neo-Thomists on a key theological issue. His book met with immediate condemnation, particularly from the leading neo-Thomist, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, and was widely believed to be the target of Pius XII's 1953 encyclical *Humani Generis*.[51] Yet within ten years of the publication of *Humani Generis*, de Lubac and Chenu would be completely vindicated and neo-Thomism in retreat if not collapse as an intellectual system.

### *Vatican II and Its Aftereffects*

The downfall of neo-Thomism as the official philosophy and theology of the church began with the convocation of an ecumenical council, which neo-Thomism's proponents initially controlled. During the preparations for the Second Vatican Council, the preparatory doctrinal commission, led by Alfredo Cardinal Ottaviani, prefect of the Holy Office (the predecessor of today's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), had composed schemas in line with the neo-Thomist way of thinking that were expected to be rubber-stamped by the council fathers. These schemas were thrown out

[50] Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Éditions Aubier-Montaigne, 1946). The work has never been fully translated into English, although David Coffey has translated sections in "Some Resources for Students of *La nouvelle theologie*," *Philosophy and Theology* 11, no. 2 (1999): 367–402, and a new French edition has recently appeared (Paris: Lethielleux, 2010). The book had otherwise been very difficult to obtain owing to an initial limited press run amid controversy and the use of fragile, poor-quality wartime paper. De Lubac updated this work in the 1960s with two volumes, translated into English as *Augustinianism and Modern Theology,* trans. Lancelot Sheppard (New York: Crossroad, 2000) and *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad, 1968).

[51] Garrigou-Lagrange's famous essay, "Where Is the New Theology Leading Us?" and its clear affirmation that the direction is revisiting modernism highlights the continued reliance of the Neo-Thomists on the condemnation of modernism as a rallying cry. This attitude, particularly a reading of the modernist controversy as a more clear-cut affair than it actually was, continues at a lower pitch among some neo-Thomists today. See http://www.traditionalcatholicmass.com/home-m109.html#Where%20is%20the%20New%20Theology%20Leading%20Us. For more on Garrigou-Lagrange, see Richard Peddicord, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2004) and Aidan Nichols, OP, *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in Service of Catholic Thought* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

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following debate about the document on revelation.[52] The rejection of these schemas set the course for the rest of the council, and for the ascendancy of the *periti* who opposed neo-Thomism, particularly de Lubac, Congar, Rahner, and Ratzinger.

Ratzinger referred to the (neo-Thomist) mentality behind the preparatory texts as evidence of "cramped thinking," which "impregnated the text and informed it with a theology of negations and prohibitions."[53] As Congar notes, some of these documents included restatements of the charges against de Lubac from the early 1950s.[54] Thus, in the debate about the schema on revelation, Congar quotes Cardinal Ottaviani, who also headed the Doctrinal Commission, as arguing that the main purpose of the council "is doctrinal: to protect doctrine, the deposit."[55] The decision of the council, at the end of the first session, not to ratify the schemas prepared by the Doctrinal Commission meant, in Ratzinger's words, "nothing less than a basic overhauling of the view manifested in the preparatory work," and thus the council "had asserted its own teaching authority."[56] The resulting documents departed from previous conciliar practice (centered on anathemas) and indeed from recent Vatican rhetoric; they refused any condemnation of modernity and certainly did not reflect neo-Thomistic philosophy or theology. The results of this change were revolutionary for Catholic theology.

The aftermath of Vatican II precipitated a sea change in the way that Catholic theology was practiced, particularly in the United States. This included the opening of doctoral programs to lay men and (both lay and religious, as both had been largely excluded before) women and ecumenical dialogue with Protestant theologians.[57] The results of this, along with the church's more positive attitude to modernity overall, were disastrous for neo-Thomism.[58] Given the reliance on church authority for its central place as well as its exclusive claims, this system was ill equipped to deal with the new attitudes and largely retreated into philosophy departments, where many of its leading

[52] O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 141: "Complaints were circulating, [Ottaviani] said, that the schema took no account of the new theology, but councils spoke for the ages, not for a particular theological school that tomorrow is forgotten."

[53] Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II,* trans. Henry Traub, SJ, et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), 42.

[54] Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council,* trans. Mary John Ronayne, OP, and Mary Cecily Boulding, OP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 63.

[55] Ibid., 167.

[56] Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II,* 51.

[57] Thomas P. Rausch, *Educating for Faith and Justice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 27–28.

[58] Thomas Joseph White, OP, examines this situation from a neo-Thomistic perspective in "Thomism after Vatican II," *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 12, no. 4 (2014): 1045–61.

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lights had been situated in any case.[59] It is within this context, of emerging from a forty-year period of consolidation and retreat, that the new neo-Thomists seek to re-present the arguments from this system as once again a kind of antidote to the so-called errors of modernity—in the present case, the errors of liberal theological modernity as represented by much Catholic academic theology in the English-speaking world.

## II. Examining the Literature of the New Neo-Thomism

For a nascent revival, the new neo-Thomists have produced an impressive and rapidly growing body of literature whose authors range from longtime keepers of the Thomist flame such as the late Ralph McInerny to younger scholars such as Lawrence Feingold and Thomas Joseph White, OP, who self-consciously position neo-Thomism as an answer to contemporary problems. A complete survey would be somewhat repetitive (since, indeed, there is a large amount of agreement between these sources), and so my examination will explore primarily what I take (and what others, such as McInerny and Reinhard Hütter, have acknowledged) to be the work upon which much of the contemporary movement has pivoted: Lawrence Feingold's dissertation at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce in Rome, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*. I will examine the broad outlines of this work, focusing on its overall methodology, as well as the areas where it takes issue with the theology of nature and grace represented by Henri de Lubac in particular. Following upon this analysis, I will highlight the work of other significant thinkers in this movement, particularly McInerny himself, Hütter, and Steven A. Long. On both the key issue of nature and grace and the related issue of theological method, these thinkers demonstrate a unity of vision while emphasizing somewhat different points.

Feingold's book is a large and closely argued study that sets out, as expressed in his introduction, "to examine exactly what St. Thomas means when he speaks of a natural desire to see God," particularly in light of questions raised in twentieth-century theology by Henri de Lubac, among

[59] Ralph McInerny, one of these philosophical leading lights (and the steward, in different ways, of the legacies of two other leading lights, Jacques Maritain and Charles de Koninck), reflects in his memoir, *I Alone Have Escaped to Tell You* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 102, that in his opinion, "as the hegemony of Thomism melted away, however, one was not confronted by devastating critiques that explained the departure. It was largely a matter of mood."

