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## **Renewal in Contemporary Theology: The Present Theological Perspective**

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# Renewal In Contemporary Theology: The Present Theological Perspective

JOHN G. BOVENMARS, M.S.C.

POPE John XXIII wanted his Ecumenical Council to be a Council of *aggiornamento*, and Pope Paul VI has expressed his intention to carry out this program. The words "new Pentecost", "new spring", "reawakening" and "rejuvenation" are still ringing in our ears and gladdening our hearts. Permit me to introduce my topic with a particularly strong and beautiful statement of Pope Paul VI, taken from his first encyclical letter, *Ecclesiam suam*:

The word *aggiornamento*, rendered famous by our Predecessor of happy memory, John XXIII, should always be kept in mind as our program of action. We have confirmed it as the guiding criterion of the ecumenical council. We want to recall it to mind as a stimulus to preserve the perennial vitality of the Church, her continuous awareness and ability to study the signs of the times and her constantly youthful agility in 'scrutinizing it all carefully and retaining only what is good' (1 Tim. 5:21) always and everywhere.<sup>1</sup>

This statement is general; it applies to the various fields of liturgy, apostolate, canon law, relations of the Church with all Christians and with the world. It applies to the whole life of the Church, of which theology is also a vital function. Pope Paul himself did not hesitate to mention theology in this connection even in the first place. For after the well-known passage in his opening address at the second session,

<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, n. 40.

where he states that the intended reform "is not a turning upside down of the Church's present way of life or a breaking with what is essential and worthy of veneration in her tradition, but rather an honoring of tradition by stripping it of what is unworthy or defective so that it may be rendered firm and fruitful," he explains: "The first requirement of this reform will certainly be a more diligent study and a more intensive proclamation of the Word of God."

For the Word of God is the mirror in which the Church must discover her true self, and it is in her theologians and through their labors that the Church does take a good look at this true self. For the Church's theologians must express the divine message in terms which are meaningful to the world of today, and thus the renewal of the Church and of the world can be undertaken. The *aggiornamento*, therefore, implies and requires a theology, attuned to the spirit of this age.

The renewal of theology is well on its way. But it is difficult to describe the process of renewal, because of its complexity. So many trends have contributed their share to this renewal, that we find ourselves at a loss when we first attempt to single out its elements. The best illustration of this theological renewal is the present Ecumenical Council itself. Though little is said *about* theology, the things said in the Council are the fruit of contemporary theological thinking. And so the results of the Council reveal the influence of the various movements which form part of the renewal — the biblical, liturgical, pastoral and ecumenical movements, and the greater stress on the role of the laity. These are the movements that have shaped the Ecumenical Council, and which in their turn have received both recognition and a new impetus from the Council itself.

Although this paper concerns the renewal of theology, it is not my intention to treat here any of the movements just mentioned. What I would like to point out rather is the root of all these other movements, the atmosphere and spiritual climate which conditioned their origin, and which we could perhaps indicate by the name of "personalism".

## THE PERSONALISTIC APPROACH.

In the first article of his book *Theological Investigations*<sup>2</sup>, Fr. Karl Rahner considers the "Prospects for Dogmatic Theology". He complains that the textbooks written during the last thirty years have changed so little though the world situation has greatly changed. New questions are not raised; new concepts are not created. The old formulations are handed down in an almost mechanical way. As a principle for a modern synthesis he states:

Every Catholic theology must be a theology of both essence and existence, or putting it simply, it must both look for necessary and intrinsic structures and connexions and it must report what in fact, without metaphysical or logical necessity, took place in saving history.<sup>3</sup>

What Rahner wants is real theological thinking, "granted always that authentic knowledge of such things is only had when it is read off the facts of saving history."<sup>4</sup> Not a reflection on concepts, but a reflection on events, which answers the questions of today and which takes the progress in the various sciences into account.

