

Thomism and the Future of Catholic Philosophy

*1998 Aquinas Lecture*¹

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I

When one takes account of the scale and range of Aquinas's achievements it becomes clear why he deserves to be described as the greatest of the mediaeval philosopher-theologians, for he was the first thinker of the high mediaeval period to work out in detail the new synthesis between Catholicism and philosophy. It is sometimes supposed that this just meant 'Christianizing' Aristotle. Even were that the limit of his achievement it would have been considerable, but in fact he went further. For while he opposed unquestioning appeals to authority, he believed in the idea of cumulative philosophical and religious wisdom and sought to integrate Neoplatonist, Augustinian and Anselmian ideas, as well as Aristotelian ones, with scripture, patristic teaching and evolving Catholic doctrine.

St Thomas inspired a tradition that bears his name; and just as he was a great thinker, so too is Thomism a great movement. It is rare, and not just among pre-modern systems of thought, in having lasted from the period of its birth to the present day. Platonism and Aristotelianism are more ancient, but neither has enjoyed the same degree of cultural continuity. Marxism has had enormous influence, but it is now all but abandoned, and while there may be positive reassessments of aspects of Marx's thought it is difficult to believe that it will ever again be widely adopted as ideology. Existentialism appears even more ephemeral, like a short-lived literary fashion. Notwithstanding its faltering emergence, and periods of decline or of marginalisation, Thomism has been a feature of Catholic thought during seven centuries.

Here I will offer a short history of the movement and consider its present state and possible future development. While I hope that this history will be of some general interest, I am more concerned that readers draw lessons from it. As will emerge, those who have associated themselves with the thought of Aquinas have tended to move in one or other of two directions: towards the goal of faithful

interpretation of the original system, or towards that of effective application to contemporary issues. Set at right angles to these movements is another pattern of variation: the rise and fall of Thomistic thought. One lesson, I suggest, is that Thomism has declined when it has ignored, or turned its back on leading rival philosophies; and a second is that its revivals have generally been the result of engagement with other traditions. A third lesson is that the task of synthesis is promising but difficult. Thomism began as a synthesis of philosophy and theology and versions of it have ended in the tangled wreckage of unworkable combinations. A fourth lesson, following upon these others, is that in there is urgent need for a systematic re-articulation of Neothomist thought.

II

Aquinas was born (in 1224) into a religious culture whose dominant intellectual tradition was a form of Christian Neoplatonism. The main source of this was St Augustine mediated via later Latin thinkers such as St Anselm. Early in his life, however, and under the direction of Albert the Great, Aquinas developed an intense interest in the more naturalistic philosophy of Aristotle. Works of 'the philosopher' were then being translated into Latin for the first time, having been re-discovered through contact with the Arab world where they had been preserved.

To Albert and Aquinas, Aristotle offered a more promising resource for the articulation of Christian doctrine than did the Augustinianism current in the cathedral schools and universities. Yet this new synthesis met with considerable opposition, for it seemed to be at odds with orthodoxy. In fact, St Thomas found himself in dispute with two groups. To one side were the Augustinians represented by the secular teachers and the Franciscans; and to the other were radical Aristotelian naturalists who held doctrines that are indeed difficult to reconcile with Christian orthodoxy. Aquinas sought to tread a middle path directing writings against each group in turn: *On the eternity of the world* against Bonaventure and other Augustinian Franciscans, and *On the Unity of the Intellect* against Siger of Brabant and other Latin Averroists.

Although Aquinas's Christian Aristotelianism was later to be judged the 'most perfect' reconciliation of philosophy and faith, its immediate fate was to be attacked and subjected to ecclesiastical denunciation. In 1270 Bishop Tempier of Paris condemned several propositions associated with Aristotelianism, and in 1277, three years after St Thomas's death, he issued a further denunciation in which

Thomistic claims were specified, though Aquinas was not named. In the same year Robert Kilwardby, Archbishop of Canterbury and a fellow Dominican, issued a similar condemnation and the following month the Pope endorsed Tempier's decree. Two years later a Franciscan, William de la Mare, produced a work 'correcting' the error of Aquinas's ways.

