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Catholic Tradition and Philosophical Research¹

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Abstract

This essay documents how the Catholic Church continues to support, and even provide impetus, to philosophy and reflects on the nature of that support. Basing itself on relevant papal and other documents, it explores the Catholic Church's influence on philosophy over the years. It also discusses its contributions, as articulated in these official publications, to the shaping and advancing of the present state of philosophy. The latter part of this essay offers philosophical observations of some of the criticisms leveled against that support and makes suggestions as to how the Catholic tradition could contribute even more so to philosophical research. The Afterthoughts added for this special issue of the journal contextualize that discussion in the light of the 500th anniversary of Philippine Christianity.

Keywords: faith and reason, Catholic Church, philosophy, Christian Philosophy

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The Catholic Context

In this essay I would like to look at philosophy within the context of the Catholic tradition.² Throughout history the Catholic Church, which could be said to embody Catholic tradition, has strongly endorsed philosophy both in its teachings and in its practice. One has merely to turn to various papal encyclicals and documents for the official Church's view on this particular matter.³ And inasmuch as philosophy features in the curriculum of Catholic academic institutions and seminaries, one can also readily conclude that there has been solid support for the study and teaching of philosophy. On the other hand, such close connection between the Catholic Church and philosophy has not always been viewed in a positive light for various reasons. Some, including those who count themselves as belonging to that religious tradition, would even go so far as to lament any association between philosophy and the Catholic religion. For while one can readily accept that it has indeed shaped philosophy, the nature of that influence would be, at least to some, rather a bone of contention.⁴ The dispute gains intensity when one examines any future association between the Catholic tradition and philosophical research.

I shall be concerned both with showing how the Catholic Church continues to offer support and even provide impetus to philosophy and with reflecting on the nature of that support. Basing myself on relevant papal documents I shall explore the Catholic Church's influence on philosophy over the years. In many ways the Catholic tradition as concretized in these writings has helped to shape and advance the present state of philosophy. To clarify this point, I need to examine not just the stated support of the

² The question of what constitutes "Catholic tradition" is rather problematic. I am interpreting it here in the specific sense described in the text.

³ During his Wednesday catechesis on November 21, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI, as reported in the Vatican website, reaffirmed that faith is eminently reasonable. Properly understood, according to him, there is no opposition between faith and reason. He emphasized that the Catholic tradition "has always rejected the so-called principle of 'fideism', that is, the will to believe against reason".

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI stressed this point in his lecture titled, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections" at the Aula Maxima of the University of Regensburg, Germany, 12 September 2006. This was widely covered in the newspapers in Europe.

Catholic Church for philosophy but also the reasons for it.⁵ In the latter part of this essay I shall offer some philosophical observations and suggestions with a view to indicating how the Catholic tradition could contribute even more to philosophical research.

The Catholic Church's Support for Philosophy

Documentation for the Catholic Church's support for philosophical research is readily available. Among various official documents two immediately come to mind: *Aeterni Patris* of Leo XIII promulgated August 1879 and *Fides et Ratio* of John Paul II published in September 1998. These two specifically address the question of the relationship between faith and reason and the role played by the Catholic Church in fostering that relationship. Although not in the same extended way other papal writings throughout history—a point drawn to our attention by both documents themselves—testify to the strong backing by the Catholic Church of the pursuit of philosophical thinking.

As is well known, the Catholic tradition has always upheld human reason, the main source and tool of philosophical thinking, as a legitimate and credible avenue to truth. In the philosophical debate between empiricism and rationalism, it has to a large extent sided with the latter. And even in the theological context, it has constantly maintained that reason, among other resources, provides us with some knowledge about God and facilitates our attempt to reach out to the divine.

The Catholic Church has always been aware of how reason drives human beings to attain goals which make human living more valuable and of how

⁵ It should, however, be noted that in emphasizing the close association between the Catholic Church and philosophical research, I am not necessarily endorsing every interpretation of that link between the two in the past or in the present. Another rather controversial issue in this respect is whether we should focus on the distinctiveness of the "Catholic" tradition; instead, we are urged to consider the "catholicity" of our tradition. This seems to me a valid observation, but it ignores an equally important question: Does the Catholic religion *as Catholic* religion not have a specific contribution to make?

philosophy facilitates that pursuit.⁶ She realizes that the advantages to human life offered by such a pursuit comes from God, and if properly used, leads back to God with God's grace.⁷ On this point, the Catholic Church could be said to be endorsing the philosophical view that what distinguishes human beings from every other creature is rationality and that the exercise of that rationality is the highest human act.⁸

The teachings of the Catholic Church have also acknowledged and valued the indispensable help provided by philosophy for a deeper understanding of faith and for communicating the truth of the Gospel to others.⁹ This can clearly be seen in the Church's continued insistence on the need for philosophical training in the study of theology and re-affirmed by Pope Benedict XVI in his lecture at Regensburg. The Church advocates the study of philosophy which, in the words of Leo XIII, "responds most fitly to the excellence of faith, and at the same time is consonant with the dignity of human science".¹⁰ Here Leo XIII singles out, citing several advocates of philosophical studies, the example of Aquinas's philosophy in his call for the practical reform of philosophy.¹¹ John Paul II develops this observation on the importance of philosophy for theology—in the light of current philosophical interests—when he remarks that a specific contribution of philosophy to theology is "in preparing for a correct *auditus fidei* with its study of the structure of knowledge and personal communication, especially the various forms and functions of language."¹² Referring to *intellectus fidei*

⁶ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 5. It is interesting to note that this encyclical makes specific reference to the common human quest for meaning in both East and West, cf. *Ibid.* 1.

⁷ First Vatican Council, ch. 4, par. 11. As the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* puts it: "Men and women have at their disposal an array of resources for generating greater knowledge of truth so that their lives may be ever more human. Among these is *philosophy*, which is directly concerned with asking the question of life's meaning and sketching an answer to it. Philosophy emerges, then, as one of the noblest of human tasks." par. 3.

