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The Aggiornamento in Catholic Philosophy

JOSEPH L. ROCHE, S.J.

THE 2nd Vatican Council was born of a vision, captured in the catch-word, "*aggiornamento*"—a bringing-up-to-date. Pope John called the 2nd Vatican Council in order to work toward bringing the Church into the 20th century and letting her imprint and influence be felt more effectively on contemporary society, principally by expressing Revelation in terms more comprehensible to the man of today.¹ Paul VI has, in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, proposed the same program:

Has not the Council itself—and justly so—a pastoral function which would be completely focused on the injection of the Christian message into the stream of the thought, of the speech, of the culture, of the customs, of the strivings of man as he lives today and acts in this life? Even before converting the world, even in order to convert it, we must meet the world and talk to it.²

This up-dating has already affected nearly every sector of the Church's life, to an extent almost unbelievable but three short years ago. In the field of Catholic philosophy, however, there has been less spectacular progress. This is partly due to the nature of the discipline itself: metaphysics, if it is to avoid relativism and subjectivism, must claim a certain stable,

¹ See E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., "Misunderstandings at the Council," *Theology Digest*, XI (Autumn, 1963), 131-34.

² Paul VI, "*Ecclesiam Suam*," *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas* 38 (Oct., 1964) p. 607.

immutable quality. Furthermore, outside of the direct management of philosophy in seminaries, the Church has a much less direct and immediate influence on philosophy than on those questions treated in the Council thus far: collegiality, religious liberty, sources of Revelation, etc. Nevertheless, the first point to be made here is to suggest that the need for such a drastic *aggiornamento* in theology and in the life of the Church in general, is due in no small measure to the isolated, self-enclosed state characteristic of Catholic philosophy over the past few centuries. The oft-repeated complaint heard at the Council for a new *metaphysique* upon which to build the new approaches in theology, is one indication of this.³

Consequently, the *aggiornamento* in philosophy is not a question for professional philosophers alone. Rather its importance touches every intelligent Catholic, for it is not a question primarily of any specific, technical philosophic doctrine, but of an attitude of mind, of an ideal of truth and its reasonable pursuit by man.

I

The over-all picture of Catholic philosophy today is characterized by an introspective questioning that has occasioned a certain air of unrest and discontent. Perhaps the core of the difficulty can be summed up in the charge of *irrelevance*.⁴ By and large, the scholastic philosophy commonly proposed in Catholic seminaries and universities is under strong criticism by Catholic scholars themselves for being out of step with the rest of the world. Scholastic philosophy, it is claimed, is not relevant to our times either in its *doctrine*, its *method* or its *style*. The importance of this charge of irrelevance is not immediately appreciated by most tradition-minded Catholic philosophers, and thus it will be worthwhile to spell out in some detail just precisely what this charge contains.

³ See F. X. Murphy, C.S.S.R., "Vatican II Needs a New Approach," *Catholic Mind* 62 (April, 1964), pp. 25-26.

⁴ C. Davis, "Theology in Seminary Confinement," *Downside Review* 81 (Oct., 1963), 307-16. (Reprinted in *Commonweal*, 80, no. 2 (April 3, 1964), pp. 43-46.) Also confer, by the same author, "The Danger of Irrelevance," *Downside Review* 79 (1961), 93-104.

Perhaps the first thing that strikes many priests (and apparently Bishops) when reflecting back on their seminary philosophy course, is the amount of time spent on problems and discussions which they never met afterwards.⁵ Even the most enthusiastic supporter of scholastic philosophy would scarcely contend that there is not a good amount of "cluttering-up" of our philosophy courses with matter which, important no doubt in its own day, is simply not *ad rem* today. Scholastic debates on the medieval problem of universals, on divine *concursus*, on the unicity of the soul, are acted out again almost as if nothing of note has happened in the intervening centuries, and that these are the real problems bothering men of today. For some, these problems, treated precisely in this way, are considered to be the best way to train men in logical, accurate thinking—at least Catholic men, and especially clerics. This supposition is strongly questioned today.

As a result of developing at great length philosophic questions that are no longer actual, many problems in contemporary philosophy can never be seriously considered because of lack of time. Another reason, it would seem, is the fact that many are psychologically unprepared to teach a philosophy which does not offer clear definite answers to the problems raised.

This irrelevance in doctrine is brought out by some hard facts, the first being the scarcity of *creative* scholastic work on *current* philosophic problems. This deficiency is emphasized by the contrasting plethora of historical works of great erudition and value on St. Thomas and the medieval period in general.⁶ Another fact is the absence of an appreciable influence and impact of scholastic philosophy in the non-catholic university milieu, and especially in the professional philosophic periodical literature. Up until the recent present, there has

⁵ Mgr. J. K. Mussio, "An 'Open Window' in the Seminary," *Social Digest* vol. 7 no. 4 (April, 1964), pp. 57-60. See also D. J. B. Hawkins, "The Future of Thomism," *The Wiseman Review* (Summer, 1962), pp. 135-36.

⁶ See R. Jolivet, "De l'actualité de saint Thomas," *Sciences Ecclesiastiques*, XV (Oct.-Dec., 1963), p. 328. See also B. Ashley, O.P. "The Thomistic Synthesis," in *Teaching Thomism Today*, ed. by G. F. McLean, O.M.I. (Cath. Univ. Press, 1963) especially pp. 46-50.

been little or no dialogue between the non-scholastic philosophic world and scholastic philosophers. Now if one considers the number of scholars, the time, expense, and energies, devoted to scholastic philosophy today in Catholic circles in comparison with any single current philosophic movement, this lack of impact and influence of scholastic philosophy on today's intellectual milieu is nothing short of scandalous.

Finally, there is the current phenomenon of discontent with scholastic philosophy common to the younger Catholic philosophers, and especially pronounced among the younger European clergy.⁷ This disenchantment is most frequently explained by an antipathy toward two particular traits which have become rather characteristic of scholastic philosophy as practiced and preached: the "completed synthesis spirit", and the "angelic" conception of philosophy.

