“A POSTMODERN AUGUSTINIAN THOMISM”?

Joseph A. Komonchak
The Catholic University of America

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Augustinian vs. Thomist?

When Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope, several people described his theological orientation and typical emphases as “Augustinian.” I was among them. A few years earlier I had used a contrast that some found useful between a typically Augustinian and a typically Thomist way of addressing theological questions. Here is how I then described these ideal-types:

The typically Augustinian approach works with a sharp and unmediated distinction between sin and grace, natural reason and faith. The natural world appears to have no solidity or substance except as a sign pointing beyond itself to the spiritual and supernatural. The dramatic contest between sin and grace monopolizes attention, distracting it away from the natural, or rather subsuming it under the religious categories so that, on the one hand, we are "natura filii irae" and, on the other, our “true” nature is only recognized in the supernatural.

The typically Thomist approach, in contrast, effects a theoretical differentiation of the natural, not in order to deny that the drama of sin and grace is the only real drama of human history but in order to promote a more accurate understanding of it. "Nature," if you will, theoretically mediates the practical drama. It has its own solidity or substance, its own laws, its created autonomy. Sin is what falls short of or contradicts nature, and grace is what heals and transcendentally fulfills nature. This permits one at once to differentiate the genuine limitations of nature without having to label them as sinful and to affirm the power of grace as the fulfillment and not the destruction of nature. This is why St. Thomas could embrace the new world opened to Christian culture by Aristotle's philosophy and by Arabian science without believing, as many Augustinians did at the time, that this was a profanation of the sacred because it implied that an understanding of nature was possible in other than religious terms. I then very briefly illustrated the differences with the examples of the treatment of human freedom and of the role of divine illumination in human knowing.

In drawing up the ideal-types, I certainly was not overlooking the tremendous debt that Thomas owed to Augustine much less suggesting that one had to choose between the two great men themselves. I was largely drawing on three sources or interpretations, particularly of the work of Aquinas. The first was the way in which Bernard Lonergan described the significance of

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what he called “the theorem of the supernatural” as it emerged in the thirteenth century. Secondly, there was the way in which Yves Congar described what he called the Albertino-Thomist revolution within medieval theology, which he contrasted with an earlier Augustinianism that had been moralized by Gregory the Great.

Another source may be found in descriptions of the way in which Thomas differed also from the neo-Augustinians of his own age with regard to the cultural challenge represented in the thirteenth century by the translation of Aristotelian and Arabic texts. When an extreme left-wing arose in the persons of the Averroists in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Paris, Aquinas wrote his *De unitate intellectus*. In the face of the same challenge, Bonaventure resorted to apocalyptic language about the impending end of things in his *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, while his Franciscan colleagues sought sanctions from ecclesiastical authority against not only the Averroists but also the Thomists. In 1930 M.-D. Chenu used the three positions of the thirteenth century—left-wing Averroists, right-wing intransigents, with Thomas occupying the sane and discriminating middle—to propose the need for someone like Aquinas to arise to show the way out of the impasse created in the twentieth century by the Modernist crisis and the intervention of Roman authority. Forty years later, in the preface to the English translation of his *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, Joseph Ratzinger suggested a comparison between those dramatic years in Paris and the turbulence of the post-Vatican II era.

The last chapter of this work discussed Bonaventure’s response to the intellectual crisis he discovered upon returning to Paris in the late 1260s. Whereas in Aquinas’s response to the intellectual crisis the distinction began to emerge between theology and philosophy and, along with the latter, the sciences of nature, which implies a certain autonomy for those other disciplines, Bonaventure, Ratzinger argued, set himself against this development and continued to insist on the unity of Christian wisdom for which Christ was the center of all knowledge. “Only faith,” Bonaventure wrote, “divides the light from the darkness.” Bonaventure, Ratzinger said, ended in an anti-Aristotelianism that came close to anti-intellectualism and he anticipated a day not far off when the end would come and reason would definitively yield to authority.

Ratzinger has himself often contrasted the Augustinian and the Thomist approaches. His own instinctive sympathies lie (or at least lay—it may be that his views have changed) with the Augustinian/Bonaventuran approach. In his early seminary and university studies Ratzinger eagerly benefitted from the renewal of theology and pastoral practice that had begun before the Second World War and flourished in the late 1940s and 1950s. He shared the view that scholastic theology “was no longer an instrument for bringing faith into the contemporary discussion,” that theology had to find a new language, a new openness.

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6 Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971) xiii: “In many ways, those turbulent years [the 1260’s and 1270’s], with the abrupt entrance of Arabian science into the firmly built structure of traditional theology, are similar to the post-Conciliar mood which we are experiencing at the present time [1969].”
Impatience with neo-scholasticism also led Ratzinger to resist the nearly exclusive emphasis placed on the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. The latter’s “crystal-clear logic” he found “too closed in on itself, too impersonal and ready-made.” He far preferred Augustine’s personalism in all its passion and depth. His doctoral dissertation was on the ecclesiology of St. Augustine, and the great saint would remain by far the most powerful influence on his thought, not least in the distinction between wisdom (sapientia) and knowledge (scientia).

During the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger was one of the German theologians who in the summer of 1965 were quite critical of a late draft of what would become Gaudium et spes, a draft that came from Belgian and French theologians largely inspired by Fr. Chenu. The Germans believed the text had not sufficiently overcome “a doctrine of man divided into philosophy and theology.” It indulged “the fiction that it is possible to construct a rational philosophical picture of man intelligible to all and on which all men of goodwill can agree, the actual Christian doctrines being added to this as a sort of crowning conclusion.” “Reason pure and simple,” Ratzinger said, “does not exist.” To the method embodied in the draft the Germans would have preferred starting “from the actual Christian creed, which, precisely as a confession of faith, can and must manifest its own intelligibility and rationality.”

After the Council Ratzinger used the distinction between Augustinian and Thomist approaches in his continued criticisms of Gaudium et spes. He found its language in places “downright Pelagian,” its optimism reflecting Thomism and the Greek Fathers rather than Luther or Catholic Augustinianism. It did not give enough attention to St. Augustine’s epistemology which Ratzinger said was deeper than that of Aquinas since it is aware that “the organ by which God can be seen cannot be a non-historical ratio naturalis, which simply does not exist, but only the ratio pura, i.e., purificata, or, as Augustine expresses it echoing the Gospel, the cor purum.” While in what Gaudium et spes said about the human mind one could hear “an echo of the medieval doctrine of illumination, derived from Augustine,” this was only in its “Thomistically domesticated form.” Ratzinger clearly preferred Augustine’s distinction between scientia and sapientia which he thought similar to that between “the view held in the natural sciences, with its necessary methodological positivism and its exclusion of the question of ontological truth,” on the one hand, and the wisdom of a receptive faith, on the other.

