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THE “CATHEDRAL” OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Somewhere in the mists of my childhood, perhaps in a lecture by the Venerable Servant of God, Fulton Sheen, I came across the idea that the Catholic faith is like a Gothic cathedral where every single piece of architecture has its purpose, even the gargoyles. The gargoyles are the demons fleeing the kingdom in terror, the powers of darkness repelled by the *Lumen Christi*. They stand for eschatology. They signify the dramatic cosmic battle for true freedom since *before* the fall of man.

It follows that the displacement of one of the pieces of the “cathedral” can cause more or less serious instability depending on how central the piece is in the infrastructure. Any damage to even the smallest part is always a pastoral disaster. As the great Fr James V. Schall often told his students, a small intellectual error at the base of any system will have exponential consequences as that error takes root in a culture, an institution or a human life¹. It may only start out as a small error, only a couple of degrees south of true north, but it will have its own rationality that sets it on a trajectory that will carry it forward to a place a long way south of true north.

If we look at the cathedral of Catholic theology today it is more problematic than a few damaged gargoyles. If the side arches are scripture and tradition there is no consensus within Catholic academies on how these two building blocks are to be understood. There are numerous hermeneutical frameworks for scripture studies, including feminist, eco-feminist and Marxist, and at least three quite different understandings of tradition (neo-scholastic, Blondelian and post-modern).

If the buttresses are philosophy and history, then philosophy is under attack as Logo-centrism and history is regarded as something like a dangerously unstable chemical by those who stand firmly on the side of a 19th century scholastic understanding of tradition. Meanwhile those intoxicated with the project of correlating the faith to whatever happens to be the dominant culture of the day take little interest in anything that happened before 1968.

¹ James V. Schall (1928-2019) was an American Jesuit, described as the “American Chesterton.” He was a professor of political philosophy and staunch critic of Marxism.

If Trinitarian theology is the lead seams that hold the roof, arches and buttresses together, then there are fractures here too between proponents of high and low Christologies, between the Jesus of history and the Christ of the Gospels. There are even divisions between those who wish to defend “Creedal Christianity” (the Nicean Creed and Chalcedonian adverbs) and those who regard the “archiving” of the teachings of the early Church Councils as one of those “reforms” that urgently need to be undertaken.

When we look at the territory of ecclesiology, the “altar” perhaps, to extend this metaphor, there is a division between those who regard sacred ordination, including the office of the papacy in relation to the other sacred ministers, as a hierarchy established by Christ himself in fulfillment of Jewish precedents, and others who regard these offices merely as outdated artifacts of the Roman empire.

When we move to the floor of the cathedral, human persons and their relationship to the Holy Trinity, there is no agreement around the building blocks of theological anthropology (nature and grace, faith and reason, history and ontology, the role of conscience and the whole territory of natural law). Since there is no agreement here it follows that there can be no agreement in the territory of morals because morality and anthropology are intrinsically linked. There can also be no stable consensus about matters pertaining to sacramental theology for as long as concepts like “ontological change,” related to the nature and grace relationship, are in dispute.

Further there are those who do not really want Catholic theology at all, they want what St. John Henry Newman called “the religion of the world.”² They want

² John Henry Newman, Sermon 24 titled *The Religion of the Day* §309 of Oxford on-line version which states: “In every age of Christianity, since it was first preached, there has been what may be called a *religion of the world*, which so far imitates the one true religion, as to deceive the unstable and unwary. The world does not oppose religion *as such*. I may say, it never has opposed it. In particular, it has, in all ages, acknowledged in one sense or other the Gospel of Christ, fastened on one or other of its characteristics, and professed to embody this in its practice; while by neglecting the other parts of the holy doctrine, it has, in fact, distorted and corrupted even that portion of it which it has exclusively put forward, and so has contrived to explain away the whole;—for he who cultivates only one precept of the Gospel to the exclusion of the rest, in reality attends to no part at all.” See also: J.H. Newman, *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects*, Toronto: Bryant Press 2007 [1872], 3: 233. Newman had written: “This is what the Age is coming to, and I wish it observed. We know it denies the existence of the Church as a divine institution: it denies that Christianity has been cast into any particular social mould. Well: but this, I say, is not all; it is rapidly tending to deny the existence of any system of Christianity either; any creed, doctrine, philosophy, or by whatever other name we designate it. Hitherto it had been usual, indeed, to give up the Church, and to speak only of the covenant, religion, creed, matter, or system of the Gospel; to consider the Gospel as a sort of literature or philosophy, open for all to take and appropriate, not confined to any set of men, yet still a real, existing system of religion. This has been the approved line of opinion in our part of the world for the last hundred and fifty years; but now a further step is about to be taken. The view henceforth is to be, that Christianity does not exist in documents, any more than in institutions; in other words, the Bible will be given up as well as the Church. It will be said that the benefit which Christianity