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others.[60] Feingold situates this historical debate within what he sees as "the great pastoral problem that faces us today," namely, that "contemporary man has lost the sense of the supernatural character of the Christian promise and vocation."[61] By situating his argument in this way, Feingold acknowledges a sound "pastoral intention" on the part of de Lubac, while uncoupling that intention from one of the twentieth-century Jesuit's central theological claims.[62] This praise of *Ressourcement* theologians who have since come to ecclesial acclaim, while at the same time deeply contesting some of their important arguments, is a frequent rhetorical maneuver for the new neo-Thomists.[63] Feingold essentially sets out, then, to affirm de Lubac's vision of Christian humanism while contesting one of its key theological building blocks.

Feingold begins by claiming that "one of the pillars of Catholic theology is the distinction of the natural and the supernatural orders."[64] After making this claim, he immediately adverts to Saint Thomas, with the second source quoted being the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In beginning his argument this way, Feingold rhetorically affirms three hallmarks of the neo-Thomistic movement: the identification of later Thomist priorities with those of Thomas himself; the identification of Thomas, read through a certain lens, with Catholic theology writ large; and the identification or very close association of theology with catechesis. The tendency, then, is to identify the new neo-Thomism with Catholic theology and belief as such, and thus Feingold is able to summarize the Christian tradition before Aquinas on the issue of the desire to see God in four pages, essentially as a footnote to and source for Aquinas.[65] Augustine, in particular, receives a brief treatment.

[60] Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010), xxiii.

[61] Ibid., xxxv.

[62] Feingold claims on xxxiv of de Lubac, "I see the catholicity of the Church as lying more deeply at the heart of his work."

[63] There is no reason to think this praise disingenuous, despite its sharp contrast with the attitude of previous generations of neo-Thomists. It is reasonable to surmise, however, that this reticence may be linked to the neo-Thomists' sometime alliance with post-liberals influenced by the *Ressourcement* movement, which will be discussed at greater length later in this article, as well as the desire to avoid the association with schismatic movements or unorthodoxy that might come with harsh critique of theologians who have ecclesiastical approbation. For a contrastive case, see Alyssa Pitstick, *Light in Darkness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), a critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar for his thought on universal salvation.

[64] Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 1.

[65] Ibid., 6–9.

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After spending two chapters working through texts of Aquinas on the desire to see God, Feingold argues that these texts are straightforward (itself a contestable claim), but that "the real problem…lies rather in harmonizing St. Thomas' reasoning and conclusions with other fundamental aspects of his doctrine."[66] Feingold lists five such areas, and then concludes that "the ability to resolve them will be the test of a valid interpretation."[67] This is a puzzling statement on its face. One might argue, from the perspective of philosophy, theology, or intellectual history, that Aquinas simply contradicts himself on this issue and is thus not the master or final authority on this (or any) theological issue. On such an accounting, one would need to seek a resolution to the overall problem wherever it might lie, with theological sources of various eras and kinds all at one's disposal to do so. Such, one might argue, was de Lubac's approach, which is generally eclectic but with a certain focus on demonstrating that his arguments do not, when read from a certain perspective, contradict those of Thomas. For Feingold, however, given the identification of Thomas with the Catholic faith and neo-Thomism with the teaching of Thomas, the stakes are much higher to harmonize the teaching of Thomas on this issue into a coherent systematic theological position.

It is from this perspective that Feingold gives a tendentious reading of Scotus on the issue of natural appetite. He characterizes Scotus' approach as a "rival understanding of the natural desire to see God" to that of Thomas, one in which "the natural desire to see God can only be an innate inclination."[68] Feingold critiques this approach both in and of itself and also on the grounds that it "can never be used in an apologetic context to show the possibility of its object, and so to persuade philosophers and unbelievers to accept Christian teachings," because such an inclination is inaccessible to experience.[69] With Cajetan, Feingold reads this Scotist approach as incompatible with that of Thomas: "Scotus has focused on the great perfection given by supernatural gifts, but has neglected to consider the attenuation of inclination stemming from excessive distance," whereas Aquinas "provides the basis of a new *supernatural inclination* to our supernatural end, precisely by giving us a new proportionality with it."[70]

When it comes to his critique of de Lubac, Feingold argues that de Lubac reads Aquinas through a Scotist conception of innate desire.[71] He argues that

[66] Ibid., 44.
[67] Ibid., 45.
[68] Ibid., 47.
[69] Ibid., 63.
[70] Ibid., 99.
[71] Ibid., 309.

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"St. Thomas and de Lubac present *two completely different models* of how our nature is ordered and inclined to its supernatural end."[72] Feingold strengthens this argument by claiming that "de Lubac is in perfect harmony with St. Thomas and with the Catholic tradition in denying that our nature itself, as it actually exists, has the slightest supernatural element," but departs from both when he interprets the "natural desire to see God as the expression of a supernatural finality imprinted on our nature in creation itself, prior to the reception of grace."[73] In the same paragraph, Feingold again identifies "the principles of St. Thomas" with "the Christian tradition." He continues to critique de Lubac on this point by adverting to Thomas' teaching on the souls in limbo and their desire for God, claiming that "either there is a fundamental contradiction in St. Thomas's own thought between his well-known teaching on limbo and the natural desire to see God, or else de Lubac's way of interpreting the natural desire to see God is not in harmony with the mind of St. Thomas."[74]

Feingold's work, then, rests on a foundational denial of any kind of methodological pluralism or eclecticism. Its hidden premise, I would argue, is that the new neo-Thomist reading of Aquinas is convertible to Catholic theology and church teaching as such, and that attempting to import notions from other sources such as Scotus inevitably creates problems. It is also presumed, from this perspective, that Thomas and his commentators are consistent and that any contradictions found by other readers actually stem from the readers' own errors. This overall method of argument continues in other neo-Thomist thinkers.

Ralph McInerny constitutes the major bridge figure between the "old" neo-Thomism, represented by his mentor, Charles de Koninck, and the new neo-Thomists, all of whom pay tribute to him as an inspiration and bearer of the flame through lean years. His Aristotelian reading of Thomas was consistent, but in his late work *Praeambula Fidei*, part of his Gifford Lectures, he took up a more systematic defense of this reading over and against others. Like Feingold, McInerny is careful to associate his own interpretation with that of Catholic orthodoxy: "This book is a defense of a robust understanding of the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas *and of the Magisterium* on *praembula fidei*."[75] Once again, there is a clear identification posited between the new neo-Thomism and church orthodoxy as such, which would not necessarily be self-evident to most readers of the theological or

[72] Italics in the original, ibid., 322.
[73] Ibid., 339.
[74] Ibid., 352–53.
[75] McInerny, *Praembula Fidei*, ix (my emphasis).