The Dominican response was to defend their master against these attacks. The general chapter appointed a committee to investigate the English Dominican disloyalty, and in the meantime they set about promoting the cause of Thomas as a thinker and as a saint. In 1282 William of Macclesfield responded to de la Mare countering his charges, and around the same time John of Paris produced a similar response. By 1286 the Parisian Dominicans commanded the study of Aquinas and this instruction was repeated elsewhere: in Saragossa (1309), in London (1314), and in Bologna (1315). Defence gave way to counter-attack and on July 18, 1323, within fifty years of his death, Aquinas was declared a saint by Pope John XXII. Two years later Bishop Bourret of Paris revoked Tempier's condemnation.

Ecclesiastical approval removed one obstacle to acceptance of Thomistic thought and his ideas began to spread and gain influence. Apart from their merit, an important factor in this development was the increasing number of colleges and universities. Each approved place of study would have houses belonging to the main teaching orders, and by this means the Dominicans ensured that their master's voice could be heard throughout Europe.

Early in the fifteenth century Aquinas found a powerful follower in the person of John Capreolus (1380–1444). In the late scholastic period the ideas of St Thomas had to compete with those of two other medieval figures, viz. Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Capreolus challenged various views of Scotus to such good effect that he earned the title 'foremost Thomist'. More common than dialectical defences, however, were informed commentaries on Aquinas's works, in particular the *Summa Theologiae*. These commentaries were important in transmitting Thomist doctrines, yet in themselves they did little to combat the rising tide of Ockhamist nominalism.

III

The next century was the most troubled in the history of post-medieval Christendom. The reformation divided Europe into Catholic and Protestant states. It would be wrong to suppose that Aquinas was only read by Catholics, for in England, the Anglican Richard Hooker (1553–1600), and in Holland the Calvinist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645)

were both influenced by studying his work. However, it was within Catholic regions that the next phase of Thomism developed. In particular, Spain and Italy gave rise to new theologically and metaphysically oriented presentations of Thomas's thought. In Protestant Europe reformers drove their axe to the roots of Catholic belief and in response, the Church of Rome set about renewing its intellectual resources. Thus was born the 'counter-reformation'.

The Council of Trent (1545–63) aimed to systematise Catholic doctrine producing a definitive Catechism in 1566 in which the thought of Aquinas had a major influence. Contrary to an oft-repeated tale, however, the *Summa Theologiae* was not placed on the altar alongside the Bible during meetings of the Council. Trent also encouraged the study of philosophy and theology in all Catholic colleges, seminaries and universities. This created a need for appropriate textbooks and that was met with a new style of manual setting out Thomistic thought. A further response to the reformers was the development of new religious orders. In founding the Society of Jesus, St Ignatius explicitly encouraged the study of Aquinas and Aristotle, and expressed the hope that interpretations of their ideas adapted to the needs of the time would be forthcoming.

In this he was drawing upon the earlier pre-Tridentine tradition of Thomistic teaching and commentary in which the major figures were Dominicans. In the first decade of the century Peter Crockaert (died 1514), a Belgian working in Paris, had substituted the *Summa Theologiae* for what had previously been the standard text for theological instruction, viz. the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Likewise in Italy, Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469–1534) was lecturing on the *Summa* and producing a major commentary later to be published alongside the works of Aquinas. In Spain Francisco de Vitoria (1485–1546) also made the *Summa* the basis of theological education, and he was followed in this by his disciple Domingo de Soto (1494–1560).

Early Jesuit Thomists included students of de Soto. But the full Jesuit appropriation of Thomas came later with Luis de Molina (1535–1600) and, most famously, Francisco Suarez (1548–1617). Starting from the need to produce theology adequate to meet that of the reformers, Suarez was led to the conclusion that it was not appropriate just to invoke the philosophy of Aristotle; instead fundamental issues needed to be addressed afresh. The result was a mix of Thomistic and non-Thomistic metaphysics. In fact, Suarez anticipates much of the thinking about essence, existence, and identity of late twentieth century analytical metaphysicians.