After having heard this prominent member of the Society of Jesus, let us listen to a well-known professor of the Dominican Order, Fr. Edward H. Schillebeeckx. After the first session of the Ecumenical Council, during which all the schemata, prepared by the theological commission, were sent back or dropped altogether, he wrote an article in which he tried to define the basic reason why the majority of the Fathers did not like these schemata.<sup>5</sup> His opinion is:

This, I thought, was where the dividing-line could be found—where the one thinks essentially (and it is more than a way of thinking) and the other thinks existentially. This is, it is true, an oversimplification. But from the tenor of the original schemata and from discussions with these bishops and theologians it is clear that this is where the fundamental difference begins. The "essentialist" attitude

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1961 (published in German in 1954).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> E. H. Schillebeeckx, *Vatican II: A Struggle of Minds and Other Essays*. Gill and Son, Dublin, 1963.

regards the mysteries of our faith and of human life as if they were abstract essences which, first and foremost, must be formulated as precisely as possible.<sup>6</sup>

At around the same time Fr. Schillebeeckx wrote this article, a patriarch among the theologians from the secular clergy wrote a very balanced article clearly designed to bring the two opposed theological trends closer together.<sup>7</sup> In the first part of this article Msgr. Gerard Philips describes the two mentalities in contemporary theology: one group stresses that the Church must preserve the "deposit" of our faith entrusted to her, while the other group places the accent on preaching the good tidings. The one group stresses the formulations and notions in which the faith is expressed; the other group stresses the distinction between the mystery and the formulation of the mystery. The one trend feels at home in the world of technical concepts which become almost the object of its study; the other type of theologian takes care to be understood by his contemporaries; he knows that our intellectual categories really open a perspective on the revealed mystery, without however expressing it adequately. He knows that even the definitions of the Church can be perfected and completed; he takes history more into account.

The three theologians introduced here, Rahner, Schillebeeckx and Philips, are without doubt great theologians, from three different universities; all three are also official experts of the Ecumenical Council. In their analysis of the present situation we find a striking agreement: theology has been too essentialistic, and must become more existentialistic, though, as a science, it must always remain authentic thinking. —What does this mean? We will try to answer this question.

#### THEOLOGY HAS BEEN TOO ESSENTIALISTIC

We are all familiar with the manuals to which Fr. Rahner refers, and on which the original theological schemata of Vatican II were based. We do not mean the *Summa* of St. Thomas; we mean the neo-Scholastic manuals.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> G. Philips, "Deux tendances dans la théologie contemporaine" in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 85 (1963) 225-238.

These books were not sufficiently based on direct contact with the sources of revelation; they are not the fruit of reflection on the history of salvation; their biblical basis was, generally speaking, weak.

Their orientation was not sufficiently kerygmatic. The needs of modern man were not sufficiently taken into account, and the message which they actually conveyed was expressed in a terminology which did not belong to our age.

Moreover the categories of their thinking were "objective", impersonal, chiefly "physical". The presentation was characterized by its abstract and non-historical character, by its immutability even in the formulation; in one word, by its "essentialism".

In fact the technical apparatus which this theology makes use of is aristotelian. Aristotle was a keen observer; he looked at the things as they were given, and his problem was: *quid sit res*, what is it? With his categories of substance and the various kinds of accidents he was able to define the quiddity of the things very distinctly. These categories, however, are taken from "things"; they can be used to characterize man in as far as man shares in these common properties of being. But it is clear that, when they are affirmed of man, human existence is described in a "physical", "objective" and impersonal way.<sup>8</sup>

What we have called here "physicism", with Schillebeeckx, is referred to as "naturalism" by A. Dondeyne in his excellent book, *Contemporary European Thought and Christian Faith*.<sup>9</sup> Let us quote one passage to illustrate this:

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. E. H. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God*. Sheed and Ward, London and New York, 1963, p. 1: "One cannot help but remark that the theology of the manuals does not always make a careful distinction between that unique manner of existence which is peculiar to man, and the mode of being, mere objective 'being there', which is proper to the things of nature."

<sup>9</sup> Albert Dondeyne, *Contemporary European Thought and Christian Faith*, Duquesne Studies, Philosophical Series, 8, E. Nauwelaerts, Louvain, 1958.

Naturalism in this wider sense is the temptation to visualize the whole real (including the realm of conscience and freedom, inter-subjectivity, and even the mysterious depth of the Godhead) in terms of cosmological categories, that is, in terms of categories borrowed from the world of nature, from the world of "things" as Bergson would put it. Among these categories, two deserve special attention, those of "things" and "impersonal causality".<sup>10</sup>

Then he sets out to describe these two cosmological categories. Let us remark here only that "impersonal causality" refers to a causal process in which there is no place for the person, for the intervention of liberty, as when "rain is formed by a sudden cooling of clouds."<sup>11</sup> When this notion of causality is used in theology, for example in connection with the sacraments as "causes" of grace, the danger exists that the sacraments are seen as impersonal, mechanical causes. The reason is, that the central reference point of this way of thinking is the cosmos, the things of nature.

