

## ROSMINI, RATZINGER, AND KUHN: OBSERVATIONS ON A NOTE BY THE DOCTRINAL CONGREGATION

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*[In his encyclical *Fides et ratio*, John Paul II favorably cited Antonio Rosmini. Since many propositions taken from Rosmini's thought had been proscribed by the 19th-century magisterium, such citation called for a rethinking on the part of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In a Note issued in 2001, its prefect, Joseph Ratzinger, explained how the earlier censure of Rosmini could now be reconciled with his current rehabilitation. Using categories drawn from Thomas Kuhn, the present article examines the Note and its admissions regarding paradigm-based rationality.]*

WHEN JOHN PAUL II, in the encyclical *Fides et ratio*, mentioned Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855) in the same breath with warhorse Thomists such as Gilson and Maritain, Orthodox thinkers such as Florensky and Lossky, and idiosyncratic writers such as Newman and St. Edith Stein, as a possible model for properly understanding the relationship between philosophy and theology, he created something of a problem for Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and his Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF).<sup>1</sup>

The problem, of course, stems from the fact that some of Rosmini's ideas had been explicitly condemned in the 19th century by the Congregation of the Holy Office, and Rosmini had been classified in generations of theology manuals as either a proximate ontologist or a semi-rationalist.<sup>2</sup> How,

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<sup>1</sup> The encyclical is dated September 14, 1998. It may be found in *Acta apostolicae sedis* 91 (1999) 5–88. An English translation is available in *Origins* 28 (October 22, 1998) 317–47. Rosmini is referred to in no. 74.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Franz Diekamp lumps Rosmini with Gioberti and Malebranche, similarly tainted by ontologism, teaching that human beings, already in this life, have a natural knowledge of God which is both immediate and intuitive and which is the necessary condition for every cognitive act. See *Theologiae dogmaticae manu-*

the obvious question became, does one reconcile the earlier condemnation with the pope's recent benign citation? Has the pope forthrightly contradicted and thereby revoked the earlier censure? It is precisely Ratzinger's attempt to answer this question that will form the substance of this article. In the process, I hope to show that what is of significant importance is not only the Congregation's rehabilitation of Rosmini, but also the many neuralgic issues in contemporary theological epistemology touched by the CDF's remarks.<sup>3</sup>

### THE NOTE OF THE DOCTRINAL CONGREGATION

The Note of the Doctrinal Congregation begins with a review of the documents relating to Rosmini's case. By 1849, Rosmini, born in 1797 in Rovereto, then in the Austrian Tyrol, had already had a distinguished theological career.<sup>4</sup> He had published several works of philosophy and theology, had founded a religious congregation, and had been appointed by Pius IX as one of the consultors regarding the definability of the dogma of

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*ale*, 4 vols., 6th edition (Paris: Desclée, 1944) 1.135. M. Nicolau deems Rosmini proximate to the semirationalism of Günther, Hermes, and Frohschammer and touched by ontologism. See M. Nicolau and J. Salaverri, *Sacrae theologiae summa*, 5 vols. (Madrid: BAC, 1950) 1.124–25. M. Schmaus, too, holds that the fundamental ontologist thesis, that God may be seen directly by the human mind, is characteristic of both Rosmini and Gioberti. See *Dogma Vol. 2: God and Creation*, trans. Ann Laeuchli et al. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969) 15.

<sup>3</sup> The Note is dated, July 1, 2001. Although versions in various languages are available on the Vatican Website, no official text has yet been published in the *Acta apostolicae sedis*. An English translation is published in *Origins* 31 (August 16, 2001) 201–2.

<sup>4</sup> There is a great deal of information available concerning Rosmini's life and thought. Besides the standard encyclopedia articles, helpful works include François Evain, "Antonio Rosmini-Serbati und der Rosminianismus im 19. Jahrhundert" in *Christliche Philosophie im katholischen Denken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1, ed. E. Coreth, W. Neidl, and G. Pfligersdorffer (Graz: Styria, 1987) 596–618; Gerald McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Seabury, 1977) 119–25; E. Hocedez, *Histoire de la théologie au XIXe siècle*, vol. 2 (Paris: Desclée, 1952) 140–57 discusses differing evaluations of Rosmini's philosophy. Books in Italian on Rosmini are numerous. One that is especially helpful for reconstructing the original controversy is *Antonio Rosmini e la Congregazione dell'Indice*, ed. Luciano Malusa (Stresa, Italy: Edizioni Rosminiane, 1999). An English translation project of Rosmini's works is also underway. See Riccardo Pozzo, "The Philosophical Works of Antonio Rosmini in English Translation," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 73 (1999) 609–37. While Rosmini's work continues to attract some interest in the English-speaking world, it is safe to say that, in general, he is not widely read. In Italy, however, Rosmini is still a significant cultural and philosophical force and this may constitute one reason for the Note's appearance.