to distill “Christian values” from the kerygma of the faith and then marry such “values” to popular contemporary social theories and ideologies. Karl Rahner’s expression “gnoseological concupiscence” is a good description of this intellectual practice. Too much interest in the thought systems of the “world” kills the cat. The “values,” such as kindness and compassion, once they have sloughed off the unfashionable elements of the kerygma, like belief in the divinity of Christ, “hook up” with utopian theories designed to foster an order of absolute equality in all things.

According to Rawlsian liberalism, one of the popular contenders for religion of the world status, the most “sinful” act a person can perform is that of making a judgement about the lifestyle choices of another.³ John Rawls believed that if a man decides to spend his life counting blades of grass, then that is the good life for him, and no one else has any standing to judge him. Again, to recall the wisdom of Fr Schall, “the Liberal-Enlightenment thesis is that evil is essentially an historical, political product.”⁴ Once this becomes axiomatic, the religious impulse is driven in the direction of utopian political projects, political activism replaces worship and the state becomes an idol. We are then back to the days of pagan Rome.

Given the above the cathedral looks like an old Portuguese azulejo mural with bits of broken tile everywhere, the grouting between the sections long decayed and parts of paint work faded beyond recognition.

So what can young Catholic scholars do in these times to help reorient the cathedral of Catholic theology heavenwards?

A simple rebooting of the system to 1959 is not the solution. The fact that parts of the building collapsed so quickly in the early 1960s is evidence of areas of underlying weakness. These weaknesses need to be addressed. Further, while a lot of junk has been brought into the building in the past half century an enormous amount of creative structural repair work has also been undertaken. Whenever there is a crisis within an intellectual tradition there are people who come forward with solutions and these solutions then become part of the tradition. Many of those on the academic honour board of the Church, the “Church Doctors,” are saints who

has done to the world, and which its Divine Author meant it should do, was to give an impulse to society, to infuse a spirit, to direct, control, purify, enlighten the mass of human thought and action, but not to be a separate and definite something, whether doctrine or association, existing objectively, integral, and with an identity, and for ever, and with a claim upon our homage and obedience. And all this fearfully coincides with the symptoms in other directions of the spread of a Pantheistic spirit, that is, the religion of beauty, imagination, and philosophy, without constraint moral or intellectual, a religion speculative and self-indulgent. Pantheism, indeed, is the great deceit which awaits the Age to come.”

³ See, for example: J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1999 and J. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Cambridge, MA – London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2001, and J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press 2005.

⁴ J.V. Schall, *The Politics of Heaven and Hell: Christian Themes from Classical, Medieval and Modern Political Philosophy*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America 1984, p. 109.

sorted the intellectual crises of past centuries. Although not yet declared a “Church Doctor,” St. John Paul II’s catechesis on human love and his work on rebuilding the “grouting” between dogmatic theology and moral theology, is certainly one element in the theology of the past half century that is a significant improvement on that which preceded it.

Rather than rebooting to 1959 it would help to study the significant works of Catholic theology produced in the century between 1860 and 1960. This would include Newman’s *Grammar of Assent* (1870) and Matthias J. Scheeben’s *Mysteries of Christianity* (1865), but also the works of the inter-war generation of German scholars who were heavily influenced by Newman. They were contending with German Idealist philosophy on the one side and the Nietzschean attack on rationality and Christian Humanism on the other. This was an era of great dynamism in theological scholarship, including an era of serious ecumenism that took the form of revisiting the moment in history when the rifts occurred. It was an era of what may be called “re-weaving the tapestry” ecumenism.⁵ This is not the kind of ecumenism that searches for lowest common denominators of agreement but the kind that re-examines the initial theological disputes and seeks to resolve them, thereby mending the tear in the tapestry of Christian intellectual life. Those working on this part of the cathedral were rebooting to 1500.