Aristotle, then, describes what the things are: therein lies his merit. His philosophy is mainly a philosophy of essence; "To Be" plays hardly any role in his thought. In this sense his system is truly "essentialistic".<sup>12</sup>

What we have said about the theology of the beginning of this century is very incomplete and therefore perhaps unfair. Actually we do not mean to give here a balanced assessment of the theology of that time; we want only to show how it differs from the more "existential" theology of today.

It must also be noted carefully that we do not say at all that the doctrine contained in these manuals is wrong. Actually in this paper we are not talking about doctrine, but about presentation of doctrine. When we say that sancti-

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotelianism is much more essentialistic than Thomism, since participation in Being plays an important role in the philosophy of St. Thomas. But in this point the Neo-Scholastics are more aristotelian than St. Thomas. It was only with L. Geiger, *La Participation dans la Philosophie de S. Thomas*, (Paris, 1942) and with C. Fabro, *La Partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino*, (Milano, 1939) and *La nozione metafisica de partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Torino—Roma, 1950) that the idea of participation was revived again.

ying grace is a habit, this is true. It is even a very important truth in as far as it expresses that grace is not a mere extrinsic relationship from man to God. But considering that "habit" is a "dinglich" category, i.e., a qualification that can as well be found in things, we could say also, that the statement that grace is a habit is as true as saying that music is a vibration in the air. In both cases the approach is "physical", naturalistic, cosmological. Can this approach be improved?

#### THE EXISTENTIALISTIC APPROACH

In an essentialistic philosophy the world of nature is regarded as a world of objects which can be studied apart from all reference to man, and with the categories thus obtained, everything is explained. In existentialistic philosophy human existence is the central reference-point, the central intuition, the primitive fact. It is the point of reference for all significance and comprehension.

The consequences of this copernican revolution in philosophical thought are many, and it would be impossible to treat them all in one article. Our purpose here is to show some consequences of this change for theology. For a deeper study of the philosophical background I have to refer to the excellent works written in this field.<sup>13</sup>

The new view of man, presented to us by phenomenological existentialism, is equally important for exegesis, dogmatic theology and moral theology. The modern trends in these theological fields are unintelligible for those who are not acquainted with this view. This view is not only splendid and rich, but it has also restored urgency and dynamism to philosophy and theology, and it seems to me that it is far more appealing, also to non-western thinkers, than the abstract conception of human nature as something given and static. Let us sketch rapidly a few features of this image.

<sup>13</sup> For those who are not familiar with this style of thinking, it will be difficult to start with first-hand reading of Heidegger, Marcel, Sartre or Merleau-Ponty. As first contact with these authors it would seem to me advisable that one start with some books *about* their



## I. INTENTIONALITY

Philosophy had become a science of objects; existentialism is a "return to the subject". For man is a subject, distinguished from the things by his consciousness; he can say "I". Existentialism opens for us, by the key of phenomenology, the treasures of subjectivity. By "object" the existentialists mean something out there, in which I am not involved. The objective approach is attempted in the positive sciences. In phenomenology I see the world as something in which I am involved; the things are seen as my "horizon". In this sense even the world, my "*Umwelt*", is not an "object" any more.

Descartes also made the ego the starting point of his philosophy. But Descartes' ego is closed—a closed subjectivity. Descartes' problem was how to prove that the world exists. It is only through the veracity of God that we know that the world corresponds to the ideas of our mind. The *I* of existentialism, the *I* of my experience, is different: that I am writing on a paper is as clear to me as the fact that I am thinking. My *I* is open to the world. It is my consciousness that makes me an "*I*" distinguished from the things; it is the openness, the "intentionality" of my consciousness that makes me a being-to-the-world, which brings me in direct contact with the world and with other people. This notion of intentionality dominates all philosophizing which derives its inspiration from Husserl, and it has far-reaching consequences with regard to the notion of truth. Though the purpose of this paper is theological, I would like to develop one aspect of this notion of intentionality a little further, because it has influenced theological thinking considerably.

