



## Development(s) in the Theology of Revelation: From Francisco Marin-Sola to Joseph Ratzinger

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### Abstract

The twentieth century has seen a dramatic shift even within Catholic theology when it comes to how the Church understands divine revelation and her own historical reception of it. The Second Vatican Council was a pivotal point in which contrasting views of doctrinal truth seemed to meet head-to-head. But while it might seem that the now popular understanding of revelation as an event, rather than a set of propositions, represents a victory for modernism, there is no contradiction between this personalistic paradigm and the propositional, which reigned in the neo-scholastic era. Rather, there are points of contact between the traditional Thomistic approach of an early-twentieth century Dominican theologian, Francisco Marin-Sola, and the understanding of revelation, particularly, the nature of doctrinal truth, that has risen to prominence thanks to the so-called *nouvelle theologie*. It is especially evident in the work of Yves Congar and Joseph Ratzinger that it is possible to reconcile the Tubingen approach to reality, which inspired the new school, and the (Augustinian-)Thomistic insistence on the immutability of truth.

### Keywords

Marin-Sola, Congar, Ratzinger, tradition, revelation, doctrinal development, *nouvelle theologie*, thomism

The theology of revelation is a field of theology that encompasses many particular questions. It would be futile to attempt a broad survey of all the recent developments in this field. I wish only to address precisely the question of development itself in the theology of revelation, as it has been treated by a few key figures in the twentieth century. In other words, I want to address the following question: given the rise in consciousness concerning the fact of real developments in ecclesial doctrine and the increasingly complex

discourse that seeks to understand the patterns of such development, how is it still possible to believe in the immutability of dogma (or is it)? To what degree does the contingent reality of development (or evolution) undermine the age-old view that Christian revelation conveys truths that are eternal and unchangeable (or does it)? With Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman's monumental work, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, remaining in the background (as it belongs to the nineteenth century), I will quickly move from the early twentieth-century Thomist conceptions of doctrinal development through some of the pertinent reflections of two pivotal theologians at the Second Vatican Council. But my goal is not so much to summarize the contributions of these thinkers as to think through the issue at hand by critically and progressively engaging their respective proposals. I will argue that there is essentially no contradiction between the neo-scholastic "propositional" and "*nouvelle theologie*" approaches to divine revelation, particularly, when it comes to grappling with the reality of doctrinal development, even though there is certainly a difference of emphasis.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the transition from one mindset to the next needs justification.

### *Historical Context: Modernism and the Reactions*

As what might be called the 'evolution revolution' infiltrated both Protestant and Catholic theology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a movement known as the 'modernist crisis,' the initial reaction within both circles may be characterized as a shift toward fundamentalism.<sup>2</sup> 'Fundamentalism' was originally a brand of Protestant thought reacting to increasingly liberal tendencies among Protestant Christian scholars, and it is probably most known for its naïve defense of 'creationism' in opposition to 'evolutionism.' Today, both Protestants and Catholics are often divided up disingenuously either into the fundamentalist/conservative camp or the modernist/liberal camp, where the former resists all change and the latter favors "progress" at almost any cost. The label 'fundamentalist' is also often attached to the philosophical approach to theology of the Baroque period that continued through the neo-scholastic

<sup>1</sup> For a concise treatment of the origin and the spirit of this so-called "new theology," particularly, with regard to one's general approach to tradition as revelation, see Marcellino D'Ambrosio, "Ressourcement theology, *aggiornamento*, and the hermeneutics of tradition," *Communio* 18 (Winter 1991).

<sup>2</sup> For the Catholic reaction, see, for example, the "Ten Roman Propositions of 1938" that Marie-Dominique Chenu was compelled by Rome to sign after circulating a manuscript which became his *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*. See also the following Papal Encyclicals: Pope Pius X, *Lamentabili Sane*; Pope Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*; Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*.

revivals.<sup>3</sup> Many Catholics today have inherited the simplistic view that the Second Vatican Council decided wholesale against this so-called fundamentalism, which held to the immutability of ecclesial doctrine, and in favor of a ‘new theology’ in which hope spurs us on to new and better things. What was termed *la nouvelle theologie* by “conservative” opponents of such change, leading up to the Council, won the day and a new era of Christian unity and world peace were prophesied. Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI have been seen by proponents of this view as setbacks and obstacles to the implementation of Vatican II. Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Hans Kung saw their heyday and for those in the know, the *Concilium* school of the *nouvelle theologie* had triumphed early over the *Communio* school, which included Henri de Lubac, Joseph Ratzinger, and Hans Urs von Balthasar.<sup>4</sup> Both of these groups of theologians cooperated to forge common formulations at the Council, but the latter group will later charge that the former hijacked the Council.<sup>5</sup> John Paul II and Benedict XVI each aided the *Communio* school in their own ways and detracted from the *Concilium* school, bringing the former into its current state of prominence. Meanwhile, so-called traditionalists sat on the sidelines, some acting as if the gates of hell had prevailed against the

<sup>3</sup> The last scholastic revival is considered to have followed Leo XIII’s praise of Thomas Aquinas and his commentators in his Encyclical Letter, *Aeterni Patris*.