The first chapter in Ratzinger’s Introduction to Christianity makes many of the same points more fully. His description of the situation of faith argues that “there are two basic forms of human attitude or reaction to reality,” the ones that Heidegger posed in terms of a contrast between “calculating thinking and reflective thinking.” The former is concerned with what is doable, makeable (die Machbarkeit), the latter with meaning (der Sinn). It is necessary to say today what in the thirteenth century Bonaventure said when he reproached his Parisian colleagues in the theological faculty with “having learned how to measure the world but having forgotten how to measure themselves.” Faith is “an essentially different kind of intellectual attitude” from the one concerned with doing and making. “Meaning is not derived from knowledge (Wissen);” it can only be received. Machbarkeitswissen is also necessarily positivistic, no longer interested in truth. “The tool with which man is equipped to deal with the

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truth of being is not *knowledge* (*Wissen*) but *understanding* (*Verstehen*), understanding of the meaning to which he has entrusted himself.... For knowledge of the functional aspect of the world, as procured for us so splendidly by present-day technical and scientific thinking, brings with it no understanding of the world and of being. Understanding grows only out of belief (*Verstehen wächst nur aus Glauben*).”

I was invited to undertake for this meeting a reflection on whether such typologies still hold up given recent interest in a “post-modern Augustine” and in an “Augustinian Thomas.” Among the works recommended for consideration is a volume that joins the two and proposes “a postmodern Augustinian Thomism” as what is needed in order to institute a properly theological critique of what its author calls “the culture of modernity.” Written by Tracey Rowland, the Dean of the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family in Melbourne, Australia, the book was published in the Radical Orthodoxy Series edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward. The work has attracted a good deal of attention and has been widely reviewed.10

The Critique of Gaudium et spes

Tracey Rowland prefaces her main argument with a chapter on the treatment of culture in the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*). Throughout the rest of her work, what she sees as the inadequacies of this treatment and what she takes to be a common interpretation of the Council’s engagement with modernity serve as a foil for her own positive proposal of a properly theological evaluation of culture derived from a “post-modern Augustinian Thomism.”

As a whole and especially in *Gaudium et spes*, the Council has been widely interpreted as having sought an accommodation to the modern world. Rowland is inclined to agree with this view but she is critical of the conciliar effort for not having brought to bear a theological critique of modern culture. The conciliar fathers, she thinks, ignored pre-conciliar work on the relationship between the Church and modernity in such figures as Maritain, Przywara, Guardini, and Dawson. The Thomist tradition, with which they were most familiar, had not developed a serious theory of culture, and cultural analysis played no great role in their intellectual formation. The result is a document that Rowland thinks is exceedingly vague in its notion of culture, neglects the fact that “modernity” is a “cultural formation” quite hostile to virtue, and defends a theory of “autonomy” that presupposes an extrinsicist notion of the relationship

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9 Joseph Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentums: Vorlesungen über das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis* (München: Kösel Verlag, 1985) 33-52; ET: *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 30-47. Note how this reverses Kant for whom religion was banished from the realm of pure reason to the realm of practical reason; here practical reason is abandoned in favor of reflective reason, which is where faith is to be located, and any sort of integration seems to be regarded as impossible.

between nature and grace.

It cannot be said that this critique rests upon a comprehensive or close analysis of the conciliar texts, not even of *Gaudium et spes*, with which Rowland is chiefly concerned, and not even with that text’s chapter on the promotion of culture (GS nos. 53-62), on which her attention is focused. Giving only a few quotations from that chapter, she takes her cues rather from quite brief remarks made about *Gaudium et spes* by a few bishops and theologians who are said to have had a hand in its redaction. Next to nothing is said about the history of this chapter or of *Gaudium et spes* as a whole. Recognition that during that history there were “quite intense debates about the relationship between nature and grace and in particular the tension between the incarnational and eschatological dimensions of Catholic theology” (17) does not tempt Rowland into exploring those debates nor into considering their effects upon the final text. No use is made of the available commentaries on *Gaudium et spes*, several of them written by experts who served on the redactional committees and who might have helped her understand texts she finds opaque or ambiguous. By largely confining her attention to the one chapter on culture, she neglects the fact that the whole document could be said to represent an engagement with the culture of modernity; it also leads her to overlook earlier pertinent passages that the Council did not consider it necessary to repeat in the chapter on culture. While she is much exercised by the Council’s remarks about “the autonomy of culture,” she neglects the earlier treatment of legitimate and illegitimate meanings of the autonomy of earthly realities (GS 36). One would never know from her book that *Gaudium et spes* includes paragraphs on what the Church and the modern world can offer one another (GS 41-44).

Now it could very well be that Rowland would not find these and other passages illuminating or convincing and that they would not lead her to change her overall judgment about the text, but they certainly show that more serious theological reflection and discernment lay behind *Gaudium et spes* than she allows for. The problem may be that often enough the theology in that text is not the theology she thinks should be in the text. In fact, one is tempted at times to think that her primary critique of *Gaudium et spes* is that it was not written by Alasdair MacIntyre and David Schindler!

The indifference to the redactional history and to the clash of theological visions is even more surprising in that among those who had a great influence on *Gaudium et spes* were two theologians who by any account must be considered as important within “the Thomist tradition,” Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar. Chenu’s thought greatly influenced the orientation and method of *Gaudium et spes*. Congar thought that with that pastoral constitution and its Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis humanae*), Vatican II had broken with “political Augustinianism,” an achievement similar to that of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Chenu does not appear even when she reviews Thomist scholars who knew enough to place Aquinas’ ideas in their historical and social context.12 Closer attention to the theological debates might have complicated Rowland’s story even more. For example, she would have found that Karl Rahner, who regularly appears as a target in her book, was rather on her side in his sharp critique of a late draft of *Gaudium et spes*, particularly for the lack of a “theological gnoseology” to explain whence and how the Council

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11 See my treatment in the chapters mentioned in note 8 above.