thought. For this purpose, the following books are to be recommended:

Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement, A Historical Introduction*. (2 volumes) Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1960; Alphonse de Waelhens, *La Philosophie de Martin Heidegger*, Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain (4eme ed.), 1955; Albert Dondeyne, *Contemporary European Thought and Christian Faith*. Duquesne Studies, Philosophical series, 8. Ed. E. Nauwelaerts, Louvain, 1958. William A. Luyten, *Existential Phenomenology*, Duquesne Studies, Philosophical Series, 12. Ed. E. Nauwelaerts, Louvain, 1960.

One important consequence of this is that all intentional behavior manifests a so-called "noetic-noematic" structure. By "*noema*", contemporary writers mean the object of the intentional consciousness, the grasped, the "seen", with the meaning it possesses for consciousness. The "*noesis*", is the manner in which the subject orients himself intentionally towards things, the way in which he views or "proposes" objects to himself, the grasping. Since intentional behavior brings about the meeting of intention and datum, *noesis* and *noema* always go together; the meaning of one points to the meaning of the other. It is impossible to describe one without bringing in the other.<sup>14</sup>

The study of this structure of our consciousness has shown that our knowledge of the things and of the other is not as perfectly "objective" as was thought formerly. For the mind of the knowing subject is not merely passively determined by the datum, as a mirror by its object; much depends on the attitude, the "intention" of the knower. When somebody calls a little stick a "baton", this reveals his intention to use it as a help in directing a choir; but for his little son it may be an instrument of torture, for once he was beaten with it. Our knowledge is greatly determined by our point of view; we know the things under a certain perspective. This is already true for sensitive knowledge: when we look down on a table, we see only the upper surface, not the underside. That the table is "in front of me" or "at my left" depends as much on me as on the table. All things can be known from various perspectives, and thus the truth results from the encounter between the datum and the subject in his particular situation.<sup>15</sup> The "intention" of the knower becomes a more and more important principle for understanding what he means. To be able to agree with him we must follow his approach. This view has caused already great changes in exegesis (hermeneutic) as well as in speculative theology.

Let us conclude this short study of intentionality with a quotation from the first "manual" of existential phenomenology, the book of Fr. Luypen:

A search has been made for terms which express as unequivocally as possible the fundamental moment of intelligibility proper to

<sup>14</sup> Dondeyne, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> What Schillebeeckx calls "perspective" in our knowledge refers to Husserl's doctrine of "Abschattung."

existential phenomenology. The main purpose of this search was to give expression to the fact that it is impossible to think subject and world as separate from each other. Perhaps "encounter" is one of the most suitable terms for this purpose. For an encounter is wholly unthinkable unless both terms of the encounter are conceived in relation to each other....

The term "dialogue" is suitable also. Existence is a dialogue in which both participants contribute their share. If either of them is thought away, the dialogue itself vanishes. The unity of subject and the world is a dialectical unity, the unity of a dialogue. This dialogue is the very source from which all statements of philosophy draw their origin.<sup>16</sup>

It is in contact with reality that man unveils the meaning of the things; that the spark of truth is ignited. It is in a given historical situation that truth emerges, as an event.

## II. HISTORICITY

We have seen so far that for existentialism man is a conscious being, an "I", open to the world and open to others, to "Thou". We can not dwell upon so many existentials implied here: man's being-to-the-world, care, intersubjectivity. To give a complete image of human existence, we would have to summarize the whole analysis or "hermeneutic" of the *Dasein*, proposed by Heidegger in his *Being and Time*, a description of man unequalled in its originality, profundity and beauty. Let us limit ourselves here to one more important existential, the historicity of man.<sup>17</sup> It is this notion which shows best the difference between the essentialistic and existentialistic view of man.

A thing is something given; it is ready and complete. Man is not just something given. That which is given in man we could call his nature. But it is on the basis of what is given that human existence starts. By his freedom man makes his own life. A man looks forward into the future and makes his plans. On the basis of his situation in the world he discovers his vocation, and thus he becomes himself. Personal being is freedom, "projecting" oneself towards the future,

<sup>16</sup> Luypen, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>17</sup> Dondeyne, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-57.

answering one's calling. What is given in him is mere facticity; that does not depend on him; after all he is "thrown" into existence. A man is rather what he wants to be, for that project comes from him, is personal; man is project, or, as Sartre says cryptically: a man is not what he is; he is what he is not.