⁸ There is, of course, a more nuanced philosophical debate on this issue insofar as some philosophers regard rationality as the human intellect (to be distinguished from the will) while others include in that term the human will. This has resulted in the debate between rationalism exemplified by Thomas Aquinas and voluntarism of which Dun Scotus is a prime example.

⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 5.

¹⁰ *Aeterni Patris*, par. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.* par. 25.

¹² *Fides et Ratio*, par. 65.

John Paul II maintains that the innate intelligibility of the divine truth contained in the Sacred Scriptures and rightly interpreted by the Church's teaching benefits from the logical and conceptual structures provided by philosophy in expounding and making these truths more explicit.¹³

Thus, far from hindering the development of human arts and studies, including philosophical study, the Church actively assists and promotes them.¹⁴ Moreover, the Church does not forbid these studies to employ, each within its own area, its own proper principles and method.¹⁵ According to Leo XIII, it would be a serious injustice to accuse the Church of being opposed to the advance and development of natural sciences.¹⁶

One can detect the practical support given to the study of philosophy by the Catholic Church in the curriculum that has been presented in pontifical institutes in *Sapientia Christiana*. This document outlines the objectives of the study of philosophy: in the basic cycle, philosophy is to be taught so that students arrive at a solid and coherent synthesis of doctrine, learn to examine and judge the different systems of philosophy, and also gradually become accustomed to personal reflection while in the second cycle when specialization takes place, these objectives are to be perfected through a deeper grasp of the determined object of philosophy and of the proper philosophical method.¹⁷ The articulation of these objectives illustrates well a

¹³ *Ibid.* par. 66. He goes on to state, with specific reference to dogmatic theology and moral theology, that "without philosophy's contribution, it would be impossible to discuss theological issues."

¹⁴ Vatican Council I, ch. 4, par. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* ch. 4, par. 12.

¹⁶ *Aeterni Patris*, par. 30. "For, when the Scholastics, following the opinion of the holy Fathers, always held in anthropology that the human intelligence is only led to the knowledge of things without body and matter by things sensible, they well understood that nothing was of greater use to the philosopher than diligently to search into the mysteries of nature and to be earnest and constant in the study of physical things." This sentiment was echoed by Pope Benedict XVI in his lecture titled "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections": "... the faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason there exists a real analogy, in which—as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated—unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language."

¹⁷ *Sapientia Christiana*, art. 59.

concerted and systematic support on the part of the Church for the study of this subject.

This preoccupation with the study of philosophy extends to the Catholic university.¹⁸ In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* the Catholic university is described as having the honour and responsibility to unreservedly consecrate itself to the *cause of truth*. In this way it serves simultaneously human dignity and the good of the Church, convinced that truth is a real ally and that knowledge and reason minister to faith. While championing the acquisition of useful knowledge, a Catholic university—as described in this document—is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about nature, man and God.¹⁹ The document points out at the same time that a Catholic university should seek the dialogue between faith and reason so that it will become more evident that these bear harmonious witness to the unity of all truth. In this way such an academic institution will promote greater love for the truth and will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of human life and God’s purpose in creation²⁰ and the person and message of Christ.²¹ A Catholic university has the responsibility, just like any other university, to respond to the search for meaning but fulfills that need in a particular way: “its Christian inspiration enables it to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research, and to evaluate the

¹⁸ In his article in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., (Detroit: Thomson/Gale; Washington, D.C. : Catholic University of America, 2003) E. A. Maziarz observes that “in the U.S. Catholics manifest their interest in philosophy by requiring it not only in seminaries but also in collegiate education.” p. 280. In Jesuit universities and colleges, as well as in other Catholic academic institutions, courses in philosophy form part of the core curriculum or general education for all undergraduates, irrespective of majors or kinds of degrees.

¹⁹ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, par. 4. A Catholic university is said to be “a place of research, where scholars *scrutinize reality* with the methods proper to each academic discipline, and so contribute to the treasury of human knowledge. Each individual discipline is studied in a systematic manner; moreover, the various disciplines are brought into dialogue for their mutual enhancement.”

²⁰ *Ibid.* par. 17.

²¹ *Ibid.* par. 21.

attainments of science and technology in the perspective of the totality of the human person.”²²

Philosophy and Reason

The Catholic Church’s position on the study of philosophy is rooted in her trust in reason. Various papal documents insist that philosophy, as an academic discipline, must obey its own rules and be based upon its own principles. *Fides et Ratio* states that “the content of Revelation can never debase the discoveries and legitimate authority of reason”²³ while *Aeterni Patris* exhorts philosophy to make use of its own method, principles, and arguments.²⁴ Maintaining that the Church makes no claim to, or states a preference for, any particular philosophy, *Fides et Ratio* gives as the underlying reason for this reluctance the Catholic Church’s view that, even when it engages theology, philosophy must remain faithful to its own principles and methods.²⁵

²² *Ibid.* par. 7. See Chapter Eleven: “Developments in Contemporary Society and Faith-based Education: Challenges and Issues,” S. Sia, *The Christian Message as Vision and Mission, op.cit.*, pp. 197-209.

²³ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 4.

²⁴ *Aeterni Patris*, par. 4.

²⁵ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 49. “Otherwise there would be no guarantee that it would remain oriented to truth and that it was moving towards truth by way of a process governed by reason. A philosophy which did not proceed in the light of reason according to its principles and methods would serve little purpose. At the deepest level, the autonomy which philosophy enjoys is rooted in the fact that reason is by its nature oriented to truth and is equipped moreover with the means necessary to arrive at truth.” The encyclical considers the term “Christian philosophy” but provides the following explanation: “In itself the term is valid, but it should not be misunderstood: it in no way intends to suggest that there is an official philosophy of the Church since the faith as such is not a philosophy. The term seeks rather to indicate a Christian way of philosophizing, a philosophical speculation conceived in dynamic union with faith.” *Ibid.* par. 76. On the other hand, the encyclical insists that Christian thought, because of its tradition, has a major contribution to make to the development of philosophical thought today: “The close relationship of continuity between contemporary philosophy and the philosophy developed in the Christian Church is intended to avert the danger which lies hidden in some currents of thought which are especially prevalent today.” *Ibid.* par. 86.