The first trait consists in the notion of scholastic philosophy as a body of doctrine, a collection of propositions enunciating unchanging and unchangeable truth. This notion is commonly enshrined in the idea of the scholastic *synthesis*, which despite all claims to the contrary, cannot help but incorporate a certain 'finished' or 'completed' quality. For the mentality under criticism unconsciously views philosophy in terms of a body of solid doctrine, essentially unchangeable because it is true, and open to new insights which are *added on* to the old, or open to new formulations which repeat the *same content* but adapted to new conditions. This 'added on', this 'new expression' when compared to the basic scholastic synthesis, can only be described in scholastic terminology as *accidental*. Without consciously wishing it, therefore,—in fact while strongly protesting the exact opposite—there is a clear presupposition that any new truths accruing to the scholastic synthesis, are accidental—that the hard central core of scholasticism is what is essential.⁸ The synthesis is conceived

⁷ See R. Harvanek, S.J., "The Crisis in Neo-Scholasticism," *Thought* 38 (Winter, 1963), pp. 531-35. Also, D. J. B. Hawkins, "The Future of Thomism," pp. 127-28. This fact is also brought out by the survey of Catholic philosophy in Germany, Cf. *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 70, 2 (1962) ed. M. Müller and M. Schmaus.

⁸ Jolivet, *art. cit.*, pp. 342-43.

as composed of layers of truth, somewhat analogous to the composition of an onion. But a philosophic viewpoint is not like an onion; new insights alter the old notions, not just add on a new outside layer. This synthesis attitude can be illustrated by the common Catholic attitude of conservative protectionism that is so strikingly apparent both in handling all non-scholastic authors, and in the encomiums heaped so lavishly upon the broad brow of the Angelic Doctor.

The second trait motivating the present discontent with much of scholasticism as practiced, consists in conceiving metaphysics as an *angelic science*.⁹ Truths of philosophy are those which are detached, abstracted from all matter, all singularity, all change, and thus are immutable, universal and simple. Philosophy therefore becomes the science which moves in the rarified atmosphere of abstract, speculative principles, and rarely comes down to earth where things have a tendency of getting all mixed up. This undue stress on the speculative, abstract principle can, and unfortunately often does, lend itself to easy *over-simplification*. The search for clear, distinct principles has led at times to a rather serious underestimating of the complexity of the reality involved, or more frequently, to relegating what cannot be included in the principle to some scholion or other. Scholastic philosophers often seem oblivious to how little they are saying to the man of today—how little understanding of himself and his environment they are offering him with their theses and universal principles.

Irrelevance in doctrine, then, can be summarized as follows: 1) treating at length questions that are no longer pertinent; 2) not taking questions that definitely are important to the man of today; 3) unconsciously conceiving our scholastic system as essentially finished, open only to accidental additions and more up-to-date formulations; 4) picturing the nature of philosophic truth as if it were not subject to human imperfections, but somehow represented a supra-human type of knowledge that would more properly be ascribed to the angels, since it abstracted from all matter, change and complexity.

⁹ Mgr. Mussio, art. cit., pp. 57-58. This point was also made at a workshop on the role of philosophy and theology in Jesuit Colleges, conducted by the Jesuit Educational Association in Los Angeles, 1962.

In addition to the actual doctrine or content, the very *method* of scholastic philosophy as carried out by the great majority of its adherents, has been under vigorous attack in recent years on a triple score: for its logical, conceptual rigidity; for its thesis presentation; and for its wide use of Latin as the standard medium of expression. Regarding the first charge, it must be admitted that the habitual scholastic stress on concepts, clear definition of terms and logical procedure has tended to emphasize the temptation common to all philosophies, that of reifying or personifying concepts and abstractions.¹⁰ Expressions such as 'the intellect presents' or the 'will commands' are so commonplace that it takes a conscious corrective effort to restore the proper unity and balance to man as a whole. This defect of scholastic philosophy is not accidental, nor of recent origin: certain contemporary historians have shown the presence in medieval schoolmen, St. Thomas not excluded, of a tendency to identify the ontological relations between beings with the logical relations between concepts representing those beings, i.e. to mistake the logical for the real, the ontological.¹¹

This conceptual approach has traditionally taken the form of thesis presentation, the hall-mark of our philosophy textbooks. No one will deny that the thesis presentation does manifest clarity, economy of expression, and rigorously logical thinking—virtues highly prized by all. Nevertheless its efficacy in communicating and developing these virtues, in the present milieu, can seriously be questioned. For it is equally evident that the thesis presentation can be deadly to any sincere interest on the part of the student seeking something to aspire to, if not be inspired by. To many it seems that the thesis method has become a crutch used to impart the greatest number of facts, in the shortest time, to a large number, in a fashion easily tested as to factual accuracy. The price paid relative to the humanizing, maturing role of philosophy, seems too high for many today.

¹⁰ See K. Basil O'Leary, F.S.C., "The Renewal of Moral Theology," *Continuum* I, no. 3 (Autumn, 1963), p. 314.

¹¹ See F. Van Steenberghe, *Dieu Caché* (Louvain: Ed. Nauwelaerts, 1961), p. 178.

The basic question here, as with use of Latin, is not pedagogical, but rather involves the notion of what philosophy should be doing. The rather standard Catholic approach of getting a good grasp of traditional Thomism first, before venturing forth into the outside philosophic world, is precisely what is being questioned. For such an approach seems to presuppose that philosophy is essentially the passing on of a certain content which is true for all time, in exactly the same way, for all men, and with the same relative importance. Dialogue, confronting the problems peculiar to contemporary man, is judged to be secondary. As practiced, this approach to philosophy is criticized as exactly that which leads to irrelevance in doctrine, method and style.

Relative to the question of the use of Latin, there is a growing appreciation today—the Liturgical Constitution of the Council is the most dramatic illustration of it—of the impact which the medium of expression has on what is being expressed—or the *medium quo* on the *id quod*, to use our old terms. For example, it is almost universally true that all the creative theology done in the past century has been done in the vernacular languages.¹² The effort to do effective philosophical work in Latin and to communicate a minimum of philosophic spirit to others in that medium, if considered on sheerly natural and intrinsic grounds, seems today to be little short of indefensible.