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ecclesial scene in light of de Lubac's work on this issue. When confronted with the fact that some disagree with the need for preambles of faith, McInerny argues thus: "A first thing to say about this is that the Church thinks otherwise. A second thing is that Thomas Aquinas thought otherwise. Unfortunately, these obvious truths were obscured during the second half of the twentieth century." McInerny continues by claiming that he will "rescue the authentic Thomas Aquinas from the allegedly 'real Thomas Aquinas' of those who mocked and attacked the great commentator [Cajetan]."[76]

McInerny singles out for criticism three thinkers, all of whom we have cited previously: Gilson, de Lubac, and Chenu. Gilson, McInerny argues, unfairly attacks Cajetan on every front that he can, particularly with respect to Scotus (whom he defends) and Aristotle (whom he critiques).[77] McInerny's critique of de Lubac runs along the same lines as Feingold's (he cites and praises Feingold's book several times), arguing that "the rejection of an end proportionate to human nature separates de Lubac more decisively from St. Thomas than anything else, doubtless because this rejection is at the basis of his thought."[78] As with Feingold, McInerny's main point is to demonstrate de Lubac's dissonance with Thomas, concluding that "it is de Lubac, not Cajetan, who is out of harmony with the teaching of Thomas Aquinas."[79] Turning to Chenu, McInerny accuses the Dominican of "trashing the tradition in which he stands,"[80] that is, Dominican Thomism, and, noting that he "emerged as a champion of the theology based on the signs of the times, by which he meant that Church teaching must emerge from the experience of the faithful and the events of the world in which they live."[81] McInerny's strongest charge, leveled against Gilson in particular, but applying generally to the reading of Thomas proffered by all three, is that of "proposing that philosophy be swallowed up by theology" and thus claiming that "Thomas's metaphysics is dependent on revelation and faith."[82]

McInerny's constructive project focuses on Aristotle, whose "doctrine pervades the theological writings of Aquinas" and whose thought McInerny argues is more central than the Neoplatonic teachings that he also employs, and which tend to be a focus for Gilsonian Thomists.[83] McInerny goes on to argue that "post-Tridentine Catholic philosophy gave Aristotle

[76] Ibid., 32.
[77] Ibid., 40–41, 52–53.
[78] Ibid., 85.
[79] Ibid., 87.
[80] Ibid., 123.
[81] Ibid., 120.
[82] Ibid., 155.
[83] Ibid., 160.

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pride of place along with St. Thomas," basing this claim particularly on the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* and on the frequent use of the term "Aristotelico-Thomist" in the neo-Thomistic revival of the nineteenth century.[84] McInerny's project, then, is to "reestablish Aristotelico-Thomism as the norm," and proceed, "as Thomas does, on the assumption that Aristotle has adequately set forth the subject matter of metaphysics once and for all."[85] While McInerny of course has the right to argue strongly for his philosophical claims, the question of "the norm" becomes rather fraught, given the history of neo-Thomism as official doctrine and the silencing tactics once used in its name. His tracing of this history back to the Council of Trent is also questionable in light of, for example, John O'Malley's work on the diversity of early modern Catholicism that problematizes attempts to impose later models on the council itself and its immediate aftermath.[86] This tendency to become a totalizing discourse, I will argue, is precisely one of the problems that the new neo-Thomists need to confront in a more forthright manner.

It is worth noting that McInerny was not uncritical of Cajetan, particularly when it came to the issue of analogy.[87] In his book *Aquinas and Analogy*, he strongly critiques Cajetan's interpretation of Aquinas on this issue when he observes a distinction between analogy of attribution and analogy of proportionality that does not exist in Aquinas.[88] The stakes here, McInerny argues, are that Cajetan, with Plato, confuses the orders of knowledge and being, thus "assuming that what is first in our knowing is first in being."[89] This critique demonstrates that the neo-Thomist tradition is not without serious disagreements, including with the great commentators themselves, but it structures these disagreements within a broad framework of what it considers the correct interpretation of Aquinas and the tasks of theology. The same generosity of reading is not typically applied to thinkers outside this tradition.

Steven A. Long builds on Feingold's arguments in his book *Natura Pura*, but he offers a much fuller critique of de Lubac that highlights the larger issues at stake in the neo-Thomist revival. Long's basic argument is that de Lubac and Gilson in particular misread Thomas on obediential potency,

[84] Ibid., 162. McInerny does not further establish the centrality of Aristotle for the period.

[85] McInerny, *Praembula Fidei*, 305.

[86] John W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 140–43.

[87] Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996). McInerny notably points out that "it was, *pace* Gilson, entirely fitting that [Cajetan's] commentary on the *Summa theologiae* should be printed along with that work in the Leonine Edition" (3).

[88] McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy*, 12.

[89] Ibid., 163.

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and that they did so because of a "*diverted attention*"—namely, their preoccupation with modernity's increasing distance from religion.[90] Long's project, then, aims to demonstrate how a neo-Thomist theological anthropology can, in a better way than their own, achieve the sociopolitical ends that de Lubac and Gilson sought—a goal parallel to that of Feingold but with a different emphasis.

What basically concerns Long is, as he titles his chapter, "the loss of nature as theonomic principle"—essentially, the loss of the concept of natural law. Rather than laying any blame at the feet of Catholic theology itself (or at least what he regards as sound Thomistic theology) he argues that modernity has broken down this concept and its overall positing of a connection between what appears in created reality and the divine order of things. Long's goal, then, is to show how arguing the complete opposite of what de Lubac believed in fact better achieves the ends he sought. Long's particular focus on natural law, however, which is not an area of focus for de Lubac, can more likely be attributed to seeking to strengthen the arguments for official Catholic positions on late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century cultural concerns such as abortion and homosexuality.

