

HUMANI GENERIS AND THE LIMITS OF THEOLOGY

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SINCE the encyclical *Humani Generis* treats of "some false opinions which threaten to undermine the foundations of Catholic doctrine," its exceptional gravity is apparent at first glance. A second detail to attract attention is the fact that it is addressed to all the bishops of the world, not to the hierarchy of a single country. Some French writers have asserted that France is envisaged. For instance, the Parisian weekly, *L'Observateur politique, économique et littéraire*, published in the issue of August 31, 1950, an article entitled, "L'Encyclique contre les nouveautés françaises." And Robert Barrat states confidently: "No one is deluded about 'Humani Generis' in France. It is France and certain currents of French theological thought to which this encyclical refers."¹ Readers who are able to keep abreast of the theological writings of the day are aware that such reports are superficial. Theories condemned in the encyclical have appeared not only in France, but in Germany, Belgium, England, Italy, Spain, and elsewhere. Even in the United States, where a pioneering spirit in theological speculation is not very conspicuous, some of the repudiated opinions, for example, those dealing with evolution, polygenism, and the gratuity of the supernatural, have found favor. Nor should anyone suppose that only certain members of two great religious orders are called to account. Tendencies reproved in the encyclical have been fostered by philosophers and theologians of various orders and congregations, of the diocesan clergy, and also of the laity.²

The encyclical did not take the Catholic world by surprise. P. Robert Rouquette assures us: "This document of the supreme teaching authority of the Church has been awaited for a long time, and many rumors have circulated about it."³ According to P. Jean Levie, "The

¹ R. Barrat, "Reaction to the Encyclical," *Commonweal*, LIII (1950), 628.

² These facts are brought out in a number of recent articles. See, for example, B. G. Monsegú, C.P., "La actualidad teológica. Hechos e ideas," *Revista española de teología*, X (1950), 179-204; Th. Deman, O.P., "Tentatives françaises pour un renouvellement de la théologie," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, XX (1950), 129-67 (of the *section spéciale*); D. L. Greenstock, "Thomism and the New Theology," *Thomist*, XIII (1950), 567-96.

³ R. Rouquette, "L'Encyclique 'Humani generis,'" *Etudes*, CCLXVII (1950), 108.

new encyclical has been awaited in Catholic circles. It was known that the Holy Father has been disturbed about certain currents of ideas and that he was determined to intervene."⁴ After remarking that "this grave document was expected," His Eminence, Cardinal Gerlier, archbishop of Lyon, prefaces publication of the encyclical in the *Semaine religieuse de Lyon* with an important note:

For some time a sort of intellectual ferment has been seething in souls. Certain bold initiatives of thought have broken forth here and there. In the calm solicitude of his teaching office, the supreme Teacher intervenes. Two conclusions are at once imposed on all. This teaching of the Vicar of Jesus Christ will find us all humbly docile, as befits sons. Certain individuals may be wounded. They will be the first to bow to the authority that no one questions. All will be mindful that this is the way we serve the Church and truth. On the other hand, all will wish to be mindful of the fine fraternal charity which alone can correspond to the gravity of the occasion and the sure desire of our common Father. We rejoice to see the Pope affirm the truth in problems which so many controversies were obscuring. But no one should forget the services of those who, in their desire to benefit souls, have conducted their researches with loyalty. The successor of Peter certainly does not wish to discourage them or to shackle their zeal; his aim is to guard them from dangerous deviations. Let no one utter a word that can sadden or embitter.⁵

That sage advice sets the tone for all of us. The Holy Father does not mention a single name. I wish to follow his kind example throughout this article. Let future historians of theology, if they must, connect names with the currents of ideas and the writings that are taken to task in the encyclical. At the present time, in the absence of personal designations, such an attempt cannot be made without risk of grave injustice to Catholic theologians and philosophers whose loyalty and devotion to the Church are beyond question.⁶ Suspicions and insinuations are out of place. Not by eyeing each other askance, but by seeking to aid and understand one another with forbearance, will theologians be able to work in harmony to further the interests of their difficult science.

⁴ J. Levie, "L'Encyclique 'Humani generis,'" *Nouvelle revue théologique*, LXXII (1950), 785.

⁵ *La Documentation catholique*, XLVII (1950), col. 1291. Similar views are expressed by M. Labourdette, O.P., "Les Enseignements de l'encyclique Humani generis," *Revue thomiste*, L (1950), 32.

⁶ Future historians will find many phases of the movement listed in the bibliography painstakingly compiled by A. Avelino Esteban, "Nota bibliográfica sobre la llamada 'Teología nueva,'" *Revista española de teología*, IX (1949), 303-18, 527-46.