Catholic tradition holds that reason, with which every human being is endowed, has the capacity to rise beyond the contingent towards the infinite.²⁶ Philosophy, with its specific tools and scholarly methods, articulates and enhances that human capacity.²⁷ *Fides et Ratio* traces this trust in reason to an important Pauline text, Rom. 1:20, citing Paul's affirmation that this capacity of human reason to transcend sensory data to the Creator himself is part of the original plan of creation.²⁸ In the document from Vatican Council I, we read that "God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason: ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made."²⁹ *Aeterni Patris* refers to the right use of philosophy as chief among the natural helps endowed by God on the human race.³⁰ The same encyclical speaks of how reason prepares the human mind for the fit reception of revelation,³¹ how it is rounded and finished by philosophic studies,³² and how philosophy enables one to defend the truths.³³

The high regard in Catholic tradition for human reason can be also be traced back to the conviction that reason, properly trained, is able to demonstrate with certainty the existence of God, to establish that divine signs are credible foundations of the Christian faith, to express the natural law properly to guide all humankind, and finally to help understand religious mysteries.³⁴ Along with science and revelation and in harmony with them, philosophy is considered an instrument of truth.³⁵ This high regard for

²⁶ *Ibid.* par. 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* par. 22.

²⁹ Vatican Council I, ch. 2, par. 1.

³⁰ *Aeterni Patris*, par 2: "For, not in vain did God set the light of reason in the human mind; and so far is the super-added light of faith from extinguishing or lessening the power of the intelligence that it completes it rather, and by adding to its strength renders it capable of greater things."

³¹ *Ibid.* par. 4.

³² *Ibid.* par. 6.

³³ *Ibid.* par. 7.

³⁴ *Humani Generis*, par. 29.

³⁵ *The Proofs for the Existence of God in the Light of Modern Natural Science*, Address of Pope Pius XII to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Nov. 22, 1951, par 52.

reason is complemented by the belief, according to *Fides et Ratio*, that there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity, a kind of an *implicit philosophy*, which all humankind shares in a general and unreflective way.³⁶ The encyclical adds that, “As a search for truth within the natural order, the enterprise of philosophy is always open—at least implicitly—to the supernatural.”³⁷

The Catholic Church, on the other hand, has always been cautious in her view of the status and significance of reason. There is talk of discernment and of the distinction of the Christian faith from reason or philosophy. In the New Testament, especially in the Letters of St. Paul, one thing emerges with great clarity: the difference between “the wisdom of this world” and the wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ. As John Paul II puts it, “The depth of revealed wisdom disrupts the cycle of our habitual patterns of thought, which are in no way able to express that wisdom in its fullness.”³⁸ And in the Pauline text, *Rom 1:20*, drawn to our attention by *Fides et Ratio* and cited earlier, there is the added observation that “the coming of Christ was the saving event which redeemed reason from its weakness, setting it free from the shackles in which it had imprisoned itself.”³⁹ Thus, while the capacity of reason to question is welcomed, there is nevertheless an insistence in Catholic tradition that it also needs to be questioned since it does not have absolute and exclusive value.⁴⁰

Thus, while the Catholic Church, as has already been noted, respects philosophy’s valid aspiration to be an *autonomous* enterprise, obeying its own rules and employing the powers of reason alone—an aspiration that should be supported and strengthened—she also reminds us that reason is

³⁶ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.* par. 75.

³⁸ *Ibid.* par. 23

³⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 22. *Aeterni Patris* also alerts us to this when it recalls that “as it is evident that very many truths of the supernatural order which are far beyond the reach of the keenest intellect must be accepted, human reason, conscious of its own infirmity, dares not affect to itself too great powers, nor deny those truths, nor measure them by its own standard, nor interpret them at will; but receive them.”

⁴⁰ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 4.

seriously handicapped by inherent weaknesses.⁴¹ Despite the external signs which confirm the divine origin of the Christian religion, human reason can be hampered nonetheless from accepting it whether because of prejudice or bad faith.⁴²

Given this observation, it is understandable that the Catholic Church would be quite solicitous in ensuring that reason, in its exercise of its just freedom, does not make claims that are contrary to divine teaching or that, by overstepping its limits, intrude on matters of faith.⁴³ The valid autonomy of reason is therefore not equivalent to a self-sufficiency of thought.⁴⁴ Thus, the Catholic Church has always insisted that philosophy should be open to all avenues to truth, including revelation. This is because in Catholic belief, revelation “introduces into our history a universal and ultimate truth which stirs the human mind to ceaseless effort; indeed, it impels reason continually to extend the range of its knowledge until it senses that it has done all in its

⁴¹ *Ibid.* par. 75. *Humani Generis* points out: “For though, absolutely speaking, human reason by its own natural force and light can arrive at a true and certain knowledge of the one personal God, Who by His providence watches over and governs the world, and also the natural law, which the Creator has written in our hearts, still there are not a few obstacles to prevent reason from making efficient and fruitful use of its natural ability.” par 2.

⁴² *Ibid.* par. 4. *Quanta Cura* puts it even more strongly: “If human arguments are always allowed free room for discussion, there will never be wanting men who will dare to resist truth, and to trust in the flowing speech of human wisdom; whereas we know, from the very teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, how carefully Christian faith and wisdom should avoid this most injurious babbling.” par.3. It is imperative, it seems to me, to seek points of *encounter* rather than points of departure.