the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Indeed, in 1848, when revolutions swept Europe, Pius IX even asked Rosmini to accompany him in exile to Gaeta. In 1849, however, two of his works, including *The Five Wounds of the Church*, were placed on the Index of Prohibited Books. Just a few years later, in 1854, a decision was rendered by the Congregation of the Index, *Dimittantur*, claiming that all of his works were to be removed from examination and that the investigation found nothing disparaging to the author. After Rosmini's death in 1855, controversy about his writings again flared up. In 1880, under increasing pressure from neo-Scholasticism, the Congregation of the Index claimed that the *Dimittantur* signifies only that a work is not prohibited, nothing more; the following year, the same Congregation noted that a work dismissed is not necessarily free from every error against faith and morals. Rosmini's works were again subject to serious criticism and, as Ratzinger notes, in December 1887, forty propositions taken from his works were condemned by the Congregation of the Holy Office in the decree *Post obitum* (DH 3201-3241).

Ratzinger says that a "hasty and superficial" reading of this history might lead one to think that the magisterium was involved in an objective contradiction in its interpretation of Rosmini's works. Such however is not the case; it is the task of the present Note, regarding the doctrinal value of the earlier statements, to clarify matters (no. 2). To this justificatory end, Ratzinger claims that the decree of 1854, *Dimittantur* "... recognizes the orthodoxy of his [Rosmini's] thought and of his declared intentions." At the same time, that decree "did not intend to state that the Magisterium adopted Rosmini's system of thought as a possible instrument of philosophical-theological mediation for Christian doctrine . . ." (no. 3). Following Rosmini's death, the Note continues, there was a certain distancing of the Church from his philosophical and theological synthesis; such distancing requires a consideration of the principal historical and cultural factors that ultimately led to the condemnations of the decree *Post obitum* in 1887.

What were these factors? The first was the issuance of the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879 in which Leo XIII promoted studies in fidelity to the thought of Aquinas. In a statement laden with implications, Ratzinger continues, "The adoption of Thomism created the premises for a negative judgment of a philosophical and speculative position like that of Rosmini because it differed in its language and conceptual framework from the philosophical and theological elaboration of St. Thomas Aquinas" (no. 4). A second factor in the distancing, the Note explains, is that the condemned Rosminian propositions were mostly from posthumous works that lacked an "... apparatus capable of defining the precise meaning of the expressions and concepts used." This statement is followed by the significant claim that "This favored a heterodox interpretation of Rosminian thought

as did the objective difficulty of interpreting Rosmini's categories, especially when they were read in a neo-Thomistic perspective" (no. 4).<sup>5</sup>

Arguing for the inner consistency of the magisterium's judgments, Ratzinger says that some of Rosmini's expressions and concepts are "ambiguous and equivocal." The concern of the 19th-century magisterium was twofold: to clarify erroneous and deviant interpretations of Rosminianism that were in contrast with the Catholic faith and to forestall the possibility that Rosmini's thought would be interpreted by secular philosophical culture as a support for transcendental, logical, and ontological idealism. Seeking to buttress the coherence of the differing magisterial decisions, Ratzinger states that the decree *Post obitum* "does not make any judgment that the author formally denied any truth of the faith, but rather presents the fact that the philosophical-theological system of Rosmini was considered insufficient and inadequate to safeguard and explain certain truths of Catholic doctrine" (no. 5).

Having explained some of the cultural factors leading to the condemnation, Ratzinger now concedes, "it has to be recognized that . . . rigorous scientific literature on the thought of Antonio Rosmini . . . has shown that the interpretations contrary to Catholic doctrine and faith do not really correspond to the authentic position of Rosmini" (no. 6). Therefore, he concludes, *Post obitum* and the condemnation of the "40 Propositions" taken from Rosmini's work "can now be considered superseded" (no. 7). This is the case because the meaning of the propositions does not correspond to the authentic position of Rosmini but to conclusions possibly drawn from his works. The condemnations do remain valid if the propositions are understood from an idealist or ontologist point of view, with a meaning contrary to the Catholic faith.