FUNCTION OF THE MAGISTERIUM

To root out doctrinal weeds that have grown up rankly during the past hundred years, the Church has repeatedly issued official pronouncements. Action was taken against Guenther, Hermes, Froschammer, Rosmini, the Rationalists, the Liberalists, and the Modernists. The basis of most such aberrations was the desire to accommodate the teaching of Christ to the state of science and philosophy as it ran its course from generation to generation. Sincere Catholics have always welcomed papal directives with joy, for they know that the light which enlightens every man is found in the Church. But non-Catholics have often been scandalized and sometimes indignant. A recent instance is supplied by H. L. Stewart, who complains: "Forty-three years ago a series of pronouncements, culminating in the encyclical *Pascendi Gregis*, showed that 'sacrifice of the intellect' at papal command is required in the Church of Rome The publication in August [1950] of a new encyclical *Humani Generis* is a renewed attempt to root out abhorrent opinions But to concede the requirements of those papal manifestos is, for us of the Reformed Churches, out of the question."⁷

What such critics cannot appreciate is the right of the Church to "interfere" with the free conduct of theological investigation. To the Catholic theologian that right is obvious. He knows that the subject of theology is God; not God as vaguely apprehended through a rational consideration of His creatures, but God as He is in Himself and as He knows Himself and His works, of which He is the first cause and last end. The subject of theology embraces God in His trinitarian life and, with reference to God, the works of God—creation and the ascent of creatures to God in the providential economy of the Incarnation, redemption, the Church, grace, and the sacraments, to the extent that God communicates to us His own knowledge of Himself and of His plans for us.

The truths of this supernatural order have not been directly conveyed to each human mind. What God has revealed about Himself and His works and His designs for us is transmitted to us by the Church. The Church has received the deposit of revelation, and the Church has the task of proposing it to all men in every generation. The Church possesses the treasure of the Sacred Scriptures, and that

⁷ H. L. Stewart, "Why the Reformation Must Be neither Compromised nor Explained Away," *Hibbert Journal*, XLIX (1950), 34.

treasure has been enriched with the vast memory of tradition. Individual men establish contact with this treasury, source of our faith, only through the Church.

Accordingly the function of the Church with respect to revelation is clear. The Church is alive today, no less than at the time of the apostles; and the living Church is teacher and judge of the truths contained in the sources of revelation. We of today enter into union with these sources, distant from us across a gap of nineteen centuries, not through the sympathies of a religious sense or by spiritual experience or even through the sole resources of historical investigation. We receive the truths of our faith from an ever-living Church.

TASK OF THE THEOLOGIAN AND HIS LIBERTY

The science that seeks intelligence of the faith is theology. The principles of this science are truths revealed by God. Therefore the Church, to which these principles have been committed, has charge over the whole science that derives from them; and theologians receive the principles of their science from the Church that is living today.

In its effort to understand divine revelation, theology employs all the resources of reason and seeks to gather information from any science that holds forth some promise of contributing to clarification. The theologian taps all channels of knowledge for facts and data that may aid toward a comprehension of his own science. Every advance in civilization and learning can be the occasion of a more explicit formulation of dogma or of progress in theological elaboration. A few examples will make this point clear.⁸

History is important for the theologian's effort. Thus, to treat satisfactorily of the Church, we have to take various facts into account, such as the Greek Schism, the Great Schism of the West, and the Reformation. Such procedure is indispensable if we are setting out to give an adequate explanation of the assistance our Lord promised to His Church when He said, "I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Matt. 28:20). We perceive now, more clearly than was possible in the third century, that such assistance is not incompatible with the secession of large regions formerly united to the

⁸ What follows has been suggested by the excellent article of M. Labourdette, O.P., "La Théologie, intelligence de la foi," *Revue thomiste*, XLVI (1946), 31 f.

Church. Again, the discovery of America made more acute the problem of the salvation of infidels. The theologian knows that God wills the salvation of all men, and at the same time he knows that faith is necessary for salvation: "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). Countless individuals lived in these lands during the period from the redemption to the discovery of the hemisphere; God willed to save them, yet they were cut off from all contact with the faith that is necessary for salvation. The two truths are seemingly irreconcilable; but they cannot be. The historical event provides the theologian with new data and an incentive for striving to understand the exact bearing of revelation on these points. Such facts add nothing to the deposit of revelation; but they are valuable means enabling theology to explain more correctly what is contained in the deposit.

Theologians have much to learn from meditation on such historical events. They have also much to learn from the great crises that arise from time to time to challenge Christian teaching.

In the thirteenth century the sensational discovery of the epoch, that of the works of Aristotle, presented a grave problem to philosophers and theologians, and they divided into three camps. Siger of Brabant, at the head of a large contingent, surrendered to Aristotle and compromised Christianity. Many others, staunch champions of a conservative Augustinianism, tried more or less successfully to ignore the new problems raised by Aristotelianism. Thomas Aquinas, acknowledged leader of the third group, had the courage to face the problem and the genius eventually to solve it.

In later centuries a new view of the physical world had to be reconciled with the teachings of theology. The conviction that the earth, scene of the drama of sin, the Incarnation, and the redemption, occupied the center of the universe, had to be relinquished, to give way to the realization that it is a trifling planet, a minor fragment of a solar system floating like a speck in the galaxy we call the Milky Way, itself only one among countless galaxies. The new conception is certainly not at odds with the faith, and Christian thought had no great difficulty assimilating information that at first had seemed so scandalous. Yet the turmoil stirred up by the Galileo case reminds us of the duties and the perplexities harassing a theology that desires to be at once correct and in harmony with newly discovered facts.

