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## The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

### Scholarship, Faith, and Higher Education

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## The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

### Medieval Lessons

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#### Introduction

[1] Whatever else a tradition is, it is something that connects us to a past, and not simply to a past fondly remembered, but one that continues to inform our present. So it seems not implausible that we might look to the past in order to gain insight into what it means to be engaged in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition today. And because Catholicism seems, for good or for ill, to have a particular connection to the Middle Ages – the “Age of Faith” – we might look to that particular past to see what lessons we can learn about what we mean when we speak of a Catholic Intellectual Tradition, about what challenges are posed to and posed by this tradition, and about how we foster and further this tradition. I will proceed by first making and exploring a distinction, and then proposing some points for consideration.

[2] Medieval scholastic thought proceeded largely by the making of distinctions, and thus it would warm the heart of our scholastic forbears if we begin with a distinction. I suggest we might distinguish between what we mean *materially* by the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, and what we mean *formally*. In other words, when we speak “materially” about the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, we mean those texts, works of art, figures, concepts, and so forth that are indispensable in preservation, transmission, and extension of that tradition. When we speak “formally” about the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, we mean not so much the content of the tradition, but rather what we might call “the rules of engagement.” It is not simply *what* we talk and think about that constitutes the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, but also *how* we talk and think about that content. Taking both of these aspects of tradition seriously means that tradition is not, as Edmund Burke would have had it, “wisdom without reflection” (129), but rather an on-going conversation that involves a self-reflective appropriation of the tradition.

### The Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Materially Considered

[3] One way in which the conversation that is tradition differs from what we typically mean by “conversation” is its extension across time and inclusion of the voices of the past as well as the present. As G. K. Chesterton famously said, “Tradition means giving a vote to most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about” (45). And in actual practice particular traditions are about listening to particular voices from the past, not to the complete exclusion of others, but with a particular intensity. Put differently, every tradition has certain “canonical” figures, texts, and cultural monuments. I will admit to having a certain trepidation about even raising this issue, recalling as I do the “canon wars” of the 1980s and 90s, in which multiculturalists wielding volumes by Zora Neale Hurston clashed with neo- and paleo-conservatives shielding themselves with copies of Alan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind*. But it seems to me manifestly dishonest to deny the crucial role of some sort of canon in every intellectual tradition, and if we are going to have a Catholic Intellectual Tradition – that is, an ongoing conversation about truth that is identifiably Catholic – then we will need to have certain touchstones to which we can refer, certain indispensable voices from the past that will be a part of that conversation.

[4] During the High Middle Ages – for our purposes the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries – there was a rather restricted range of canonical texts that were employed in schools. Pretty much everywhere students studying the Liberal Arts would read Priscian and Donatus for Grammar; Cicero, Aristotle, and Boethius for Rhetoric; Aristotle’s *Organon* for Logic; Boethius’s adaptation of Nicomachus of Gerasa for Arithmetic; Euclid’s *Elements* for Geometry; Ptolemy’s *Almagest* for Astronomy; and Boethius’s *Musica* for Music; as well as, eventually, the *Ethics*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and other works of Aristotle (Weisheipl: 270). In the higher faculties, Gratian was read for Canon Law, the *Digest* of Justinian for Civil Law, Galen for Medicine, and Peter Lombard as well as, of course, Sacred Scripture for Theology. In addition to the texts studied in the curriculum, there were a host of other authoritative texts that were universally consulted within certain disciplines, particularly the works of Avicenna in Medicine, a variety of Arabic commentators on Aristotle in the natural sciences and philosophy, and Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite, among others, in Theology.

[5] This canon of authoritative texts was central to the entire intellectual enterprise of the high Middle Ages. It served as a shared foundation from which conversation could proceed and which would provide guideposts along the way. The invocation of authorities was common in medieval forms of argumentation; indeed, almost all advanced studies proceeded by means of the presentation of authoritative texts, either in the form of texts that were lectured upon by masters, or texts employed in the presentation of conflicts between authorities, about which masters and students joined in public disputations that attempted to reconcile or decide between those conflicting authorities. Many will be familiar with the use of authorities in theological and philosophical disputations, but this was no less common in the faculties of Law and even Medicine (see Evans: chaps. 10-11; French: chap. 4). To our modern way of thinking, the disputing of authorities might seem to make sense in the context of legal education – indeed, the law school moot court of today is a unique survival of the medieval disputation – but it seems most peculiar, even pernicious, in the context of medical education. Should not the study of medicine, indeed of any natural science, be purely empirical? Was it not the argument from authority that had to be thrown off before we could have the advent of modern science? Do not the modern natural sciences, with their restless questioning of received wisdom, demonstrate to us precisely the dangers of a canon endowed with too much authority?