12 One could get the impression from Rowland’s book, pp. 116-18, that MacIntyre had to learn this rather uncontroversial methodological orientation from R. G. Collingwood.
derived its judgments, for ignoring the “legitimate and necessary ‘pessimism’ that Christians must profess before the world,” and for neglecting what a Christian theology of history must acknowledge, namely “that the antagonism between a world under the power of the Evil One and the disciples of Christ will never be mitigated but will grow ever more bitter in the course of time.”

Alleged inadequacies either in the conciliar text or in remarks about it are invoked in each of the three chapters dedicated to a theological critique of modernity. Thus when the Council speaks of “an ever-growing awareness on the part of experts of their responsibility to help and indeed to protect men” (GS 57), she treats this text sarcastically and for some reason thinks it has something to do with “government by experts” or with the idea “that persons with social science qualifications ipso facto have solutions to the problems of the ‘culturally poor’” (26-27) The brief comment, for the interpretation of which Rowland expends no energy, is then taken as the foil against which to present MacIntyre’s critique of the “epistemic authority of experts and the ethos of modern institutions”.

In GS 54, the Council makes a simple reference to the fact that “industrialization, urbanization, and other causes are creating new forms of culture (mass-culture).” A comment by Albert Dondayne that this might be dismissed by those bound by “the aristocratic cultural ideal of former times” leads Rowland to complain that he does not explore whether “a specifically Christian form of self-development” is possible within that mass culture. She then develops a whole chapter to this question and argues that the mass culture created by modernity does not favor the development of a genuine Christian self. In such circumstances it is ambiguous to speak of a “right to culture” as Gaudium et spes does in no. 60. She appears unaware that this text in fact was talking about basic literacy and education at the primary and higher levels which, it says, ought to be available particularly for those often deprived of opportunities to gain it: rural inhabitants, workers, women.

Rowland also thinks that “the treatment of culture in Gaudium et spes... is consistent with an extrinsicist construction of the grace-nature relationship.” She finds this treatment “ambivalent” and “very loose”, and it, along with “undefined references to concepts such as ‘modern man’ and ‘modern culture’ and the ‘autonomy of culture’” she thinks provided a justification for those who sought an accommodation with modern culture (107). The extrinsicism indicted seems to be the view that cultures can be theologically neutral or that elements of a culture are autonomous in relation to one another. No attention is given in this chapter nor anywhere else to the discussion in GS 36 of legitimate and illegitimate notions of “the autonomy of earthly realities.”

Rowland devotes a chapter to “Culture within Post-conciliar Magisterial Thought.” This treatment also is highly selective and rapid. Two pages suffice for a discussion of the theme of culture in Pope Paul VI’s Evangelii nuntiandi, with no attention given to the theme of the “evangelization of culture,” a theme which that Pope initiated. Her review of the teaching of Pope John Paul II is also highly selective; the main part of it being a rather nervous effort to establish that this Pope, despite his frequent use of the language of modernity and despite some passages that seem to find him open to elements in the culture of modernity, agrees with Rowland that the culture of modernity is inimical to theism in general and to Thomism in particular (49). She interprets his position as “a deference to the rhetoric of Liberal democracy, particularly the use of the natural rights discourse, coupled with a tendency to attempt to impregnate the democratic ideals and ‘rights’ with a Christian substance” (40). It is clear that she
is not confident that this suffices since rival traditions will give meanings to the terms of this
discourse quite foreign to John Paul II’s christo-centric views of them. She faults both post-
council popes in that, while recognizing the tragedy that is the split between the Gospel and
culture, they do not address “the question of the historical cause of this split, and in particular the
possibility that the treatment of ‘culture’ in Gaudium et spes may itself have contributed to the
secularisation of Catholic culture (Kultur), the ethos (Geist) of the Church’s pastoral institutions
and the kind of self-formation (Bildung) fostered by the same pastoral constitution” (49). “An
intellectual engagement with Liberalism as a tradition,” she says remained a lacuna in the
writings of Pope John Paul II.

The Treatment of the Views of Others

At several points Rowland refers briefly to comments of various figures who have
commented either on Gaudium et spes or on the question of culture. In three cases familiar to
me, her treatment leaves a great deal to be desired.

Rowland introduces the figure of Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro as representing in an
important speech to the Council a “desire to defer to the authority of secular scholarship” (26).
Such a desire is certainly not conspicuous in the Cardinal’s speech, not even in the single
paragraph cited by Rowland. The “terminological looseness” of which she complains in the
speech could easily have been clarified by a little work on her part. The speech in question was
given on Nov. 4, 1964, during the debate on Schema 13; the official Latin text is available for
study, as is the original Italian. In addition, Lercaro explained his purpose in a letter: “Our idea
was that the problem needs to be emphasized, given the great need for a profound renewal of the
methods of study and of the too static positions of the ecclesiastical universities.”
He was
talking, then, not about culture in general, but about a certain intellectual culture in Church
universities that was content with what he called “certain perhaps anachronistic riches of a
glorious past”; illustrations were “scholastic systems of philosophy and theology; educational
and academic institutions, methods of university teaching and research” Lercaro was of the view
that this culture might “prevent the Church from opening herself to the true values of modern
culture and to ancient non-Christian cultures.”

There are no grounds in Lercaro’s speech for Rowland’s further complaint that Lercaro
seems not to have “regarded an experience of beauty as something significant for moral

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13 Rowland, however, has misunderstood the source on which she draws. While Roberto Tucci says that
Lercaro’s speech was of decisive importance in the first conciliar debate on culture, he indicates that the final
paragraph (no. 58) was written “in contradistinction” to that speech; see Commentary on the Documents of
influence the final text is regretfully expressed by Giuseppe Alberigo in “L’esperienza conciliare di un
vescovo,” the preface to Per la forza dello Spirito: Discorsi conciliari del card. Giacomo Lercaro (Bologna:
Ed. Dehoniane, 1984), 46, where he describes the speech as criticizing “symbiosis with a single cultural
system” and calling for “living contacts with other cultures.”

14 It can be found in Acta Synodalia, III/6, 249-52; the Italian can be found in Per la forza dello Spirito, 226-
30, as well as in Caprile, Il Concilio Vaticano II, Terzo Periodo, 318-19. A reply to Lercaro’s speech by
Archbishop Dino Staffa, who understood its precise reference to ecclesiastical universities, can be found in
the same volume of the Acta Synodalia at p. 436.

formation” and had ignored the effects of mass culture on the ability of plain persons “to experience beauty and self-transcendence.” More generally, such indifference she thinks demonstrates that “the Protestant rejection of beauty as a transcendental was finding its way into the Catholic mind” (28). On p. 29 she then has this “...the general spirit of the Lercaro interpretation...suggests that the Church should divest herself of both juridical and intellectual authority and even reverse the order of the hierarchy of disciplines to give priority to the social and natural sciences. In effect, such a perspective invites the wholesale secularisation of culture.”