<sup>4</sup> Soon after he was made Pope, Benedict XVI (now Emeritus) approached the interpretation of the Council that accompanied its implementation not in terms of the rival academic journals, as I am here, but in terms of reform and continuity versus rupture and discontinuity, which is perhaps a more adequate division of the ensuing hermeneutics since it may be argued that a couple thinkers associated with each school did not follow the mainstream trend operative in their respective groups. In his Christmas address to the Roman Curia in 2005, Pope Benedict opposes a hermeneutic of reform to the hermeneutic of discontinuity, harkening back to Yves Congar’s monumental work, *Vraie et fausse reforme dans l’Eglise*, which purportedly inspired John XXIII to call the Second Vatican Council: “The problem in [the Second Vatican Council’s] implementation arose from the fact that two contrary hermeneutics came face to face and quarreled with each other. One caused confusion, the other, silently but more and more visibly, bore and is bearing fruit. On the one hand, there is an interpretation that I would call ‘a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture’ . . . On the other, there is the ‘hermeneutic of reform’, of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given us. She is the subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God.” Again, “the hermeneutic of discontinuity is countered by the hermeneutic of reform, as it was presented first by Pope John XXIII in his Speech inaugurating the Council on 11 October 1962 and later by Pope Paul VI in his Discourse for the Council’s conclusion on 7 December 1965” (“Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings,” Thursday, 22 December 2005, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html) [accessed 10/18/14]).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Schließung der Bastionen: Von der Kirche in Dieser Zeit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1952); ET, *Razing the Bastions*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

Church at last and others just waiting for what they thought to be the latest fads to pass away. Schismatic groups arose in reaction to what was perceived to be real changes in the Church's perennial teaching, having accepted the progressivist mantra that the Church had simply adopted the "modernist errors" it had previously condemned.

Nevertheless, anyone who reads the documents without an iso-getical intention to oppose the letter and the spirit of the Council, a hermeneutic that ends up privileging a spirit devoid of literal content, recognizes that the Church did not simply adopt evolutionism or modernism and squash the scholastic proclivity to objectivism – no, the Church makes a much more subtle move than that. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance, O.P., is commonly held up by traditionalists as the champion among Thomists defending what many thought to be peculiarly Catholic, that is, the unchanging character of Christian doctrine.<sup>6</sup> In the twenty years leading up to the Council, the conclusion of which he did not live to see, his prime target was, in fact, the *nouvelle théologie*, above all, precisely on the point of its apparent denial of the immutability of dogma.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Réginald Garrigou-Lagrance, O.P., "La Nouvelle Théologie, où va-t-elle?," *Angelicum* 23 (1946), pp. 126-145; "Vérité et immutabilité du dogme," *Angelicum* 24 (1947), pp. 124-139; "Les notions consacrées par les Conciles," *Angelicum* 24 (1947), pp. 217-230; "L'immutabilité des vérités divines et le surnaturel," *Angelicum* 25 (1948), pp. 285-298; "Le relativisme et l'immutabilité du dogme," *Angelicum* 27 (1950), pp. 219-246. Concerning his greatness, see Richard Peddicord, *Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance, OP* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Concerned with defending the proper notion of truth according to metaphysical realism, Garrigou opens the first aforementioned article ("La Nouvelle," p. 23) with a key text from Bouillard's *Conversion et grâce* on truth and proceeds to attack the relativistic implications he sees with Aristotelian rigor. Bouillard states: "Quand l'esprit évolue, une vérité immuable ne se maintient que grâce à une évolution simultanée et corrélative de toutes les notions, maintenant entre elles un même rapport. Une théologie que ne serait pas actuelle serait une théologie fausse." These words can certainly be interpreted more charitably than they are by Garrigou, but they could have also been more carefully chosen. Garrigou points out immediately that the old notion of form, derived from Aristotle's 'outdated' science, is essential to Thomas' theology of sanctifying grace, which Bouillard nevertheless wants to maintain, at least in some form (see p. 126). Bouillard points out that the Council of Trent does not canonize the notion of 'form' even though it uses it and thus other, potentially better, notions could be substituted for it (unforeseen at the time of the Council). Garrigou agrees the notion of form was not itself canonized, but he retorts that the Council did approve it and other concepts as stable human notions (e.g., it defined the permanence of virtue), which opposes Bouillard's understanding of truth (see p. 128). Garrigou paraphrases Bouillard's limitation of immutable truth as obtaining only where notions have the same relationship amidst change, which gives rise to the question for Garrigou of how truth itself can be immutable if the notions 'truth' and 'immutability' are in principle subject to change. His resolution to the conundrum is that Bouillard's understanding of truth ends up in absurdity because: (1) given the mutability of truth, one can suppose that notions x and y are not immutable, which, by the laws of predication, yields that (2) 'y' cannot be immutably predicated of 'x,' and (3) propositions cannot be

It is forgotten that not all his fellow traditional Thomist colleagues agreed completely with his approach to the question. Marie-Michel Labourdette, O.P., rejected an article of Garrigou's submitted to the *Revue Thomiste* for its prematurely authoritarian and excessively polemical tone. Labourdette still had some strong reservations regarding the *nouvelle theologie*, but he expressed them in a more nuanced and moderate fashion.<sup>8</sup> Both of them, however, focused principally on a few statements of Henri Bouillard, S.J.,<sup>9</sup> and Jean Daniélou, S.J.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps more significantly, the esteemed Dominican professor at Fribourg, Francisco Marín-Sola, O.P., wrote a series of articles in which he develops a more sophisticated hermeneutic with regard to the tradition concerning doctrinal development than is evident in Garrigou-Lagrange's insistence on the rigidity of doctrinal propositions.<sup>11</sup> These articles were later collected and published as

immutably true (see p. 127). This is, of course, my formalized paraphrase of his condensed argumentation. He attributes the fallacy regarding truth inherent in Bouillard's statement (taken literally) to the "philosophy of action," but he does not name Maurice Blondel. The much needed dialogue between the latter philosophy and Thomism would be a voluminous endeavor, already initiated to some extent (e.g., in the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar).