In this era Russian scholars taking refuge in Paris from the Bolshevik Revolution brought with them their knowledge of the Greek fathers. Their ideas cross fertilized with the neo-patristic or *ressourcement* movement in France. In the German-speaking regions Lutherans, Catholics and Calvinists began working together on the territory of Christocentrism. The big names were Oscar Cullmann, Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, Erich Przywara, Romano Guardini and Hans Urs von Balthasar, but there were many others whose work deserves to be retrieved, including Gottlieb Söhngen (the *Doktor Vater* of Joseph Ratzinger) and Theodor Steinbüchel who was a moral theologian influenced by personalist philosophy. There were also significant female Catholic writers in this era, including Norway’s Nobel laureate Sigrid Undset, the Austro-Japanese author Ida Friedericke Görres and St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein). These members of the inter-war generation, some of whom lived into the early post-Conciliar era, were among the most highly educated Catholic scholars for centuries. Young scholars today would profit from reading their works.

The idea of a simple “reboot” to 1950s neo-scholasticism has gained some traction among people in their 20’s who belong to a generation that desperately needs a “narrative” to explain what went wrong. Just as the post-war generation of German youth needed a narrative to explain how their parents and grand-parents could have allowed a bunch of thugs led by a psychopath to take over their country,

⁵ This concept is taken from H. Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2011.

plunge the world into war and commit genocide, today's Catholic youth need an explanation for why priests became child molesters, why bishops covered for them, why teachers in their ostensibly Catholic school system were permitted to teach a lot of rubbish that is in no way consistent with magisterial teaching, and why the Church is so full of mediocrity and liturgical banality.⁶

While there are certainly elements of the scholastic framework that are worthy of retrieval and should never have been thrown overboard, the idea that all of our problems can be traced back to the demise of neo-scholastic thinking is way too simplistic a narrative. The current situation has been brought on by a perfect storm of multiple causes one of which is the wealth of the Church in first world countries, particularly in Germany, and the desire of first world Catholics to be socially acceptable and upwardly mobile. To achieve these social goals it helps to embrace Newman's religion of the world and many do. In the academy this often takes the form of a syncretic mixture of Christian tropes like mercy and compassion combined with social theories that presume all truth claims are oppressive. The presumption is that as we move through history there is always a social club of oppressors and another club of victims and Christianity is all about solidarity with the victims. This, however, is more of a Marxist theory of history than anything authentically Christian. Certainly Christians should never support tyranny but for Christians the fulcrum of human history is the Incarnation and all this entails, not participation in class struggles.

Accordingly, one of the first things needed in any theological reform is the study of Catholic understandings of history. Here the helpful names are St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John Henry Newman, Jean Daniélou, Martin D'Arcy, Christopher Dawson, Thomas Molnar, Ernest Fortin, Aurel Kolnai, Werner Stark, Remi Brague and James V. Schall. Other names could be added to this list, but these names would make a good start. To this end R. Jared Staudt's *The Primacy of God* offers a helpful meta-history with reference to Aquinas, Balthasar and Dawson, among others.⁷

Included within any Catholic understanding of history is a notion of the providential nature of the encounter with Greek thought or what is often pejoratively called "Hellenism." In the words of St. John Paul II, "in engaging great cultures for the first time the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides His Church down the paths of time

⁶ The problem of teachers misleading students in ostensibly Catholic schools by presenting ideas to the students in religious education classes that are in no sense consistent with magisterial teaching is a major problem in some parts of the world and not others. Liturgical banality is also a problem in some parts of the world and not others. These two problems are particularly evident in some dioceses of the Anglosphere.