Long's background as a moral theologian colors most of *Natura Pura*, especially its decisive chapter about de Lubac and Balthasar on nature and grace. Here, he argues that de Lubac's theology of nature and grace ultimately implies an antinomianism with respect to the church's magisterium on faith and morals.[91] As Long explains, this fundamentally means "rejection of all moral objectives and precepts defined by natural ends subordinate to the final end of supernatural beatific vision."[92] For Long, basically, de Lubac's theology of nature and grace inhibits the possibility of a *moral order* that has its basis in natural law and that is ensured by church and civil authorities. While this focus on natural law and natural order may seem like an aside, it is in fact central—he believes that only what he consistently regards as "Classical Thomism" can undergird these ideas.

Arguments like Long's would have hardly seemed alien to de Lubac—they were exactly the kind of things that Garrigou-Lagrange argued in opposition to his theology. Long's basic position, though he attempts to deny this, is a revanchist one—it is something upon which one could build a version of Christendom.[93] This constitutes exactly the kind of position that de Lubac

[90] Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 36.

[91] Ibid., 98.

[92] Ibid., 99.

[93] This position is made most clear by the end of Long's first chapter, where he agrees that the theological situation at the time of de Lubac was less than ideal, but for completely

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himself opposed on the French Catholic Right, and that animated their loyalty to Vichy.[94] If, as Long himself acknowledges, de Lubac's sociopolitical perspective was fundamental to his theology of nature and grace, it is impossible to accept that Long's account remotely does it justice.[95]

Reinhard Hütter, a convert to Catholicism from Lutheranism, has emerged as a prominent member of the neo-Thomistic revival. In a series of essays collected in his book *Dust Bound for Heaven*, Hütter has expressed the priorities of the neo-Thomistic resurgence in a way that adds to those already dealt with here. Hütter works under the presupposition of Thomas as the Common Doctor of the church, a title he assumes but laments is not properly understood by Catholics today.[96] In analyzing this title, he startlingly quotes John Senior, without acknowledging any hyperbole, that popes have taught "as an infallible teaching of the Ordinary Magisterium, the *Summa Theologiae* is the norm and measure of all Catholic theology before and since. Catholics must believe Thomas Aquinas to be the Common Doctor of the Church with the same degree of certainty that he is a saint."[97] Once again, Hütter positions this quote, with its overly capacious reading of the place of Thomas Aquinas in Catholic theology, not as an extreme expression but rather as a kind of proof that Thomas ought to be accorded this place.

Among the many topics Hütter deals with is that of nature and grace; here he relies heavily upon Feingold's work. Praising Feingold's method, he notes that "theology for many a contemporary Catholic theologian can only be conceived as defensible and intelligible in a thoroughly historical-contextualist and constructivist mode," whereas Feingold relies on "propositional discourse as informed by metaphysical realism and discursive, conceptual

different reasons than those enunciated by de Lubac himself. Long goes on to argue that his goal is to see that "the shards of right reason are reunited within a rich and realistic metaphysic translucent to the further ordering of grace and revelation, and at the service of *sacra doctrina*" (Long, *Natura Pura*, 51).

[94] De Lubac deals with these issues in a series of essays written during World War II: "Internal Causes of the Weakening and Disappearance of the Sense of the Sacred," in *Theology in History*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 223–40; "Christian Explanation of Our Times," ibid., 440–56; and "Spiritual Warfare," ibid., 488–501.

[95] It is worth noting here that Kathryn Tanner in *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 124, critiques the whole Catholic tradition on nature and grace, including de Lubac, for using terms such as "natural," precisely because this tends to support a natural-law framework. Effectively, Tanner critiques de Lubac for supporting exactly what Long thinks his work cannot support.

[96] Reinhard Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 2–3.

[97] John Senior, *The Restoration of Christian Culture* (1983; Norfolk, VA: IHS Press, 2008), quoted in Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven*, 6.

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argumentation."[98] Notably, Hütter does not cite any of the theologians whom he criticizes, and further praises Feingold for the fact that "he advances his enquiry and argument as if none of the above"—that is, both newer theological methods as well as new modes of Thomism—"had ever happened."[99] He continues this argument by claiming that "Feingold refuses to engage de Lubac in the discursive mode by way of which the latter chose to critique the commentators, that is, by way of a primarily historical exegesis of theological language."[100] Hütter thus defends and champions a neo-Thomist refusal to engage with contemporary theological method as a sign of a theological and methodological orthodoxy. It is perhaps for this reason that he refuses to even cite by name many of the contemporary theologians included in this sweeping critique.

In another place, Hütter argues that Catholic theology must become "intrinsically ordered to and informed by the supernatural dynamic and content of theological faith," and that neo-Thomism (to which he refers simply as "Thomism") "is in an advantageous position to make a salient contribution to such a contemporary renewal of Catholic theology."[101] This is necessary because, as Hütter argues elsewhere in the volume, "typically theologians in the modern research university want to be nothing but excellent philologists, linguists, historians, archeologists, and philosophers," rather than practitioners of *sacra doctrina*.[102]

From this analysis, some commonalities can be drawn between the various proponents of the new neo-Thomism discussed above.[103] First, their embrace of neo-Thomism is largely void of revisionism or engagement with the theological approaches that have arisen since Vatican II. Rather, as Hütter says in praise of Feingold, they write as if none of these ever happened, and such an approach is common among the various thinkers I have discussed. The superiority of neo-Thomism to other theological schools is thus presumed rather than argued; the only other schools dealt with are competing versions of Thomism. Indeed, entire swaths of Catholic theological inquiry are often ignored or dismissed without being seriously engaged.

The relationship between nature and grace and the impossibility of a plurality of theological methods are linked as the key ideas supporting

[98] Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven,* 137.

[99] Ibid., 138.

[100] Ibid., 140.

[101] Ibid., 316.

[102] Ibid., 405.

[103] It is worth mentioning also some recent entries into the field by younger scholars such as Andrew Dean Swafford, *Nature and Grace* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014) and Adam G. Cooper, *Naturally Human, Supernaturally God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

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neo-Thomism as it currently exists. De Lubac's theology of nature and grace, grounded as it was in a historical reading of the sources, simultaneously demanded a new method of doing theology. This methodology, while classical in form, was also concerned with contemporary problems, and as such it gave rise to other methods of political and contextual theology, some of which de Lubac himself did not esteem highly.[104] What arose in any case was a form of methodological pluralism, in which different approaches could be taken to expositing Catholic theology to deal with modern problems.