The Dominicans meanwhile had stayed closer to the detail of Aquinas's philosophy, in part out of loyalty to a brother who had long been misrepresented and maligned. Their need to evangelise and to educate also led them to produce a line of philosophical and theological text books, the most famous of which (still in use into this century) were those of John of St Thomas (John Poincot, 1589–1644).

In 1568 Aquinas was named a 'Doctor of the Church', only the ninth person to be so honoured and this led to the familiar title of 'Angelic Doctor'. By the end of that century there were two main schools of Thomism. The first had its strongest base in Italy, was associated with Dominican textual interpretation, and remained close to the historical doctrines of St Thomas. The second was rooted in Spain, centred around the Jesuit appropriation of Aquinas, and gave rise to treatises on particular philosophical themes.

Inevitably there was competition between these traditions; but the most heated conflict was doctrinal not interpretative. It ran from around 1590 to 1610 and continued intermittently thereafter. The subject was grace, free-will and divine foreknowledge. On the one side the Jesuit Molina argued that God's total omniscience is compatible with human liberty, because God knows what each person would freely do in every possible circumstance of choice, and distributes grace accordingly. In opposition the Dominicans, of whom the most prominent was Dominic Banez (1528–1604), contended that God knows who will be saved and who will be damned because he has distributed fully effective grace to some but not all. The Jesuits accused the Dominicans of Calvinist predestinarianism, while the Dominicans charged the Jesuits with Pelagianism.

This 'heresy calling' led the popes to try and tame the debate, though without much success. Meanwhile the energies of Thomists had been largely distracted from the important task of developing the general system so as to take account of the rise of modern science and the new philosophies of rationalism and empiricism. The trial of Galileo (1564–1642) and the replies of Descartes (1596–1660) to his critics show the Thomists to have fallen behind their times. Indeed it was their ill-preparedness to engage modern thought rather than weaknesses within Thomism itself that led to the marginalisation of the tradition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The fate of Thomism in the latter period also reflected the general situation of the Church. The century featured many social disruptions and much ecclesiastical infighting. In 1772 the Jesuits were suppressed on the order of the Pope, and in the next decade Catholicism itself was battered by the French Revolution and by the

rise of secularism. The new political thinking was anti-theocratic, anti-clerical, broadly democratic, and at best deistic, though often atheist. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a system of thought born of medieval Catholicism did not flourish in these circumstances. The Dominicans went on producing critical editions of St Thomas's writings but it is doubtful whether many other than Dominicans read them. Even in Rome ecclesiastics had lost interest in Thomism.

IV

As in the past, however, a process of revitalisation led to a renaissance. Following the French revolution, Catholic thought in France, Belgium and Italy divided between two movements: one that emphasised the centrality of faith and sought to deal with the threat from rationalism by side-stepping it; and a philosophical approach which maintained, along lines first suggested by Christian Neoplatonists, that the intellect directly intuits God in all its acts of knowledge. These two approaches came to be known as 'traditionalism' and 'ontologism'; their main proponents being Lamennais (1782–1854) and de Maistre (1752–1821), and Gioberti (1801–1852) and Rosmini (1797–1855), respectively.

Elsewhere in Italy and in Spain, the Dominicans maintained loyalty to St Thomas. The Italian Tommaso Zigliara (1833–93) found favour with Bishop Pecci of Perugia (later to become Leo XIII), and in 1873 he was appointed Regent of Studies in the Dominican College in Rome where he was joined by Alberto Lepidi (1838–1922). Both men were critical of the traditionalists and the ontologists; and through their writings, teachings and administration did much to encourage members of their order in Italy and France to develop Neothomistic responses to these movements, as well as to the empiricism and rationalism to which they had been reactions. The revival of Thomism was much encouraged by the papacy. In 1846 Pius IX argued that reason and faith are compatible and that lapses into fideism and intellectual intuitionism are both to be avoided. Versions of traditionalism and ontologism were condemned and a return to the scholastic approaches was openly favoured. An important figure in this revival was Joseph Kleutgen (1811–83) a German Jesuit. Kleutgen identified the weaknesses in Catholic intellectual responses to modern thought. He argued that only Aristotelian metaphysics could provide a sure foundation for Catholic theology and expounded his own version of Neoaristotelianism. Like St Thomas, Kleutgen and his colleagues affirmed the unity of the human person. Also while upholding the epistemological primacy of

experience they maintained the possibility of establishing, by abstract reflection, various necessary truths about reality, principally that it is the creation of God. Although the thought of Aquinas featured in this movement it was more generally a revival of scholasticism rather than of Thomism as such.