⁷ R.J. Staudt, *The Primacy of God. The Virtue of Religion in Catholic Theology*, Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic 2022.

and history.”⁸ In his *Regensburg Address* Pope Benedict further declared “that the encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with him: ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us!’ (cf. *Acts* 16:6-10) – this vision can be interpreted as a ‘distillation’ of the intrinsic necessity of a *rapprochement* between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry.”⁹

It is not however enough to quote St. John Paul II and Ratzinger. There needs to be an intellectual defence of the idea that the synthesis of elements of Greek philosophy with the inheritance of the call of Israel fulfilled in Christ was providential, that is, that it was intended by the Lord of history. Ratzinger recommended reading Alois Grillmeier’s *Mit ihm und in ihm. Christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven* for guidance in this field.¹⁰

The defence of the Greek contribution to the Catholic intellectual tradition entails the idea that *logos* precedes *ethos*. This is a point of principle that was emphasized by both Romano Guardini and Joseph Ratzinger.¹¹ Actions do embody meanings, they do have their own inner logic. They have a rationality that is internal to the practice and are not so unstable, so undefined, as to be capable of taking on any meaning an individual decides to give them. Reversing the order of *logos* and *ethos*, apparent in theologies that privilege Marxist notions of *praxis*, leads directly down the path to the religion of the world. It also leads to what Ratzinger, following Albert Görres, calls the “Hinduisation of the faith” – a situation in which “faith propositions no longer matter because the important thing is contact with a spiritual atmosphere which leads beyond everything that can be said.”¹² Ratzinger agrees with Görres that “Jesus had no intention of producing some contentless state of exaltation.”¹³

Recent work on the Catholic metaphysics of gift is consistent with this defence of the precedence of *logos* over *ethos*. Names worth mentioning in this context include: St. Thomas, Erich Przywara, Ferdinand Ulrich, Gustav Siewerth, Balthasar, Kenneth L. Schmitz and David L. Schindler. Michael Dominic Taylor masterfully traces the development of this vein of theologically informed metaphysics in *The*

⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 72, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1998.

⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Regensburg Address*, §19, in: J.V. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture*, South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press 2007, p. 135.

¹⁰ A. Grillmeier, *Mit ihm und in ihm. Christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven*, Freiburg: Herder 1975.

¹¹ R. Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, New York: Crossroad Publishing 1998, p. 54; J. Ratzinger, *The Church’s Teaching: Authority-Faith-Morals*, in: J. Ratzinger, H. Schürmann, H.U. von Balthasar, *Principles of Christian Morality*, San Francisco, CA: Ignatius 1986, p. 70, and R. Millare, *The Primacy of Logos over Ethos: The Influence of Romano Guardini on Post-Conciliar Theology*, “The Heythrop Journal” 57 (2013), no. 6, pp. 974-983.

¹² J. Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding Its Role in the Light of Present Controversy*, San Francisco, CA: Ignatius 1995, p. 91.

¹³ J. Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, p. 91.

Foundations of Nature.¹⁴ Other noteworthy names working in this space include David C. Schindler, Antonio López and Giulio Maspero.

Considerations of the Greek contribution should also encompass the Eastern Christian theologies. There is a mountain of treasure to be mined in that heritage which we share with members of the Orthodox and Eastern Rite traditions. This means a continuation of the ecumenical endeavours of the first part of the twentieth century. One way into this territory for those familiar with only the Latin tradition is to read some of the books of Aidan Nichols and Anna Silvas.¹⁵ Nichols has helped to chart the influence of the Russian diaspora in France, and Silvas, who is a Romanian Greek-Catholic, is a leading authority on the Cappadocian Fathers and saintly women.

The exploration of the Greek intellectual treasury is related to the broader question of the appropriate handmaidens for theology. Everyone agrees that Catholicism is a faith open to reason. Given this, we need to understand reason. This in turn gives rise to Alasdair MacIntyre’s famous question of “which rationality?”¹⁶ The reason of Augustine, of Anselm, of Aquinas, of Kant, of Heidegger, of Gilson? Of who exactly? By what criteria do we judge that some philosophical system is an appropriate partner for theology? Further, can social theory ever be a legitimate partner? Are social theories, as John Milbank argued in his *Beyond Secular Reason*, theologies or anti-theologies in disguise?¹⁷ What criteria do we use to avoid the pitfalls of a gnoseological concupiscence?