<sup>8</sup> See Marie-Michel Labourdette, O.P., "La Théologie et ses sources," *Révue Thomiste* 46 (1946), pp. 353-71; Aidan Nichols, O.P., "Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie," *The Thomist* 64 (2000), pp. 1-19. Not directly impugning Bouillard with modernism, Labourdette merely asks how anyone can avoid historical relativism if there are no immutable human expressions of divine truth (see p. 356), that is, if by his 'law of incarnation' dogma is entrenched in contingent notions (see p. 364), or if eternal affirmations are necessarily tied to changing representations. He questions the subjectivist and evolutionary tendencies of a pseudo-philosophical (or a-metaphysical) historical method apparently favored by some in the *nouvelle theologie* (see pp. 360ff.). He argues in favor of building upon the prior edifice of scholastic thought rather than replacing it with an 'art' that regresses beyond the scientific character of theology developed in the middle ages (see pp. 258ff.). He concludes that for dogma to be intelligible there must be some human expressions that are perennially adequate expressions of immutable truth (see pp. 366-7).

<sup>9</sup> See Henri Bouillard, S.J., *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris, 1944), especially p. 219.

<sup>10</sup> See Jean Daniélou, S.J., "Les Orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse," *Études* 249 (1946), pp. 5-21. He endorses the evolutionary perspective of Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., on p. 15. Throughout the article he invokes existentialist philosophy as a promising path (e.g., see p. 16 on Simone de Beauvoir and original sin). Garrigou spends much of his first article drawing out the consequences of such a philosophical mistake for the doctrines of original sin and the Eucharistic presence of Christ.

<sup>11</sup> See Michael Torre, "Francisco Marín-Sola, OP, and the Origin of Jacques Maritain's Doctrine on God's Permission of Evil," *Nova et Vetera* 4, no. 1 (2006), pp. 55-94, which depends largely upon the letters of Charles Journet (in terms of what transpired in the debates between Garrigou-Lagrange and Marín-Sola, with Jacques Maritain somehow in the middle). He notes there that "Garrigou-Lagrange had himself dealt with this issue [the evolution of Catholic dogma] in his *De Revelatione* (Rome: Ferrari, 1918). He favored the view of Reginald Schultes, OP who had argued against Marín-Sola's view. See the latter's [sic] *Introductio in historiam dogmatum* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1922); and *De Revelatione*, vol. 1, p. 509, for Garrigou-Lagrange's view. Marín-Sola acknowledged their differences ... but sought to minimize their differences and to laud their respective virtues" (p. 56 n. 7).

a book under the title, *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, provocative phraseology for a Thomist of that time.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Traditional Thomistic Approach: Moving Toward Development*

Therefore, rather than enter into an exegesis of the Council texts, a task that many have already belabored, it is opportune to turn briefly toward Marín-Sola's principal contribution to the theology of doctrinal development. He approaches the issue from the perspective of a Thomist in the commentator tradition, which nowadays would be dubbed a propositional view of revelation,<sup>13</sup> that is, a view of the *depositum fidei* as a set of propositions that reveal saving truths about God, man, and their relationship to one another. Yet, he manages to face head on the reality of doctrinal development within that framework rather than undermine its significance.<sup>14</sup> His primary goal is to argue that doctrinal development, rather than contradicting the

<sup>12</sup> Francisco Marín-Sola's articles appeared in successive issues of *La Ciencia Tomista* between 1911 and 1922, originally compiled in 1923, later elaborated for a French edition in 1924 and finally translated back into Castellano in *La evolución homogénea del dogma católico* (Madrid, Third Edition: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1963), to which I will be referring.

<sup>13</sup> For the division of perspectives on revelation into propositional and experiential-expressivist, see George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), one of the seminal works founding the post-liberal movement, which cannot be (explicitly) engaged here.

<sup>14</sup> "En ese estudio creemos haber puesto en claro, entre otras cosas, los cuatro puntos siguientes: 1. Es un hecho histórico, fuera de toda duda, que muchos dogmas se han desarrollado o han evolucionado por la vía de conclusión teológica propiamente dicha, y que ese hecho debe ser reconocido por todo teólogo moderno, como fue reconocido por toda la teología tradicional hasta el siglo xvii. 2. Es un principio filosófica y teológicamente cierto que el raciocinio propio y riguroso puede intervenir en el desarrollo o evolución del dato revelado sin destruir su perfecta homogeneidad. 3. Ese hecho histórico, como ese principio filosófico-teológico, fueron admitidos *por todos* los teólogos anteriores al siglo xvii, y que la persuasión contraria que hoy día existe en algunos proviene de una confusión introducida por Suárez sobre la naturaleza de la verdadera virtualidad del depósito revelado, confusión continuada por Lugo y no advertida por los Salmanticenses y Billuart. 4. Una vez restablecida la verdadera inteligencia del virtual revelado, es fácil entender como puede existir y existe de hecho en el dogma católico verdadera y propia evolución, pero evolución homogénea, con lo cual desaparece esa antinomia que parecía existir entre la enseñanza de la teología católica y los hechos de la historia, y se desvanece por completo la objeción modernista sobre el transformismo del dogma." "In [this] study we believe to have clarified, among other things, the following four points: 1) It is a historical fact, without a doubt, that many dogmas have developed or evolved by way of theological conclusion properly speaking, and that such a fact must be recognized by every modern theologian, as it was recognized by all traditional theology until the seventeenth century. 2) It is a philosophically and theologically certain principle that proper and rigorous reason can intervene in the development or evolution of the revealed given