⁴³ Vatican Council I, ch. 4, par 12. *Fides et Ratio* explains the reason clearly: “The search for truth, of course, is not always so transparent nor does it always produce such results. The natural limitation of reason and the inconstancy of the heart often obscure and distort a person’s search.” par. 28. *Aeterni Patris* also warns of the dangers of false reason in matters of conduct: “For, since it is in the very nature of man to follow the guide of reason in his actions, if his intellect sins at all his will soon follows; and thus it happens that false opinions, whose seat is in the understanding, influence human actions and pervert them.” par. 2. The same point is made in *Quanta Cura*: “But who does not see and clearly perceive that human society, when set loose from the bonds of religion and true justice, can have, in truth, no other end than the purpose of obtaining and amassing wealth, and that (society under such circumstances) follows no other law in its actions, except the unchastened desire of ministering to its own pleasures and interests?” par.4. Cf. also Vatican Council I, par. 7.

⁴⁴ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 75.

power, leaving no stone unturned.”⁴⁵ The claim is made that by being open, reason itself, far from being damaged, becomes more aware of the universality of truth.⁴⁶ And even when acknowledging that in the case of doctrines graspable by human intelligence philosophy should make use of its own method, principles, and arguments, *Aeterni Patris* teaches nevertheless that it should not be done in such a manner as to withdraw from divine authority because “those things which become known by revelation have the force of certain truth, and ... those things which war against faith war equally against right reason.”⁴⁷ It is not, of course, surprising that this view of human reason and of the limitations of philosophy would have its critics.⁴⁸

Catholic tradition has always held that faith does not threaten but rather enriches reason. “Faith therefore has no fear of reason, but seeks it out and has trust in it. Just as grace builds on nature and brings it to fulfillment, so faith builds upon and perfects reason.”⁴⁹ Reason divorced from faith, just as faith without reason, is impoverished and enfeebled.⁵⁰ *Fides et Ratio*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* par. 14.

⁴⁶ As *Fides et Ratio* explains it: “Of itself, philosophy is able to recognize the human being’s ceaselessly self-transcendent orientation towards the truth; and, with the assistance of faith, it is capable of accepting the ‘foolishness’ of the Cross as the authentic critique of those who delude themselves that they possess the truth, when in fact they run it aground on the shoals of a system of their own devising.” par. 23.

⁴⁷ *Aeterni Patris*, par. 8. The same point is made in *Qui Pluribus*, par. 7: “In order not to be deceived and go astray in a matter of such great importance, human reason should indeed carefully investigate the fact of divine revelation.”

⁴⁸ The encyclical *Qui Pluribus* notes this criticism: “We know that there are some who, in their overestimate of the human faculties, maintain that as soon as man’s intellect becomes subject to divine authority it falls from its native dignity, and hampered by the yoke of this species of slavery, is much retarded and hindered in its progress toward the supreme truth and excellence” but responds, citing the example of the Scholastic teachers, that those “who to the study of philosophy unite obedience to the Christian faith, are philosophizing in the best possible way.” par. 9. Cf. also *Humani Generis*, par. 18.

⁴⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 43. *Fides et Ratio* explains this claim in some detail: “what matters most is that the believer’s reason use its powers of reflection in the search for truth which moves from the word of God towards a better understanding of it. It is as if, moving between the twin poles of God’s word and a better understanding of it, reason is offered guidance and is warned against paths which would lead it to stray from revealed Truth and to stray in the end from the truth pure and simple. Instead, reason is stirred to explore paths which of itself it would not even have suspected it could take. This circular relationship with the word of God leaves philosophy enriched, because reason discovers new and unsuspected horizons.” par. 73.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* par. 48.

observes that this joint mission towards the truth “on the one hand makes the believing community a partner in humanity’s shared struggle to arrive at truth; and on the other hand it obliges the believing community to proclaim the certitudes arrived at, albeit with a sense that every truth attained is but a step towards that fullness of truth which will appear with the final Revelation of God.”⁵¹

Revelation and the Magisterium

To understand more fully the Catholic Church’s defense of its position regarding reason and faith, we need to explore further the Catholic tradition’s view of revelation and of the Church’s own role. It has always held that there are two kinds of knowledge: natural reason and revelation, distinct not only as regards its source but also as regards its object.⁵² The insufficiency of human reason is supplemented and complemented by revelation, a supernatural way to the truth.⁵³ According to this religious tradition, the truth, which God reveals to us in Jesus Christ, is not opposed to the truths which philosophy perceives. On the contrary, the two modes of knowledge lead to truth in all its fullness.⁵⁴ Consequently, the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* speaks of two complementary forms of wisdom—*philosophical* wisdom, which is based upon the capacity of the intellect, for all its natural limitations, to explore reality, and *theological* wisdom, which is based upon Revelation and which explores the contents of faith, entering the very mystery of God.⁵⁵ It stresses that the truth made known to us by Revelation is neither the product nor the conclusion of an argument devised by human reason. Revelation is gratuitous and is anticipatory of the ultimate and definitive vision of God.⁵⁶

⁵¹ *Ibid.* par. 2.

⁵² Vatican Council I, ch. 4, par. 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.* ch. 2, par 1.

⁵⁴ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 34.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* par. 44.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* par. 15.

In *Ecclesiam Suam*, revelation is described as the history of salvation, a “long and changing dialogue which begins with God and brings to man a many-splendored conversation.”⁵⁷ This conversation with God occurs most fully in Jesus Christ and through him God discloses something of God’s nature and of God’s love for us.⁵⁸ The encyclical also notes that the dialogue of salvation takes on many forms and chooses appropriate means, adapting itself to the concrete situations.⁵⁹ *Dei Verbum* takes up this theme.⁶⁰ It adds that as time moves on, the Church constantly moves forward towards the fullness and fulfillment of God’s divine truth in her.⁶¹

This understanding of revelation leads the Catholic Church to claim a particular role in the pursuit of truth. Having received “the charge of preserving the deposit of faith and the apostolic office of teaching, she has the right and duty of condemning what wrongly passes for knowledge, lest anyone be led astray by philosophy and empty deceit.”⁶² In *Humani Generis*, one will read that the authentic interpretation of this deposit of faith has been entrusted not to each of the faithful, not even to theologians, but only to the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church.⁶³ And it insists that “because aberrations from the truth persist, even in the field of philosophy, the Teaching Authority of the Church has to keep watch over

⁵⁷ *Ecclesiam Suam*, par. 70.