Another structural repair issue is understanding how the various sub-disciplines of theology relate to one another. If the “lead” holding the structure together or the “grouting” between the tiles, to use two metaphors from above, has been eroded, then we need to start thinking about how the various sub-disciplines have lost their intrinsic relationship to each other. Or, to put the idea concretely, what is the relationship between dogmatic theology and moral theology? What is the relationship between moral theology and theological anthropology? What is the relationship between moral theory and sacramental theology? And the list could go on. While bachelor’s degrees in theology cover most of the sub-disciplines, they tend to be taught in discreet packages with little attention given to their relationships within the greater system. The relationships are however hugely important. Peter John McGregor from the Catholic Institute of Sydney has been leading the way in promoting

¹⁴ M.D. Taylor, *The Foundations of Nature* (Veritas), Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2020.

¹⁵ See, for example: A. Nichols, *Theology in the Russian Diaspora*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989, and A. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press 2005, and A. Silva, *Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God*, Turnhout: Brepols 2008.

¹⁶ A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?*, London: Duckworth 2013.

¹⁷ J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2005.

the project of healing the fractures between the sub-disciplines.¹⁸ Olivier-Thomas Venard OP is also important in this context. Fr Venard is the Vice-Director of the École biblique et archéologique française in Jerusalem. He has been working on the fracture between the Gospel of St. John and the Synoptic Gospels.¹⁹

The clasp that unites moral and sacramental theology is the concept of deification. Moral practices and sacramental graces should work in tandem and they should be studied within the broader context of the human person's relationship to the Holy Trinity. If this context is removed then moral theology has a tendency to descend into casuistry and hunts for "tax-lawyer" loop-holes and if sacramental theology is detached from its relationship to the Trinity then it descends into something like social psychology. Sacraments become social milestone markers and therapeutic goods and services. St. John Paul II's suite of encyclicals on the Trinity, along with his moral theology encyclicals, are important foundation stones for this work. The publications of Jarosław Kupczak OP and Livio Melina are excellent guides in this territory. More recently, Matthew Levering's *The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology* concludes that the "repair work" for the theological renovation of conscience must consist in "reintegrating conscience into the broader framework of the Christian moral organism" with the Holy Trinity at the center.²⁰

Once we venture into the territories of moral theology, sacramental theology and a Trinitarian theological anthropology we cannot help but bump into eschatology, described by Balthasar as nothing less than the "storm center" of contemporary theology. He also described the treatment of eschatology in terms of the "four last things" (death, judgment, heaven and hell) as a mere "estuary" of the subject. Another appropriate metaphor might be a mine-field. The theology of salvation history and topics in protology, eschatology, cosmology and soteriology are all interrelated and cover the great existential issues of the meaning of suffering and death and the relationship between life in time and life in eternity. They also entail a consideration of the difference between so-called Incarnational and eschatological approaches to salvation history. This area is like a computer game where pieces of the puzzle only fit together in certain configurations. A choice in one area rules out options in others. Deny free will and hell becomes other people. An enormous amount of work needs to be undertaken to explore the relationships between the "building blocks" in this field.

In ecclesiology the pontificate of Francis has amplified the concept of the Church as a field hospital. Field hospitals are places where wounded people are bandaged up before being placed in an ambulance and sent to a real hospital. Serious surgery

¹⁸ See: P.J. McGregor, T. Rowland (eds.), *Healing Fractures in Contemporary Theology*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2021.

¹⁹ O.-T. Venard, *A Poetic Christ: Thomist Reflections on Scripture, Language and Reality*, London: Bloomsbury 2020.

²⁰ M. Levering, *The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology*, Steubenville: Eerdmans 2021.

has to be done elsewhere – in a confessional box for example – and preventative medicine (proper catechesis) is a service the Church can offer to reduce the numbers of those who bleed to death.