Finally, the *style* of scholastic philosophy has been branded as irrelevant to the present times. Style is a difficult notion to define precisely; no doubt it includes elements of both doctrine and method. But the general scope of today's criticism of scholastic style is clear: three particular animadversions constantly appear. First, its style is unintelligible to the contemporary intellectual; secondly, its attitude toward non-scholastic philosophy is often one of polemical contro-

¹² See Davis, *art. cit.*, *Commonweal*, p. 45. Serious attempts to communicate contemporary philosophic positions in Latin, appear more as an obstacle course, ultimately ineffectual, rather than as a reasonable attempt to communicate truth. See, for example, R. Arnou, S.J., *De Subiecto et Objecto in Cognitione Nostra Intellectiva* (Textus et Documenta, Series Philosophica no. 17; Rome: Univ. Gregoriana, 1960).

versy; finally, there is the attending deficient openness for truly creative dialogue which follows from this polemical stance.

The unintelligibility spoken of seems to be principally a question of a point of view, an approach, a way of questioning human experience and the world. There has been an intellectual revolution—a few of them in fact—since the golden era of scholasticism. Yet many Catholic philosophers carry on in much the same fashion; the same style of thinking, debating, approaching problems, as the medieval schoolmen.¹³

One concrete occupational hazard to which Catholic philosophers are particularly prone, especially clerical Catholic philosophers, is that of confusing one's own position with orthodoxy, and any opposing view with heresy.¹⁴ It is an attitude of mind that is undoubtedly furthered by the scholastic style of disputation, and which is definitely out of fashion today. Consequently, at times it may needlessly expose the Church and Catholic intellectuals to criticism, scorn and even ridicule. Perhaps the day is not too far off when to brand any position as Kantian, Hegelian or even Cartesian, will not be equivalent to obliterating it from any further consideration among Catholic philosophers.

A sheerly pragmatic criticism of this polemical style of refutation common to scholastic authors, especially textbook authors, would be to point out its remarkable inefficacy. It would appear that all the scholastic refutations of Kant put together have had no perceptible effect on his reputation or influence in the non-scholastic philosophic world, whereas others who have worked from Kant's position and were pointing out its deficiencies even before he died, have gained a tran-

¹³ E. Gilson cites particular examples of this unintelligibility in his *The Philosopher and Theology* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 203. See also G. Philips, "Two Tendencies in Contemporary Theology," *Theology Digest*, XI (Autumn, 1963), pp. 143-44. "Our contemporaries are out of tune with [scholastic] categories of thought and modes of expression."

¹⁴ See a concrete example of this described by R. Harvanek, S.J., "Philosophical Pluralism and Catholic Orthodoxy," *Thought* 25 (1950), pp. 25-29. The general intolerant attitude of some scholastics is well documented by Gilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-206.

quill, effective hearing. What seems to be clearly indicated, therefore, is a rather radical change in that style of philosophizing which conceives its work largely in terms of defending a solid core of unchanging principles against any and all attacks. A ghetto mentality develops out of this attitude that is injurious to all concerned. The apriori refutation *en bloc*, and the reduction of non-scholastic doctrine to easily refuted positions in scholastic terminology, are simply not intellectually honest.¹⁵

Perhaps the most important aspect of scholastic style's irrelevance has been its frequent incapacity, with some notable exceptions, to carry on open, creative dialogue. Despite the current simplest and incredibly unrealistic claims made for dialogue, its efficacy and power, there is very little insight needed to perceive that the snippet treatment the "adversaries" receive in the traditional scholastic courses, falls terribly short of anything approaching a real dialogue.¹⁶ Demands of time, space and talent do not change the equally concrete fact: such a procedure simply does not present an honest picture of philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, not to speak of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Jaspers. Strangely enough, when it is finally realized that something must be cut, scholastic textbooks are still produced with 124 pages devoted to the problem of divine concursus, yet without Heidegger, Jaspers, or Merleau-Ponty mentioned even once.¹⁷ Far from being matter only for doctoral students, these latter would seem to be necessary for the non-specialist—just to understand what is going on today—whereas the intricacies of the various *signa rationis*, *sensu composito* & *sensu diviso*, etc. of Bañez, Suarez, Bellarmine and Billot, might be considered less than crucial for the ordinary Catholic intellectual layman or priest.

¹⁵ Jolivet, *art. cit.*, p. 343.

¹⁶ J. Collins, *Three Paths in Philosophy* (Chicago: Regnery, 1962), Chapter XV: Thomism in College, p. 391.

¹⁷ See, for example, E. Gisquière, *Deus Dominus*, (Paris: Beauchêne, 1950), 2 vols. The author's treatment of *concursum* is found in vol. II, 233-357.

What is most to be regretted here is the fact that this lack of open dialogue has often deprived scholastic philosophy of the creative self-reflection it absolutely needs to progress. In other words, the first effect of this shut-in policy has been to stymie scholastic philosophy itself.¹⁸ For too long there has been an almost criminal waste of highly trained intellectual potential in the inter-scholastic debates well known by all Catholic philosophers. Today's dialogue demands a more open stance than the former convert-making approach; it aims at something higher than merely trying to convince someone else of a truth already possessed by the speaker. For no truth is really possessed, really known for its true value with all its significance appreciated, except gradually, in dialogue of one kind or another.¹⁹

It should be noted that the *importance* of this charge of irrelevance is due in part to its ingrained quality. For many scholastic philosophers, this irrelevance is not at all accidental. It is *fostered on principle*—not indeed precisely under the formality of irrelevance, but because of certain principles which engender as an unavoidable concomitant, this irrelevance. Three particular motivations can be observed: 1. From the intimate link between *scholastic philosophy* in the textbook sense and *our theology* and the Faith, any watering-down or tampering with it is construed as a challenge to the true Faith, as dangerous to the life of the Church. Secondly, there is the argument from authority; there almost seems to be an inverse proportion between the actual, current influence of an author and his ecclesiastical press. Just as scholars are beginning to gain a better grasp of the proper place of Thomism in the *philosophic* field, the encomiums of the Angelic Doctor are running beyond all bounds. Finally, as noted above, the nature of philosophy itself seems to demand a conservative holding-the-line attitude.