One of the notable achievements of the past two centuries is the pursuit of historical investigation and the lengthening of historical perspective. Our conception of the history of the world has had to change. The situation is well illustrated by Felix Rüschkamp's study on the age of mankind. Referring to the Peking man or *Sinanthropus* he writes:

His burial place had not been disturbed by any agency before its discovery by the Jesuits, E. Licent and P. Teilhard de Chardin, around 1925. Various stone implements found together with the human fossils furnish sufficient evidence that *Sinanthropus* was a real man, an intelligent being, even though his outward appearance differed considerably from that of the living human races. Geological and paleontological indications point to the earliest Quaternary corresponding to the ninth interglacial epoch which means in numbers 650,000–800,000 years. If it is taken into consideration that the Peking man was contemporaneous with other distinct human races—in Europe with the Heidelberg man, in Java with the Trinil man—and that the permanent splitting into distinct races takes a long time, we may have to go back a million years until we come to the moment when the words of Holy Writ were fulfilled: "And God created man to his own image."⁹

Not many estimates of the age of the human race exhibit the same extremes. But everyone knows that mankind is incomparably older than was thought a generation or two ago. We now recognize that the horizons of history have widened, and that Christian thought must proceed with caution in conceiving the providential economy of the salvation of man. The theology of the creation of man and of original sin cannot ignore the discoveries of the sciences of prehistory. The problem cannot be solved by pronouncing the estimates ridiculous, on the score that God could not have allowed the human race to languish in misery for thousands of centuries before the coming of the promised Redeemer.

Of all the problems that plague the Catholic mind today, perhaps the most pressing is that of the relations between evolution and transcendence.¹⁰ No phase of thought is more characteristic of the modern mentality than the idea of evolution. With regard to evolution in the

⁹ Thus summarized by J. Horst, S.J., "The Age of Man," *American Ecclesiastical Review*, CVI (1942), 292, from F. Rüschkamp, S.J., "Wie alt ist das Menschengeschlecht?," *Stimmen der Zeit*, CXXXIII (1938), 156–71.

¹⁰ See the discussion of this question in B. de Solages, "Pour l'honneur de la théologie," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique*, XLVIII (1947), 81–84.

narrower sense, the evolution of living species, a paleontologist or a biologist who is not an evolutionist would indeed be hard to find. But the evolution of species is only one aspect of the question. The significant trait of modern thought is the hypothesis, if not conviction, of universal evolution. And if everything in the universe evolves, there is no changeless truth; no values are stable, nothing is permanent.

The problem cannot be shrugged off; it has to be faced. How, in an intellectual atmosphere of universal evolutionism, can we safeguard transcendental truth? Evolution has captured the very vocabulary of the natural sciences, and from there has seeped into the common outlook. The theologian likewise is induced to consider the possibility of its consonance with Christian faith.

In some respects this question is more vexatious than the problem St. Thomas had to solve; for the discoveries of modern science reach farther than the rediscovery in the Middle Ages of the works of an ancient philosopher. As in those days, theologians divide into three camps. A few refuse to pay any attention to evolution. Others founder on the rocks of relativism and suffer shipwreck in their faith. A third class tries to emulate the attitude St. Thomas took when one day Aristotle rose up and stared him in the eye.

To our grief, no St. Thomas has been born in our century. But colleges of Catholic scientists and groups of Catholic philosophers and theologians have bent their energies to the solution of this many-angled puzzle, with the aim of demonstrating permanence in the midst of evolution and of showing that evolution demands the transcendent God. Thanks to their labors biological evolution, which had been mechanistic and materialistic, has become finalistic and, no less than the view of the separate creation of distinct species, has been shown to require God at its beginning and throughout its course. On the other hand, the evolutionary hypothesis has released a number of theological difficulties that have by no means found a convincing solution.

Modern evolutionary theories, though mainly the product of paleontology, also stem from a philosophy of history; widely remote at their origin, the two sources have mingled their waters. Some Catholic philosophers have set themselves the arduous task of comprehending Hegelianism from within, proposing to enrich Catholic thought with

any truth it might contain. Others have made similar forays into dialectic materialism, pragmatism, and existentialism, on the theory that they might be able to express dogma and theology in new categories if they could but correct such philosophies and purge them of error, somewhat as Aquinas had done with Aristotelianism. It is now clear that the explorations have ended in failure; the modern philosophies are incompatible with dogma, not in rectifiable details or tendencies, but in their basic principles.

The history of theology is a mine offering rich rewards to prospectors. Rationalists of the last century, imitated by their descendants in this century, have tried to arrange the results of their researches in such a way as to expose radical contradictions among theological positions taken in various ages of Christianity. Against such misrepresentations, the theologian has to show that the faith remains constant and that theology is homogeneous throughout its history. To perform this task successfully, he needs a profound knowledge of Scripture, the Fathers, the Scholastics, and the essays of modern theologians. The few scholars who can pass easily from one epoch to another and are at home in all of them have endeavored to safeguard the transcendence of Christian revelation and the homogeneity of theological development in an environment of historical evolutionism, by showing that the expression of Catholic truth, though not Catholic truth itself, is relative to various languages, cultures, and stages of philosophical maturity. Revelation has been made to men, and must be set forth in human language; and theology, the science of revelation, can be propounded only in human terms. Men who cleave to revelation by faith naturally try to formulate it more intelligibly in their own ideas and to express it more clearly in their own idiom. Yet this very procedure is perilous; relativity of expression may degenerate into relativity of doctrine.