In 1878 Gioacchino Pecci was crowned Leo XIII and the following year he published the famous encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in which Aquinas is commended as providing the surest intellectual foundation for, and articulation of Catholic doctrine. Kleutgen is reputed to have contributed to the draft of the encyclical and certainly his scholastic stance was vindicated by it. Leo also appointed neoscholastics to important posts in Rome. Once again, then, through the edict of a pope, Thomism became the orthodox system of thought for Roman Catholicism.

Neothomism now looked in two directions. On the one hand it was commanded to address contemporary philosophical issues; and on the other it drew its inspiration from the past. These orientations gave rise to two lines of development, one 'problematic', the other historical. At the University of Louvain in Belgium a new school of scholastic scholarship emerged to which important contributions were made by Cardinal Mercier (1851–1926), Maurice de Wulf (1867–1947) and Martin Grabmann (1875–1959).

The problematic strand was first developed in response to the challenges of modern philosophy. Traditional Thomism assumed that the mind was in direct engagement with reality through experience. According to Aquinas both perception and intellection involve openness to the external world. After Descartes, Locke, Hume and Kant, the new orthodoxy was that the starting point of all philosophy is consciousness. From this we need somehow to argue to the existence of external reality. Awed by this doctrine several Neothomists maintained that no philosophy could be credible that did not accept the new starting point of immanent consciousness. The philosopher Joseph Maréchal (1878–1944), and the theologians Karl Rahner (1904–84) and Bernard Lonergan (1904–84)—all of whom were Jesuits—tried to show that it was possible to combine Kant's critical philosophy with the transcendental realism and theism of Aquinas. The result, 'Transcendental Thomism', though widespread in its influence among theologians was never taken very seriously by philosophers.

Another attempt to synthesise Thomism with a modern philosophy is represented by the Polish 'Lublin school'. Here the sources have been several: Thomism as represented by French

interpreters; phenomenology as advocated by Roman Ingarden (1893–1970), who had been a student of Husserl (1859–1938); and logic and philosophy of science. The best known member of the school, was Karol Wojtyła (1920–) who drew on the value theory of Max Scheler (1874–1928), Husserlian phenomenology and the anthropology of Aquinas, to devise a form of Thomist personalism articulated in his work *The Acting Person*. Wojtyła's time at Lublin was short, however, being promoted to the see of Cracow in 1958, and elected Pope in 1978. John Paul II was not the first, nor probably the last pope to favour Thomism.

Two of the most important twentieth century Neothomists were French laymen. Both were critics of transcendental Thomism and both had great influence in North America as well as in Europe. They were Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) and Etienne Gilson (1884–1978). Maritain was raised in a comfortable, politically liberal, Protestant family. Despairing of the materialism and secularism characteristic of Paris university and intellectual life, he and his wife made a suicide pact but revoked this after attending lectures by Henri Bergson. While Bergson's 'vitalist' philosophy lifted their despair, it was not until they converted to Roman Catholicism and then discovered the philosophy of Aquinas, that the Maritains felt they had found a wholly adequate world view combining humanism with transcendence.

Maritain lectured and published widely in most areas of philosophy, and was a dominant influence in Catholic thought from the 1920s to the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). He approached the ideas of Aquinas somewhat ahistorically rather than as medieval revivalist and drew from it a metaphysics, epistemology and value theory. In his most important work of speculative philosophy, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, he argues that we have knowledge of objective reality. Likewise, he insists that the natural order has an objective structure and that this is the proper concern of science. His value theory is similarly keyed to external realities, but value is seen as directed towards participation in the life of God. Maritain's social and political philosophy emphasised the irreducibility of community and of the common good, notions which have featured prominently in Catholic social teaching throughout this century and for which Maritain is often regarded as a source.