¹⁸ Jolivet, *art. cit.*, p. 343. Davis makes this same point, *Commonweal*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁹ One approach to the notion of dialogue is outlined in my "Philosophic Approach to Dialogue," *International Philosophical Quarterly* (Dec., 1964).

These three factors, which in the past have motivated a rather conservative approach in the Church toward philosophy, have become today the *very factors initiating a demand for change*. It is the very needs of the Faith and theology today that have sparked the remarkable interest of certain Church scholars in existentialism, phenomenology and criticism. In short, Vatican II has shown, perhaps as nothing else ever could, the Church's need for a broader philosophic base than that which the scholasticism we have known has been able up till now to afford.²⁰ Secondly, the expression of so many of the Fathers of the Vatican Council itself clearly points toward a more open interpretation of the ecclesiastical authority's directives regarding Thomism. The existence of Marechal Thomism of Louvain, unintelligible without Immanuel Kant, Rahnerian Thomism, bred of Heidegger and the Angelic Doctor; Gilson's historical interpretation of St. Thomas' thought and Fessard's Hegelian encounter—these should suffice to halt the precipitous hurling of anathemas at non-Thomistic Catholic philosophers.

But most important, it is the new theories on the nature of philosophy itself, and the nature of truth as grasped by men, that have more than anything else been responsible for today's situation in which the problem of a monolithic philosophic structure vs. philosophical pluralism of some kind, can no longer be avoided. An excellent contemporary study has pointed out that there are at least six different philosophic trends which are actually influential among Catholic thinkers today.²¹ They range from those which conceive of philosophy as a dialectical historical progress, through others centered on a personalistic inquiry into the subjectivity of being and the inter-subjectivity of men, and finally those with a phenomenological orientation stressing human intentionality. What is important here is to grasp the radical change of climate that has taken place in the philosophic debate. No longer is the

²⁰ See Murphy, *art. cit.*, pp. 25-26, 30; also Schillebeeckx, *art. cit.*, pp. 132-34.

²¹ W. Norris Clark, S.J., "Current Views on the Intrinsic Nature of Philosophy," in *Jesuit Education Workshop on the Role of Philosophy and Theology in Jesuit Colleges*, 1962.

primary concern engaged in particular disputes between different scholastic schools, such as the Thomistic-Suarezian hassle over the real distinction, or the Bañezian-Molinist dispute, but rather on the more basic premises of what it means to philosophize, what is the nature of philosophic truth, what is the relation of this truth to man's daily life, etc. Instead of stressing the idea of a total synthesis of all experience and all reality, or a *Weltanschauung*, today's philosophy is marked by a much more modest approach. There is shyness toward universal theories conceived as absolute and definitive.

The Other Side

Men being what they are, however, this new problematic is, in the concrete, not without its own pitfalls. The first thing that must be said is that the detailed charge of irrelevance just described is by no means universally true. Furthermore, many of the particular complaints aired are not at all limited to scholastic philosophers, but on the contrary, are more or less the common weaknesses of philosophers of any type or description. Still on the theoretical level, it is doubtful if any philosopher or any type of philosophy, does not tend naturally toward some sort of systematic way of approaching, studying and explaining man's experience. If system is something natural to philosophy as such, the scholastic can boast of a more fundamental, more universal ground in his metaphysics of *being* than any philosophic system yet devised.

However, just as most of the criticisms leveled against scholasticism were drawn from scholasticism as *practiced*, so too the weaknesses of these new approaches show up much more strongly in the actual attempt to put some of these new ideals into practice. For instance, in practice the new approaches often seem little more than the substitution of new labels for old disputes. Today the fight is between the existentialists vs. the essentialists, the subjectivity advocates vs. the objectivistic spectator-analysts; the historicity personalists vs. the intransigent, die-hard conceptualists. A sure cure for considering these new approaches completely superior to the old is to listen to young students, supposedly imbibing all these lofty, purified ideals, explain what they understood of it, or

simply ask questions. Often the shock is enough to make one yearn for the good old days of Cotter's *ABC of Scholastic Philosophy*—all of philosophic truth in one book.

There are other pitfalls waiting the reformer; for instance, he will find a disconcerting attitude regarding basic human realities in some of his favorite authors. The fact that some of the new theories seem at first sight to undercut all objective morality, without supplying any effective substitute, does not seem to bother these authors in the least.²² Unfortunately, concrete human life cannot afford the luxury of such indifference, nor await the day when some new philosophical foundation for morality may be offered—it is the man of today, thinking, acting, willing, who is looking for principles and guide lines, now, not tomorrow.

There is a third pitfall which is largely overlooked by the avant-guardists in the heat of the fight, namely, falling into the very trap which they have set for the old manualists. No one can be quite so dogmatic as a new anti-dogmatist; nothing can be presented with such an air of superiority, of being closed to the other as other, as the “new breed”, once they gain the rostrum. There seems to be very little realization, or apperception, that the “new look” may itself be not quite perfect, that the new approach may not be definitive, that a Kung, a Congar, or a Rahner do not have the monopoly on truth which up to now has officially been bestowed on the Angel of the Schools. In short there is more than a little danger of re-enacting the same mistakes so scathingly attacked today, all over again.