[6] I think there is a certain truth to such criticisms of medieval scholastic thinking, and not only in the field of medicine. Indeed, it was only when the social barriers between the scholastic master with his logical acumen and the artisan or craftsman with his *ad hoc* empiricism and experimentalism – that is, the barrier between the liberal and the mechanical arts – began to be broken down that something like modern natural science could emerge (see Zilsel). At the same time, we ought not to view the scholastic thinkers of the Middle Ages as somehow naive in their use of authorities. Not only were they aware that arguments based on authority were the weakest sort of arguments, yielding mere probability and not true knowledge (*scientia*), but they also found in the disagreements among these authorities grist for the intellectual mills that were the universities (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.1.8; for a discussion of Aquinas' understanding and use of "authorities," see Chenu: 126-55). In other words, it was in part the conflicts within the canon of authorities that made the tradition a living and self-reflective conversation. Though every age has its share of academic hacks who seek in canonical sources "wisdom without reflection," no one who has attended carefully to the subtlety with which the best scholastic thinkers make use of their canonical authorities would ever think that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition coming out of the Middle Ages was simply a matter of parroting prepackaged authorities.

[7] Likewise, we ought not simply assume that modern science does not have its own authorities. Certainly no scientist proves every claim by means of his or her own empirical investigation. Rather, there are people and institutions – particularly the scientific journal – that "authorize" what counts as trustworthy scientific knowledge. It is the nature of human knowledge in general that most of what we speak of as "knowing" we in fact take on trust. I see no reason, *prima facie*, to think that this is not also true in the natural sciences. Medieval discussion had the advantage of at least being explicit about the role played by authorities.

[8] In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a great deal of intellectual effort was spent not only on adjudicating conflicts within the canon of authorities, but also on the question of the shape of the canon

itself, particularly the question of to what degree, if at all, the works of Aristotle ought to be included in that canon. To many, Aristotle's works were far too "naturalistic" in their perspective, too disruptive of the Catholic Christian conversation that had been proceeding for centuries with a rather large measure of success. To others, Aristotle presented valuable resources for thought, resources that were worth the intellectual effort required to resolve the difficulties raised for the Christian tradition. Indeed, we might see in the 13<sup>th</sup> century's struggle to assimilate the works of Aristotle a model of the attitude that a tradition might take toward the disturbing voice of an "outsider" and how that tradition is able to engage in a discerning way with that voice. It shows us how a tradition can be reshaped while still remaining recognizably the same tradition (see MacIntyre: chaps. 5-6).

[9] The medieval struggle over the inclusion of Aristotle indicates that a "canon" need not be a rigidly fixed body of texts. Today only a few of the canonical texts of the medieval university would be considered required reading at most Catholic universities. We also have far more texts available to us, both texts from the past and newly produced texts. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition today is a living thing, and part of what makes it live is the ongoing conversation about its canon of authorities, a conversation concerning which touchstones of that tradition are necessary for the conversation to continue in such a way as to allow Catholics and others to draw upon the riches of that tradition without becoming mere "traditionalists," mired in the past, imbibing "wisdom without reflection."

[10] What should be included in the canonical works of the Catholic intellectual tradition today? Certainly this would include works by Catholic authors, both "classic" and contemporary: Augustine, Dante, Newman, Bonaventure, Thérèse of Lisieux, Galileo, Hopkins, Aquinas, Waugh, Mendel, Catherine of Siena, Dawson, Greene, Pascal, Rahner, Lemaître, O'Connor, and so forth. There is a sense in which the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is something that is, as they say, "caught" more than "taught," and there is no better way to catch this than to read Catholic intellectuals. At the same time, if we take the Middle Ages as a starting point, it is apparent that there is no reason why the canonical texts need be Christian. Indeed, in the medieval Arts curriculum, Boethius seems to be the only Christian author who has a significant presence. If we transpose this into our contemporary context, it would seem that the fostering of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition not only allows for, but even requires, truth to be sought wherever it might be found, in authors who hold the Christian faith, or another faith, or perhaps no faith at all. Medieval debates over the inclusion of Aristotle show us that the inclusion of disturbing voices, voices not easily – or perhaps ever – assimilated, is itself an element in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. The question of how, if at all, Aristotle's "naturalism" (about which I shall say more below) could be reconciled with the Christian faith should find its echo today in questions of what Christians have to learn from Marx or Darwin or – dare I say it? – even Nietzsche. As important as the texts that nurture and support the Catholic faith are those that challenge and provoke it. The relevant question to ask about the text is not, "Is the author Catholic?" but rather "Is this text of sufficient quality and influence that engagement with it will further our shared pursuit of the truth?"