The historicity of man supposes his temporal structure. A *Dasein* retains the past in his consciousness (retention); lives in the present and looks forward into the future (protention). These are the three ecstasies of time, as Husserl calls them. The future is not just something which fate has in store for us; an authentic person does not let himself be swept along by the current of events, but takes a stand in this current; he makes his own future, at least, up to a certain limit. This implies planning, choosing and deciding. Of course, my situation and my future are also influenced by other persons. Historicity results from the combination of temporality and intersubjectivity.

In the realm of things we find evolution, but not history in the strict sense. Evolution is a physical or biological process. History is pervaded by freedom and is found on the personal level. A man makes history by free decisions. Evolution is determined by fixed laws; freedom is creative and original. Things, the world, can, however, participate in the history of man. For man is an incarnate spirit who forms his environment. He builds his own world because he needs it as his instrument. To become himself he cultivates the world. And so man's historical character is inseparable from the history of "civilization". In civilization the world plays a role; it is a give and take between man and his world.

The most characteristic trait of European thought, particularly since World War II, is its realization of the historical dimensions of man's existence. Thus historicity has become a central theme in contemporary philosophy, whether it be of Hegelian, Marxist, or phenomenological inspiration. Such an emphasis can easily lead—and has, in fact, quite often led—to a form of relativism which would be impossible to reconcile with the notion of a Divine Revelation, of an immutable Truth or of an absolute moral law.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Dondeyne, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Combining these two central "existentials" of intentionality and historicity, we see at least a glimpse of human existence, and we can understand what is meant with the historicity of truth. If it is true that man is not an impartial spectator, but rather a subject engaged in a particular historical situation, and if truth is born in such contact, it follows that our insight into the world must inevitably manifest a historical character.<sup>19</sup> The meaning which the world takes up for me depends, to some extent at least, on my attitude, on the project I am proposing. And this project, in turn, is connected with my situation in the world. As an incarnate spirit I live in one place at a certain moment in history; I can not synthesize all points of view in one sweep. And thus I know the world only in a finite, incomplete, and, in a certain sense, provisory way. Truth as "event", truth as "possession", is conditioned; it is historical.<sup>20</sup>

### III. THEOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS

The influence of this view of man in theology goes very deep. We have to limit ourselves here to the field of dogmatic theology. But let us mention in passing that the new exegetical method of form criticism is rooted in this conception. Rudolf Bultmann actually worked together with Heidegger in the University of Marburg at the time that *Being and Time* was written.<sup>21</sup>

Moral theology also is deeply affected by the personalistic approach. (22) Moral behavior is now considered as an answer given by man to an invitation from God; morality is a project of life, not merely a body of rules and moral norms. Personal

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-52.

<sup>20</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Vatican II: A Struggle of Minds and Other Essays*, p. 31: "Truth as a human possession is never outside time and place. A denial of this (making one interpretation of truth absolute) betrays its fatal effect in what we have called essentialist thinking. This, I maintain, is the basic conflict that came to the surface during the first phase of the Council."

<sup>21</sup> For a good synthesis of the doctrine of Bultmann with a criticism from the Catholic point of view, see L. Malevez, *The Christian Message and Myth. The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann.* SCM Press, London 1958.

responsibility is stressed; for a man must think himself and discover what the situation demands. The idea that life comes essentially from within; that personal life consists in thinking and freedom, is very fruitful, even for the art of education, which consists in helping somebody to become a person, by helping him to think and to decide well.

Just as philosophy is a reflection on human existence, so theology is a reflection on Christian existence, on the life of a believer. Now human existence is a dialogue with the world and with the other; Christian existence is primarily a dialogue with God.

For faith is a dialogue. Faith is not merely the mental acceptance of some ideas and propositions; we believe rather in a person, in God. Revelation, faith, must themselves first be seen in a personalistic way.<sup>22</sup> The propositions are not the term of my faith, but the mystery expressed by these propositions; the living God, and His Son Jesus Christ.