⁵⁸ It adds that “the dialogue of salvation normally experienced a gradual development, successive advances, humble beginnings before complete success.” *Ibid.* par. 77.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* par. 85.

⁶⁰ *Dei Verbum*, par. 2: “This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.* par. 8.

⁶² Vatican Council I, ch. 4, par. 8.

⁶³ *Humani Generis*, par. 21. In papal documents there is a certain wavering in the description of revelation between “deposit of faith” and “salvation history”. The reference in this essay to the Magisterium of the Church is merely to show how the claim to, and the exercise of, the teaching authority of the Catholic Church has contributed to philosophical research.

the philosophical sciences themselves, in order that Catholic dogmas may suffer no harm because of erroneous opinions.”⁶⁴

The Church’s role, vis-à-vis philosophy, is clarified by *Fides et Ratio*: “The Magisterium’s role is not to intervene in philosophical disputes but to respond clearly and strongly when controversial philosophical opinions threaten right understanding of what has been revealed, and when false and partial theories which sow the seed of serious error, confusing the pure and simple faith of the People of God, begin to spread more widely.”⁶⁵ In the light of what has been revealed by God, the Magisterium therefore believes it to be its duty to authoritatively exercise what it describes as “a critical discernment of opinions and philosophies which contradict Christian doctrine.”⁶⁶ John Paul II, himself a noted philosopher, is careful to add that this discernment in the form of interventions ought not to be understood as negative but rather as prompting, promoting and encouraging philosophical enquiry. He notes that “besides, philosophers are the first to understand the need for self-criticism, the correction of errors and the extension of the too restricted terms in which their thinking has been framed.”⁶⁷ And here we are given some indication of how the Magisterium actually promotes philosophical research. With specific reference to *Aeterni Patris* this encyclical states that “the Magisterium does more than point out the misperceptions and the mistakes of philosophical theories. With no less concern it has sought to stress the basic principles of a genuine renewal of philosophical enquiry, indicating as well particular paths to be taken.”⁶⁸ The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* itself illustrates very well this aspect of the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* par. 34.

⁶⁵ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 49.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* par. 50. Cf. also par. 63. For this reason, *Humani Generis*, par. 9 exhorts Catholic philosophers and theologians to study and rebut erroneous opinions: “Now Catholic theologians and philosophers, whose grave duty it is to defend natural and supernatural truth and instill it in the hearts of men, cannot afford to ignore or neglect these more or less erroneous opinions. Rather they must come to understand these same theories well, both because diseases are not properly treated unless they are rightly diagnosed, and because sometimes even in these false theories a certain amount of truth is contained, and, finally, because these theories provoke more subtle discussion and evaluation of philosophical and theological truths.”

⁶⁷ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 51.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* par. 57.

Magisterium's role since in Chapter VII it discusses at some length current requirements and tasks for philosophers and theologians today.

Some Observations and Comments

So far, I have attempted to deal with the topic of this essay by presenting what I consider to be the Catholic Church's stance on philosophy based on my reading of relevant papal encyclicals and documents. I have also discussed the nature and direction of that support arising from the position taken by the Catholic Church in its teaching and practice. In this section of the essay, I should like to offer some observations on the relationship between the Catholic tradition and philosophy and to make some comments on the suggestions for the future as presented in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.⁶⁹

Given the Church's documented interest in philosophy itself as well as in its recognized importance for theology, one cannot but accept that such a situation will lead—as indeed it has done—to promoting philosophical pursuits. With any pursuit, no matter in what discipline, the volume and quality of support, material or otherwise, go a long way towards advancing it. This advantage is compounded when the pursuit serves a certain goal—in the case of philosophy, its special service to theology—because, though secondary, the benefits may be important enough to stimulate more interest in the subject.⁷⁰ Both history and actual results can confirm the developments in philosophy which have occurred because of the Catholic tradition.

⁶⁹ For a more extended discussion, see Santiago Sia, *Religion, Reason and God* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishers, 2004).

⁷⁰ One can perhaps draw a parallel here with the teaching of philosophy courses in a core curriculum. In my experience of teaching these courses in the USA to non-philosophy students (who need these courses to graduate), a number have become quite interested in the subject even to the extent of switching their major or taking a minor in philosophy.

But the Catholic Church's patronage of philosophical research and the link between philosophy and theology have led some to question the *kind* of philosophy that has resulted.⁷¹ It might even make one compare the situation to the suspect beneficence of patrons that artists enjoy. Centuries ago, the Athenian stranger in Plato's *Laws* had bemoaned the practice in Italy and Sicily of leaving the judgment of poets in the hands of the spectators. Such a practice spelled the destruction of the poets since they were in the habit of composing their poems to suit the taste of the judges. Or one may have serious reservations with a philosophy that has been endorsed by a Church body in the same way that there are those who frown upon any corporate sponsorships for various activities. The suspicion is not just about the motives but extends also to the end-product. Similarly, a philosophy that meets with the approval of ecclesiastical bodies runs the risk of being isolated or largely ignored. Worse, it could be dismissed as being subservient and therefore lacking in integrity.

The papal documents which we have examined have addressed this criticism. But it is worth adding that the criticism itself seems to be founded on a certain questionable assumption; namely, that philosophical thinking occurs or should occur in a vacuum. It does not. The act of philosophizing always takes place in a specific context, and every philosopher brings into it personal as well as communal presuppositions and assumptions.⁷² In addition, one's motives as well as intended goals always colour one's pursuit of the truth, whether one does this in the religious or non-religious context. Autonomy is never absolute, nor is freedom of thinking. The encouragement and support of philosophy by the Catholic Church do not *in themselves* constitute restrictions that would prevent it from attaining standards which would be possible without them. We need to distinguish perception or isolated cases from the total reality. My point is not to deny that

⁷¹ I have limited my exploration to the relationship between philosophy and theology. The encyclicals, particularly *Fides et Ratio*, also discuss the relationship between philosophy and culture, cf. par. 100. It is important likewise to bear in mind that Catholic tradition has always held that philosophy plays an important role in enabling believers and non-believers to engage in dialogue with each other.