Gilson was also taught by Bergson, but his own interests lay in the history of ideas, in particular the relationship between modern philosophy and pre-modern scholasticism. His influence on the Neothomist revival was as much through his teaching and academic

leadership as through his writings. He lectured in north America, and co-founded the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto. Like Maritain, he deplored the subjective turn introduced by modern philosophy. However, he believed that attempts to invoke medieval thinking must be mindful of the variety of views held during the Middle Ages and, even more importantly, of the fact that they were developed primarily in theological contexts. Whereas Maritain presented Thomism as if it were a set of timeless ideas, Gilson distinguished between the teachings of Aquinas and those of later commentators who sometimes imported their own views or sought to synthesise Thomism with approaches current in their own day. Similarly he argued that while St Thomas drew heavily on the work of Aristotle he often used Aristotelian notions for different purposes, generally to defend Christian theology, and added ideas of his own; the most important being the claim that God is necessary existence and the source of the being of other things.

V

Gilson's contextualist approach has been most widely followed among Catholic historians of the medieval period, but its influence is also apparent in the account of traditions of enquiry advanced by Alasdair MacIntyre (1929–). A convert, like so many other English-speaking Catholic philosophers, MacIntyre's understanding and use of Aquinas have been shaped not by a Thomistic education but by personal study and in response to the views of others. For some years he taught at the University of Notre Dame where the Medieval Institute and the Jacques Maritain Center have each engaged scholastic thought. The second of these is directed by Ralph McInerny, himself one of the leading representatives of Neothomism in north America and for many years editor of the *New Scholasticism* (now the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*), which together with the *Modern Schoolman*, and *The Thomist* comprise the main English-language fora for the presentation of essays in neoscholastic historical and problematic traditions.

Thus we have arrived at the present day. Contemporary historical scholarship in the area of Thomistic philosophy is of a high standard. This is largely a consequence of the efforts of Gilson and his followers. Aquinas and other medieval and scholastic figures have also benefited from a rise of interest in the history of philosophy, and by no means all who now study Christian medieval thought are themselves Catholics or even theists. At the same time it is natural that, as with Hooker and Grotius, those who avow a Christian world

view should look with intense interest at the work of the individual who is beyond question the greatest Christian philosopher-theologian.

In the future it is likely that the tide of interest in Aquinas will rise and fall as before. As in the past, this will partly reflect the intellectual condition of the Catholic Church and that of the colleges, seminaries and universities established to serve it. However, Aquinas and Thomism are not the preserve of Catholics only, or of those engaged in theology or avowedly religious thought. There is a growing interest in his ideas among philosophers trained wholly or partly in the analytical school. Drawing on the example of the British philosophers Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, and Anthony Kenny, some younger writers have used Thomistic resources to deal with contemporary philosophical problems. Recent examples of this may be found in the 'Analytical Thomism' issue of *The Monist* (October 1997), one of the leading American philosophy journals. Others have turned to Aquinas as an important figure in the history of philosophy to be studied as one might any other thinker from the past.

Thus is repeated a pattern of previous centuries. Like Capreolus, Suarez, Kleutgen and Maritain, some wish to mine Thomas's work as a source of interesting ideas. Like Crockaert, Banez, Mercier and Gilson, others devote their efforts to giving an accurate representation of his thought. A precious few try to combine both tasks. Of course there is merit in each approach; but if the history of Thomism suggests that when its practitioners stray far from Thomas's central doctrines they are liable to fall into confusion, it also indicates the great cost of confining one's attention to the interpretative task. For Thomists the point of trying to understand Aquinas must be to see more clearly how best to formulate and answer perennial philosophical and theological questions.

VI

With that thought in mind I wish to consider further the role that Thomistic ideas might have in a Catholic engagement with the dominant mode of English-language philosophy, namely the analytical tradition, which I am here construing sufficiently broadly to embrace those, such as Jürgen Habermas, who now seek to be part of it.