Since *Aeterni Patris* at least, neo-Thomism has had trouble functioning as a method among methods. Part of the reason for its sudden collapse after Vatican II certainly had to do with the lack of an available apologetic beyond that of authority. Such an apologetic is of course possible, and the new neo-Thomists have engaged in it more effectively, but there is still a tendency toward an association of this methodology with authority, and to associate church authority, whether in the forms of recent popes or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, with it whether this is warranted or not.[105] Connected to this lack of revisionism is a strong belief in neo-Thomism as a sign and safeguard of Catholic orthodoxy. It is clear especially for Hütter and Long that moving away from the neo-Thomistic method has resulted in unorthodoxy and incoherence in Catholic theology, and that a return to it will bring order. Thus, rather than a school among schools, neo-Thomism is considered to be *the* school of thought that guarantees Catholic orthodoxy in doctrine and morals.

## III. Neo-Thomism, Methodological Pluralism, and Theology Today

### *Critiques of Contemporary Theological Method*

In a 2007 article entitled "Theology after the Revolution," R. R. Reno reflected, through a review of Fergus Kerr's *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, on the collateral damage to theological coherence that was a side effect of the work of the "heroic generation"—the group of theologians responsible for the renewal of Catholic theology in and around Vatican II,

[104] De Lubac's work following the *Communio/Concilium* split took a more "conservative" turn, critical of what he took to be the excesses of other thinkers such as Schillebeeckx. De Lubac expresses these ideas most fully in his essay "The Council and the Para-Council," in *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Brother Richard Arnandez, FSC (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 235–60.

[105] Cajetan Cuddy, OP, and Romanus Cessario do precisely this in a *Nova et Vetera* article on John Paul II and neo-Thomism, "Witness to Faith: George Weigel, Blessed John Paul II, and the Theological Life," *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 10, no. 1 (2012): 1–13.

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such as Chenu, Congar, de Lubac, Rahner, Balthasar, and Ratzinger—fighting and ultimately discrediting the system theology represented by neo-Thomism.[106] Reno, whose own scholarly background reflects both an interest in Rahner and a postliberal unease with the way his work has been interpreted in American Catholic theology by and large, puts forth an argument representative of conservative American Catholics who affirm Vatican II and praise many of the above-mentioned theologians, who contributed to the council itself or whose work is unimaginable without it, but who are troubled by the lack of certainty and solicitude toward the doctrinal magisterium of the church in the present-day theological academy that this revolution engendered. Reno, though not himself a neo-Thomist methodologically, offers in this piece a kind of constitution for this new movement just as readily as Chenu once did for another movement in *Le Saulchoir* or de Lubac in *Catholicism*.

Reno's article articulates the intellectual outline of an alliance between postliberals and new neo-Thomists that I would argue has influenced the relationship between the Catholic church hierarchy and theologians. Essentially, the postliberal impatience with the kinds of discourse characterized by the more "liberal" Catholic academy opens up a space for a neo-Thomist approach to offer clear answers that do not challenge church teachings or deal directly with postmodern questions. The investigation of Elizabeth Johnson's *Quest for the Living God* by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Doctrine in 2011, as well as further comments made by some of the committee's key figures, namely, Donald Cardinal Wuerl and Reverend Thomas Weinandy, OFM, illustrate this point quite effectively. The outlines of this case will be well known to readers of *Horizons*, and so I will only summarize them briefly for the purpose of illustrating this overall point.

The USCCB Committee on Doctrine launched its critique of Johnson's *Quest for the Living God* on the grounds that it "contains misrepresentations, ambiguities, and errors, that bear upon the faith of the Catholic Church as found in Sacred Scripture, and as it is authentically taught by the Church's universal magisterium," and contended further that in the area of method, "the book rests upon a false presupposition, an error that undermines the very nature of its study and so skews many of its arguments."[107] This sweeping

[106] R. R. Reno, "Theology after the Revolution," *First Things* 173 (May 2007): 14–21.

[107] USCCB Committee on Doctrine, "Statement on *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, by Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson," in *When the Magisterium Intervenes*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 183–200, at 183.

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critique on the ground of method suggests a kind of unarticulated hierarchy of methods in Catholic theology. In contrast to the supposed errors of Johnson, the Committee on Doctrine argues that theologians who examine the mystery of God ought to "do so from within the very heart of the Church's faith."[108] It is notable that for this document, the primary places cited as defining this faith and method are papal encyclicals, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas. This method is articulated further when the document charges that "*Quest for the Living God* contaminates the traditional Catholic understanding of God, which arises from both revelation and reason and which has been articulated by the Fathers and the Scholastics, especially Thomas Aquinas," by seeming to associate it with Enlightenment deism.[109] The charge as such is less important for the purposes of this study than the presupposition of a unitary and unsurpassable tradition and method. This charge is summed up at the end of the document with the conclusion that "the book does not take the faith as the Church as its starting point."[110]

The methodology behind this critique is revealed further in a document entitled "Bishops as Teachers" by Donald Cardinal Wuerl, then head of the Committee on Doctrine. In this document, in the course of setting the stage for a defense of the committee's approach to the Johnson case, Wuerl argues that theological inquiry must let "its creativity be channeled and maximized by boundaries defined by the received revelation."[111] This is fair as far as it goes, as is Wuerl's subsequent emphasis on the role of bishops as referees, but it betrays a maximalist account of what constitutes "received revelation" and concomitantly a minimalist view of what is open for debate.[112] The issue of divine suffering or lack thereof, which figures centrally in this discussion, has not been without interest for new neo-Thomists, but the more important issue for this study is that of methodological pluralism.[113]

The main theological figure involved in the Johnson case, Thomas Weinandy, is not a new neo-Thomist himself by theological background, being rooted more in patristic theology—precisely what was emphasized by

[108] Ibid., 184.

[109] Ibid., 187.

[110] Ibid., 199.

[111] Donald Cardinal Wuerl, "Bishops as Teachers," in Gaillardetz, *When the Magisterium Intervenes*, 205.

[112] Ibid., 206–7.

[113] For neo-Thomist and other sympathetic perspectives on divine suffering, see James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, OP, *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), a volume of conference papers, including one by Thomas Weinandy.

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those such as de Lubac who overthrew neo-Thomism as the dominant intellectual system within Catholicism. What the Johnson case evinces is the clearest recent instance of a challenge to the methodological pluralism that has flourished in Catholic academic theology since Vatican II, and a challenge to one of its more moderate exponents.[114] It is a challenge that comes, in a sense, out of that very pluralism, out of the aforementioned alliance between new neo-Thomist and postliberal (or *Communio*) Catholic theologians in opposition to other schools of thought. It is to this alliance and its own laudable methodological pluralism, and the limits thereof, that I now turn.