First, Lercaro does not say a word about the social and natural sciences; second, he calls for “an ever-greater concentration on the absolute richness of the sacred book, of biblical thought and language”, which is hardly secularization; third, the renewal in theology he calls for will mean a return to the days of the “bishop-doctor,” or scholar-bishop and to the days when lay people devoted themselves to theological studies. If Rowland had read the whole speech, she might even have found last paragraph congenial:

Then the theological schools and the very culture of priests will find truly new ways. Only then will the cultural institutions of the Church undergo an adequate renewal; all her Paideia will open itself to a new dynamic; her cultural organon will know a new dawn, and all, priests and laity, will be formed in such a way as to understand the world. The children of the Church committed (as the schema hopes) at the external frontiers of the human sciences, will be able to be more directly helped to give a Christian inspiration to contemporary culture and all men of culture will be able more immediately and more spontaneously to encounter theology, the wisdom of God.16

Rowland twice refers critically to Bernard Lonergan’s distinction between “classicism” and historical consciousness (45, 72). Taking this, wrongly, as a criticism of “the Thomist tradition,” she regards it as representing the “idea of abandoning ‘what the Church gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought.’” First, in fact, for Lonergan the classicism indicted did not refer so much to the ancient classical culture as to a post-Renaissance ideal, the kind of thing enshrined in the Jesuit Ratio studiorum. 17 Second, the transition Lonergan was describing was one that occurred in the larger intellectual world, the world in and to which the faith has to be mediated, a development that he believed was causing something quite similar to the “epistemological crisis” of which MacIntyre and Rowland speak. Thirdly, included in Lonergan’s notion of historical consciousness is the idea that Rowland says the “Thomist tradition” must give attention to: the influence of culture on the formation of the self. Finally, if Rowland had read further in the volume from which she quotes Lonergan, she would have found an article in which he vigorously defends the Greek achievement against the proposal to

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16 Per la forza dello Spirito, 230.

17 Rowland gives as an example of the abandonment of the Greco-Latin tradition, the papal decision to allow the liturgy to be celebrated in vernacular languages. She seems to share the mistaken view that Latin is the language of the Church; she thinks that “liturgy and ‘high culture’ go together because we offer only our best to God.” She assigns almost cosmic significance to recent criticisms of the liturgical reform: “Implicit within these arguments is a critique of a number of different elements of the culture of modernity, including the tendency towards lowest common denominator cultural standards, the instrumentalist account of language, the project of a thoroughly rationalistic ‘Christianity’, the severance of the relationships between memory, tradition and transcendence, the lop-sided emphasis on the immanence of God at the expense of His transcendence and the destruction of the perichoresis of the transcendentals” (45-47).
“dehellenize dogma” and calls for a development of it in order to meet the new challenges.\(^{18}\)

Finally, Rowland makes two brief references to John Courtney Murray. He is described as having further developed “Whig Thomism” by his “defence of the American polity,” a position that finds “a logical extension” in George Weigel’s defence of “the culture of America” (16) Later, his position is described as an illustration of a type of Liberalism that sees a “soft dichotomy” between the realms of the sacred and the secular (104). She cites David Schindler as having argued “that Murray conflated the sacred-secular distinction typical of neo-scholastic thought into a Church-state distinction typical of the theology of the Reformers, and included within was an understanding of the Church as a purely juridical entity.” Murray’s views seem also to be intended when Rowland describes “the American experiment” as “a polity founded upon an alleged severance of the relationships between Church and State, theology and political philosophy, and the consequent marginalisation of religious questions to the ‘private domain.’” (45)

This is seriously to misrepresent Murray’s defense of the American political experiment.\(^{19}\) So far from accepting a reduction of religion to the private sphere, Murray took up the question of religious freedom and Church-State relations in the first place precisely because he found that the classical modern Catholic position in terms of “thesis” and “hypothesis” was inhibiting the possibility of cooperation among believers in addressing what he called “the spiritual crisis in the temporal order,” a phrase one might expect Rowland to like. From beginning to end he distinguished the Catholic position from that of Protestants. When Vatican II issued its Declaration on Religious Freedom, he noted that in no. 4, it said that “it comes within the meaning of religious freedom that religious communities should not be prevented from freely undertaking to show the special value of their doctrine in what concerns the organization of society and the inspiration of the whole of human activity.” “The depths of the religious problematic of our age,” Murray went on, is “the problem of religious truth in its relation to human society in its full sweep.” With its freedom guaranteed, it is the task of “religion itself, by the force of its own truth alone, to recover its public standing and its social influence in an industrial society to which religion has become largely irrelevant and even insipid.” With the “distracting debate” over religious freedom settled, Murray hoped that the Church could now “get on to the deeper issue of the effective presence of the Church in the world today.”\(^{20}\)


\(^{19}\) One wonders what Rowland will make of the speech to the Roman Curia, 22 December 2005, in which Pope Benedict XVI appealed precisely to the American political experiment as one of the developments in the world that made it necessary for the Second Vatican Council “to determine in a new way the relationship between the Church and the modern era”: “People came to realize,” the Pope said, “that the American Revolution offered a model of a modern state that differed from the one theorized by the radical tendencies that had emerged during the second phase of the French Revolution.” This distinction between the continental European and the American political experiments was a major theme in the writings of John Courtney Murray.

“A post-modern Augustinian Thomism”

While the phrase in which Rowland sets out her own proposal for the future first appears in her description of what Alasdair MacIntyre is about, she later says that the expression has wider pertinence: it “encapsulates the substance of the arguments that have been advanced by individual scholars against the presuppositions of Whig Thomism” (53), the latter referring to efforts at some kind of accommodation between Christianity and the “culture of modernity,” sometimes called the “culture of America”. We can briefly indicate what she means by the words of the phrase.

Surprisingly, it is the noun Thomism that is least well defined. The fullest information as to what it means actually occurs in a footnote:

Throughout this work the word ‘Thomist’ should be broadly construed to include not only the ideas of St Thomas but also the ideas of his Patristic antecedents which he incorporated and those of his scholastic heirs (169).