⁷² See Chapter One: "Philosophizing, Philosophy and the Religious Context", Santiago Sia, *The Christian Message as Vision and Mission*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-27.

philosophical research has at times become parochial because of the Catholic Church's attempt to oversee it, but rather to reject the claim that such cases constitute a general adverse effect on philosophical thinking.

The criticism is also grounded in another suspect assumption; namely, that philosophy must be *entirely* accountable to its own standards, methods, and terms. Hence, any association with faith would be seen as an unacceptable crossing of boundaries.⁷³ Again, we have already encountered the Church's response to this point. But perhaps it is not out of place to note that in alerting us to the demands of faith on philosophy,⁷⁴ we are actually being reminded that human experience in its reality, which includes a certain awareness of transcendence, is much wider than its conceptual or its intellectual expression.⁷⁵ Thus, no philosophical conception can exhaust experience, simply because its expression is merely one, albeit probably the most important, feature of the human reality.⁷⁶ In distancing philosophy from faith, some philosophers mistake the important conceptual distinction between reason and faith for the reality of human experience.⁷⁷ Moreover, this criticism takes a rather narrow interpretation of human rationality to be the exercise of reason whereas the latter arises from, is grounded in, and serves human *rationality*. The two are not the same. This means that philosophy, which employs reason, must be more open to its wider base

⁷³ This strict separation between disciplines runs throughout the academic curricula, but is fortunately being countered by interdisciplinary studies.

⁷⁴ "The truths of faith make certain demands which philosophy must respect whenever it engages theology," *Fides et Ratio*, par. 77.

⁷⁵ It would be instructive to compare this point with what some contemporary European philosophers have become aware of in their philosophical thinking; namely, the need to incorporate the imagination.

⁷⁶ A similar distinction can be made between the act of philosophizing and the pursuit of philosophy. See also Chapter Nine: "Concretizing Concrete Experience" in S. Sia, *Religion, Reason and God*, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-158.

⁷⁷ The separation of reason and faith, or philosophy and religion, is more evident in Western compared to Asian thought. I believe that the task is not to re-think but to reconstruct the relationship between reason and faith in more holistic ways. Cf. "Faith and Reason: a Process View" in S. Sia, *Religion, Reason and God*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-9. To me, the reality is the one human experience, interpreted and acknowledged differently by the religious believer and by the humanist. Faith thus is awareness *and* acknowledgement of transcendence. Religious faith develops when that takes place within the context of a religious community. See *ibid.*, Chapter 8: The Function of Religion in Human Life and Thought", pp. 125=140.

which gives us more access to the truth than that which human reason can achieve.⁷⁸

In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* John Paul II draws our attention to an important relevant consideration. He distinguishes between philosophy as a system and philosophy as human aspiration: “Every philosophical system, while it should always be respected in its wholeness, without any instrumentalization, must still recognize the primacy of philosophical *enquiry*, from which it stems and which it ought loyally to serve.”⁷⁹

And he contextualizes that comment by observing the changed role of philosophy itself in modern culture. “From universal wisdom and learning, it has been gradually reduced to one of the many fields of human knowing; indeed in some ways it has been consigned to a wholly marginal role”⁸⁰ In other words, it seems to have forgotten the wider basis.⁸¹

Regarding the relationship between faith and reason I would refer to it as the “exercise of reason within the context of religious faith” because the starting point for reflections, whether one is a theist, or a secularist is the common starting point of any thinking being: our own humanity and our experience of it as we interact with one another. What distinguishes the theist is that the use of reason is done within the context of religious faith. Religious beliefs, therefore, are an acknowledgement and articulation of

⁷⁸ This is, of course, an epistemological question which gives rise to the debate between rationalism and empiricism. The point I am making does not side with either but is inclusive of both.

⁷⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 4. In a certain sense, such an observation could well be expressed in Shakespeare’s words: “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy”!

⁸⁰ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 47. This unfortunately has influenced the goals and objectives of education. We have been asked to specify learning outcomes in terms of “knowledge, skills and competence”. While this is crucial in meeting the demands and needs of the market place, the functionality of this approach can make one wonder about the overall purpose of education—an issue that could well make the encyclical’s challenge a particularly relevant one. See Chapter Eleven: “Developments in Contemporary Society and Faith-based Higher Education”, S. Sia, *The Christian Message as Vision and Mission*, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-207.

⁸¹ See Chapter One: “Philosophizing, Philosophy and the Religious Context”, *Ibid.*, pp. 11-27..

that context. It is a context that of course can be challenged by anyone insofar as the theist makes claims. But challenge and dispute by anyone who does not operate from the same context is possible only because there is a common starting point to which I have just referred.⁸² This proposed understanding of the relationship between faith and reason is different from *fides quaerens intellectum* because in that interpretation religious faith is already the starting point. Nor should this understanding be described as *intellectus quaerens fidem* because for me it is experience rather than an intellectual act that grounds the intellectual process. Philosophy thus is not regarded as *ancilla fidei*. Instead, I regard the same human experience as occurring in *different contexts*, one of which is described as “religious”.⁸³

The Tasks Ahead

How may the Catholic tradition shape the future of philosophical research? To some extent this question has been dealt with, albeit implicitly, when we examined the support and the kind of influence that the Catholic tradition has given to philosophy. The continued support will no doubt stimulate further scholarship and teaching of this subject. Aside from individual interests in specific issues or schools of thought, the shape of such philosophical research will also be influenced by the response to official guidance or directives.