*Nova et Vetera* has been a central periodical for the neo-Thomist revival, with many of the authors mentioned above having appeared in its pages. Much of the work cited above by Hütter originally appeared there, for example. These same pages have also offered vigorous debate about a number of theological issues within the framework of schools of thought that position themselves as orthodox or faithful to the magisterium. I would like to focus particularly on the issue of method, analyzing several articles by diverse authors that nevertheless illustrate an overall approach.

*Nova et Vetera* notably published a sixty-page critique of Elizabeth Johnson's theological method in *Quest for the Living God* in the wake of the USCCB investigation of the work.[115] This article by John McDermott deserves a brief analysis as part of this discussion of method, particularly inasmuch as it links some new neo-Thomist concerns to the broader ecclesial issues at hand. McDermott argues that the main problem in Johnson's method has to do with "the natural-supernatural-relation and analogy."[116] On the former, McDermott faults Johnson for assuming Rahner's position on nature and grace rather than rebuilding it metaphysically from the ground up.[117] McDermott's critique is more totalizing than that of the bishops, particularly on method, arguing that the "amorphous post-modern philosophy underlying Johnson's theology renders dialogue impossible, since it acknowledges no objective standards of judgment."[118] For McDermott, then, as for the new neo-Thomism, there is a clear connection between nature and grace on the one hand, and theological method on the other. It is to these issues, and to

[114] Johnson's classic work *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) is structured precisely as a kind of Thomistic argument.

[115] John J. McDermott, SJ, "Elizabeth Johnson on Revelation: Faith, Theology, Analogy, and God's Fatherhood," *Nova et Vetera* 10, no. 4 (2012): 923–83.

[116] Ibid., 924.

[117] Ibid., 976.

[118] Ibid., 982.

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some other thinkers who shed light on the neo-Thomist approach to them, that I now turn.

The summer 2011 issue of *Nova et Vetera* demonstrates a kind of indirect debate on theological method between Christopher Malloy, a defender of neo-Thomism, and the late Edward Oakes, a scholar of Balthasar and *Ressourcement* who was not a neo-Thomist but was sympathetically conversant with the movement. Oakes sets out to defend de Lubac, first by distinguishing in his work on nature and grace a historical component, that is, recovering what was taught by Aquinas, and a theological one, arguing against the thesis of pure nature.[119] In analyzing the critiques of de Lubac discussed above, Oakes notes that though the charges against him might seem sweeping, "if de Lubac is wrong, then his error must be as sweeping as were his attacks" against the neo-Thomist position.[120] Oakes critiques Feingold's interpretation of de Lubac by singling out particularly his emphasis on limbo, concluding that "any theology of nature and grace that entails the necessary conclusion that the *limbus infantium* actually exists, will have undermined its case irreparably."[121] Oakes interestingly attempts to draw together de Lubac and his critiques by noting that scholarship on de Lubac "largely ignores his criticism of liberal Catholicism in the wake of Vatican II."[122] From this point of view, Oakes argues, de Lubac and his critics can be read as pursuing similar goals, particularly in upholding the natural law per Long's concerns.[123]

In the same issue, Christopher Malloy begins an analysis of de Lubac on natural desire by assuming the idea of pure nature.[124] Malloy describes de Lubac as a disciple of Pascal, as he "unwittingly conjures up this specter of a naturally miserable man," without the gift of grace.[125] In this context, Malloy argues that de Lubac's attempts to escape this quandary are insufficient, and the only way to avoid it is ultimately through the idea of pure nature. Malloy thus contradicts Oakes on this issue while taking a path parallel to that of Feingold. One can argue that these articles perform a kind of methodological and substantive pluralism by debating a central issue within theology. It is unfortunate, however, that this pluralism and respect

[119] Edward T. Oakes, SJ, "The *Surnaturel* Controversy: A Survey and a Response," *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 9, no. 3 (2011): 629.
[120] Ibid., 635.
[121] Ibid., 643.
[122] Ibid., 649.
[123] Ibid., 652.
[124] Christopher Malloy, "De Lubac on Nature Desire: Difficulties and Antitheses," *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 9, no. 3 (2011): 567.
[125] Ibid., 591.

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are mainly extended to a deceased and hierarchically approved theologian such as de Lubac, as opposed to the totalizing critique of Johnson discussed earlier.

Guy Mansini, OSB, demonstrates the alliance between neo-Thomists and postliberals quite effectively in his article "Experiential Expressivism and Two Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians," analyzing Rahner and Lonergan.[126] This "experiential expressivist" category is derived from George Lindbeck's classic *The Nature of Doctrine,* arguably the key text of postliberal theology.[127] Mansini does so by way of arguing with Fergus Kerr in *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* and concluding that Rahner "leads us back, not just to an expressivist view of doctrine wherein religious experience is privileged as the locus of revelation, but also to a sort of non-cognitivism that was the most unbearable part of the Liberal Protestant Catholic Modernist views of dogma."[128] Mansini also critiques what he calls "an imperialist streak in Rahner," and further critiques the idea that contemporary experience matters to theology.[129] Mansini, then, continues the totalizing critique of contemporary theological methods (with many later contextual theologies deriving in part from Rahner) while framing it in postliberal terms.

What these discussions model, then, is a healthy debate about methodological pluralism between two reasonably sympathetic schools of thought. What I would like to argue for is an expansion of these debates beyond the scope of the divides or impasses in which they tend to be situated. Thomas Joseph White, OP, may be correct, though not for the reasons he gives, when he argues that "many of the influential theologies of the postconciliar period *are not* today in any position to attempt to replace Thomism as normative guide to modern Catholic intellectual life," echoing the critiques by Reno discussed above and singling out the limits of Rahner's anthropology in the face of postmodernity.[130] Putting aside the contestable claims of whether most postconciliar theology tried to do these things in quite the way that neo-Thomism did and sometimes does, it is notable that White argues that Thomism is not "the solution to all life's intellectual problems," but rather "one of the only plausible contenders left that offers an authentic vision of the sapiential unity of human knowledge amidst the diversity of university

[126] Guy Mansini, OSB, "Experiential Expressivism and Two Theologians," *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 8, no. 1 (2010): 125–41.

[127] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1984).

[128] Mansini, "Experiential Expressivism," 140–41.

[129] Ibid., 141.

[130] White, "Thomism after Vatican II," 1055.