Yet despite all these concrete, actual deficiencies, there is definitely something substantial behind this *aggiornamento*, and it may well be seen, in centuries to come, that it is the only sound way of preserving the real vs. verbal importance of scholastic philosophy. Rather than hiding behind an authoritarian *fiat*, we must have enough confidence in our traditional philosophy to open it up to contact with non-scholastic

²² See, for example, J. Wild's “Christian Rationalism,” in *Christianity and Existentialism*. Earle, Edie and Wild, (Northwestern Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 63-64.

philosophies in a manner hitherto practiced by only the rare exception. The openness demanded consists in a sincere intellectual attempt to grasp the truth of what is being proposed by non-scholastic authors, and not to demand that everything said be fitted in neatly under some thesis or other as a scholion. Conversely, it is largely our own pre-suppositions, the unconscious options we have taken in forming our metaphysical outlook, that must be developed and explained to non-scholastics, and communicated in terms of the present day. If we really touched the truth of today, what is most basic, ultimate, in the *hic et nunc*, we would not have to worry about it becoming out-of-date tomorrow. The refusal to come to grips with today's problems in all their multifarious complications and elements, by sticking to general, universal principles which "only" have to be applied—this is what today's intellectual can seriously complain of. For the principle seems sadly empty if no one can indicate how it can be applied.

The challenge presented by the *aggiornamento* in philosophy, then, seems to be twofold: it is first an effort to grasp the broad lines of the change demanded—a try for the wider, deeper view, the longer and broader look—both for the conservative and for the progressive. Secondly, it means the personal effort to act effectively within this climate of change, toward true, solid progress—a progress which will be a continuation of the tradition rather than its over-throwing. Here what comes to mind is the need for humility and patience: not an either-or approach, the mentality that gives up and runs off when things do not fall out as one would wish. Dialogue in the concrete order, is constantly beset with misunderstandings, with over-statements, with obscurities, with personal rather than doctrinal differences. It is within this framework that we must be willing to carry on dialogue, to work together—for there is no other.

II

What Kind of Change is Demanded: Although most scholastic philosophers, and Thomists in particular, are aware of the need for a change, for some type of *aggiornamento*, there is little unanimity concerning just what has to be changed.

For some, it is primarily a question of *presentation*: either the doctrine itself, the content presented, is deficient, or the manner of presenting even the genuine thought of St. Thomas is at fault.²³ The excellent historical studies of Gilson, Chenu, Van Steenberghen have clarified St. Thomas' own thought and clearly marked it off from Cartesian rationalism, Lockean common sense, and late scholastic conceptualism.²⁴ Nevertheless, even with the genuine existential interpretation of Thomistic thought, a faulty manner of presentation can induce a spirit of routine, inertia, excessive attachment to the past, spiked by continuous and psychologically deadening appeals to the Angelic Doctor.²⁵

Consequently, others have gone further and envision the *aggiornamento* in terms of the evident contrast between the scholastic mentality, mind, or *denkform*, and the intellectual milieu of today. The general lines of the traditional scholastic *denkform* (i.e. its fundamental orientation of reflection, the horizon against which particular problems are silhouetted) can be sketched in terms of the four causes, the ten categories of Aristotle, being conceived primarily as *nature* rather than *person*, that is, in terms of time and space treated cosmically rather than in terms of freedom and historicity. For the Aristotelian, substance held the primacy, whereas today, both in philosophy and theology, relation, that last category of Aristotle, the *minimum ens*, has become the center of investigation. In brief then, the ancient cosmological orientation in which man was interpreted, explained and understood in terms of the universe, as one level within the hierarchical structure, has today become definitely *anthropological*, with the universe read in terms of man who is recognized under a different formality than the biblical, as Lord of the universe.²⁶

²³ Harvanek, *Thought*, (Winter, 1963), p. 536.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

²⁵ See the pertinent comments of Duncan Cloud, "On Writing for the Educated Layman," *The Clergy Review* 49 (Feb., 1964), pp. 87, 90.

²⁶ See, for example, Hans urs von Balthasar, *Science, Religion and Christianity* (London: Burns & Oates, 1958), pp. 27, 29, 33, 72-75, 106-107.

A particular outstanding example of what this shift in emphasis can do in the world of today is the current controversy on conjugal morality. In today's philosophical climate of personalism, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, of I-Thou relations, arguments drawn *uniquely* from the traditional concept of natural law, and argued according to the notions of primary and secondary precepts, and the primary and secondary ends of marriage, can hardly be expected to be easily understood, nor accurately evaluated according to their *full* value and weight, unless they are brought up-to-date. The many popular articles written on the subject by supposedly educated Catholic laymen, indicate at least the fact that the teaching powers of the Church have not been particularly successful in communicating to the Catholic of today a sound grasp of working principles in conjugal morality. The call for a serious re-study of the problem sounded by two of foremost Cardinals in the hall of the Council, and applauded by some theologians as a turning point in contemporary theological practice, should show that this is not irresponsible, novelty-seeking criticism, but serious, absolutely basic honesty before a problem never before posed in the terms with which it clearly confronts man today.

The major source of dissatisfaction with the traditional structure for exposing the principles of conjugal morality, and in fact all morality, is its emphasis on nature vs. the human person, on precept vs. charity. Our traditional scholastic philosophy has not developed a metaphysics of the person, i.e. a scientific philosophical approach to the *personal Lebenswelt*.²⁷ Such a metaphysics would necessarily entail personal categories of presence, interiority, intentionality—the qualities of directness, immediacy, wholeness, rather than the formal structural categories common to the scholastic treatment of the person.²⁸ Man would be approached from the side of his freedom which constitutes the foundation for the world of intentionality wherein his whole finality as a created, incarnated spirit is

²⁷ See O'Leary, *art. cit.*, pp. 320-23, 327.

²⁸ G. McCool, S.J., brings this point out in his excellent article, "Philosophical Pluralism and an Evolving Thomism," *Continuum* II (Spring, 1964), p. 13.

found. Such a metaphysics is being worked out today by men like DeFinance, Johann, Rahner and Coreth.