God reveals Himself to us, not merely by words, but rather by deeds. He has revealed Himself to Israel as a saving God by redeeming them from Egypt and by guiding them to the Promised Land. He has shown His mercy to us, not so much by words, but by sending His Son to redeem us. Christ is the revelation of God's love, not so much by what He said, but rather by His dying for us on the cross. Christ is the revelation of God. Revelation, therefore, is not so much a collection of statements, but rather—God entering human history by His actions. The mystery in which we believe is: God with us; the Alliance; Christ.

When God wants to talk with us, He has to make use of human language to be understood. Similarly the prophets who interpreted God's saving deeds expressed themselves in categories used at that time. The union between Jahweh and his people, for example, was called *berith*, alliance, after the

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<sup>22</sup> Besides the by now classical book of B. Häring, *The Law of Christ* see for example, Th. Steinbuchel, *Religion und Moral im Lichte personaler Christlicher Existenz*, Frankfurt 1951.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Mouroux, *I Believe. The Personal Structure of Faith*. Geoffrey Chapman, London 1959.

example of a king striking an alliance with his vassals or with a conquered people, as happened sometimes around 1000 B.C. Since the notion of evolution was unknown, the creation of the world had to be described in categories taken from their static world view, in which everything is thought to exist right from the beginning.<sup>24</sup> The world view, used in wording the divine message, is the primitive semitic view of the earth shaped like a flat cake, founded upon the waters of a primeval sea, and vaulted by a fixed firmament to which sun, moon and stars are attached. For us it is evident now that these elements do not belong to the content of the divine message; they are rather the human dress in which God's Word comes to us. For, as Pope John said, the mystery is one thing, and another thing the formulation of the mystery. The formulation is colored by time and place. When somebody is familiar with the people of that time and place, when he knows not only their language, but also their way of life, their customs, literature and world view, then he can understand their expressions and images, the vehicles of their thought, and he will be able to re-interpret them in his own language.

God addressed his message to the Jews, speaking their language. The first expression of revelation was semitic. But God intends his message also for us, today. For the Church must go on to teach all nations whatever Christ taught His Apostles. To be understood by us, the Church also must speak our language. Here the theologians have a task; they must keep the understanding of the message alive; they must try to understand it ever more deeply, to present it ever more effectively. From the preceding it ought to be clear that this re-interpretation must have the following characteristics:

(a) *It ought to speak the language of its own time, making use of the categories of thought of its own time. For theology is a science; an authentic thinker thinks in categories drawn from his own experience. Actually we see how theology took a hellenistic dress in the first centuries, accord-*

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Levie, *The Bible, Word of God in Words of Men*. Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1961.

ing to the culture of that time.<sup>25</sup> And at the time of scholasticism, when Aristotle made his entry in the Christian world, St. Thomas expressed revelation in aristotelian categories. In our own day many theologians are courageously attempting a new re-interpretation of the faith, a modern presentation, making use of the phenomenological style of thinking of our day. Is it not evident that a science, to be vital, must think in concepts which are vital now? Is it not clear that theology, to be relevant, must present the whole divine message, but with the accents required by the present age? "An appeal to the continuously growing clarification of human existence is a question of life or death for authentic theology."<sup>26</sup>

This explains the growing interest of so many theologians all over the world, both Protestant and Catholic, in the work of philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gabriel Marcel, and especially Martin Heidegger. The hermeneutic of the *Dasein* is particularly illuminating, though it would be an exaggeration to say that it can claim universal value.<sup>27</sup> In painting the image of man Heidegger likes dark colors: sense of despair, fall, being-toward-death. It seems

<sup>25</sup> Jean Daniélou, *Message évangélique et Culture hellénistique aux IIe. et IIIe. Siècles*, Desclee, Tournai, 1961.

<sup>26</sup> E. H. Schillebeeckx, "De nieuwe wending in de huidige Dogmatiek," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*, I (1960), p. 26. See also the article by Joseph Ratzinger in *Theology Digest*, X (1962) pp. 71-76. "Therefore, the primary task of theology today, as far as spreading the gospel message is concerned, is not 'adaptation' to oriental or African cultures but rather adaptation to the spirit of our time." (p. 76)

<sup>27</sup> Some recent articles on Heidegger's relevance for theology:

William J. Richardson, "Heidegger and Theology," in *Theological Studies*, 26 (1965), pp. 86-100 (positive appreciation).