Theology has to be keenly alive to all modern discoveries and currents of thought. But involvement in new movements and facts uncovers a danger as well as a benefit. The benefit is a deeper and enriched knowledge of a traditional doctrine; and that is a precious acquisition. The danger is a premature attempt to assimilate an insufficiently criticized opinion that may turn out to be theologically indigestible. A diseased relativism may be the unsuspected result. The desire to present dogma in forms acceptable to modern philosophies, so different from one

another and so divergent from Scholastic teaching, may issue in the view that none of them is wholly true; and if all of them are only approximations, they can be interchanged and some notions can be replaced by others that may be opposed at points yet are roughly equivalent. In this way Catholic doctrine is made available to various cultures in terms of their own cherished ideas. Dogma may come to find expression in notions that are relative; misgivings are quieted by the comforting assurance that such notions reflect rays of revealed light that in the last analysis is too radiant for human eyes. In the case of scientific discoveries the danger may be a superficial and ephemeral concordism. An instance that now appears faintly ridiculous is afforded by the innumerable attempts made during the last century to match the six days of creation with the successive geological ages variously reconstructed by naturalists.

In all his speculations the theologian must constantly keep in mind the exactions of his own science. His first care must be to ascertain whether alleged facts are conclusively established. When he has satisfied his mind on this detail, he must go on to consider whether the historical discovery or the scientific hypothesis has any theological significance. Not every fact is a truth assimilable by theology, not every problem admits of theological solution. Examination and criticism are needed and must be carried on in the light of the principles proper to theology. Assimilation will never be achieved by sacrificing articles of faith or by beating a hasty retreat from traditional positions. For instance, we all know that in the first pages of Genesis the Hebrew noun meaning "man" can, in itself, designate either a singular Adam or collective man. On this basis a number of theologians found a desired harmony between the dogma of the creation of man and the hypothesis of paleontology that the human race originally appeared more or less simultaneously in different quarters of the earth. But when this hypothesis is scrutinized in the light of original sin, an incontestable dogma of faith, it is seen to be incompatible with theology.

Ill-advised excursions of this sort remind the theologian that he must always check his proposals with tradition, the common teaching of his brother theologians, and especially with the mind of the official magisterium. For theology is an instrument in the hand of the Church and is employed by the Church to guard intact, to transmit, and to develop

the wealth of the deposit of faith. In the researches he institutes at his own risk the theologian is exposed to error. That is why Christ appointed a living magisterium, to preserve us from doctrinal peril.

Yet to perform its task theology requires liberty. Unlike the official teaching authority, which has the function of preservation and continuity and is charged with the office of transmitting to each generation the revealed truth received at the beginning, theology has the function of exploitation and progress, of research and discovery. Although theology studies the data of revelation to which nothing can be added, it is an activity of development that is carried on with all the resources available to natural reason. Within the world of faith vast unexplored regions provide abundant fields for scientific initiative. Stimulated by his need to comprehend, the theologian probes beyond the truths proposed to his faith, attempts syntheses from unrelated elements of dogma, and seeks solutions for which revelation furnishes nothing but a point of departure. He cannot exercise his profession if he is denied the opportunity of inquiring, of testing, of setting up hypotheses, of suggesting questions and essaying answers. If he refuses to run the slightest risk, if he is content merely to say again what has often been said before, if he is so timid that he will teach nothing except what is above all criticism, he is not a theologian after the heart of Aquinas or Scotus or Suarez. Such an attitude is safe; were it to become general, theology would become stagnant.

The Middle Ages knew and enjoyed a wholesome liberty which fostered the flowering of theology during that fertile epoch. In this connection we can ponder, to our profit, the famous passage from William of Tocco, the first biographer of St. Thomas:

God gave him so much wisdom, and so much learning was divinely imparted to his lips, that he seemed to surpass all, even the Masters, and by the brilliance of his teaching to excel all others in stirring up in students a love of knowledge. In his lectures he introduced *new* articles, found a *new* and effective method of arriving at conclusions, and applied *new* arguments to his solutions. No one who heard him teach *new* doctrines and settling doubtful questions with *new* answers could doubt that God was illuminating him with rays of *new* light. His judgment was so sure and ready that he did not hesitate to propose orally and in writing *new* theories, with which God deigned to inspire him *anew*.¹¹

¹¹ *Acta Sanctorum*, March 7 (Paris, 1865), p. 661; the italics are mine.

That was, in all truth, a "new theology." And Thomism is historically characterized by this trait of newness, which aroused enthusiasm in some but scandalized others.

A great Thomist of our own day, A. D. Sertillanges, O.P., adds some details to this description:

When St. Thomas met with some new point of view, or with contradiction, or an adverse doctrine, he did not buttress his own view. He examined with discrimination what he had discovered, and seems more eager to assimilate than to combat it. Once he had modified and corrected it, he was prepared to use it for his own growth. His whole life shows this tendency; it is a consequence of his independence and breadth of mind. And surely we should be like him in this.