Besides this work on the personal, inter-subjective approach to philosophy, some contemporary philosophers, schooled in scholasticism, have shown a very definite "relevance" to the times. Outstanding in depth and scope is Bernard Lonergan's theory on the basic structure of human understanding, and consequently on the nature and inter-relations of the various human disciplines. The current theological discussion on the evolution of dogma by men such as E. Schillebeeckx, H. Rondet, and K. Rahner, has also shed new light on the nature of philosophic thinking, and on the nature of truth itself, a question we shall take up presently. Moreover, the excellent studies of S. Breton, A. Dondeyne, S. Strasser and others, have clearly proven the quality and depth which Catholic philosophers can bring to such a movement as current existential phenomenology. Their place in this approach parallels that of K. Rahner, E. Coreth and J. Lotz in the transcendental philosophic school.²⁹

The fact that such scholastic and Thomist philosophers can contribute so substantially to the contemporary philosophic debate, is itself indicative of the fundamental strength and depth of scholastic metaphysics, of its real power to open itself to, and profit from, the valid truths and insights of new philosophic positions and trends. Yet it is precisely this strength that has, it would seem, placed the greatest practical obstacle to any real *aggiornamento* in Catholic philosophy. Today there are serious philosophic works being written every year on Aristotle and Plato, yet no one claims that those illustrious men have said the last word, nor that anything new that comes to mind has already been clearly enunciated by

²⁹ See, for example, Lonergan, *Insight* (London, 2nd ed., 1958); also his articles on the 'verbum' in *Theological Studies* VII (1946) pp. 349-92; VIII (1947), pp. 35-79; 404-44; X (1949), pp. 3-40, 359-93. Rahner's basic work remains his *Geist in Welt* (Munich, 1957); the Duquesne Philosophical Series has furnished translations of Dondeyne, *Contemporary European Thought and Christian Faith*; Strasser, *The Soul in Metaphysical and Empirical Psychology*. S. Breton's works are published by Vitte, Paris; see his *Conscience et intentionnalité*, and *Approches phénoménologique de l'idée d'être*. (1959).

them. That, however, seems to be what is often claimed, expressly or implicitly, for St. Thomas. For example, once God has been reached as *Esse Per Se Subsistens*, any new insight in the future is already included and surpassed. This mentality illustrates the rather disastrous scholastic habit of taking the universal, abstract term to equal actually, in practice, every concrete singular that could possibly fit under such a term, or every aspect of truth covered by the term, despite the fact that at any particular moment no one has an inkling of what does actually fit there.³⁰

To return to the commonly proposed defense of Thomists' namely their philosophy's power to "incorporate" new truths and valuable insights from outside, two questions immediately arise. First, what is the nature of this incorporation? Does it indicate that any truth which cannot be drawn into the Thomistic synthesis is *ipso facto* contradictory to it and erroneous? Such a conclusion meets the difficulty of the continued separate existence of the Augustinian and Scotistic tradition, not to speak of certain modern Catholic philosophies such as those of Maurice Blondel and Gabriel Marcel. The second question revolves on what is to be expected of a philosophy: is the power to incorporate into its own system the insights discovered by non-scholastic philosophers, sufficient in itself to enable scholasticism to fulfill the work of philosophy? Or may there be some basic inadequacy indicated by the lack of creativity within the scholastic camp itself? These two questions rest fundamentally on one basic problem: that of the nature of human truth.

The philosophic problem of the nature of truth has been brought to light in the Council debates between the conservative and progressive elements. Language studies of modern times have gone far beyond the ancient and medieval state of the question, and it would seem that the adage, attributed to Newman, that to think correctly is to think like Aristotle, has been superseded much as an old map of Europe before 1492 was superseded by the new maps consequent upon the

³⁰ Gilson unfortunately offers a personal example of this in his book, *The Philosopher and Theology*, pp. 171-72, in discussing "existentialist Thomism" and Kierkegaard.

discovery of the New World. The old map remains, but now it is put in a much larger context, a context which is not merely extrinsic, like another layer of the onion, but which modifies the meaning and significance of the relations within the old map itself. Regarding truth, therefore, it is recognized today in a clearer fashion that to affirm that man never grasps *naked* truth, abstracted from all expression or formulation, to assert that truth for man never stands alone, never exists in a 'pure state' but is always embedded in contingent notions and in a certain point of view, to recognize that the *mode* of expression of a particular truth is a natural sign of the insight into that truth, and that to change that expression to any significant degree, or to change the context of the expression, is to change the very content of the truth itself: all this is NOT equivalent to subjectivism.³¹ It is merely a practical, concrete example of what is meant by de-angelizing our scholastic mentality. The truth a man grasps never stands alone; it proceeds out of a unity of knowledge and belief and love that makes up man's spiritual, personal grasp of reality.

The modern debate on the nature of truth that preceded the Council was occasioned by the discussion on the problem of the factual diversity of philosophies vs. the unity sought by all philosophies, and centered on the notion of a *perennial philosophy*. As discussed after the war and preceding the encyclical *Humani Generis* of August, 1950, the debate largely was concerned with the relative position and importance of concepts and judgments, and the analogy of truth. This state of the question shifted in succeeding years to the pre-judgmental experience of man, the *pré-réfléchi*. Today there seems to be a further stage in the discussion, for what is particularly studied at the moment is the extra-intellectual knowledge of man.³² What is being sought is a scientifically elaborated ex-

³¹ See Schillebeeckx, *art. cit.*, pp. 132-33; Harvanek, *Thought* (1963), pp. 543-45. Also confer Harvanek's article, *Thought*, (1950), pp. 51-52, and his "The Unity of Metaphysics," *Thought* 28 (Spring, 1953), pp. 398-405.

³² See, for example, J. Girardi, "Les Facteurs extra-intellectuels de la connaissance humaine," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 62 (1964), 299-346; also R. Johann, "The Return to Experience," *Review of Metaphysics* (March, 1964), 321-39.

planation of how there can be different systems philosophy which exist within the lines of orthodoxy and yet which cannot be combined into one system. In fact their differences are often the very heart of their particular grasp of truth. If truth is ultimately one, there is the problem of how our inadequate expressions of truth are multiple and complementary rather than contradictory.