This interest in field hospital management is coming to be called “pastoral theology.” It raises the question of how is it possible to be “the body of Christ in the age of management” (the title of a book by the Anglican scholar Lyndon Shakespeare)?²¹ Concretely the issue is how can those who run ecclesial welfare agencies behave in a Christ-like manner when their behavior is so circumscribed by bureaucratic protocols enforced by agencies of the state or committees of lawyers and accountants appointed by bishops to protect Catholic Inc from law suits? This is a serious pastoral issue of our time and a problem that is directly proportional to the wealth and size of any diocese. It also influences the understanding of the episcopacy. The difference between what Max Weber called bureaucratic authority and charismatic authority is central to the problem here. In theory the episcopacy is based upon charismatic authority but in practice bishops often follow the business practices of CEOs of large corporations.²² The more they act like CEOs rather than shepherds the more inclined lay people are to demand greater say in the running of the bureaucracy. This means more committees and meetings and in the metaphor of Balthasar we end up with the “photocopying church” or “*Ecclesia photo-copians*” in the Latin transcription of Aidan Nichols. The Church ceases to be recognizable as a spiritual reality and operates like any other institution bureaucratically administering welfare. Those who think that being a Catholic has something to do with a personal relationship with the Holy Trinity run away from this kind of “church.” They find a priest who shares their concerns, enter into communion with him, receive the sacraments from him, and otherwise ignore episcopal statements, pastoral programs and the whole gamut of the projects of church agencies.

Related to the territory of pastoral care is the work of catechesis and evangelisation. One problem with evangelization today is that people think they know what Christianity is. They associate every imperfect form or even pathological manifestation of Christian belief with authentic Christianity. The Word therefore needs to be “made strange,” to use Milbank’s phrase, it needs to be presented as something different, something alternative to both its decadent forms and the mundane materialist culture that the decadent forms inhabit. Evangelisation is not a capitalist marketing exercise or a Soviet-style five year plan, it’s a total Trinitarian transformation of the human heart. The Eucharist is absolutely central to this transformation. Any presentation of the faith that mutes Eucharistic theology

²¹ L. Shakespeare, *The Body of Christ in the Age of Management*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2016.

²² This problem is particularly acute in the large archdioceses of countries where the Church is wealthy and has many institutional assets to manage.

seriously weakens the entire structure. Brad Bursa's *Because he has Spoken to Us* addresses these issues.²³

A sub-topic within Trinitarian theology is the meaning of sexual difference. Cardinals Marc Ouellet and Angelo Scola have both contributed significant scholarly works to this area, as have Michele M. Schumacher and Prudence Allen.²⁴ Scola argued that without belief in the Trinity it is hard to simultaneously affirm the equal dignity of the sexes and their difference. This is because the Trinity is the perfect model of relationships of equality within difference. Professors located at the Washington session of the John Paul II Institute and a younger generation of scholars clustered around the on-line Veritas Amoris Project continue to undertake research in this front line field.

A second signature tune of the Francis pontificate has been synodality. Synods have been around for centuries but synodality refers to a mode of decision-making or discernment. It is notoriously difficult to define. It is what Australians call a "weasel word" meaning a concept that is in practice assigned different content by different people. With weasel words everyone can be in favour of the concept because its meaning is so ambivalent. Obviously, in this context, work needs to be done to explain how the *sensus fidelium* is made manifest in the life of the Church. It cannot ever be that the Holy Spirit takes a different position from that of Jesus Christ. If in the name of synodality people start arguing for a rejection of Christ's teaching in the scriptures then something has gone wrong. The starting places for this analysis are Newman's ideas on the *sensus fidelium* and the International Theological Commission's documents covering this territory. The truth is not synonymous with majority opinion, as Newman observed in his studies of the early Church Councils and the situation of St. Athanasius who had to stand *contra mundum*. The Catholic faith is something very different from congregationalism.

A third theme of the Francis pontificate has been stewardship of the environment. Like synodality this is an ambivalent subject. Everyone agrees that we need to protect the environment but some people think that if Catholics have more than two children polar bears will start dropping dead in Norway. There needs to be an authentically Catholic approach to this subject that includes the notion of a human ecology and within it a natural law. Romano Guardini was onto the problem early in the twentieth century while the works of the late Stratford Caldecott, especially *The Radiance of*

²³ B. Bursa, *Because He Has Spoken to Us*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Publishing 2020.

²⁴ See, for example, A. Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2005; M. Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2006; and M. Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love: A Theology of Marriage and the Family for the New Evangelisation*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2015; M.M. Schumacher (ed.), *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2004; M.M. Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology: Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar in Dialogue with Thomas Aquinas*, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press 2021; P. Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, vols. 1-3, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997, 2002, 2016.