We have a very good example in John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio* where he outlines what he considers to be the current requirements and tasks for philosophy. Although addressed specifically to Catholic thinkers, he has a wider audience in mind. The context in which he presents his suggestions is the acknowledged relationship between faith and reason, and for this reason he turns to the Christian vision as expressed in Sacred Scripture. For some philosophers, it is probably neither the source nor even the vision itself but the possibility of having a vision (a metaphysical as well as an

⁸² I refer to this as “points of encounter”. See Chapter Five: “Hope, Creativity and the Christian Message”, *Ibid.*, pp.85-100, for instance.

⁸³ *Fides et Ratio* uses the symbol of “two wings”.

epistemological issue) that will be of interest to them. And here John Paul II touches on an issue that should indeed concern contemporary philosophers—even if it runs counter to much of the work that is being done presently in philosophy. Noting the fragmentation of knowledge in various fields, including philosophy, and its consequences, one of which is the crisis of meaning, he speaks of the need for philosophers to retain and develop a vision of reality. He wants us to recover what he calls “the sapiential dimension” of the pursuit of truth, reminding us that “a philosophy which no longer asks the meaning of life would be in grave danger of reducing reason to merely accessory functions, with no real passion for the search for truth.”⁸⁴ The encyclical bemoans the loss of metaphysical thinking that characterizes much of contemporary philosophy, and in doing so illustrates well what had been adverted to earlier; namely, that the *Magisterium* does more than just point out lacunae but also sparks off a renewal, and in this case, in the study of metaphysics. John Paul provides us with the reason: “If I insist so strongly on the metaphysical element, it is because I am convinced that it is the path to be taken in order to move beyond the crisis pervading large sectors of philosophy at the moment, and thus to correct certain mistaken modes of behaviour now widespread in our society.”⁸⁵ It is a call worth heeding.⁸⁶

Another issue touched upon by the encyclical that hopefully will be pursued by those engaged in philosophical pursuits, is the nature and status of human reason. According to John Paul II, this is “one of the tasks which Christian thought will have to take up through the next millennium of the Christian era.”⁸⁷ Given the fact that this is the very tool of philosophers, it should be of interest to contemporary philosophy, particularly since its capabilities have been largely curtailed by—of all people—philosophers

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* par. 81. In *Veritatis Splendor*, he refers to the crisis of truth and its consequences.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* par. 83.

⁸⁶ In response to this call, mentioned by a number of international news media, a major conference, “Metaphysics in the Third Millennium International Conference,” was held in Rome in September 2000.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* par. 85.

themselves.⁸⁸ Variations of Kant's view on faith abound in the writings of many contemporary philosophers. In contrast, the encyclical states emphatically the conviction that humans can arrive, having been endowed with reason, at a unified and organic vision of knowledge.⁸⁹ Since in some ways the future of philosophy is very much linked to our claims regarding reason's capabilities,⁹⁰ this topic certainly merits much closer attention.

John Paul's own words provide us with a fitting summary and conclusion:

I appeal to *philosophers*, and to all *teachers of philosophy*, asking them to have the courage to recover, in the flow of an enduringly valid philosophical tradition, the range of authentic wisdom and truth—metaphysical truth included—which is proper to philosophical enquiry. They should be open to the impelling questions which arise from the word of God and they should be strong enough to shape their thought and discussion in response to that challenge. Let them always strive for truth, alert to the good which truth contains. Then they will be able to formulate the genuine ethics which humanity needs so urgently at this particular time. The Church follows the work of philosophers with interest and appreciation; and they should rest assured of her respect for the rightful autonomy of their discipline. I would want especially to encourage believers working in the philosophical field to illuminate the

⁸⁸ There is a certain irony here when one takes into account that the tool being called into question is the very one used to question it! The same observation can probably be made of those who reject metaphysics. One wonders whether they are merely substituting one kind of metaphysical thinking for another. Or sometimes the debate develops into a linguistic one: what one means by "metaphysics".

⁸⁹ John Paul II refers to this topic also in more specific terms: "How can one reconcile the absoluteness and universality of truth with the unavoidable historical and cultural conditioning of the formulas which express that truth?" *Fides et Ratio*, par. 95. Here I believe that the metaphysics developed by the philosophers Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne has much to offer with its distinction between the abstract and the concrete. See Chapter Seven: "From Vision to Mission with PASS for Life in S. Sia, *The Christian Message, op. cit.*, pp. 119-137.

⁹⁰ It seems to me that an even more crucial issue is re-thinking the dominant Western conception of reason. There is a rather one-sided consideration of, and even an over-emphasis on, the intellectual aspect to the neglect of both the affective and the voluntary side of human nature.

range of human activity by the exercise of reason which grows more penetrating and assured because of the support it receives from faith.⁹¹

His successor, Pope Benedict XVI echoes and supports this appeal, noting that success in the pursuit of truth will come about only “if reason and faith come together in a new way, if we overcome the self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically falsifiable, and if we once more disclose its vast horizons.”⁹² Likewise, Pope Francis affirms the intimate relationship between faith and reason and the importance of the dialogue between them.⁹³

Some Afterthoughts

The 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines is an important reason to celebrate. But, more importantly, it is also an opportunity for some reflection by the nation and its people. After all, having been Christianized for five centuries, the country would be expected to show how it has lived up to the Christian message and to what extent its teaching and guidance have transformed its society. That such a message should have made a marked difference to the country is an understandable expectation indeed. Furthermore, given the length of time since the arrival of Christianity, there would also be some hope that it would continue to stand out, and not just be known, as a Christian nation.

These are difficult expectations to live up to, and one may even entertain some doubts as to whether they are realistic and achievable. After all, even if a certain commonality among the people can be identified, every country is sufficiently heterogeneous. Since there are differences in the lives and views of its people, it would appear that such generalization would hardly be possible. In the case of the Philippines, despite being known as a Catholic nation, there are other religions which are also thriving side by side with this dominant religion. A country comprising of more than 7,000

⁹¹ *Fides et Ratio*, par. 106. This call has a special relevance to the present attempt to draw out the significance of the Christian message.

⁹² Pope Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections,” op. cit.