Another method of approaching the nature of truth as understood by man, is the contemporary study of human *methodology* in expressing truth. In this line, Fr. Fransen's article on the "Three Ways of Dogmatic Thought" offers one concrete approach to explain the factual diversity of philosophies.³³ Fransen specifies three types of analysis: psychological, essential and existential. Each has its strong points and imperfections; what is particularly of note, however, is that they do not cancel out each other. The scholastic system, and St. Thomas in particular, are proposed as outstanding examples of essential analysis, with its emphasis on clarity, logical coherence and objective structure. There admittedly is abstraction from the concrete here and now, but it is recognized and controlled, consciously practiced in the interest of universal objectivity. Existential analysis, on the other hand, is directed precisely toward capturing this concrete reality in its wholeness, in the totality of its existential situation. What is proposed, then, does not contradict the objective natures involved in the situation, but it does attempt to get beyond the universal objective structure and reach the concrete singular personal existence. Since there is universality among persons as well as natures, there is a fundamental basis for a metaphysics of a personal *Lebenswelt*.

These three types of analysis may help to provide a theoretical explanation of how there can be a plurality of philosophical systems which cannot be reduced to one single system, and yet are not contradictory. The difficulty here is to be able to really think in terms of *analogy*; for in the very process of talking about the analogous application of metaphysical notions and principles, man is constantly tempted to picture

³³ P. Fransen, "Three Ways of Dogmatic Thought," *The Heythrop Journal* 4 (Jan., 1963), 3-24.

the reality as composed of a hard core of univocal truth: something solid, lasting, true for all men, for all time, in exactly the same way, surrounded by a certain periphery which is open to new truths, better formulations, etc. This seems to be the usual conception of *philosophia perennis*; today this notion must be modified in terms of man's deepening appreciation for his human grasp of truth, and his human pursuit of that truth. Philosophy may be one in essence, as truth is one, but this affirmation must always be balanced with the complementary truth that it is always multiple in the actual human achievement.³⁴

From this discussion of Catholic philosophy, some may draw the conclusion that scholastic philosophy is on the way out, that it constitutes an anachronism. This pessimism does not seem to be substantiated by the facts, and certainly does not represent a valid inference from the preceding discussion. On the contrary, far from relegating Thomism into oblivion, its confrontation with contemporary philosophy, its evaluation in the light of the new theories on the nature of philosophy—appear to be the only sound approach toward safeguarding and manifesting the true value of Thomism as a philosophy. If the investigation into the nature of truth as grasped by man, and into the nature of the philosophical enterprise, should issue in the practical effect that scholasticism would become in the future a Catholic philosophy instead of *the* Catholic philosophy, it may well gain more by this moderate view than through the pathetic attempts to preserve its quasi monopoly by isolation and authoritarian decree.³⁵

From the various points made in the preceding discussion, some general conclusions can be drawn which may help to specify more precisely what constitutes the challenge of the

³⁴ See J. Collins, *op. cit.*, Chap. 10: The Problem of a Perennial Philosophy," pp. 262, 278-79; also confer F. Va Steenberghe, "L'avenir du thomisme," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 54 (1956), especially pp. 211-14, 217-18.

³⁵ See Rosemary Lauer, "Thomism Today," *Commonweal* vol. 80, no. 2 (April 3, 1964), p. 42. See also J. V. Mullaney's "Developmental Thomism," *The Thomist* 19 (1956), 1-21, especially pp. 2-3, and the application of Newman's theory of development to Thomism.

aggiornamento applied to Catholic philosophy. In the first place, there should be a realistic appreciation of the fact that there is no single metaphysical system that is complete and finished, a system which only has to be passed on as one would pass on some heirloom, like a piece of jewelry. The pursuit of truth does not mean gathering up all the accumulated knowledge of the past. If philosophy is alive, if it means anything to living men and their experience, it must develop in every age. The study of philosophy, from the very start, can never be reduced to the reproduction of any particular system, already worked out and ready to be served. If Thomism does not have any new paths to offer, Catholic intellectuals will seek them elsewhere, as in fact they have been doing in ever increasing numbers, especially since the end of the last war. What is to be insisted upon here is the fundamental inadequacy of the ideal, consciously or unconsciously fostered in Catholic intellectual circles, of a philosophic system that does offer a ready-made synthesis, that is for all practical purposes complete and unchanging in its essentials. Any hope of such a synthesis should be rejected not only as impossible as far as concrete realization is concerned, but as an erroneous ideal. Such a finished system would literally be the finish for philosophy, as Mgr. Jolivet aptly remarks.³⁶

Yet balance here must be maintained as in everything else. To assert that there is not, and never will be, one perfect system which perfectly expresses all truth, is not to claim that all systems are equally good. The Thomistic synthesis, when rightly understood, incorporates an unmined and largely uncharted potential and universality that is certainly unmatched by any philosophy that has appeared thus far. But

³⁶ Jolivet, *art. cit.*, p. 348. E. Yarnold, in his article "The Mission of the Church," *The Way* IV (Oct. 1964), pp. 284-85, puts it this way: "People talk glibly about the Church's 'perennial philosophy', forgetting that philosophy, if alive, develops in each age. It is not the philosopher's main task to define areas of truth once for all . . . Philosophical truth is not so easily pinned down. It is much truer to say that each generation of philosophers experiments—with new concepts or new groupings of old concepts, trying to express by them the never totally expressible reality, so as to produce a new interpretation of human experience."

as yet this extraordinary value, as far as today's philosophical world as a whole is concerned, must be recognized as only potential. That fact alone constitutes the major part of the challenge of the *aggiornamento* for any Catholic philosopher.