### The Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Formally Considered

[11] The challenge posed by the texts of Aristotle to the medieval Christian tradition provides us an opportunity to think not only about the question of the material constitution of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, but also about its formal constitution. We might say that in the 13<sup>th</sup> century a major preoccupation was not simply *whether* to read Aristotle, but *how* to read Aristotle. The incorporation of any figure or text or cultural monument into an intellectual tradition is never so simple as its inclusion on a syllabus. And in the case of Aristotle in the Middle Ages, even inclusion on the syllabus was at times a perilous enterprise.

[12] At the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Latin West knew only two works by Aristotle, the *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, in a sixth-century translation by Boethius. By the middle of the century, Aristotle's other logical works had surfaced in translation. By the end of the century Latin translations of most of Aristotle's works were available, though intensive study of them did not really begin until the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Dod: 46-48). Thus in a relatively short span of time a comprehensive view of the world was introduced into the Latin West, a view of the world in some ways strikingly at odds with what is typically characterized as the "Augustinian" synthesis of Christianity and Platonism. As the texts of Aristotle began to be studied, often alongside Arabic commentaries on those texts, worries arose. In 1210 the teaching of Aristotle's works was forbidden at the University of Paris. This ban was reiterated five years later, with an exception made for the optional teaching of Aristotle's works on logic and his *Ethics*. In particular, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and his works of natural philosophy were banned. Around the middle of the century the ban on lecturing on Aristotle at Paris began to be ignored, and in 1255 the Arts Faculty – what we today would call the undergraduate division of the university – proclaimed a new syllabus that required the teaching of all of Aristotle's works (Dod: 70-72; Van Steenberghen: 34-35). But even with the inclusion of Aristotle in the syllabus, the hard questions of how he was to be read within a Catholic intellectual tradition remained to be addressed.

[13] As I have mentioned, the chief difficulty posed by Aristotle was what might be called the resolute "naturalism" of his philosophy. To Christian intellectuals who had long since expunged, or at least reined in, the heterodox emanationist elements in neo-platonic metaphysics, and transformed the forms of Plato into ideas existing in the mind of God, the works of Aristotle must have been jarring . . . and exhilarating. Rather than a descending coming-forth of beings from the One, Aristotle offered a God who was a "prime mover," eternally bringing things from potentiality to actuality. Rather than forms in a transcendent realm, Aristotle saw forms in things, tied up with, and in a sense perishing with, concrete material substances. His writings raised fundamental questions about the cogency of such central Christian doctrines as the creation of the world in time and the immortality of the soul. Moreover, Aristotle presented a strikingly different account of human knowing. Whereas Christianized neo-Platonism saw a certain connaturality between the human mind and God, such that things were known by means of a divine "illumination" of the mind, for Aristotle the natural object of the human mind was the *quidditas* (the "whatness") of material things. In place of the "wisdom" of Christian neo-platonism, a wisdom that is a real

reflection of Christ, the Wisdom of God, Aristotle offered a “science” of material things, known purely through the natural light of reason.

[14] This should give some idea of the sort of intellectual challenges posed by Aristotle to the Catholic intellectual tradition during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. All who took up these challenges sought to find a way to appropriate what was true and good in Aristotle into the Christian worldview while maintaining the integrity of that worldview. The ways in which this was done varied. At Paris, the Arts Faculty had several luminaries who are today sometimes referred to as the “Latin Averroists” (because of their tendency to read Aristotle through his Arabic interpreter Averroes) or “Radical Aristotelians.” They dedicated themselves to understanding the text of Aristotle and his Arabic commentators without any reference to Christian revelation, while at the same time affirming the truth of Christian doctrine, even when it contradicted what Aristotle had demonstrated. This emphasis on the autonomy of philosophical inquiry led critics to accuse them of holding a “double truth” theory, by which something could be true philosophically and false theologically and vice versa. Most scholars today think that the term “double truth” is misleading, implying either dishonesty or a violation of the principle of non-contradiction yielding radical incoherence. Neither of these seems to be the case with those Radical Aristotelians whose texts have survived. But it does seem to be that case that thinkers such as Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia held that something might be demonstratively proven according to the principles of Aristotelian natural philosophy and yet disproved by divine revelation, which trumps natural philosophy. In this scheme, philosophy is autonomous, even though its most securely demonstrated conclusion might be undercut by theology.<sup>1</sup>