St. Thomas never meant his system to be exclusive or watertight. He wrote for all who think, in order to exchange ideas and to harmonize his thoughts with theirs. He expected his followers to do likewise, and would have been horrified at their clinging to his apron-strings and refusing to move with the times.

Much still remained unsaid! Nothing that he said could express adequately the fullness and unfathomable depths of truth, but he at least had due respect for what he could not adequately explain. He counted on the collaboration of others for the development of various problems. The future might be able to find out what in his days was unknown.¹²

This accords perfectly with what St. Thomas himself said: "They who come after discover some new truths over and above those that had been discovered by their predecessors."¹³ The reason is indicated by the renowned exegete, M. J. Lagrange: "No one has the right to forbid the Holy Ghost to shed new lights upon the Church under the pretext that the men of old have seen all and said all that was to be seen and said."¹⁴

Theologians are not mere recorders of received doctrines. They are not clerks busy filing side by side the opinions of various schools. They are scholars, with courage to reflect for themselves. They are experts well acquainted with the work of their predecessors and with theories current among their contemporaries. Like all scientists, they desire to contribute researches of their own leading to a fuller clarification of their specialty. And, like all scientists, they may make

¹² A. D. Sertillanges, *Saint Thomas Aquinas and His Work*, translated by G. Anstruther, O.P. (London: Burns Oates, 1933), p. 144 f.

¹³ *Contra Gent.*, III, 48.

¹⁴ M. J. Lagrange, O.P., *Historical Criticism and the Old Testament*, translated by E. Myers (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1904), p. 23.

mistakes. The possibility of error grows with the distance from revealed data their quest of truth takes them.

SOME DEVIATIONS

The decade 1940-50, especially since the end of the war, has witnessed astonishing theological activity. The period has been extremely prolific in strikingly original books, collections of works, and articles in theological periodicals. No review of these published works will be attempted here; some of the main currents have been admirably set forth by Philip J. Donnelly, S.J., in a series of articles in *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* from September, 1947 to September, 1950. A further account of the controversies may be found in a recent study by Th. Deman, O.P.¹⁵ I wish merely to mention, by way of example, one or two issues not referred to by these theologians, and shall then pass to a brief consideration of another kind of writing, not published.

In an address, subsequently published, to a foreign Catholic university, a prelate of the Church declared:

That evolution is a fact, that life is ascending, that evolution is a way of thinking that imposes itself, we cannot deny in our day. The universe is going somewhere. It has a history. Little by little, science is discovering what that history is. . . . We do not know what matter is and in what it differs—if indeed it does differ—from life, from spirit.

This is a good example of the eventual result of an integrally evolutionist mode of thought; all reality is reduced to an initial monism in which matter and spirit are indistinct. The encyclical *Humani Generis* briefly refers to this tendency: "Some question . . . whether matter and spirit differ essentially."¹⁶

A Spanish critic examines a book of essays on Christ, published in 1949. In two of the chapters he finds that the author rejects the notion of sin as an offense against God, since God is too high to be touched by any act of man. Consequently the doctrine of satisfaction, as usually proposed, is to be dismissed as anthropomorphical; the satisfaction which the Church says Christ offered consists in this that the Savior, as the first-fruits of mankind, desired to suffer and die on the

¹⁵ Th. Deman, O.P., "Tentatives françaises pour un renouvellement de la théologie," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, XX (1950), 129-67 (*section spéciale*).

¹⁶ N.C.W.C. edition, no. 26.

cross to lead us into the road of purification we have to enter if we wish to be united with the most pure God. The critic finds that this teaching cannot square with the doctrine of the Church as represented by the Council of Trent; the official explanations of several Popes have long ago rejected it; the texts of Sacred Scripture and passages from the Fathers about propitiation, expiation, and sacrifice show that it is quite impossible. But the rest of the book is pronounced to be inspiring.

But a French theologian turns in a contrary verdict. He questions some of the author's observations about Christ's various kinds of knowledge, but writes that apart from this he finds nothing in the book that does not merit high praise, so that it is perfectly suited for the religious formation of lay Catholics.

This divided judgment is typical of the diverging views of theologians on most of the themes that characterize the "new theology," and is an instance pointing to the need of doctrinal directives. Such a directive has been given with regard to the case in question: "Disregarding the Council of Trent, some pervert . . . the concept of sin in general as an offense against God, as well as the idea of satisfaction performed for us by Christ."¹⁷

Before referring to certain unpublished writings, I desire to add my voice to the protest that indelicate use has been made of them in public controversies. They should never, perhaps, have been thus utilized. But now they are open to general criticism, since excerpts have been published. Therefore, especially since the Holy Father calls attention to them in his encyclical, they may be discussed.

Some of these papers are by well-known scholars. The author of the most widely publicized of them passed them among his non-Catholic friends. They were subsequently, without his knowledge or consent, distributed by enthusiastic admirers and eventually, in multigraphed form, reached large numbers of young clerical and lay students, among whom they worked considerable harm. These unpublished writings—indeed, they could never have been published under Catholic auspices—belong to various dates and manifest the progress of thought of their authors. They propose some astonishingly fantastic theories which any informed theologian would immediately reject.