Recently a colleague at a major Catholic university in the United States related an exchange between him and a postgraduate student at a secular university. The student's previous education had been at a traditionally-minded Catholic institution but now he found himself in a programme where he was expected to read and appreciate

work by leading secular philosophers. The student reported how he found that he could not even enter into a reasonable dialogue with these thinkers or with his fellow students. The disagreement, he supposed, was over first principles which, by definition, could not be proven. He was intensely frustrated and was inclined, given his view of the current situation of academia and the impossibility of reasonable argument, to abandon his studies—though he was also disposed to try to fight back.

The advice given by my colleague was of exactly the right sort. First, he pointed out that engagement need not be on questions of first principles. Instead one may attempt an ‘immanent’ or internal critique, showing that a position is not consistent or defensible even on its own terms; and second one may try to show that a doctrine is contrary to observable facts or widely accepted views. He also noted that the ideas against which the student railed would not have become dominant if there were nothing to them, for they have been judged to be persuasive by people who are clearly neither fools nor knaves. The message to the student, then, was that he should learn how to expose conflicts in opposing views and to show that his own position could account for what is right in them while also accounting for more besides. The alternative to this policy (which has been practised to good effect in recent work by Alasdair Macintyre) is to abandon philosophy to those whom one believes to be in error.

Here I think my colleague had encountered a problem that has bedevilled Catholic philosophy at least in the US, for in Britain it has neither a collective identity nor an institutional base. Among those trained in the various branches of neoscholasticism it is commonly supposed that analytical philosophy is something to be avoided as a serious threat to one’s grasp of God, goodness and truth. This view derives from the belief that mainstream English-language philosophy is Logical Positivism. It is not just Catholic philosophers who are so affected, however; for the same thing is true of most Christian theologians of all denominations in the West. In this latter connection it is interesting to note an observation made by Fergus Kerr O.P., reporting on the creation of a database listing research projects in theology in British and Irish institutes of higher education from 1994 to 1998. Kerr writes that of the 4,000 items registered “surprisingly few projects show much acquaintance with contemporary Anglo-American analytical philosophy, which (one might think) exerts considerable influence, for better or worse, on neighbouring disciplines and the general intellectual climate in our culture” (“Theological Research Initiative”, *New Blackfriars*, February 1998).

The common belief is that from seeds sown in the early modern period a weed grew and took hold in the garden of philosophy. The lineage and flowerings are familiar: Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Russell, early-Wittgenstein, A.J. Ayer, and so on to contemporary scientific materialism. While this belief is not without foundation it is fragmentary and seriously and dangerously distorted. No-one who reads Locke, Mill or Russell could doubt that they held metaphysical views. One may be 'anti' their positions; but it is a mistake to suppose that they are anti-metaphysical positivists. Similarly, the practice of careful analysis and argument that they inspired has produced, and continues to produce, insightful and inspiring philosophy.

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is a work the depth of which will be celebrated for so long as philosophy is practised. Less exaltedly, in Oxford in the late 1950s and 60s very good philosophers such as Gilbert Ryle and J. L. Austin deployed broadly Aristotelian categories in connection with important issues in the philosophy of mind and moral psychology. Similarly, the work of Oxford-trained Catholics such as Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach may be characterised as largely ahistorical, analytical Aristotelianism. Subsequently the centre of the philosophical world crossed the Atlantic. If anything, however, that strengthened the subject, and in the last thirty years some of the most important work of the second half of the century has emerged from North America.

Viewed as a group, analytical writers certainly have their own deficiencies. Among these is a lack of historical sense. It is not uncommon to find quite able philosophers writing as if the subject began in this century. This outlook is particularly marked among graduate students in the best analytical departments, who commonly speak as if not only currently favoured solutions but the problems they address were both newly minted. The story is told, often with appreciation, of one prominent analytical philosopher teaching at a leading institution who would wear a tee-shirt bearing a slogan derived from the anti-drug campaign: 'Just say "no" to history of philosophy'.