From a Protestant point of view:

Hans Jonas, "Heidegger and Theology," in *The Review of Metaphysics*, December, 1964, pp. 207-233 (quite negative).

Helmut Franz, "Heidegger's Relevance for Theology," in *Theology Digest*, X (1962), pp. 87-93.

Besides Bultmann, Paul Tillich also cooperated with Heidegger at Marburg and was greatly influenced by him.

In Fr. Richardson's article, mentioned above, a whole series of books is listed on p. 87. "But whether it offers any light or not, the ecumenical importance of Heidegger's influence, especially for us in



that he considered very few people to be "authentic men". But this does not take away the fact that personalistic categories are more appropriate for talking about God, grace, the sacraments, etc. than cosmological categories; the adventure of the Encounter with God should be described in personalistic terms, for it is a personal event. There may be dangers involved; it does not dispense us from recourse to analogy, to the way of negation and eminence, but all things being said, the personalistic presentation means a tremendous gain.

(b) *The new interpretation actually stresses that theology is perspectivistic.* Limited beings as we are, and influenced by our situation, by our concern, we have a view of the mystery which is relative. That is why our theology can grow and change; it can be completed by a deeper realization of the mystery. Our statements are never definitive, because theology shares in our historicity. The mystery does not change, but the perspective in which we view the mystery changes in the course of history, and so our knowledge of the faith is deepened. "This does not destroy the absoluteness of truth; it merely indicates that man perceives this absoluteness in a limited perspective that is capable of expansion."<sup>28</sup>

We know the absolute (revelation) in a relative way, and because we are conscious of our perspectivism, at the same time we transcend it, and so we overcome relativism.

At first sight it may seem more convenient to stick to a timeless, unchangeable language in theology. But this would mean in practice that a definite moment in history is superimposed as a model beyond time and space for the entire subsequent evolution of the Church. This would mean death

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America, is unquestionable. This would be the second reason for discussing it. The *New Frontiers in Theology* series includes such titles as *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (1963) and *The New Hermeneutic* (1964). Another volume, (now in preparation) will contain the proceedings of a consultation of Protestant theologians held at Drew University, Madison, N.J., in April 1964, on the theme *The Problem of Non-objectifying Thinking and Speaking in Theology—Heideggerian terminology of the purest water.*"

<sup>28</sup> J. Ratzinger, *loc. cit.*, p. 74.

for theology, for it would not be a vital act anymore; theology would become a relic:

To refer back to a certain snapshot of Church history—even one taken at a peak period, as for instance the age of scholasticism—and posit it as a norm for all further insight into the truth, is in fact a form of relativism “maintaining the absolute truth”, because it means that a relatively successful theological synthesis—and every human achievement is relative in this sense—leads to rejection of every new synthesis.<sup>29</sup>

(c) *Are the dogmatic formulations to be also re-interpreted?* As long as there is talk about changes in canon law or in the liturgy, or about “organic development” in dogma by making explicit what was implicitly given, the *aggiornamento* is not disturbing to most theologians. But when they hear about re-interpretation of dogmatic formulations, they are startled. Is at least our dogma not a stable rock amid the waves of change? Can there be something like an “evolution by subtraction”?

Let us try to be clear about this. We can not change revelation. What God has affirmed, no man can deny. Dogmatic formulations also cannot change, in the sense that the opposite can never be defined.

But the mystery expressed by the definition is one thing, and another thing is the formulation of the mystery.<sup>30</sup> This is very important, not only for exegesis and theology, but even for the infallible formulations of the Church. Just as the Word of God in Holy Scripture is expressed in human signs characterized by the time and the culture in which they were created, so the official declarations of the Church are dressed in formulations, conceptions and representations shaped in

<sup>29</sup> E. H. Schillebeeckx, *Vatican II* . . . , p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> The literal text of this statement of Pope John, made during the opening speech at the first session of the Council: “oportet ut haec doctrina certa et immutabilis, cui fidele obsequium est praestandum, ea ratione pervestigetur et exponatur, quam tempora postulant nostra. Est enim aliud ipsum depositum Fidei, seu veritates, quae veneranda doctrina nostra continentur, aliud modus, quo eadem enuntiantur, eodem tamen sensu eademque sententia.” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, LIV (1962), p. 792.

a certain period, influenced by a certain situation. Even though the content is unchangeable and definitive, and even though the formulation itself is in a true sense infallible, as a correct expression of the mystery, still the formulation can be updated. It is possible that certain elements of the formulation connote, for example, a world view which later on became antiquated. It is clear that the world view was not defined, but served merely as a medium of thought. This leaves room for a more modern statement of the same content. What holds for the Word of God in the Bible, holds also, in this respect, for the Word of God as contained in dogmatic propositions.