Now this is a broad usage indeed. Rather like the Mormons, it performs a Thomist baptism on his predecessors: Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and John of Damascus, it turns out, were in “the Thomist tradition.” Similarly, several recent thinkers who are not commonly thought of as Thomists are brought in under the label: examples are Romano Guardini, Hans Urs von Balthasar, the sociologist Werner Stark, and David Schindler. There are times when one suspects that Rowland simply identifies the Catholic intellectual tradition with Thomism, almost as if there has never been another tradition within Catholicism.

It does not appear that what passes for Thomism in the book is the result of a first-hand engagement with the texts of Aquinas. There are very few discussions of his thought and few direct citations from his writings. Rowland is most concerned with discrediting “Whig Thomists” and of promoting her “Augustinian Thomism” which she says is built upon the understanding of the nature-grace relationship that Henri de Lubac in particular had proposed. What she calls “the principles of the Thomist tradition” are often expressed in terms that one never finds in Aquinas himself, e.g., the stress she places on something called “participation in the transcendentals.” As for method in interpreting Aquinas, the proponents of “the so-called Nouvelle Théologie” are favored over the Anglo-American analytical Thomists, and kinship is claimed with the group of theologians associated with Communio and with others linked with Radical Orthodoxy.

It is more presupposed than argued that de Lubac’s interpretation of the nature-grace relationship is (1) a correct interpretation of St. Thomas’ thought and (2) the best, even only, explanation of it. For a position that plays so recurrent a role in Rowland’s argument, it is surprising that she considered two paragraphs sufficient on de Lubac’s position, and these appear almost two-thirds of the way through her book (p. 94). As I pointed out in my review of John Milbank’s book on de Lubac (to appear in Pro Ecclesia), de Lubac never considered what systematic role “the theorem of the supernatural” (as Bernard Lonergan called it) played in Aquinas’ thought; neither MacIntyre nor Rowland has expressed any interest in this either.

At one point Rowland says that the project she favors “exhibits some of the characteristics of what Romanus Cessario calls the ‘custom of reading Aquinas as if he were Bonaventure’” (6), which suggests that she knows there is some tension in her association of “Augustinian” and “Thomist.” That things remain rather fuzzy is indicated when she says that starting “in an Augustinian fashion” means “submitting one’s intellect and will to the truths of the Christian (especially Thomist) tradition”! No
If we turn now to the adjectives that modify “Thomism,” we find that Rowland thinks MacIntyre’s project *postmodern* in three ways: (1) it “views the primary problem as the culture of modernity and its need of transcendence”; (2) it begins not with metaphysics or epistemology but with “the soul caught within the contradictions of the culture of modernity”; (3) it focuses “upon the issue of the role of culture and a narrative tradition in moral and intellectual formation,” something Rowland considers “a quintessential postmodern theme” (5-6).

Accepting the suggestion that the year 1968 represents “the beginning of the period of postmodernity and a growing recognition of the internal contradictions within the Liberal tradition,” Rowland finds it ironic that it was just around that time that “the project of synthesizing Aquinas with Kant and various other members of the Liberal tradition became fashionable among Thomists and members of the hierarchy” (16-17). For Rowland the postmodern critique was that “the hegemony of the Liberal tradition, and in particular its claim to theological neutrality, began to be challenged by those who preferred Nietzsche and Heidegger to Locke and Kant, or by those, such as Milbank and MacIntyre, who prefer Augustinian ‘narrative traditions’ to Kantian ‘pure reason.’”

To prefer Nietzsche to Kant, of course, is, in MacIntyre’s terms, to prefer the Genealogical tradition to the Encyclopedic. The reason for this preference, “the central postmodern element,” is “the idea of a narrative tradition and its associate concept of a tradition-c unstable rationality” (115). Thomists, Rowland thinks, need “a deeper understanding of the extent to which the tradition agrees with the Genealogists that conceptions of rationality are tradition dependent” (129). A contrast is drawn between the Enlightenment idea of “pure reason” and “the pre-modern and post-modern idea of tradition-constituted rationality” (144). While post-modern in the sense indicated, however, the sort of Thomism she proposes is “a continuation of the pre-Kantian emphasis on the symphonic harmony of the faculties of the soul” (165).

The Thomism that Rowland favors is called *Augustinian* for very similar reasons. Like St. Thomas, Augustine himself does not appear very often in her book and he is cited even less often. The adjective is first used in order to associate MacIntyre’s project with the Augustinian theology of grace of the *nouvelle théologie* scholars, which provide it a theological grounding. The adjective also makes central “the typically Augustinian themes of the relationship between the secular and the sacred orders, the role of memory in the formation of the soul and the importance of a narrative tradition for intellectual and spiritual development.”

The role of narrative would seem to be a primary element in what Rowland means by the adjective “Augustinian.” Thus, she notes that thinkers such as Milbank and MacIntyre prefer Augustinian ‘narrative traditions’ to Kantian ‘pure reason’” (17). When MacIntyre says that “no progress in moral enquiry is possible without first committing oneself to a particular narrative tradition,” he is valorizing “the Augustinian current within the Thomist synthesis” (138). In terms of an approach to philosophical questions, MacIntyre is quoted as saying that “the Augustinian is committed to one central negative thesis about all actually or potentially rival positions: that no substantive rationality, independent of faith, will be able to provide an adequate vindication of its claims” (130). MacIntyre’s view that “the process of self-formation requires, as a principle of epistemic priority, the existence of a narrative tradition and the self’s

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23 This may be when it became “fashionable,” but the effort was underway long before the mid-1960s.
immersion within that tradition” is said to be “quintessentially Augustinian” (134). If I understand Rowland correctly, this is a MacIntyrean way of expressing the priority of faith to understanding: Nisi credideritis non intelligeretis. But I note that what is a theological point in Augustine becomes in MacIntyre and Rowland a generalized philosophical axiom.

The other main theme brought in under the rubric of “Augustinian” is the relationship between the Church and the world. Rowland argues for “returning to St. Augustine and other patristic scholars for a theological reading of the relationship between the Church and the world” (166); this reading “rejects the Lutheran and Calvinist constructions of the secular and the sacred” and those who propose it believe that the attempted rapprochement between Christianity and Liberalism has been a failure. She cites Robert P. Kraynak’s Christian Faith and Modern Democracy as offering “an excellent juxtaposition of the Kantian and Augustinian alternatives.” (166) The separation of the sacred and secular is regularly described by Rowland as a Protestant thesis, and, as already noted, she misrepresents John Courtney Murray’s position as if he had conflated the sacred-secular distinction typical of neo-scholastic thought into a Church-state distinction typical of the theology of the Reformers” (104).