A further deficiency commonly to be found among analytical writers is a lack of love of wisdom (*philosophia*). By this I mean that one too rarely encounters individuals whose clear motivation is to achieve a form of understanding that may bring warranted peace of mind. Notable exceptions to this are thinkers influenced by a certain interpretation of the goal of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. For them the task is 'to let the fly out of the fly bottle' and to see it pass from

agitation to regular flight. Significantly, however, this view of philosophy as therapy for the soul is sometimes ridiculed and generally ignored by analytical philosophers. These defects admitted, it remains a serious mistake to represent analytical philosophy as anti-metaphysical, sceptical and nihilistic. Indeed, for all that it stands in need of improvement, I believe it has a claim to be the prime continuant of Western philosophical rationalism.

The effects of neoscholastic hostility to analytical thought have generally been bad ones. Without open and informed exchange between conflicting positions there is no growth, and in the life of the intellect without growth there is stagnation. For its own self-definition and benefit a philosophy needs to test itself against rivals; but any activity ordered towards truth also has a responsibility to respect the same search when it is evidently pursued by others. Avowedly Catholic philosophers in general, and Neothomists among them, are largely isolated from the mainstream. In consequence, their intellectual standards are generally lower, and they are still not sufficiently learning from nor contributing to the main debates pursued in the wider world. This latter failing is particularly ironic since some of the central themes of contemporary analytical philosophy, such as intentionality, normativity, causality and explanation, holism and reductionism, and realism and anti-realism, have also been prominent in Thomistic and neoscholastic thought from the middle ages onwards. Opportunities for productive engagement have been missed too often and for too long.

With its understanding of philosophy as a partly spiritual activity ordered to a supernatural end, Thomist thought can also help others appreciate the possibility of engaging in philosophy as something more than conceptual geography. Earlier I listed some characteristic deficiencies of analytical philosophy. It is arguable that these derive from its lack of a unifying *telos*. For the Catholic, by contrast, philosophy is an intellectual high road to speculative and practical truth. St Thomas was committed to such an understanding, and because of it he drew upon the best thought of his day and of the past. For him, the rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle provided the basis for a new synthesis of faith and reason. So today, Catholic philosophers should be setting about the task of refining and developing the Thomist synthesis by drawing into it the methods and insights of analytical thought—not to mention those of other philosophical movements. The tradition needs to engage in one of its periodic reassessments. As in the past that can be expected to lead to revitalisation and renaissance.

Let me end by saying that it is not my view that a philosopher who is a Catholic must be a Thomist, or even that he or she must aim to be an avowedly 'Catholic philosopher' in the sense of being one who always seeks to bring Catholic solutions to philosophical problems. Indeed, I am conscious that the very phrase 'Catholic philosophy' will fill some readers with dread. This reaction may be prompted by the thought of the triumphalism of the ghetto, in which an isolated minority views the wider world through narrowed eyes and thereby sees it as a place of darkness.

It should be clear that this is neither my perspective nor my condition. For what it is worth my admiration of Aquinas, and of aspects of the Thomistic tradition, is not the product of a neoscholastic philosophical education but of personal study and reflection. My teachers were, and my colleagues are, thoroughly analytical and I am a fully subscribing member of the same community. Indeed, in my experience those who react most strongly to the phrase 'Catholic Philosophy' are not those who have had the advantages of an analytical upbringing but are refugees from seminary scholasticism. Had their teachers practised the engagement I am recommending the reactions of their students might have been otherwise. A Catholic may be a good philosopher without being a Thomist and without practising 'Catholic philosophy'; but it is worth such a person considering why they would wish to resist the possibility of harnessing their reason to their faith. For Aquinas, this possibility established an imperative: to try to achieve a synthesis of Christian revelation and philosophical insight. His achievement in this respect is part of the intellectual inheritance of every philosopher who is a Catholic. For that reason alone we owe his Thomism our attention.

- 1 The following is the text of the 1998 Aquinas Lecture delivered in Oxford on 12 February 1998. I am grateful to the Dominicans of Blackfriars for the invitation to give the lecture and for their hospitality. I have drawn material from two other essays: "Thomism" in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998) and "What Future has Catholic Philosophy?" in *Virtue and Virtue Theories*, Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Vol. 72, 1998