⁹³ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013), pars. 33-34.

islands and whose inhabitants speak different languages and who follow specific customs among themselves can hardly be adequately classified in a rather general way. Still, there are sufficiently plausible reasons for classifying the country in terms of its Christian background and history and therefore to address the questions posed earlier and many others.

This anniversary affords an opportunity for undertaking such an examination. One hopes that those, including philosophers, who are in a position to do so may rise to the occasion and take up the challenge. But how can philosophical thinking meet it? There is the assumption, sometimes well-grounded, that the nature of such thinking is too abstract to enable it to do so. However, as the discussion above indicates, there is a close link between faith and reason, particularly in Christian doctrine. One could assume that philosophical thinking which bases itself on reason has an important contribution to make in the present context. Whether, of course, that is the case in this instance needs to be ascertained.

I appreciate the opportunity provided by the editor of this journal to share some brief afterthoughts on this topic. This reflection complements an earlier essay of mine in connection with this event.⁹⁴ In putting forward here some additional philosophical considerations I have in mind Martin Buber's version of the act of philosophizing; namely, that what he wanted to express in his writings was his "viewpoint". He explained that all he was doing was opening the window and sharing with his readers his view of the landscape from where he stood. Rather than a mere subjective opinion, however, his is a perspective enriched by a constant dialogue with others and serious reflection on his part. Consequently, it shows that it stands on firm foundations.

Taking my cue then from Buber, I should like to share a viewpoint regarding what the 500th anniversary of Christianity in the Philippines could mean and what it could involve. Whether it is on firm grounds is for others

⁹⁴ "Re-tell, Relive—and Reveal the Christian Message: Some Philosophical Considerations of its Challenge," *DIWA: Studies in Philosophy and Theology*, Vol. 44, Nos. 1-2 (October 2020), pp. 40-63.

to evaluate. Moreover, I am aware that for some, it could be faulted as an outsider's point of view since I have been out of the country for decades although I have been a frequent visitor. Nevertheless, it may direct the discussion towards what hopefully will still be regarded as worthwhile considerations. After all, a view from someone else's window may prompt more discussions and contribute to further deliberations which otherwise would remain out of sight.

Given the reason for the commemoration of this important event there is the understandable expectation that discussions should revolve around the Philippines as a Catholic Christian nation and how this situation contrasts with that of its neighbours. After all, the country stands out as the only such nation in Asia. For some, it is a source of justifiable pride. It is indeed worth a celebration. It also deserves the gratitude of its people, and indeed that has been shown in various ways. One way of expressing thanks is precisely to publicly acknowledge what has been received.

But as the country reflects on its Christian heritage it would be worthwhile to focus on what is *distinctive* about it rather than what sets the Philippines because of its Christianity apart from the neighbouring countries. Although it may seem to be merely a play on words, the two foci are not entirely the same. What separates something is what cuts it off from the others while what is distinctive about it concentrates on what makes it stand out or is identifiable.⁹⁵ But what is the significance of the strategy in the context of the Christian heritage of the Philippines compared to the neighbouring countries? In concentrating on what is distinctive, one is singling out what is proper to it; but there is recognition, too, of what it has in common with others. One could ask then what makes Philippine Christianity distinctive while accepting at the same time that it has much in common with others. In tackling this question in this way, one would also be acknowledging how it benefits from engaging with the others. The philosophical issue then being proposed for deliberation is: in what way

⁹⁵ This point is discussed more fully in Chapter Three: "Distinct, not Separate: a Critique of Dualistic Thinking in and of Society," Santiago Sia, *Society in its Challenges* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 45-64.

does its Christian heritage make the Philippines distinct, rather than separate, from the others? That is to say: What has it learned about its heritage from interacting with its neighbours? What has it come to appreciate about itself?

What difference is there—if indeed there is any—in shifting the emphasis in this way? It seems to me that such a way of posing and understanding the situation is that it involves recognizing what is known as “the otherness of the other” and may thus require a shift in how one relates to the other.⁹⁶ While treasuring what the country is because of its Christian inheritance and sharing it with others, the country has also enriched its own understanding of Christianity by seeking and acknowledging what we have learned about ourselves and our inheritance from engaging with others, including countries close by. Philosophical insights on this question and the related issues can be helpful in deepening our grasp of what is involved in this way of turning to others.

Another issue that merits close attention because of this important event in the history of Philippine Christianity is that Filipino Christians are no longer just hearers, as may have been the case in the past, but are now also *proclaimers* of the Christian message. This observation and related ones are worth much attention and thought. In this context a possible issue for philosophical deliberation in the context of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines is the need to concentrate on the Christian *message* itself and not just the inherited teaching and practice of Christianity. This is not to devalue the importance of giving attention to the latter. Not only is this to be expected but since it is a historical event that is being commemorated, it would be unwise to ignore it.

In fact, in this context it may even be necessary to recover the original message. Furthermore, by concentrating on what is entailed when we probe into the Christian message itself, philosophical thinking could usher in a better understanding and appreciation of what is really fundamental in

⁹⁶ See Santiago Sia, “The Otherness of the Other: a Philosophical Contribution to the Discussion,” *Missio Inter Gentes*, 3, 2 (July 2017), pp. 71-90.

the country's Christian heritage. This is because the passage of time and the intricacies of interpretation have a way of bypassing what is essential and introducing what is not truly integral to the message. Therefore, an issue that deserves more philosophical scrutiny as the country celebrates its inheritance is, in my view: what fundamentally is the Christian message and what is its essential message?⁹⁷ How does it contribute to our development and flourishing? To what extent is it a fresh call to all of humankind to participate in the development of the entire creation?

All these issues, of course, call for much reflection and thorough discussion. I should like to think that that task is a particular challenge, occasioned by the commemoration of an important event, to those who align themselves with that inheritance. Philosophical probing does unearth as well as re-invigorate our grasp of fundamental issues and in this way can extend a helping hand to faith and so impact its future development. Additionally, it can contribute towards the nourishment of what has been sown in the Philippines five centuries ago so that it will continue to be a living faith for its people and its neighbours.

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