Autonomy

Two particular themes closely associated with modernity may illustrate more particularly how Rowland envisages her postmodern Augustinian Thomism. The first is the idea of “autonomy”. Here her failure to explore what the Council meant when it spoke of “the autonomy of earthly realities” and of “the autonomy of culture” is particularly decisive. Her treatment of the latter (27-29) says nothing about the earlier section in which Gaudium et spes distinguishes proper and improper notions of autonomy (GS 36), which certainly would be relevant to her purposes.24 Her own view is that the nouvelle théologie logic fosters “the idea that all realms of culture have a theological significance” and therefore ought not be called “autonomous.” While there may be fields of activity that “lie outside of the jurisdiction of the Church” and in that sense are “autonomous”, still “no field is ever truly ‘secular’ in the sense of being unrelated to, or autonomous of, theological presuppositions. For example, neither ‘economics’ nor ‘politics’ is a value-free science. Rather both are sub-branches of the discipline of ethics that is intrinsically related to theology” (29).

Again, while Rowland accepts the idea of the “autonomy of culture” if it means “that it is not possible to deduce the laws of thermodynamics from the Scriptures” (30), she prefers Schindler’s statement that “the Church is ‘destined to form from within everything in the cosmos, every act, every relationship, every cultural or social or economic order,’” this being an implication, she believes of GS 22. Later, again echoing Schindler, she says that this conciliar paragraph requires the rejection of the idea that cultures are “theologically neutral.” From a Christocentric perspective, “every created entity of the cosmos, every aspect of every entity, is, from the beginning of its existence, related to God in Christ”. In other words, “Christ affects the cosmos not only efficiently and finally but also formally”. As a matter of logic it follows from this that cultures cannot be “autonomous” in the popular sense of

the word. Rather, as von Balthasar acknowledged, “the interpretation of the grace-nature distinction affects one’s understanding of the structure of metaphysics, ethics, apologetics, politics, and the entire praxis of human life”, which of course includes the realms of institutional practices, conceptions of self-formation, and the logic of cultural forms (92).

In the same paragraph (GS 22) she finds a distinction “between ‘autonomy’ in an ontological sense and ‘autonomy’ in a juridical sense. In effect, it means that, while the natural and social sciences and the arts may be ‘autonomous’ in the sense that they are not the subject of ecclesiastical governance, they are not ‘autonomous’ in the sense of having their own frames of reference external to the theology of the Incarnation.” What this could possibly mean for, say, physics or chemistry she does not say.

Rowland opposes “the popular construction of the ‘autonomy of culture’” in order to argue that “while the Church acknowledges that there are ‘laws of nature’, she also holds that they have been affected not merely efficiently and finally but also formally by Christ” (50). No documentation is given to support this claim about Church teaching. And, of course, no illustration, much less explanation, is offered of what it means that, say, the law of gravity has been formally affected by Christ; and how this can be thought to be a “Thomist” position, even on Rowland’s broad notion of Thomism, is not explained.

On the other hand, she believes that the treatment of culture elsewhere in Gaudium et spes “is consistent with an extrinsicist construction of the grace-nature relationship,” as opposed to “de Lubac’s reading of the relationship” (92). Rowland sees assertions of the autonomy of the secular, or of culture, as leading to “a ‘plain meaning’ interpretation [that] carries within it an implicit extrinsicism in the interpretation of the nature and grace relationship” (32).

How modern is the notion of autonomy with which Rowland is working is shown when she quotes (inaccurately) from Paul VI in Evangelii nuntiandi where the Pope had spoken of “a ‘legitimate secularism’” and of the discovery of laws that regulate events “with a certain autonomy, but with the inner conviction that the Creator has placed those laws there.” This leads her to ask a very un-Thomistic question: “What kind of autonomy is it that is regulated by divinely ordained laws?” Rowland even seems to wonder whether Paul VI admitted the possibility of miracles: his remark “leaves unanswered the question of whether the divinely ordained laws remain beyond further acts of Providence.” Then there is the Schindlerian question to be posed to the same Pope: “And what, if any, effect did the Incarnation have on such laws?” If Walter Niegorski asks, “what kind of independence is that is so thoroughly and deeply dependent”? Rowland herself wants to know, in a revealing phrase: “Autonomy from what?” (36)

Finally, she quotes approvingly a statement of Schindler to the effect that it is “the conception of the self as primitively constructive or self-creative that is at the source of the

25 In fact, Paul VI had said that secularization, not secularism, is “in itself just and legitimate and in no way incompatible with faith or religion, to discover in creation, in each thing or each happening in the universe, the laws which regulate them with a certain autonomy, but with the inner conviction that the Creator has placed these laws there. The last Council has in this sense affirmed the legitimate autonomy of culture and particularly of the sciences.” “True secularism,” on the other hand, the Pope describes as “a concept of the world according to which the latter is self-explanatory, without any need for recourse to God, who thus becomes superfluous and an encumbrance. This sort of secularism, in order to recognize the power of man, therefore ends up by doing without God and even by denying Him.”
autonomy that must be challenged if we are to have principled ontological protection against atheism.” Against this, again according to Schindler, must be set “the classical Christian model of self-development” which is “anterioiy receptive,” the conclusion being that “the idea that a classical Christian mode of self-formation takes the form of a participation in the life of the Trinity wherein a person receives a vocation as a gift of grace is difficult to assimilate to a principle which holds that human dignity rests upon the capacity for autonomy and self-creation” (153).

That one may quote a sentence from St. Thomas that nearly exactly states precisely the same thing—“This is the supreme degree of dignity in human beings, that they be led to the good by themselves and not by others”26—already makes one suspect that something has gone wrong in the course of Rowland’s argument. What has gone wrong, it seems, is that she has accepted a distinctively modern notion of autonomy, which places it in tension with, even in contradiction to, divine sovereignty, as if, to put it in Feuerbach’s terms, to enrich God one must impoverish man, to enrich man impoverish God.27 Her rhetorical questions would suggest that there is no other notion of autonomy that might be brought into play, particularly by someone standing in the Thomist tradition. Is it not decidedly Thomist to assert that God has implanted in all creatures the laws of their own natures, followed by natural necessity or instinct by all other creatures but freely and intelligently by human beings, and that divine causality and created causality are not in conflict? The exercise of their own intelligence and freedom is the way in which human beings, uniquely among creatures, participate in the divine providence in their own regard.28 To speak of “utterly dependent independence” in response to Niegorski, or of “created autonomy” in response to Rowland, is not contradiction, as she implies, but a paradox that one might expect an admirer of de Lubac to relish.