¹⁷ *Loc. cit.*

One of these multigraphed articles suggests that Adam is not an individual man from whom the human race descends, but is rather a collectivity. Original sin is not a true sin inherited by us from our first ancestor who voluntarily transgressed God's command, but is a general turning away from God in consequence of the baneful influence exercised on mankind by sinful leaders; the spirit yielded to the press of matter, and men immersed themselves in sense-life. Truly, as the Holy Father points out, "some pervert the very concept of original sin."¹⁸

In another of these pirated manuscripts we read:

If we Christians wish to preserve for Christ the qualities that are the basis of His power and our adoration, we cannot do anything better, or indeed anything else, than accept to their ultimate implications the most modern conceptions of evolution. Under the combined pressure of science and philosophy, the world is imposing itself more and more on our experience and our thought as a connected system of activities mounting gradually toward liberty of conscience. . . . In my opinion, it is necessary to place and to recognize the plenitude of Christ on this physical pole of universal evolution. . . . By discovering a summit for the world, evolution renders Christ possible, just as Christ, by giving direction to the world, makes evolution possible.

I am fully aware that this idea is enough to make the head reel . . . but, by imagining such a marvel, I am merely transcribing in terms of physical reality the juridical expressions in which the Church has cast its faith. . . . For my part, I unhesitatingly enter the only path in which it seems to me possible to go ahead and consequently to save my faith.

At first sight, Catholicism had deceived me, with its narrow representations of the world and its incomprehension of the world of matter. But now, in consequence of the revelation of the incarnate God, I recognize that I cannot be saved except by becoming one body with the universe. At the same time my most profound "pantheistic" aspirations find themselves satisfied, reassured, guided. The world around me is becoming divine.

A general convergence of religions toward a universal Christ, who may at last be found satisfactory to them all—such seems to me the sole conversion possible for the world and the only imaginable form of a religion of the future.

These ideas reached an extensive and appreciative, though undesired, audience. No wonder that the Supreme Pontiff states reprovingly: "Some imprudently and indiscreetly hold that evolution, which has not been fully proved even in the domain of natural sciences, explains

¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*

the origin of all things, and audaciously support the monistic and pantheistic opinion that the world is in continual evolution."¹⁹ The last paragraph of the excerpts quoted above is so appalling that almost every page of the encyclical may be said to condemn it.

A third mimeographed article, whose author seems to be quite unknown, discourses of the Real Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. It asserts that the genuine problem of the Real Presence has not until now been posed. Formerly, in response to difficulties, theologians said that Christ is present in the manner of a substance. This explanation is held to evade the real issue. The very term "transubstantiation" has drawbacks, for it corresponds to the Scholastic conception of transformation, which is inadmissible. In the Scholastic view, according to which the reality of a thing is its so-called substance, transubstantiation involves a change of substance. But in our present enlightened perspectives, in virtue of the offering made according to a rite fixed by Christ, the bread and wine become the efficacious symbol of Christ's sacrifice and consequently of His spiritual presence. Thus, though nothing happens to their "substance," their religious entity changes; and this, the anonymous author assures us, is what we may designate by the term "transubstantiation."

Gladly and thankfully does the Catholic welcome the Holy Father's condemnation: "Some even say that the doctrine of transubstantiation, based on an antiquated philosophic notion of substance, should be so modified that the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist be reduced to a kind of symbolism, whereby the consecrated species would be merely efficacious signs of the spiritual presence of Christ and of His intimate union with the faithful members of His Mystical Body."²⁰

A professor of theology in the country where these mimeographed papers were most widely circulated testifies: "These writings are eagerly read. . . . They exercise a tremendous influence."

SIGNS PRESAGING INTERVENTION

Ideas such as those advocated in these privately circulated writings, which are admittedly extremist, along with many other expositions

¹⁹ *Humani generis*, no. 5 (N.C.W.C. edition).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 26.

published in books and articles, which contain detectable amounts of similar poisons in diluted form, have been lumped together and made to fit into the term "new theology." Opposition in theological circles mounted steadily up to the summer of 1950. Evidence of vigorous reaction is found in the controversies featured in learned journals. Further evidence is provided by the "Theological Weeks" held at the Gregorian University in September, 1948, and in Madrid the following year. Most of the debated themes were thoroughly ventilated by prominent theologians. The subjects discussed were the familiar ones of relativism in the expression of revealed truth, the possibility of employing non-Scholastic philosophies in the elaboration of theology, the person of Adam and original sin, polygenism, evolution, the gratuity of the supernatural order, the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, existentialism and mysticism, the subjectivity and objectivity of dogma, and others.