[15] The Franciscan theologian Bonaventure, on the other hand, seemed quite unconcerned about the autonomy of philosophy. Indeed, philosophy, and all of the arts, both liberal and mechanical, can be “reduced” or “traced back” to theology by means of a Trinitarian exegesis of the natural world as a “text” for which Sacred Scripture is the interpretive key (see Bonaventure, *De reductione artium ad theologiam* and *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*). Bonaventure is happy to pillage Aristotle’s works for whatever useful ideas are ready to hand, but the framework into which he fits them is the Augustinian framework of divine ideas, exemplary causality, and illumination. Thus Joseph Ratzinger has argued that while Bonaventure’s thought, considered materially, is “eclectic Aristotelianism,” considered formally it is Augustinian (129). In this way, Bonaventure made much use of the content of Aristotle’s philosophy, while denying that philosophy any autonomy, thereby subordinating it to divine revelation.

[16] Thomas Aquinas took a somewhat different approach. Contrary to some popular views of Aquinas, he, no less than Bonaventure, subordinated philosophical knowledge to divine revelation (Van Steenberghen: 73). However, within this subordination he sought as much as possible to give a real autonomy to philosophical thought, by not simply using Aristotle as

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<sup>1</sup> John Wippel notes of Siger and Boethius, “their efforts to reconcile faith and reason, and at the same time, to protect the intrinsic integrity and autonomy of purely philosophical inquiry, end by paying a considerable price, i.e., by placing the certainty of purely philosophical inquiry at risk or in question when dealing with certain issues” (70). If Wippel’s interpretation is correct, then the so-called Latin Averroists are not, as typically thought, rationalists, but rather radical fideists.

an *ad hoc* conceptual resource, in the way that Bonaventure did, but by adopting the *way* of thinking that he found in Aristotle's texts. As Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, Aquinas became "a native speaker of two first languages, each with its own distinctive conceptual idiom," the one being the inherited Augustinian synthesis and the other being Aristotelianism (114). In the case of Aquinas, rather than a "retracing" of all mundane knowledge back to theology, he proposed an approach in which "grace does not destroy nature but perfects it." (*Summa theologiae* 1.1.8). Natural reason, which Aquinas takes Aristotle's philosophy to be a good, though not perfect, exemplar of, can tell us certain truths about the natural world, and can even give us dim intimations of God, but it is ultimately inadequate to the task of human fulfillment, which is only found in the vision of God's essence (*Summa theologiae* 1-2.3.8). Even in this life – *in via*, as Aquinas puts it – the truth we can know through our natural reason and the good we can do through our natural powers are partial and fragmentary (see *Summa theologiae* 1.12.12; 1-2.109.2). And yet, we *can* know truth and *can* do good. Though grace brings us to a more perfect realization of truth and goodness, it does not contradict the truth of our natural reason nor the goodness of our natural inclinations, at least to the degree that reason and will are not warped by sin. Grace perfects the powers that are latent in nature: the capacity to respond to grace and be perfected in transcending the limits of nature.

[17] Thus we can discern in the Middle Ages at least three possible approaches to *how* one thinks about the figures, texts, and cultural monuments that are the "matter" of the Catholic intellectual tradition. For the Radical Aristotelians, non-theological disciplines are strictly autonomous, operating by their own methods and reaching their own conclusions in a sphere separate from theological concerns. To use a modern term, for thinkers like Siger and Boethius of Dacia, the Arts are characterized by "methodological atheism," or at least a methodology that needs no God but the God of the philosophers. For Bonaventure, one cannot really understand the subject matter of the Arts at all until one has located them within their theological framework. Particularly in our fallen human state, nature is a strange hieroglyph that remains opaque to understanding until one discovers the Rosetta Stone of Scripture. For Aquinas, unaided human reason, even in its fallen state, can discern some degree of truth, and thus the Arts can proceed according to their own inherent intelligibility. But at the same time, reason must recognize its own limitations, acknowledging that the wisdom that is received through grace can not only show us a truth that transcends this world, but can show us this world's truth with a perfected clarity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> My delineation of these three approaches is perhaps best thought of along the lines of sociological "ideal types" rather than actual historical descriptions. While I believe them to give an accurate account of the general tendencies of thought in the figures to which they are attached, close attention to the texts of Boethius, Siger, Bonaventure, and Aquinas will, of course, reveal far more complexity and nuance than I have represented here. Often, particularly in the case of Bonaventure and Aquinas, the differences are more matters of an intellectual "style" than of doctrine. Thus, though to my knowledge he does not use the phrase itself, Bonaventure can plausibly be construed as affirming that grace perfects nature; similarly, Thomas holds, no less than Bonaventure, that human beings can only find ultimate fulfillment through the assent of faith to divine revelation. The difference is more one of relative emphasis.