Being, and publications of others in the wider Caldecott circle, and the research of the Laudato Si' Institute in Granada, provide structural support for this area.²⁵

Finally, when it comes to those who want to be twenty-first century *ressourcement-style* Thomists, that is, those who have taken on board the criticisms of pre-Conciliar "Thomism of the Strict Observance," it may help to read Fergus Kerr's *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* and then subscribe to the French and English versions of *Nova et Vetera* and to the *The Thomist*, while working one's way through the publications of Matthew Levering, Fr Thomas Joseph White OP, Olivier-Thomas Venard and other Dominicans.²⁶ Kerr is really important because the pitfall for young players is to presume that the intellectual tradition of Thomism has no history and no internal divisions. This is not so, as Alasdair MacIntyre well explained in his essay "Too Many Thomisms" published in his book *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*.²⁷ Theodore Steinbüchel captured the spirit of Thomism at its best in the following paragraph: "Thomas Aquinas designed the richest and most concrete image of man in the medieval West: the man in the *humanitas christiana*. And he placed his image of man in the wide cathedral, the really heavenly Gothic building of his *Summa theologica*, which, however, shares the fate of being incomplete with many cathedral buildings of the medieval period. This cathedral is also based on faith and reason, these two pillars of *humanitas christiana*; on the faith to which the revelation of God gives itself, and on the bright, lucid reason, this natural dowry of the spiritual God to his highest earthly creature, His spirit's sole image and likeness in the world."²⁸

For authors like Steinbüchel, one of the most creative scholars in the inter-war years of twentieth century Germany, the theology of Aquinas was, metaphorically, a "wide," "heavenly" but nonetheless, "incomplete," Gothic cathedral. It was built in a period of human history when people were not asking the kinds of questions that arose in the last three hundred years. One can acknowledge the grandeur of the cathedral as St. Thomas left it, while deciding to add a few new side chapels, and this was certainly the attitude of St. John Paul II when he developed his "Lublin Thomism" to take account of issues that had arisen in the philosophy of the twentieth century, especially the existentialist interest in the uniqueness of each human person. Further, as the critics of "Strict Observance Thomism" argued, some sections of the cathedral were not authentically Thomist at all, but seventeenth century "pastiche" of classical Thomism mixed with emerging liberal theory. It is completely myopic and counter-productive to try and block the development of the Thomist tradition by rejecting the many great theological works of the second

²⁵ S. Caldecott, *The Radiance of Being: Dimensions of Cosmic Christianity*, New York: Angelico Press 2013.

²⁶ F. Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, Oxford: Blackwell 2002.

²⁷ A. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, London: Duckworth 1990.

²⁸ T. Steinbüchel, *Grosse Gestalten des Abendlandes*, Trier: Paulinus-Verlag 1955, p. 199.

half of the twentieth century, including, of course, St. John Paul II's catechesis on human love, the subject of his Wednesday audience addresses in the early years of his pontificate. This catechesis placed human love into the context of the human person's relationship to the Holy Trinity and with this development simultaneously struck a blow against the Jansenist (puritanical) attitude to sexuality on the one side, and the complete de-sacralisation of sexuality by the promoters of the sexual revolution of the 1960s on the other. Anyone who wants to reboot the system to 1959 should be asked whether they want a moral theology that analyses sexual intimacy with concepts like "marital dues" and other tropes borrowed from contract law.

Whether one is a Thomist, or some other species of authentically Catholic theologian, it helps to read the works of Ratzinger, including documents of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the International Theological Commission and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, promulgated on his watch as a Cardinal Prefect. Ratzinger did not have the leisure time to develop his own theological system but he did address the crisis issues of the past century. When one reads his essays it is like reading a pathology report where he takes an idea, examines its intellectual pedigree, and explains how it is, or is not, consistent with what he calls the *memoria Ecclesiae* – the memory of the Church. From Ratzinger we can learn what the foundation stones for any authentically Catholic theological "cathedral" should be.²⁹

Since those who are most aware of the importance of healing the fracture between spirituality and theology are often those who are members of new ecclesial movements, it is from this part of the Church that one is likely to find the deepest sources of renewal. These movements are conglomerations of faithful Catholic families – the "Domestic Church" – and it is from this seed-bed, not from the wealthy institutions of Catholic Inc. obsessed with their standing in the world, that the renewal is already taking place.