immutability of revealed truth, is a legitimate form of evolution in the Church's *understanding* of divine revelation; in other words, developments in doctrinal formulation evolve in a homogeneous rather than heterogeneous manner.<sup>15</sup> One of his preoccupations is to rid the discourse on doctrinal development of Francisco Suarez' influence, who in his attempt to find a *tertia via* between Thomas and Scotus manages to muddy the waters regarding the parameters of possibility for the evolution of doctrine (or genesis of new dogma).<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most significant move made in Marin-Sola's manual on the problem is to distinguish two ways in which the Church's understanding of divine revelation may evolve, namely, by means of speculative reason (i.e., theology) and by means of a connatural-affective *sensus fidei* (exemplified in the saints).<sup>17</sup> Although he is preoccupied with explaining the ways in which new conclusions may be drawn from perennial premises, he does spend some time coming to terms with the relatively recent developments in Catholic doctrine, namely, the elevation of Mary's immaculate conception to the level of dogma and the definition of papal infallibility. He manifests a delicate balance between the views on opposite extremes, which claim either (1) that all saving truths must have been proposed in apostolic times or (2) that all doctrines are subject to mutation according to the present needs of God's people,<sup>18</sup> although he does not state the dichotomy in precisely these terms. While he does not quite arrive at Newman's fourfold division of development into logical, historical, moral, and metaphysical modes,<sup>19</sup> he does decidedly defend Newman on the organicity of ecclesial life against the lack of distinction-making and historical attunement involved in the emphatic resistance of some to

without destroying its perfect homogeneity. 3) The [aforementioned] historical fact, like the [aforementioned] philosophical-theological principle, [both] were admitted by all prior theologians into the seventeenth century, and the contrary persuasion today exists in some comes from a confusion introduced by Suárez concerning the nature of the true virtuality of the revealed deposit, confusion continued by Lugo and not avoided by the [Carmelites of Salamanca] and Billuart. 4) Once the true understanding of the virtual revealed is reestablished, it is easy to understand how true and proper evolution can exist and exists in fact in catholic dogma, with which that antinomy that would seem to exist between the teaching of catholic theology and the facts of history disappears and the modernist objection concerning the transformism of dogma completely vanishes" (*La evolución*, no. 11 [emphasis original]).

<sup>15</sup> See *La evolución*, especially nos. 19ff.

<sup>16</sup> See *La evolución*, nos. 11, 60, 71ff.

<sup>17</sup> See *La evolución*, nos. 213ff.

<sup>18</sup> See *La evolución*, no. 359, for example.

<sup>19</sup> See Aidan Nichols, O.P., *From Newman to Congar: The idea of doctrinal development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1990), p. 50. See Marin-Sola, nos. 213ff.

any notion that in time the Church may propose doctrines that were not previously discerned to belong to divine revelation.<sup>20</sup>

According to Marin-Sola, new doctrines can emerge not only from the power of speculative reason explicating what is already contained in aboriginal propositions, but perhaps even principally, they arise out of the Spirit's influence over the spiritual sentiments of the faithful.<sup>21</sup> While he vigorously defends the immutability of dogmatic truths, at the same time, he recognizes the historical reality that new doctrinal formulations do arise and demand more than "ecclesiastical faith."<sup>22</sup> This puts him in unique relationship to the *nouvelle* movement.<sup>23</sup> Among the latter are *ressourcement* Thomists, who seek to go behind Suarez and other commentators to Thomas himself and his own sources, especially Augustine, in order to bring the modern world more effectively into contact with the gospel.

### *Two Nouvelle Theologians*

Arguably the greatest of the *ressourcement* thomists is Yves Congar, whom some acclaim as the principal founder of what became known as the *nouvelle theologie*,<sup>24</sup> and who certainly straddled the *Concilium-Communio* divide, although he technically belonged to the former (for reasons unknown to this author). Congar utilizes insights of Maurice Blondel concerning history and dogma to describe better the complex reality of tradition as a conduit of divine revelation, and he ties this ecclesial reality not merely to the Magisterium, but principally to the Holy Spirit as both the divine subject of tradition and the "co-instituting principle of the Church."<sup>25</sup> Supplementing the logical

<sup>20</sup> He subtly links Garrigou to Schultes and Schultes to Bossuet and Kilbert, which in turn are influenced by Suárez' *via media* (see *La evolución*, nos. 516-519, 359, 246 n. 42, 87, and 11 in that order).

<sup>21</sup> See *La evolución*, nos. 216ff.

<sup>22</sup> See *La evolución*, c. 5.

<sup>23</sup> The introductory essay to the second (and third) edition of *La Evolución* concisely treats the relationship between Marin-Sola's thought and some of the central ideas of the so-called *nouvelle theologens*, particularly, Bouillard and Danielou (without naming names).

<sup>24</sup> See Jurgen Mettepenningen, "Yves Congar and the 'Monster' of *Nouvelle Theologie*," *Horizons* 37, no. 1 (2010), pp. 52-71.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding the latter point, see Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, trans. David Smith (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), pp. 78ff. For his theology of tradition, see *La Tradition et la vie de l'Eglise* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1963 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1984]); English translation, *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004); and especially, *La Tradition et les Traditions: Essai Historique* (Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1960) and *La Tradition et les Traditions: Essai Theologique* (Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1963); English translation, *Tradition and Traditions: The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition*, trans.



approach of traditional Thomists like Marin-Sola with “the more historical manner of proceeding which relies on *documentation* for establishing the homogeneity of development,” he appeals as well to the “faith-awareness of the Church” and concludes that “the Church is the only subject capable of grasping adequately the internal homogeneity of the revealed ‘given’ in its self-expression through time. With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, perception of the homogeneity between the apostolic deposit and its later explication can be found in the ‘sense of the Church’, the judges of which are the bearers of the apostolic ministry.”<sup>26</sup> Ecclesiological questions enter here, such as the precise ways in which the faithful and the hierarchy relate to one another in the constitution of “the Church.” In any case, Congar’s inheritance of the propositional view of revelation, which he does not entirely disavow (at least, at the time of the Council), is complemented by that phrase in *Dei Verbum* (which he certainly had a hand in crafting), “[Tradition] comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which [believers] experience” (no. 8).