### Some Points for Consideration

[18] Whether due to historical contingency or its innate superiority, the approach of Thomas Aquinas has been favored by the Catholic intellectual tradition at least since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> In part, he was lauded for his seemingly unique ability to vanquish modern errors that were eroding not only faith, but also the foundations of civil society. As Pope Leo XIII wrote in his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (§18), which commended Aquinas as a philosophical resource for the Church confronting modernity, “with his own hand he vanquished all errors of ancient times; and still he supplies an armory of weapons which brings us certain victory in the conflict with falsehoods ever springing up in the course of years.” But in addition to this more combative use of Aquinas, Leo XIII also commends him for the harmonious relationship that he establishes between faith and reason: “carefully distinguishing reason from faith, as is right, and yet joining them together in a harmony of friendship, he so guarded the rights of each, and so watched over the dignity of each, that, as far as man is concerned, reason can now hardly rise than she rose, borne up in the flight of Thomas; and faith can hardly gain more helps and greater helps from reason than those which Thomas gave her.” (*Aeterni Patris* §18). If, in the immediate aftermath of the *Risorgimento* and the loss of the Papal States, Pope Leo saw Aquinas chiefly as a weapon to beat back the flawed modern philosophies that had led so many people to hold God and his Church in such contempt, he did not ignore entirely the partial autonomy that Aquinas granted to human reason.

[19] As the Church in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to make its peace with the modern world, it was this latter aspect of Aquinas’s thought that Catholic intellectuals came to value more. This can be seen in the Apostolic Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae*, which Pope Paul VI issued on the seventh centenary of Aquinas’s death in 1974:

In the history of Christian thought, therefore, Thomas is regarded as a pioneer on the new road to be traveled thenceforth by all philosophers and scientists. The teaching in which he gave the prophetic answer of genius to the question of the new relation between faith and reason rests on a harmonization of the world’s secularity with the radical demands of the Gospel. He thus avoided the unnatural tendency to despise the world and its values, while at the same time not betraying in any way the basic, inflexible principles governing the supernatural order (*Lumen Ecclesiae* §8).

Paul VI sees Aquinas embracing the world’s “secularity” – a term that would have undoubtedly puzzled Aquinas himself, and horrified Leo XIII – without compromising the Gospel.

[20] Thus in the context of Catholics after the Second Vatican Council seeking to, as John XXIII put it, “throw open the windows of the Church,” Aquinas becomes something of a cipher for the new, harmonious relation of the Church and the modern world. His emphasis on the relative independence of non-theological intellectual pursuits allowed Catholic

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<sup>3</sup> Certainly one factor in this favoring is the official approbation Aquinas has received from the Church (see Pereira).



scholars to claim, and occasionally attain, a measure of respect in the secular academy. For if grace perfects and does not destroy nature, then “good Catholic scholarship” must first of all be good scholarship, just as “good Catholic art” must first of all be good art. Further, this approach has allowed Catholic intellectuals to be something other than theologians (which were, after all, rather rare in medieval universities), pursuing non-theological lines of inquiry into the nature that God has created and grace will perfect. Such scholarship does not deny the theological dimension, though it may not engage it directly. The Thomist approach has even allowed non-Catholics a place in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition by virtue of their engagement with the figures, texts, and cultural monuments that constitute the Catholic intellectual “canon,” so long as that engagement recognizes its own limits with regard to the theological dimension.