Aquinas himself regularly invoked two axioms, one Aristotelian: “Liber est causa sui,” and one biblical: “Posuit eum in manu consilii sui” (Sir 15:14). So far was he from

26 Super Epistolan ad Romanos Lectura, ch. II, lect. 3 (Marietti #217): “Et iste est supremus gradus dignitatis in hominibus, ut scilicet non ab alis, sed a seipsis inducantur ad bonum.” See Super Epistolam ad Galatas Lectura, ch. V, lect. 5: “With regard to coercion, the just are not under the law because the motion and instinct of the Holy Spirit, which is in them, is their own instinct, for charity inclines them to the very thing that the law commands. Because the just have an inner law, they spontaneously do what the law commands and are not coerced by it.” See also Summa contra Gentes, IV, 22 (Marietti # 3587-3588).

27 “To enrich God, man must become poor; that God may be all, man must become nothing”; Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957) 26. Niegorski and Rowland could have benefitted from reading Chesterton: “If St. Thomas stands for one thing more than another, it is what may be called subordinate sovereignties or autonomy... We might even say he was always defending the independence of dependent things. He insisted that such a thing could have its own rights in its own region... And in exactly this sense he emphasised a certain dignity in Man, which was sometimes rather swallowed up in the purely theistic generalisations about God”; G.K. Chesterton, Saint Thomas Aquinas (New York: Doubleday Image, 1956) 39.

28 If the sermon “Homo quidem erat dives” is from Aquinas, we have the following: “Tria committit dominus homini. Seipsum, bona spiritualia, et res exterieores. Primo, dico, committit dominus homini seipsum. Haec est differentia inter hominem et alia animalia, quod dominus dedit homini potestatem sui. Potest homo facere de se quod vult, sed alia animalia moventur instinctu naturali. Unde in Ecclesiastico XV, 14: Deus ab initio constituit hominem, et illum dimisit eum in manu consili sui. .... Deus hominem sibi ipsi commisit.”
counterposing human autonomy and participation in the Trinity, that he even invoked the Aristotelian tag in order to explain what genuine Christian freedom is. Immediately after saying that every created will must be “regulated by the divine law,” he went on to comment on the Pauline text, “Where the Spirit is, there is freedom” and made use of the Aristotelian axiom as the hinge of his interpretation:

A person is free when he is causa sui, while a slave is for the sake of a lord. Whoever acts on his own initiative (ex seipso), therefore, acts freely, while whoever acts because moved by another, does not act freely. A person, then, who avoids evil not because it is evil but because of the Lord’s commandment, is not free. But if a person avoids evil because it is evil, he is free. And this is what the Holy Spirit effects when he inwardly perfects the soul by means of a good habit so that out of love he avoids something as if the divine law had commanded it. And thus he is called free, not because he is not subject to the divine law, but because by the good habit he is inclined to do that which the divine law ordains.29

For Aquinas the Aristotelian tag meant that human beings, at the highest level of their dignity, are self-directed, act on their own initiative, for their own sake. The triumph of grace is not the denial of this human autonomy, but its transcendent realization. On this view, one does not have to choose between, on the one hand, the idea that “human dignity rests upon the capacity for autonomy and self-creation” and, on the other hand, “participation in the life of the Trinity” or the idea of “a vocation as a gift.” The divine vocation is precisely that human beings be brought to the full exercise of their intelligence and freedom through faith and love, with love making it possible for them to realize, in their graced condition, the autonomy by which Aristotle defined the free person.

Subjectivity

The neglect of the subject is a second and related feature of Rowland’s work. Rowland says that she wishes to defend “an authentically Augustinian-Thomist sense of inwardness—not its subjectivist Kantian-Lutheran alternative” (111), but what this might mean is not stated at any length or with any precision. It would appear to have something to do with “participation in the transcendentals.” Success in rational inquiry, she says, citing MacIntyre, “‘depends for its success on the virtues of those who engage in it, and it requires relationships and evaluative commitments of a particular kind’.” According to Aidan Nichols these “include a commitment to a view of life centered upon participation in the forms of the true, the good and the beautiful—forms so little experienced in ‘mass culture’ as to make many people almost impervious to evangelisation” (128-29). What Kenneth Schmidt calls “sapiential experience” is said to flow “from participation in the transcendentals” (129), but the possibility of such participation seems, on Rowland’s account, to vary from culture to culture and to be well-nigh impossible in the culture of modernity.

She disagrees with Charles Taylor’s view that a synthesis could be made of pre-modern theism, enlightenment rationality, and Romantic expressivism, the last of these having three properties: 1) the affirmation of ordinary life; 2) focus on inwardness; 3) interest in the inner voice of nature. Against this idea Rowland insists on “the differences between pre-modern and

subsequent Cartesian understandings of ‘inwardness,’” and in illustration of this difference she quotes from Schmitz: “The interiority of modern subjectivity is vastly different in character and motive from the ontological interiority that, as traditional metaphysics appreciates, is resident in all being as the heritage of every created being...” No explanation of what is meant by “ontological interiority” is offered unless it is found in the statement that Christian interiority places itself “before the transcendent Source of whatever being, meaning, and value the human person possesses as a gift received” (87). We have lost, Schmidt argues, “the pre-modern theistic quest for participation in the transcendental properties of being” and “authenticity” is sought without reference to God.

While Taylor thinks the main problems with modern culture are spiritual and moral and not epistemic, MacIntyre thinks they have an epistemic basis. For him, Rowland says, the problem arose with the Reformers’ attack on tradition and hierarchy. “The Lutheran dogma of ‘faith alone’, ‘Scripture alone’, and ‘God alone’ introduced subjectivity and diversity into an order which was based on tradition, sacraments and hierarchy, for which ‘certainty’ and ‘objectivity’ and ‘universalism’ were the inherent values” (88-89). (One might have thought that dichotomies of this sort, as between “subjectivity and diversity” and “‘objectivity’ and ‘universalism’” were the sort of thing that needs to be overcome.)