For both Marin-Sola and Congar, the Catholic Church represents a ‘middle way’ on the question of doctrinal development between the static approach of the Eastern Orthodox, according to which only what the Fathers explicitly and unanimously taught is admissible as dogma, and the ‘dynamic’ approach common to much of Protestant Christianity, according to which doctrinal truth is completely and utterly subject to the arbitrary whims of the Spirit operative in each believer.<sup>27</sup> Congar argues: “The fact of a progress in the understanding of the faith finds its foundation in the very nature of revelation as

Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (San Diego: Basilica Press, 1966). The latter work is largely a collection of articles appearing originally in *Dieu vivant*, no. 23 (1953) and the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1950, 1953).

<sup>26</sup> Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, pp. 260-261.

<sup>27</sup> Marín-Sola states: “En realidad, inmutabilidad y desarrollo no son dos cosas opuestas, sino dos aspectos armónicos y dos facetas complementarias de la misma cosa, esto es, de la evolución homogénea. . . . Eso explica cómo dos apologistas católicos tan grandes como Bossuet y Newman hayan podido emplear, en defensa de la Iglesia católica, razonamientos que parecen contradictorios. Bossuet dijo al protestantismo: ‘Cambias, luego no eres la verdad.’ Newman dijo al anglicanismo: ‘No admites evolución, luego no tienes vida.’ En realidad, esos dos aspectos, lejos de contradecirse, son las dos características que distinguen a la verdad, cuando esa verdad está depositada en inteligencias y corazones humanos, para ser la vida del individuo y de la sociedad.” “In reality, immutability and development are not two opposed things, but rather two harmonious aspects and two complementary facets of the same thing, that is, of the homogeneous evolution. . . . That explains how two such great catholic apologists as Bossuet and Newman have been able to utilize, in defense of the Catholic Church, arguments that seem contradictory. Bossuet said to Protestantism: ‘You change, therefore you are not the truth.’ Newman said to Anglicanism: ‘You do not admit evolution, therefore you do not have life.’ In reality, those two aspects, far from contradicting each other, are the two characteristics that distinguish the truth, when that truth is deposited in human intellects and hearts to be the life of the individual and of society” (*La Evolución*, no. 359). Regarding Eastern Orthodox

in the proper character of the ‘time of the Church’, the latter being a community of human beings *en marche*.’<sup>28</sup> Aidan Nichols comments on this passage:

Like the Neo-Scholastics of the earlier part of the century, above all the Spanish Dominican Neo-Thomist Francisco Marin-Sola (1873-1932), Congar initially describes such doctrinal development as an explicitation of what is still implicit in the normative *donné* or ‘given’ of the apostolic teaching. . . . With the Neo-Scholastics, Congar holds that the process of separating out one truth from the original reality may be thoroughly intellectual, and even strictly logical in character: an implicit truth, formally contained in another explicit truth, can be teased out by (deductive) ‘explicitative’ reasoning. If, by contrast, the implicit truth concern is only *virtually* contained in the truth established earlier, the reasoning process involved will require more  *finesse*, what Newman called, in relation to the act of assent, the ‘illative sense’. However, Congar, with his more acute feeling for history than the Neo-Thomists, proposes that, in addition, this kind of relationship of implicit to explicit also exists in the *practical* order. The dogmatically implicit can be enveloped in, for example, a liturgical practice. . . . Yet Congar is sufficiently Thomist in his fundamental allegiance to add that what is thus implicit in action only becomes consciously explicit through the work of intelligence, of mind in act. He insists that this business of the implicit element in revelation . . . fits in well with revelation’s own nature as the ‘unveiling of a free and gracious design’.<sup>29</sup>

Although not entirely accurate with regard to Marin-Sola, Nichols correctly emphasizes Congar’s thomistic inheritance, which did not prevent him from contributing to the developing theology of revelation. His discussion in *Tradition and Traditions* of the different species and subjects of tradition and their relationship to the “monuments” of patristic writing and liturgical practice, for example, is invaluable.

Early in his career, Congar took a somewhat ambivalent stance toward Newman, apparently because of his influence among modernists,<sup>30</sup> and yet he argued at the time of the Council for a controversial thesis regarding the relationship between scripture and tradition, known as the “material sufficiency” of Scripture.<sup>31</sup> In fact, in an article defending the theory, he aligns anyone who opposes the theory

attitudes toward the idea of doctrinal development, see Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, Appendix.

<sup>28</sup> Yves Congar, *La Foi et la théologie* (Tournai, 1962), cited by Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Yves Congar* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1989), p. 47.