As Cardinal Robert Sarah remarked in a homily at Puy du Fou in the department of the Vendée in France: "From now on, in the heart of each family, of every Christian, of every man of good will, there has to rise up an interior Vendean! [...] Let us pray that a powerful and joyful interior Vendée may rise in the Church and in the world."³⁰ The French, above all, know what this means. The word Vendée stands for opposition to the ideologies of the French Revolution and for the defence of the faith under the banner of the Sacred Heart. In a Polish context one might say under the banner of divine mercy. As the restoration of the great cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris is a project for our time, so too is the renewal of the cathedral of Catholic theology with its high altar, its side-chapels, its foundations, its roof and buttresses and last but not without its own importance, its

²⁹ Especially important is J. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, San Francisco: Ignatius 1987.

³⁰ R. Sarah, *Homily at Puy du Fou*, France, August 12, 2017, <https://onepeterfive.com/cardinal-sarah-christians-need-spirit-vendeans/> [access: 23.06.2022].

gargoyles, who remind us of the cosmic battle if we are ever tempted to surrender ourselves to the religion of the world.

„KATEDRA” TEOLOGII KATOLICKIEJ

Abstrakt

W trzeciej dekadzie dwudziestego pierwszego wieku „katedra” teologii katolickiej doświadczyła pewnych strukturalnych ataków, a droga naprzód jest obecnie „gorącym tematem.” W niniejszym artykule autorka argumentuje przeciwko powszechnej wśród katolików pokolenia milenialsów idei, że musimy po prostu „zrestartować” system do 1959 roku i przywrócić ramy „neoscholastyki ścisłej obserwancji.” Zamiast tego sugeruje, że należy zwrócić uwagę na samą strukturę, na kwestie teologii fundamentalnej oraz na relacje i zagadnienia kluczowe w ramach teologii katolickiej, zgodnie z zaleceniami Josepha Ratzingera i innych osób z jego kręgu teologicznego.

Słowa kluczowe: teologia fundamentalna, ewangelizacja, „religia świata”, synodalność, *sensus fidelium*, *logos* i *ethos*, Joseph Ratzinger.

THE "CATHEDRAL" OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Abstract

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, the “cathedral” of Catholic theology has suffered some structural assaults and the way forward is a contemporary “hot topic”. This paper argues against the idea, common among Catholics of the millennial generation, that we simply need to “reboot” the system to 1959 and restore the framework of “Strict Observance Neo-Scholasticism”. Instead, it suggests that attention needs to be given to the structure itself, to issues in fundamental theology, and the relationships or “joints” in the framework of Catholic theology, along the lines recommended by Joseph Ratzinger and others in his theological circle.

Keywords: fundamental theology, evangelization, the “religion of the world”, synodality, *sensus fidelium*, *logos* and *ethos*, Joseph Ratzinger.

DIE «KATHEDRALE» DER KATHOLISCHEN THEOLOGIE

Abstrakt

Über die Jahrhunderte hat die «Kathedrale» der katholischen Theologie einige strukturelle Angriffe erlitten, und der Weg in die Zukunft ist ein aktuelles «heißes Thema». Dieser Beitrag wendet sich gegen die unter Katholiken der Millennium-Generation verbreitete Vorstellung, dass man das System, das bis zum 1959 herrschte einfach «neu starten» kann und den Rahmen der «Neoscholastik der strengen Observanz» wiederherstellen

muss. Stattdessen wird vorgeschlagen, die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Struktur selbst, auf Fragen der Fundamentaltheologie und auf die Beziehungen oder «Gelenke» im Rahmen der katholischen Theologie zu richten, so wie es Joseph Ratzinger und andere aus seinem theologischen Kreis empfehlen.

Schlüsselwörter: Fundamentaltheologie, Evangelisierung, «Weltreligion», Synodalität, Sensus Fidelium, Logos und Ethos, Joseph Ratzinger.

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