[21] And yet, in the years since the Second Vatican council we have perhaps seen among Catholic intellectuals something of a revival of the Radical Aristotelian spirit: not primarily in a revival of interest in Aristotle, but rather in an insistence on the radical autonomy of purely rational inquiry. I suspect we can all think of those, in a variety of disciplines, who see any reference to a theological dimension of truth as undercutting the integrity of their scholarship, who associate faith with fideism and unreason. Like Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, many of these scholars are sincere Catholics, but also like Siger and Boethius they see their Catholic faith as something completely divorced from their intellectual pursuits. We might say that they are intellectuals who are Catholics, rather than Catholic intellectuals. In some cases, the Catholic faith can even be perceived as a threat to their intellectual pursuits. For if secular truth is radically autonomous, then divine truth can only affect it by an act of sheer power, by which it cancels and overrides the truth arrived at by natural reason.

[22] The approach of the Radical Aristotelians proved to be inadequate to the intellectual task of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and I suspect their approach will prove inadequate today, at least if we want to develop and hand on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. For this approach implicitly denies what I take to be the central conviction that underlies both *what* we include in our intellectual canon and *how* we read that canon: the belief that all truth is God’s truth. There is not one set of criteria by which we ought to think about “natural” things and a second set of criteria by which we ought to think about “supernatural” things. Rather, there is a single, multi-voiced, on-going conversation in which we together feel our way toward the criteria that will be adequate for *this* moment in the conversation, when the Catholic Intellectual Tradition faces *these* questions and can marshal *these* resources.

[23] Yet there is perhaps a deeper difficulty that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition faces today. While some Catholic intellectuals might still concern themselves with the autonomy of reason and the threat of ecclesiastical impositions upon reason, much of the secular academy seems to have given up on reason, seeing it as at best a quaint Enlightenment notion and at worst a mask for the Will to Power.<sup>4</sup> “Reason” is increasingly seen as a strictly local phenomenon, entirely determined by language and culture. This might be seen as a

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<sup>4</sup> If Wipfel is correct that the radical Aristotelian bifurcation of faith and reason ultimately issues in a fideism, then perhaps it should not surprise us if methodological atheism ends up in irrationalism.

good thing: if an insistence on the radical autonomy of purely rational inquiry is problematic for the Catholic intellectual tradition, then the secular dismantling of that autonomy might be greeted with joy. But the enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend. Catholics have a stake in reason and in the possibility of reasoned discourse across traditions. After all, we profess to believe that God is *Logos*, and that the *Logos* of God is somehow revealed in the order of the world, an order that our minds can grasp. The alternative to such faith in reason would seem to be the position that all disputes, intellectual and otherwise, are ultimately settled according to who has the most power. Thus the Church, seen so long as the enemy of reason, now finds itself cast as the defender of reason against a certain strain of postmodern “irrationalism.” This was a major emphasis in John Paul II’s encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998) as well as Benedict XVI’s now infamous “Regensburg Address” (2006) – a point that was almost entirely lost in the ensuing furor over what were seen as unflattering remarks about Islam.

[24] So the Catholic Intellectual Tradition stands poised between a rebirth of the Radical Aristotelian bifurcation of faith and reason on the one hand and the irrationalist erasure of reason on the other. What path can lead us through? Perhaps the answer lies in a rediscovery of Aquinas’ approach to faith and reason, with its demarcation and balancing of nature and grace. Or perhaps it lies in a revival of the more prophetic spirit of Bonaventure; perhaps the proper response to a radical claim of the strict autonomy of secular knowledge is an equally radical claim of the unintelligibility of all things apart from divine revelation, the claim that faith in reason ultimately hangs on faith in revelation. It might be the case that the conversation that is the Catholic Intellectual Tradition will for our place and time turn out to be a conversation between the heirs of St. Bonaventure and the heirs of St. Thomas about how best to relate faith and reason, cult, and culture.<sup>5</sup> But what we must not do is to lose confidence in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition itself: in its ability to rise to new challenges, to help us see better and farther. Writing in the mid-12th century, John of Salisbury said:

Our own generation enjoys the legacy bequeathed to it by that which preceded it. We frequently know more, not because we have moved ahead by our own natural ability, but because we are supported by the strength of others, and possess riches that we have inherited from our forefathers. Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic shoulders (quoted in McGarry: 167).

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<sup>5</sup> For the suggestion that Pope Benedict XVI represents of a “Bonaventurian” stream in theology, distinct from the Aquinas-inspired theology of figures such as Rahner, Lonergan, Chenu and Schillibeeckx, see Komonchak: 11.

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