One of Rowland’s summaries of MacIntyre’s position illustrates what difficulty she has with the notion of subjectivity:

It should be emphasized...that although MacIntyre’s defence of the Thomist tradition begins from the perspective of the self, his account of the process of self-formation requires, as a principle of epistemic priority, the existence of a narrative tradition and the self’s immersion within that tradition. This means that while MacIntyre employs a very Aristotelian ‘reflection upon practice’ methodology in his examinations of the predicament of the various types of modern self, his solution to the predicament is quintessentially Augustinian” (134).

One notes here Rowland’s haste to get away from the self, even from MacIntyre’s self. She seems to see danger in beginning from “the perspective of the self” and so has immediately to stress the need for immersion into a narrative tradition. MacIntyre’s Aristotelian dialectical treatment of other notions of the self must yield to the “quintessentially Augustinian” solution that emphasizes the tradition.

There are difficulties with all this. First, nowhere in the book is there a serious engagement with either Augustinian or Thomist subjectivity, and one could never guess from Rowland’s treatment that either Augustine or Thomas had appealed to reflection on human subjectivity at key moments in various arguments or that their differing interpretations of the role of divine illumination in human knowing had any theological consequence. Only the vaguest antitheses warn us against confusing pre-modern subjectivity with modern notions of the self. All the emphasis falls on objectivity, for example, on the transcendental properties of being in which the authentic self must participate. What this participation requires on the part of the subject is inadequately described, and there is no treatment of what kind of experience it might be to “participate in the transcendentals.” The discussion even seems to assume that it is possible not to “participate in the transcendentals,” a position which surely conflicts with Thomas’ insistence that original sin has not so ravaged human nature that our minds do not continue to seek the truth nor our wills the good. Seeking the transcendentals might almost be described as a definition of human subjectivity. Because we have not ceased to be human beings, our minds can
be illumined by God’s word and our wills can be healed by God’s grace. Conversion and grace, however, play little part in Rowland’s account, and she seems unaware of the danger of Pelagianism in the emphasis placed on tradition and on narrative.

In the end, the emphasis on rationality as “tradition-constituted” becomes one-sided, and the reason may be that Rowland shares MacIntyre’s view that although there is abundant evidence of an “epistemological crisis,” its solution cannot be found in epistemology. This is rather odd since Aquinas’ achievement in reconciling by developing both the Aristotelian and the Augustinian traditions had, in good part at least, to do with reconciling their accounts of human subjectivity. That in his effort to do so Aquinas often appealed to the structure and dynamics of human knowing as a criterion is passed over in silence. Instead there is a tendency to identify conceptions of rationality with rationality itself and thereby to assume that because the first may be tradition-bound, the second is also, and also to ignore what Aquinas did not ignore, namely that more than the rules of logic unite in rationality participants in rival intellectual traditions, whether the Augustinian and the Aristotelian or the three traditions counterposed by MacIntyre and Rowland.

In the end Rowland’s Augustinianism has little room for Augustine, and there is not much distinctively Thomist about her Thomas. In fact, the two great and holy thinkers are homogenized, become indistinguishable from one another. That St. Thomas was about something different in his own day than Augustine in his is mentioned here and there, but no lessons, it seems, are to be drawn from the fact. If Aquinas himself had been as “tradition-dependent” as Rowland, following MacIntyre, thinks we human beings are, could he have departed from the language and methods familiar from the earlier tradition and engaged the contemporary challenge as he did? In fact, of course, he found himself criticized by the neo-Augustinians of his time precisely for trying “to recreate the tradition, rather than merely develop it,” and for finding greater room for human andcreaturely rationality and even autonomy than was commonly recognized.

It may be that Rowland does not pay as much attention as might be expected to the cultural engagement of St. Thomas because she fears that it might be taken as a model for what throughout she considers impossible: any kind of engagement with liberal modernity. Toward the end of the book she writes:

...the Liberal tradition cannot be conceived as standing in the same relationship to the Thomist tradition as the Thomist or Patristic traditions stood in relationship to ancient Greek and Latin learning. The Fathers encountered a civilisation which had no knowledge of the Incarnation, but which was open to the transcendent and the absolute. To use a Balthasarian metaphor again, the Greeks had constructed part of a bridge which was heading in the direction of Christian Revelation while the Jews had partially constructed that bridge from the other side of the Mediterranean. The Incarnation united the spans of the bridge—it brought the cultures of Athens and Jerusalem together. However, a MacIntyrean reading of the Liberal tradition... cannot be united with the Christian: it is from a posture which demands that one chooses between faith and reason, and that insists that in public life, at least, faith has no currency (157).

The insufficiency of narrative can be illustrated by Thomas Aquinas’ discussion of the cause of a person’s assent of faith. External motivation, such as a miracle or the persuasiveness of a preacher is an inadequate explanation since some believe on this ground but others do not. Something inner is needed, and, unless one is a Pelagian, this can only be God’s grace moving one to assent; Summa theologica, II-II, q. 6, a. 1.
This rather oversimplifies the relationship between Christianity and classical culture during the Patristic period and it passes right over the tensions and struggles that marked the age when Aquinas tried to integrate Aristotle’s thought, ignoring most notably the resistance of the tradition-bound neo-Augustinians. Above all, it comes close to a Manichean interpretation of “the culture of modernity” from which, apparently, theology has had and still has nothing to learn.

Conclusion

It will be clear by now that I do not think that Tracey Rowland’s proposal of “a postmodern Augustinian Thomism” is either coherent or persuasive. At all the crucial points, whether in defining her terms or in describing “the culture of modernity”, Rowland begs the important questions. Her work, and the project it is meant to serve, is certainly anti-modern; whether it should be called “post-modern” might be questioned if this designation implies a serious engagement with modernity and an effort to overcome its failures while also appreciating and sustaining its achievements. I do not think that her book represents an important contribution to the delineation of what is meant by “Augustinian” or by “Thomist”. In some respects, of course, her proposal of an “Augustinian Thomism” is designed to counteract efforts to set the two saints themselves over and against each other, and it may well be that Rowland disagrees with the ideal-types people have constructed and used, or that, compared with the demonized “culture of modernity,” there differences are relatively trivial and justify assimilating them even with the danger that the distinctive genius of each is lost. I am not persuaded that there is nothing to learn, even in how to respond to the culture of modernity, from exploring distinctively Augustinian and distinctively Thomist ways of engaging cultural challenges.