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disciplines."[131] While White's claim can and ought to be contested (as indeed I have been doing here and will do in the following section), he is more open, at least in theory, to the insights of other methods than past generations of neo-Thomists.

White makes some of these claims more explicit in his article "The Tridentine Genius of Vatican II," in which he claims that "the Catholic progressivist left has taken up in its own way the hermeneutical presupposition of Nietzsche: this is the implicit understanding of an interpretation of Christian teaching that centers above all upon the power of authority."[132] He supports this claim that liberal Catholicism is equivalent to nihilism in that this trajectory, "because of its hermeneutical stance toward the tradition of the Catholic Church, is unable in the end to sustain a coherent claim that there is meaning in the world."[133] White proposes as an alternative to this Nietzschean approach that of Newman, whose ideas support a "hermeneutic of continuity" in that "there is a common dynamic development of the inner life of the Church in the world, a mysterious life spanning across ages, growing in a consistent fashion."[134] The relative generosity with which White regards postliberalism thus does not extend to other theological methods, particularly those of a "liberal" stripe.

White's article repeats and expands the totalizing critique of methodological pluralism described above, but in doing so it oversimplifies the *Communio/Concilium* divide by focusing on Küng and Schillebeeckx, on the one hand, and Balthasar and Ratzinger, on the other, as the central figures of these past decades in theology. Focusing on these thinkers who pushed the boundaries of the new methodological pluralism (Hans Küng and to a lesser extent Edward Schillebeeckx) or sought to referee those boundaries (Ratzinger), White obscures the origins of this pluralism in thinkers such as Rahner, de Lubac, and Congar at the time of Vatican II itself. His reduction of liberal Catholic theology to a struggle for power also notably downplays the extent to which more "conservative" theologians have exercised power without theorizing it as such.[135] Within the confines of White's

[131] Ibid., 1056.

[132] White, "The Tridentine Genius of Vatican II," 10.

[133] Ibid., 11.

[134] Ibid., 12.

[135] Gerald O'Collins, hardly a liberal in the mold that White critiques, writes in an excerpt from his biography (*National Catholic Reporter,* February 22, 2014, http://ncronline.org/news/people/look-back-dupuis-skirmish-vatican) about the treatment of Jacques Dupuis by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, particularly changes that were made to the text of the Notification after its signature by Dupuis. Eric Genilo's description of John Ford, SJ, and the run-up to *Humanae Vitae* in *John Cuthbert Ford,*

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argument, my advocacy for methodological pluralism may seem to repeat the liberal reduction of theology to power, but I would argue that such pluralism assists in an honest search for precisely what Thomas Aquinas, Cajetan, de Lubac, and many others have sought—namely, truth.

It is clear that some new neo-Thomists have shown a willingness to entertain some theological arguments that arise from outside their own methodological boundaries, particularly if these come from a certain kind of postliberal or *Communio* approach. I would like to argue, in dialogue with White's article discussed above, for a greater plurality of dialogue partners. An easy rejoinder to the analysis I have made here would be that I am associating various methodologies found within more "conservative" intellectual trajectories of Catholic theology in order to dismiss them, but that is not my intent here. Rather, I am concerned to demonstrate what I think has been the coalescence of differing schools of thought around shared affirmations and goals, and to invite them into a broader conversation. I also question whether the totalizing rhetoric of much of the neo-Thomistic approach is intrinsic to the school of thought, or whether it has become an unfortunate defensive device. I would hope that it is the latter.

### *Assessing the New Neo-Thomism*

Simultaneously with the neo-Thomist revival in theology, then, there has been a revival of argumentation and intellectual interests very similar to those put forward by this school of thought in the pronouncements and disciplinary actions of the US bishops. Such actions only fuel suspicion that the New Evangelization promoted by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, rather than a response to the sign of the times, could be carried out by some bishops more as a revival of a kind of propositionalist orthodoxy in contemporary terms. These simultaneous developments point to some of the problems with the kind of discourse that the neo-Thomists are seeking to reinstantiate, which I will attempt to enumerate here.

The first problem with the neo-Thomistic revival is that it relies on a particular reading of history in which neo-Thomism has always been the most reliably orthodox method of doing Catholic theology, which resultingly gives its arguments a privileged claim on truth. Rather than being the inheritors of a nineteenth-century movement, the neo-Thomists, particularly those who emphasize the Dominican aspects of this tradition, portray themselves as

*SJ: Moral Theologian at the End of the Manualist Era* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007) also reveals some of the power dynamics at work. Without reducing the workings of theology and ecclesiastical decision-making to power, it is fair to observe that power dynamics are at work on all sides of such issues.

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the heirs and true interpreters of the great thirteenth-century theologian. There is also a clear rhetorical attempt to position the neo-Thomistic movement as receiving a mandate from the Council of Trent, one that belies the diversity of the period surrounding the council and attempts to read Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* back into the praise of Thomas Aquinas several hundred years earlier. The broader historical narrative undercuts neo-Thomist claims to exceptionalism and reduces such claims to arguments from authority based on papal pronouncements.

This historical narrative becomes most problematic in the case of Thomas Aquinas himself. The neo-Thomist reading of Aquinas prioritizes Thomas' reading of Aristotle while at the same time downplaying the controversial character of this appropriation, as exemplified by the posthumous condemnation by Bishop Stephen Tempier of thirty-one of his opinions.[136] Neo-Thomists thus praise and appropriate the works and legacy of Thomas as such, rather than his example of engagement with the best intellectual currents of his time, with all the risks this entailed.[137]

The second problem with the neo-Thomistic revival and its methods is the further reliance on arguments from authority, and presupposition of a right to be at the center of Catholic theology and church authority. This leads to two other problems. The first is a hermeneutical one. It is presumed that when popes or other church documents pronounce on important theological topics, they are doing so in a way that is in keeping with neo-Thomist orthodoxy. This often leads to contorted readings of documents, especially of works by Benedict XVI (very much in the Augustinian-Bonaventurean tradition) and of John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (which operates in a mode very different from neo-Thomism).[138] The further problem, involving the use of authority, is that neo-Thomists, by virtue of *Aeterni Patris*, justify their theological methods by reference to papal pronouncements about Thomas Aquinas or theological method. This problem is summed up by Ulrich G. Leinsle when he argues that for the new neo-Thomists, "the philosophy that agrees with the Magisterium, being the 'perennial philosophy' ('*philosophia perennis*'), becomes the ahistorical norm of philosophy and the only permissible auxiliary of theology."[139] Gerald O'Collins has referred to this tendency as the "regressive method," since it "began with whatever was the

[136] Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 49.