The Holy See could not remain indifferent to these stormy currents of ideas. As early as 1946, when elected representatives of both the Jesuits and the Dominicans met in Rome for the purpose of choosing new superiors general of their respective Orders, the Pope took the opportunity of speaking out his mind unmistakably. To the delegates of the Society of Jesus he said:

Both orally and in writing you exercise the ministry of teaching theology, Sacred Scripture, and the other ecclesiastical sciences, as well as philosophy. . . . To all and to each of those to whom this task is entrusted the voice of the Apostle makes itself heard: "O Timothy, guard the deposit! Avoid the profane and fruitless discussions and disputations of knowledge falsely so styled" (I Tim. 6:20). . . . To the men of their day the members of the Society of Jesus ought to speak, whether by word of mouth or in writing, in such a way as to be understood and willingly listened to. In setting forth questions, in developing arguments, and also in the choice of style, they should wisely accommodate their discourse to the mentality and tastes of their century. But let no one undermine or try to change what is changeless. Much has been said, not always with sufficient realization of the implications involved, about a "new theology" which goes on evolving with the constantly evolving universe, so that it is always progressing without ever arriving anywhere. If such a view is to be admitted, what is to become of Catholic dogmas than can never change, what is to become of the unity and stability of the faith? . . . A friendly hand should be held out to those who are going astray, but no compromise can be made with error.²¹

²¹ Pius XII, Allocutio "Ad Patres Societatis Iesu in XXIX Congregatione generali electores," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, XXXVIII (1946), 384 f.

Five days later His Holiness addressed the General Chapter of the Friars Preachers:

The very foundations of our perennial philosophy and theology are being called into question. . . . Men argue about science and faith, their nature and mutual relations. . . . They talk about the truths revealed by God, and question whether the mind with all its acumen can penetrate into them and can deduce further truths from them. Briefly, this is at stake: whether the structure which St. Thomas Aquinas erected beyond and above all time, by putting into an orderly synthesis elements supplied by those who in all ages have cultivated Christian wisdom, stands upon solid rock; whether it is still flourishing and valid; whether it can still defend and protect the deposit of Catholic faith and can, even in our day, serve to orientate the further progress of theology and philosophy. The Church certainly answers in the affirmative.²²

These words had the effect the Holy Father intended, and yet could not halt the tide. Religious superiors took what steps they could, but the movement had got out of hand and nothing could be accomplished in circles beyond their jurisdiction. The Pope had no recourse left but to issue an instruction to the universal Church.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE ENCYCLICAL

Readers of THEOLOGICAL STUDIES have perused and pondered *Humani Generis*. Any attempt to summarize its teachings here would be superfluous as well as impertinent. Some commentaries on this important document have already appeared, and many others will be written.

The paternal spirit animating the encyclical has been recognized and expressed by commentators. Msgr. Fontenelle observes that "the encyclical is an affectionate warning rather than a harsh condemnation" and that it should not be regarded as a "new *Syllabus*."²³ P. Jean Levie has skilfully diagnosed the character and purpose of the encyclical:

It would be unjust to generalize geographically or to paint in the blackest possible colors the symptoms of this intellectual disorder. The Pope asserts clearly that there is question only of an incipient disease. . . . There is nothing in the "new theology" that recalls the turmoil of the modernist crisis. But the Holy Father is

²² Allocutio "Ad Patres delegatos ad Capitulum generale Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum," *ibid.*, p. 387.

²³ *La Croix*, Oct. 9, 1950; reported in *La Documentation catholique*, XLVII (1950), col. 1295. Other excerpts from the French and Dutch press quoted in the same issue express a like conviction

alive to the threats of intellectual corrosion which can lead, tomorrow or the day after, to genuine disaster. Only one remedy suits the distemper: *clarity of directives*, the sharp decisions of competent authority.

That is the purpose of the encyclical: to *clear up* confusion and thereby to restore intellectual serenity in regions where it had been disturbed. The Pope is not eager to condemn persons; he desires but to halt the spread of errors. His eyes are turned not to the past but to the future. He is concerned, not with fixing the responsibilities for yesterday, but with definitely marking out the positions that have to be held so as to guarantee the healthy condition of Catholic thought.²⁴

The Church does not wish to halt or suppress any creative movement that has been inaugurated. Theological research may go on and must go on; it is needed for the effective presentation, to the men of our day, of revealed truth that is ever fresh and vital. But the teaching authority must insist that all such currents remain within the right channel, because it has to safeguard fidelity to the deposit of revelation.

The encyclical confers an incalculable benefit on Catholic theology and life. In the first place, it points a sure finger at the goal toward which some contemporary movements were tending and which they would risk reaching if they were not checked and redirected. That is a valuable service benefiting theologians as well as the faithful. A professor of philosophy has asked whether theological sanity would not have prevailed even if no papal directive had been issued. Undoubtedly it would have; but in the meantime the teaching authority of the Church would have failed in its duty to guard the deposit, which is unthinkable, and many Catholics might have been lost to the faith. What P. Charles wrote about the devastating inroads Modernism would have made in Catholic circles if the Holy See had remained silent, is not without application to the present situation:

An extremely virulent relativism had, almost without notice, found its way into the teaching of doctrine. Psychology displaced ontology; subjectivism was substituted for revelation; history inherited the place vacated by dogma. The difference between Catholics and Protestants was seemingly being reduced to a practical attitude toward the papacy. To arrest and correct this baneful tendency, Pius X had to act energetically and decisively. The modernism we observe in Anglican thought shows the appalling consequences to which doctrinal relativism might have led us had the Holy See not intervened.²⁵

²⁴ J. Levie, "L'Encyclique 'Humani generis,'" *Nouvelle revue théologique*, LXXII (1950), 788.

²⁵ P. Charles, S.J., "La Théologie dogmatique hier et aujourd'hui," *Nouvelle revue théologique*, LVI (1929), 810.