It is to be noted that this re-interpretation is not merely a question of terms and categories; there is something deeper. As we have seen when we talked about "perspectivism", what was affirmed at some time in the past, was an answer to a certain question asked then. It was connected with spontaneously accepted presuppositions. Consequently, to understand these affirmations correctly, we can not always consider them immediately as answers to our question. Maybe our questions were not even known at that time; and maybe certain presuppositions have changed. Our perspective may be somewhat different, and this may be the reason why our question is to be answered in a different way.

Let us take one of the examples chosen by Bultmann: "*descendit ad inferos, ascendit ad caelos*". The truth presented by these propositions is expressed in spatial terms which reveal a Ptolemaic view of the world. Would the Christian, in order to remain loyal to his faith, be forced to hold to the Ptolemaic system? It is evident that a faith which has to be associated so closely with ancient cosmology cannot be reconciled with the modern picture of the universe. But the real object of the message of the descent and ascent is different. While the descent may, according to some exegetes, refer to the death of Christ (entering the under-world usually means to die), the ascent certainly means the final exaltation of Christ to the right hand of the Father; it proclaims also the end of an epoch: henceforth, Christ is withdrawn from our

"felt" experience; he no longer manifests himself save to a pure faith which is happy to believe without seeing.<sup>31</sup>

Here we have an illustration how the progress of scientific thought, the abandonment of the Ptolemaic system for the Copernican view, has helped theology to explain its true content at a particular point and to separate it from images and representations which surrounded its first formulation without belonging to the substance of our faith. When such accessory elements of the formulation are dropped, we could speak of a certain "evolution by subtraction".

This is of course a very delicate process. Who will decide what belongs to the real content of our faith, and what is merely an external element of formulation? It is evident that the teaching authority of the Church has an important role in this re-interpretation of her dogma, to take care that no dogma will be interpreted into nothingness. Though Bultmann has realized the need for an existential interpretation of the divine message most clearly, it is obvious for us that his re-interpretation is unacceptable. Most important elements of the content of our faith, like the resurrection of Christ, are considered by him as mythological covering of the Christian message. He has taken away the Lord, and so he cannot escape the charge of having made an attack upon the very substance of Christianity. But this does not mean that theologians, inspired by the living tradition of the Church and guided by her magisterium should not undertake the task of updating the presentation of Christian dogma at all.

These few introductory remarks show how vast the program of theology is. To be able to present the Christian message to our time the theologian must understand both sides in this dialogue: God and the world. He must listen to God by making himself familiar with the biblical categories, utilizing the fruits of modern exegesis to the fullest. He will have to be familiar with the patristic and scholastic presentation of the divine message, for these interpretations embody great progress in understanding God's Word. He has to be familiar

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. L. Malevez, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

with the official statements of the magisterium of the Church and with her official prayer. He must be well acquainted with the style of thinking of his own time, with the situation, the way of living, the needs and trends of his contemporaries, so that he can translate for them the Word of God in their own idiom. For theology is a pastoral science, and this does not make it less scientific. A pastoral presentation does not mean a pragmatic approach, which is less concerned with the truth.<sup>32</sup> The existentialist approach is both scientific and pastoral. Theology is a function of the Church, rooted in the faith of the Church and serving the growth of her life of faith. Theology must let the light of faith shine through human existence: showing the Christian how, freed from anxiety and enslavement to the temporal, he is set free to love his heavenly Father and his brothers; and how, involved in the life of the world, he should keep alive the hope of the beatifying Encounter.

<sup>32</sup> E. H. Schillebeeckx, *Vatican II...*, pp. 22-26, "The Term 'Pastoral'."