[137] See Karl Rahner, "On Recognizing the Importance of Thomas Aquinas," in *Theological Investigations XIII,* trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 3–12.

[138] Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.

[139] Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*, 359.

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present teaching of the pope and bishops," and thus theologians "read the sources only in the light of what was currently taught and believed."[140]

The third problem with this revival is its reliance upon the neo-Thomistic distinction between philosophy and theology in order to manifest a distaste for almost all contemporary theologies and sometimes, it would seem, for theology itself. On the one hand, some of this is historical and coincidental—after Vatican II, the new neo-Thomistic discourse was more at home in philosophy departments where the Anglo-American logical method of philosophizing resembles neo-Thomism in its respect for an ahistorical approach. This approach can be seen in the works of John Wippel, who has demonstrated sympathy for the neo-Thomist movement.[141] It would also seem that neo-Thomists were unable to make the case for their theological methods except by the insistence of church authorities, and once church authorities at Vatican II moved beyond this method, its reason for existence in theology ceased to have a purpose.

On the other hand, though, some of the new neo-Thomistic resistance to contemporary theology often appears rooted in a constructive proposal that the purpose of theology is to reaffirm and explain the orthodoxy of the church, and that this has already been accomplished in the most exemplary way possible by Thomas Aquinas and the neo-Thomist school. This vision, I would argue, truncates the Anselmian definition of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* by delimiting the seeking to what has already been found. This tendency results in an overreliance on the *Catechism* and on teachings issued by popes and other church authorities, particularly recent ones, as the mark of orthodoxy. Such an approach misunderstands the purpose of a catechism and also presumes an agreement of recent popes (particularly John Paul II and Benedict XVI) with neo-Thomism because of their being popes (and thus arbiters of orthodoxy).

The neo-Thomist equation of their approach with orthodoxy, and the ensuing refusal of methodological pluralism, are the most serious problems that this resurgence poses to theology today. The biggest problem that Yves Congar, Joseph Ratzinger, and others at the time of Vatican II had with the neo-Thomist approach was not the arguments themselves, questionable though they may be. Rather, the problem for these theologians was the reliance upon imposition by church authority and the presumption that the neo-Thomistic system of thought was the standard-bearer of Catholic orthodoxy.

[140] Gerald O'Collins, "*Ressourcement* and Vatican II," in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology,* ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 372–91, at 375.

[141] John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).

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Without such an acknowledgment of methodological pluralism, it is hard for the neo-Thomistic approach to be part of a healthy and sustained debate with other theological schools.

The ultimate question would appear to be whether the question of nature and grace, which has underlain so much of the debates about method described above, can be detached from these methodological considerations. For de Lubac and his neo-Thomist opponents, these issues were inseparable, and this position has been echoed in the neo-Thomists described above. At the same time, the position of de Lubac has increasingly been incorporated into magisterial teaching since Vatican II, making the pairing of the neo-Thomist position on grace with church orthodoxy appear increasingly dissonant. It would seem practical in this context for neo-Thomists to make peace with this situation and, as before *Aeterni Patris,* once again to function as a school among schools within theology.

## Conclusion: Opportunities and Dangers

The neo-Thomistic revival, as outlined above, certainly presents some challenges to contemporary theologians, while also offering opportunities for dialogue as well as an affirmation of contemporary theological methods. Christopher Ruddy has argued that the understandable rejection of neo-Thomism has unfortunately created "a new breach within the church's history and theology: that between pre- and post-Vatican II Catholicism," and thus has dismissed centuries' worth of intellectual effort in the process.[142] Ruddy argues, as have I, that post-Tridentine Catholic theology was multifaceted and vibrant, critiquing overly sweeping characterizations of the period.[143] After focusing on the value of post-Tridentine ecclesiology and its influence on Vatican II, Ruddy argues for three aspects of post-Tridentine theology that ought to be recovered and appreciated: method, pastoral concern, and reasoned engagement.[144] In terms of method, Ruddy focuses, in critical dialogue with R. R. Reno's article mentioned earlier, on the need for a common language. In terms of a pastoral approach, he emphasizes the ideas of clarity and definition that can help "to form the theologically educated laity needed to meet the challenges of contemporary life." Finally, regarding reasoned engagement, Ruddy emphasizes that post-Tridentine

[142] Christopher Ruddy, "*Ressourcement* and the Enduring Legacy of Post-Tridentine Theology," in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 185–204, at 187.

[143] Ibid., 191.

[144] Ibid., 199.

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theology "can show that honest, forthright engagement of differences need not be divisive or unecumenical, but rather a condition for dialogue."[145]

While legitimate questions can be raised about some of Ruddy's assertions, what cannot be denied is that his article models a spirit of dialogue between theological methods. Ruddy does so as an expert on the ecclesiology of the *Ressourcement*, but in a way open to the insights of other schools of thought. It is precisely this openness, I think, that the neo-Thomists too often fail to embrace, whether by not reading their opponents or otherwise not taking them seriously (e.g., not citing or even naming them). The presumption of authority as a kind of birthright hinders neo-Thomism and prevents it from finding dialogue partners within the theological academy beyond the postliberal approach described above. Even if neo-Thomism makes further gains in influence among church authorities, it cannot regain credibility as an intellectual system without engaging opposing views and methods sympathetically. This does not mean accepting all the terms of such methods or taking a purely hermeneutical approach, but rather acknowledging legitimate diversity in a more capacious manner.

Given this situation, members of the theological academy ought to view the neo-Thomistic revival with interest and, at the same time, with a degree of vigilance inasmuch as its members engage in certain kinds of rhetoric. On an intellectual level, the neo-Thomistic emphasis on the greatness of Thomas Aquinas and the validity of reading him through the commentary tradition should not need the backing of church authority in order to be convincingly argued. While some theologians would not find these arguments persuasive, this methodology would certainly deserve a seat at the table as a school of thought with deep roots in the Catholic tradition and with an admirable philosophical rigor. Yet the neo-Thomists continue to use rhetoric that argues for their school over and against all other schools by virtue of its commendation by past church authorities in a way that cannot be deemed anything other than deeply problematic. It would do well for them, in seeking a way forward, to heed the words of John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*, a document to which they frequently advert for its praise of Thomas: "The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others" (FR §49) and "No historical form of philosophy can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth" (FR §51).

[145] Ibid., 200.

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