<sup>29</sup> Nichols, *Yves Congar*, p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> See *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), pp. 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> See especially his “Le Débat sur la Question du Rapport entre Ecriture et Tradition au Point de Vue de Leur Contenu Matériel,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 48, no. 4 (1964), pp. 645-657. Interestingly, Marin-Sola approvingly quotes a statement

with those who view tradition as simply oracular<sup>32</sup> and doctrine as “above all a list of propositions,” which he opposes to the view that doctrine (or tradition) is “first the preaching of the Christian mystery.”<sup>33</sup> Looking at these two objective components (not “sources”)<sup>34</sup> of divine revelation through a hylemorphic lens, he proposed what he took to be the patristic view, that all the truths of Christianity are in some way contained in scripture, even if only implicitly, meanwhile tradition stands alone as the living interpretation of the text. At the same time, he affirms that “the Church is tradition!”<sup>35</sup> After all, even scripture itself developed out of communal reflection upon events in salvation history.

Joseph Ratzinger,<sup>36</sup> surely a collaborator at the Council with Congar on the theme of tradition and scripture, criticizes the theory of material sufficiency, arguing that the form-matter schematic it

of the early Dominican commentator, Capreolous, which would support Congar’s thesis, even if Marín-Sola quotes it only in support of the notion that all doctrinal developments are explications of what lies implicit in revelation (without addressing the question of the relationship between scripture and tradition): “*Omnia implicite continentur in S. Biblia, dice Capreolo comentando ese mismo artículo [ST I, q. 1, a. 3].*” “‘All things are contained implicitly in the Holy Bible,’ says Capreolous commenting on that same article” (see *La evolución*, no. 215).

<sup>32</sup> “[A]ssez curieusement, les partisans des deux sources ou de l’insuffisance matérielle de l’Ecriture, ou de la Tradition constitutive, opèrent généralement en dehors de ces perspectives, avec une notion de la Tradition orale (par parole).” “Rather curiously, those who advocate the two-source theory or the material insufficiency of Scripture or Tradition as constitutive, work generally outside of this perspective, with a notion of Tradition as oracular” (“Le Débat,” p. 650 [my translation]).

<sup>33</sup> “[S]i l’on considère la Foi catholique comme une série de propositions atomisées, sans lien organique avec un centre, on est porté à demander que chacune prise séparément soit appuyée d’une référence, et l’on cherche, dans une Tradition orale constitutive, la référence qu’on ne trouve pas dans l’Ecriture. Il serait aisé d’appliquer cela aux dogmes mariaux. Mais, d’autre part, il n’est pas besoin d’approfondir beaucoup la chose pour voir que les oppositions qui se sont manifestées dans les discussions récentes traduisaient un clivage des esprits entre ceux pour qui ‘la Doctrine’ était surtout une liste de propositions aux arêtes tranchées, et ceux pour qui elle était d’abord la prédication du mystère chrétien.” “[I]f one considers the Catholic faith as a series of atomized propositions, without an organic link to a center, one is led to ask that each taken separately be supported by a reference, and one searches, in an orally constitutive Tradition, the reference that he does not find in Scripture. It would be easy to apply this to the Marian dogmas. But, on the other hand, it is not necessary to go very deep in order to see that the oppositions that are manifest in the recent discussions reflect a mental conflict between those for whom doctrine is above all a list of propositions and those for whom it is first the preaching of the Christian mystery” (“Le Débat,” p. 654 [my translation]).

<sup>34</sup> See Jared Wicks, “Yves Congar’s Doctrinal Service of the People of God,” *Gregorianum* 84, no. 3 (2003), pp. 499-550, at pp. 524-525. He cites Congar’s *Mon Journal du Concile*, pp. 1, 314, 388.

<sup>35</sup> *True and False Reform*, p. 132.

<sup>36</sup> While I would argue that Ratzinger transcends both the *ressourcement* and *nouvelle* movements, he is commonly classed as a member of these and certainly initiated his career within this context.

employs is an inadequate framework for understanding the complex relationship between these two components of the one divine revelation in Christ.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, his view of revelation is less cognitivist and more personalistic than Congar's. In his *habilitationsschrift* on Bonaventure's theology of history, he approaches revelation in terms of event rather than proposition, that is, he understands God's self-communication to mankind in Christ through the prism of relationship, a reality that inevitably involves not only agent, but also recipient. In fact, part of his original text was rejected by the Thomist faculty on his dissertation board at Tübingen and still has not been translated into English.<sup>38</sup> Hence, Newman's distinctly non-propositional view of revelation did not find a home among non-modernists until Joseph Ratzinger had recourse to Bonaventure instead of Thomas, who are both distinctly Augustinian. Indeed, the now oft-repeated phrases in the context of doctrinal progress, "organic development" and "hermeneutic of continuity," extrapolated from Pope Benedict's writings,<sup>39</sup> have their origins in Newman's seven "tests" or "notes" for discerning whether a proposed development

<sup>37</sup> See his essay, "Offenbarung und Überlieferung," which he wrote originally for a larger theological project, vol. 25 of a series called *Quaestiones Disputatae*, co-authored with Karl Rahner. The latest English translation appears in *God's Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), as "The Question of the Concept of Tradition: A Provisional Response." For a comparison of Congar and Ratzinger on tradition and scriptural sufficiency, see Joshua R. Brotherton, "Revisiting the *Sola Scriptura* Debate: Yves Congar and Joseph Ratzinger on Tradition," *Pro Ecclesia* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2015), pp. 85-114.

<sup>38</sup> The English version of this text contains only the first half, which was in the end approved as sufficient for Ratzinger to acquire teaching privileges in Germany.