The second benefit touches Catholic life in general. For the most part the condemned propositions convey the simplified sense, devoid of saving context, into which the thought of scholars is translated once it infiltrates into the common mind.²⁶ The Church, fully aware of the power of ideas, is less disturbed about the theories of a particular individual than about the refractions of his thought throughout the Catholic community; it is less worried about the carefully qualified views of the solitary scholar than about the application these views find among the populace. In taking this attitude the Church is thoroughly realistic. The Church knows from sad experience, as in the case of Rosmini, that doctrines have a vitality of their own, and that their orthodoxy is not guaranteed by the personal piety or apostolic intentions of those who teach them.

The Catholic theologian will have no difficulty in following the directives of this encyclical. He can confidently carry on his researches and he can still pursue his apostolic ambition to make the changeless profundities of Catholic truth intelligible to the minds of our time. But in his freedom of investigation and boldness of speculation he must keep his ears open to the voice of the Church.²⁷ The personal ideas of the Catholic theologian are not indispensable to the life of the Church; and when not guaranteed by the directions of the magisterium, his teachings remain merely human opinions. Without ecclesiastical approval of his labors, the theologian cannot hope to influence Catholic life.

Any suspicion that *Humani Generis* stifles theological initiative betrays gross misunderstanding of the bearing of the document.²⁸ We can have certitude about truth and we can have certitude about error. Eventual arrival at truth possessed with complete certitude is the goal of all scholarly enterprise. And when error is in question, is not the scholar the recipient of a great favor if he is saved from wasting his

²⁶ An interesting account of this process is given by J. le Cour Grandmaison in an article written for *La France catholique*, Sept. 9, 1950; see *La Documentation catholique*, XLVII (1950), col. 1313 f.

²⁷ A striking feature of the article written by A. Michel, "Les Enseignements de l'encyclique," *L'Ami du clergé*, LX (1950), 662-71, is the evidence he amasses to show that practically every one of the errors proscribed in *Humani generis* has been previously, and in some cases repeatedly, condemned by ecclesiastical authority.

²⁸ P. Vanier, S.J., "L'Encyclique 'Humani generis,'" *Relations*, X (1950), 293, shows from the encyclical itself how unfounded such a suspicion is.

time by wandering astray and is simultaneously rescued from propagating falsehood among his fellowmen? Who, more zealously than Pius XII, has stimulated the activity of theologians with regard to doctrinal investigations of the Assumption? Far from stifling their studies, he has crowned them with a glorious dogmatic definition. To say nothing of the *Divino afflante Spiritu* and the addresses of the Pope to various groups welcomed by him in audience,²⁹ the present encyclical repeatedly urges vigorous study undertaken with the purpose of extending knowledge in philosophy, anthropology, Sacred Scripture, and theology.³⁰

Even in the natural order humility and dependence, consisting in submission to the exigencies of the subject under examination, are conditions for successful research. Similar submission to doctrinal formulas canonized by the Church and attentiveness to the directives of its teaching authority are nothing else than scientific integrity in the field of theology. No science may deviate from its principles—theology less than any; for its principles are articles of faith entrusted to the Church and guaranteed by the prerogative of infallibility. The limits of theology are as wide as the limits of truth. Far from constricting liberty, submission to the magisterium aids liberty, because it increases efficacy of study. By saving us from meandering down wrong paths it perfects our liberty, for it guards us against making bad choices and guides us in making right choices; and that is the purpose of liberty. The theologian is in quest of truth; what better fortune can befall him than to find it?

Although theology is a science of the specialist, as all sciences are, it is a public service undertaken, not for the gratification of propounding personal views, but for helping all of us to contemplate with joy the “good news” of the gospel given to us for our salvation. This fact lays social duties on theology—the duty of exercising care not to bruise the faith, the duty of not giving scandal by questionable speculation and shaky apologetics; the duty also of consecrating intense study to vital problems and of seeking answers to current questions.

As a public function, the work of theology is a work of the Church. The Church has been commissioned to teach. And because it has to

²⁹ A. Michel, *art. cit.*, p. 666, note 6, supplies some examples of the incentives given by the Holy Father to the development of the sciences and the arts.

³⁰ See, for example, nos. 9, 21, 29, 36, 38, 43 (N.C.W.C. edition).

teach, it has to know the explanations given of its teaching and oversee the science wrought from that teaching. Otherwise such teaching would not be basically its own.³¹ That is why the Church guides theologians, as it does in *Humani Generis*; the sacred truth to which theologians devote their lives is the Church's own truth.

At the end of his incomparable work on the Trinity, one of the masterpieces of Catholic theology, St. Augustine utters a prayer: "O Lord, one God, O Triune God, whatever I have written in these books about what is Thine, let those who are Thine receive; if I have written anything that is mine, may Thou and Thine overlook." Every theologian ought to make that prayer his own. And he has the good fortune of knowing how to mark off what is his, and therefore sometimes not good, from what is God's, and therefore always good; for in all his theological labors he is enlightened by the Church, the keeper of the things that are God's.

³¹ E. Mersch, S.J., *La Théologie du corps mystique*, I (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1946), 28 f., insists strongly on the social nature of theology.