But the challenge is bigger than the Thomist, or the scholastic in general. For the second general conclusion that could be drawn is this: the scholastic method of philosophy is not the only valid, legitimate method even for the Catholic philosopher. By scholastic method is meant that method of analyzing, developing, reflecting upon, discussing and expressing truths which was common to the medieval schoolman, and which has been carried on with various adaptations and grades of success ever since. The question of method is decidedly not an accidental issue, confined to the level of pedagogy. For many modern philosophers, philosophy *is* method. The least that should be said is that the Thomism of the *aggiornamento* must be read in view of phenomenology, of linguistic analysis, of dialectic, and this NOT from any apologetic point of view, nor for ease of discussion, nor to gain greater stature in today's philosophic community, but simply because that is what the nature of the philosophic enterprise demands.³⁷ Perhaps some would push this conclusion farther and speak of the challenge to Catholic philosophers to strike out with greater initiative and originality. Instead of attempting to bring Thomism into the 20th century, they would try to follow the example of St. Thomas himself, not his precise doctrine, and create their own, fresh Christian vision of 20th century reality. It was the creative rethinking of the Greek wisdom of Aristotle with the Christian Augustinian tradition that gave us the *Summa Theologiae*. The age of the *Summa's* is past, and those who yearn for a new St. Thomas have, it would seem, not quite plumbed the depths of the new intellectual milieu in which they live. The Catholic philosopher has a vocation today that extends beyond the realms of scholastic philosophy, to the farthest reaches of contemporary dialogue.

³⁷ See J. D. Robert, O.P., *Approche contemporaine d'une affirmation de Dieu*, (Museum Lessianum, section philosophique, no. 50; Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1962), pp. 41-42; 45, n. 2; 49-51, n. 2. Also, McCool, *art. cit.*, p. 12.

Philosophic reflection like the life of the philosopher himself, manifests a certain rhythm. There is the constant but uneven discovery of philosophic insights and approaches paired with the reaction of a necessary return to the sources.³⁸ Philosophy like life can be true to itself only by changing. The history of Thomism points out clearly enough what happens when the major concern is simply to hang on to what has already been discovered, instead of confronting the new questions, the new problematic that develop with each new age. A philosophy is alive, actual, only when it is created anew in and out of the concrete particular situation in which it exists; to receive it lock, stock and barrel, already made, from an earlier age, and nothing more, is intellectual suicide.³⁹ Philosophy by nature is a personal, humanizing, self-creative opus.

This emphasis on the here and now, however, can be overdrawn to the extent that the philosopher cuts himself off completely from all the experience of mankind before him, and starts out as if he were the first man ever to reflect on human experience. This would be an absurdity, impossible to fulfill perfectly in any case; but what should be noted is the fact that what certain outstanding thinkers have thought and said on the major philosophic problems, constitutes *part* of the problem, part of the matter of the question, for today's philosopher.⁴⁰ What a Kant or a Hegel have said on the idea of reason's power to get to God, is actually part of the problem itself, for the contemporary philosopher. Thus there is an intrinsic link between much of tradition and the philosophic "today". A contemporary Thomist, then, is not cutting himself off from his patrimony by taking up an active dialogue with today's problems.

What must be insisted upon here, however, is the fundamental inadequacy of the "inspirational supplement" frame of mind. Scholastic philosophy is not going to grow into an

³⁸ See Harvanek, *Thought* (1963), pp. 545-46; McCool, *art. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁹ See K. Rahner, "Philosophy and Theology," *Theology Digest*, 12 (Summer, 1964), p. 122.

⁴⁰ See J. Delanglade, *Le Problème de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1960), pp. 150-51.

active force on the 20th century philosophic stage, simply by tacking on some more scholia.⁴¹ The aggiornamento demands a much more profound and deeper change than that. What is needed is a creative rethinking of Thomistic principles in today's climate, a prolongation of our metaphysics which would be impossible in any climate other than the milieu in which we live—in other words, one which St. Thomas would never have dreamed of himself. Juxta-position of the new and the old is a half-way measure that satisfies no one; exclusion of the new or of the old is simply admitting defeat. Integration is the end devoutly to be wished, but which is never accomplished by devout wishes. The supplement idea is inadequate because it fails to take into account the change that is effected by any vital assimilation of new truth, within the old system. Again, philosophic expression of truth is not an onion, but more like our old map, modified by new discoveries. The personalistic, phenomenological trend today is bound to—has already—colored certain traditional Thomistic elements with new overtones, and brought out in a new way relationships that were never realized before.

Finally, there is the question of style—how one goes about philosophizing. The scholastic philosopher of today often finds it extremely difficult to work with ease and harmony within the wider context of a far more profound philosophical diversity than he had imagined existed. Often he seems to lack a definite program, or an adequate set of tools to tackle the problems posed by the concrete situation. Steps are being taken today to remedy this situation. In seeking open dialogue and a modern style, irresponsible eclecticism is decidedly not the answer. There must be retained a sense of tradition, of our tradition, which, when rightly understood, is precisely that which demands progress and openness to the new.⁴² This openness demands a suppleness that has not always been the

⁴¹ See J. Danielou, S.J., "Crisis in Christian Theology," *Catholic Mind* 50 (June, 1962); also McCool, *art. cit.*, p. 7.

⁴² See Van Steenberghen, *art. cit.*, pp. 209-14; also A. Hayen, S.J., "L'Encyclique 'Humani Generis' et la philosophie," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 73 (1951), p. 125: "To accept tradition is to accept its effort for progress."

most characteristic quality of scholastic authors, a basic intellectual humility, honesty, and sincerity that shuns facile use of jargon and name-tagging—for such practices only return to haunt their users. If philosophy is to be truly *humanistic*, an effective force in the making of a man, it must be something more than a “ferocious debate between irritable professors.”⁴³

More is demanded, then, of today's Catholic philosopher, than passing on the tradition he has received from his forebears; or more precisely, the tradition must be handed down more creatively, or else we are failing the tradition itself. More is certainly demanded than skipping around between the latest intellectual fads. There is a courage, an initiative, linked always with the prudence that is human realism, a largess we might say, which alone can respond adequately to the challenge of today. Men are needed to work with what they have, in the context in which they find themselves, with all the breadth of vision and insight of which they are capable, together with the humility and the patience that is demanded in every human condition. This, it would seem, is the challenge of the *aggiornamento* in Catholic philosophy.

⁴³ See W. Stokes, S.J., “Whitehead's Challenge to Theistic Realism,” *The New Scholasticism* 38 (Jan. 1964), pp. 5, 18-9.)