<sup>39</sup> To be clear about the latter, speaking of the contrasting hermeneutical approaches toward the Council, Pope Benedict XVI argues for a delicate balancing of continuity and discontinuity with past ecclesial formulations: "It is clear that in all these sectors [of the Council's teaching], which all together form a single problem, some kind of discontinuity might emerge. Indeed, a discontinuity had been revealed but in which, after the various distinctions between concrete historical situations and their requirements had been made, the continuity of principles proved not to have been abandoned. It is easy to miss this fact at a first glance. It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists. In this process of innovation in continuity we must learn to understand more practically than before that the Church's decisions on contingent matters – for example, certain practical forms of liberalism or a free interpretation of the Bible – should necessarily be contingent themselves, precisely because they refer to a specific reality that is changeable in itself. It was necessary to learn to recognize that in these decisions it is only the principles that express the permanent aspect, since they remain as an undercurrent, motivating decisions from within. On the other hand, not so permanent are the practical forms that depend on the historical situation and are therefore subject to change. Basic decisions, therefore, continue to be well-grounded, whereas the way they are applied to new contexts can change. . . . [T]he human person is capable of knowing the truth about God and, on the basis of the inner dignity of the truth, is bound to this knowledge" ("Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings").

in doctrine is authentic or not.<sup>40</sup> The English convert, whom Marín-Sola esteems more as a psychologist than a theologian, had great influence on the thought of Joseph Ratzinger, who as Pope had the pleasure of beatifying him.<sup>41</sup>

During the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger will reject (as untrue to the evidence) Geiselmann's ecumenical interpretation (or rather, interpolation) of the Tridentine decrees, which yields a false dichotomy between two-source theory and material sufficiency. But early on in his career, before entering into the question of tradition as a constituent of revelation, he speaks of revelation as "the spiritual understanding of Scripture,"<sup>42</sup> which he therefore denominates a "process":

[T]he understanding of Scripture which arises in theology can be called revelation at least indirectly. We can easily understand this in view of the process of revelation itself; for in this process, 'revelation' is understood to consist precisely in the understanding of the spiritual sense. . . . the process of inspiration includes a penetration through the *mundus sensibilis* to the *mundus intelligibilis*. It is precisely in this penetration that inspiration lays claim to its special status as revelation (*revelatio* = = unveiling!).<sup>43</sup>

With Bonaventure and Pseudo-Dionysius before him, Ratzinger conceives understanding (with respect to eternal truths) not so much in terms of Aristotelian syllogism as in terms of the affective-mystical experience of the saints:

[T]here is also a development of knowledge to the highest form of super-intellectual affective-mystical contact with God. The historical ascent of the Church from the Patriarchs at the beginning to the People of God of the final days is simultaneously a growth of the revelation of God. In other words, it is not only the hierarchical thought-pattern that

<sup>40</sup> Nichols summarizes the pivotal fifth chapter of Newman's *Essay* thus: "[Newman] contrasts authentic developments with corruptions, suggesting seven 'notes' by which genuine developments will tend to show themselves. These are: (1) Preservation of the original type: in effect, preserving the quality of the original impact of some new thing. (2) Continuity of known principles. (3) Power to assimilate alien matter to the original idea. (4) Logical connectedness. (5) Being anticipated early in a partial way here and there. (6) A conserving attitude to the past: taking steps to preserve an old idea in a new form. (7) Chronic vigour: i.e. lasting in a healthy state for a long time" (*From Newman to Congar*, p. 51 [excerpt reformatted]).

<sup>41</sup> Marín-Sola quotes a letter of Newman's in which he states: "Really and truly I am not a theologian . . . I am not, and never shall be" (see *La Evolución*, no. 215). He also cautions against utilization of the notion of "assimilation" and expresses reservations regarding the metaphor of biological development since animal and vegetative life are not entirely on par with the development of understanding which occurs in the minds of believers (see nos. 213 and 215).

<sup>42</sup> *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), p. 69.

<sup>43</sup> *Theology of History*, p. 66. He makes clear thereafter that such understanding is not an individualistic enterprise, but one undergone in communion with the Church universal.

is transformed in terms of history, but mysticism as well. Mysticism is not a grace given in isolation and independently of time; it is, rather, conditioned by the historical development of the divine revelation. . . . [The revelation of the final age] will be the true fulfillment of the New Testament revelation which has been understood only imperfectly up till now.<sup>44</sup>

He will later speak of the gospel in terms similar to Congar's, emphasizing the primacy of the Spirit, operative in the hearts of believers, in the New Covenant.<sup>45</sup> Without the living tradition of the Church, the written word would be formless and void.<sup>46</sup> But he adds: "Revelation goes beyond Scripture . . . to the same extent as reality goes beyond information about it."<sup>47</sup>

### *Conclusion*

If there is more to reality than information (or cognitive content), then certainly there is more to eternal truth than propositions. But this implicit critique of the neo-scholastic approach to revelation does not lead to the liberal Protestant or modernist view of doctrine as ever-changing and essentially human. If there is religious truth that transcends historical conditioning (or contingency), then religious doctrine cannot be without propositional content, supposing the existence of divine self-communication in history. In other words, even though (1) (contingent) realities change, (2) concepts are linguistically determined (to a certain extent), and (3) language is constantly evolving; there must be something immutable about the concepts involved in propositional truth precisely because (1) there must exist a constant reality beyond all contingency, (2) the human mind has some access (however historically conditioned) to the essence of being as such (*ens commune*), and (3) human language is capable of making stable predications (however imperfect) about reality. Otherwise, the truths of divine revelation are perpetually subject to change (i.e., not immutable in themselves) and subjectivism must reign with respect to religious doctrine.<sup>48</sup> If the logic of the Church's

<sup>44</sup> *Theology of History*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>45</sup> Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 5 [F I, 17], p. 500 [F II, 249].

<sup>46</sup> See Ratzinger, *God's Word*, 79-80. Concerning the canon of scripture, see *Theology of History*, pp. 78ff. He further elucidates the relationship between scripture, tradition, and Church in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation as Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*.

<sup>47</sup> *God's Word*, p. 51. Tradition is therefore viewed in part as the "surplus of revelation" (see pp. 69 and 72).

<sup>48</sup> Certainly, experience has not only subjective qualities, but also objectifiable ones. In fact, the subject subjectivizes the object and objectivizes itself. But one need not advocate a subject-object "dualism" in epistemology in order to avoid relativizing everything; even an epistemology that seeks to transcend the constructed division of "knowledge systems"



own development in self-understanding is predominately connatural-affective, as Marin-Sola admits, then certainly the deposit of faith is not simply an object that may be cognized with increasing precision, but principally an event of self-communication on the part of God as incarnate Word, whose Spirit animates His body, the faithful, as they progress in their encounter with the world He created. Hence, the Newman-inspired approach of the so-called *nouvelle theologie* to divine revelation, particularly, as tradition, does not contradict the neo-thomistic perspective, at least, as represented by the Dominican commentator, Francisco Marin-Sola.

Since the Encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, and the subsequent CDF document, *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, the commensurability of immutable truths concerning God's own self-disclosure and the historical conditioning of every linguistic proposition intended to convey such truths ought to be relatively clear to Catholic theologians,<sup>49</sup> thanks in part to the theological debates before and during the Second Vatican Council. Keeping the hierarchy of truths in mind, the Council Fathers worked with a distinction between immutable truth and contingent application of principles, which is nevertheless always imperfectly articulated and thus capable of being explicated more fully since there is the revealed given and then there is the growing understanding of such.<sup>50</sup> Due to the limitations of the human

into idealism/subjectivism and realism/objectivism is inevitably inadequate to the task of understanding the supernaturality of particular events, the nature of the truths therein communicated, and the relationship of doctrine to these essentially constitutive dimensions of the historical phenomenon of divine revelation. Everything within the purview of human experience may be "historicized," which is not to deny normativity, and yet divine revelation transcends subject-object interdependence. In other words, man's ontological relationship to the supernatural events of historical revelation (and even more so, the divine itself) cannot be understood by means of any epistemological framework.

<sup>49</sup> "These formulas [of Trent on the Eucharist]—like the others that the Church used to propose the dogmas of faith—express concepts that are not tied to a certain specific form of human culture, or to a certain level of scientific progress, or to one or another theological school. Instead they set forth what the human mind grasps of reality through necessary and universal experience and what it expresses in apt and exact words, whether it be in ordinary or more refined language. For this reason, these formulas are adapted to all men of all times and all places. They can, it is true, be made clearer and more obvious; and doing this is of great benefit. But it must always be done in such a way that they retain the meaning in which they have been used, so that with the advance of an understanding of the faith, the truth of faith will remain unchanged. For it is the teaching of the First Vatican Council that 'the meaning that Holy Mother the Church has once declared, is to be retained forever, and no pretext of deeper understanding ever justifies any deviation from that meaning' (11)" (*Mysterium Fidei: Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Holy Eucharist*, nos. 24-35, available on the Vatican website). See also the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Mysterium Ecclesiae: Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church Against Certain Errors of the Present Day*, sect. 5, available on the Vatican website.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the speech of John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Marín-Sola speaks similarly (see *La evolución*, nos. 19-21).

mind (in *receptivity* to divine revelation)<sup>51</sup> and of the cultural-linguistic matrix within which men must formulate the saving truths inherent to such revelation (albeit empowered by the Spirit), even teachings regarded as infallible are inevitably articulated in a manner that is always susceptible to further improvement.<sup>52</sup>

It seems, therefore, that the Church has merely applied to her own doctrinal authority the scholastic maxim: *Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*. Revelation is a divine act of communication, a communication that must involve both agent and recipient – the Church is the recipient and the triune God, the agent. The agent does not change. The recipient does change. In the event of revelation, the two are united and what results is a communion of what is necessary and what is contingent, that is, a continually developing grasp of the ungraspable, the incommunicable communicated, the Word made flesh.

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<sup>51</sup> I do not mean here to exclude the other faculties of the human person from receptivity to divine revelation, nor to defend a purely propositional view of revelation, which certainly would not cohere with the “new theology” of tradition. But the human mind, nevertheless, is recipient of revelation, and revelation is in part propositional, no doubt. Speaking of Heinrich Schlier’s conversion in the context of the meaning of ‘incarnation,’ Ratzinger states the following regarding the propositional content of revelation: “[T]here is the correlation of tradition and living transmission. Intrinsically connected to this is apostolic authority, which interprets the Word which is handed down and gives it an unequivocal clarity of meaning. Finally, there is the insight that God has definitively decided in our favor. ‘According to the New Testament,’ this decidedness accounts for ‘the fact that the faith fixes itself in concrete propositions which demand from belief concrete acknowledgement of their truth.’ It is for this reason that Schlier could say that he had become a Catholic by strictly Protestant means – namely, *sola scriptura*” (*The Nature and Mission of Theology*, trans. Adrian Walker [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995], p. 60).

<sup>52</sup> By this statement it should be evident that I do not mean to say a dogma, for example, transubstantiation, could be supplanted by a “better” explanation of the mystery (e.g., trans-signification or trans-finalization, which Paul VI subordinated to transubstantiation in *Mysterium Fidei*), but rather that theological understanding of the mysteries of faith can, presumably, always be further refined, which build upon (rather than subtract from) the dogmatic formulas.