Only at the end of the Note, in its penultimate section, does the Doctrinal Congregation mention *Fides et ratio*, the likely source of the current reevaluation, stating that the encyclical names Rosmini "among the recent thinkers who achieved a fruitful exchange between philosophy and the word of God" (no. 8).<sup>6</sup> The Note closes lauding the courage and daring, "which at times bordered on a risky rashness" of Rosmini's speculative enterprise, undertaken for the sake of offering "new possibilities to Catholic doctrine in the face of the challenges of modern thought . . ." (no. 9).

When it is examined in its skeletal structure, the Note makes quick, but decisive turns: the 1854 decree *Dimittantur* dismisses Rosmini's works, thereby exonerating him, but, as Ratzinger carefully notes, it does *not* claim

<sup>5</sup> At this point, the French reads "dans la perspective néo-thomiste" while the German text has "in neuscholastischer Sicht."

<sup>6</sup> The Note adds that the encyclical itself (no. 74) did not intend to endorse every aspect of the thought of those who are enumerated.

that Rosmini's system could serve as a possible theological mediation of the Christian faith. This leaves elbow room for the condemnation in 1887 by *Post obitum*. However, the Prefect is again careful to say that *Post obitum* does *not* claim that Rosmini denied any truth of the Catholic faith. This leaves room once again, but this time for the rehabilitation of Rosmini in *Fides et ratio* and in the current Note. It is worth pointing out that the early exoneration left room for the condemnation while the later condemnation left room for the rehabilitation. This is certainly not impossible. Nonetheless, these interpretative moves provide useful lessons about the hermeneutics of magisterial statements.

Now there is much in this Note that will be of interest to Rosmini scholars and to historians of 19th-century thought. I would like to examine the document, however, not so much from a historical frame of reference, but from the perspective of theological epistemology, especially regarding issues such as theory-laden interpretation, the incommensurability of theological systems, the possibility of "masking" in theology, and the relationship between referential stability and socially reinforced paradigms. Some of this terminology is immediately recognizable as indebted to Thomas Kuhn. In the following sections, I examine some of the convergences and divergences between Kuhn's thought and the CDF's Note on Rosmini. Kuhn's original, ground-breaking book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, arguably one of the most important published in the 20th century, still has something to teach us and can, I believe, serve to clarify some of the fundamental issues raised in the Note, perhaps especially about claims not immediately visible on the surface.

### THEORY-LADEN INTERPRETATION

Kuhn's *opus magnum* is now over 40 years old. But his thought continues to spark controversy and the insights of his post-positivist manifesto continue to call forth important works of commentary and analysis.<sup>7</sup>

When *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was written, Kuhn was reacting against scientific positivism, an excessive Baconism that assumed that the scientific researcher *qua* knowing subject played a minimal role in empirical observation and subsequent interpretation. This position argued that the rigorous following of specific scientific methodology led ineluctably to verifiable truth. Kuhn characterized this point of view as untenably

<sup>7</sup> Two recent significant works on Kuhn, with particular attention to his epistemology, include Alexander Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000) and Steve Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000). Bird offers a detailed examination of Kuhn's life-long oeuvre while Fuller's work is a wide-ranging indictment of how Kuhn's philosophy was developed in tandem with a particular political program.

rationalistic, forgetful of the many elements that saturate the interpretative endeavor. In particular, Kuhn launched an assault against the “worldless” observer, seeking to show that understanding, indeed observation itself, is affected by many factors besides purely “objective” and “quantifiable” ones. Ultimately, Kuhn was contending that the natural sciences, no less than the *Geisteswissenschaften* were deeply marked by historicity, finitude, subjectivity, and a welter of other elements today often associated with hermeneutical and postmodern thought.

For Kuhn, the scientific researcher is never merely a passive receptor of “facts.” He or she is always an active and searching mediator and interpreter of what is observed. In this claim, Kuhn had been immediately preceded by Norwood Hanson, another thinker who had called into question the methodological positivism of science. In a significant passage, Hanson asserted: “To say that Tycho [Brahe] and Kepler, Simplicius and Galileo, Hook and Newton, Priestley and Lavoisier, . . . Heisenberg and Bohm all make the same observations but use them differently is too easy.”<sup>8</sup> For Hanson, and soon afterwards for Kuhn, this “layer-cake” type of reasoning (one layer being observation, the other theory) fails to recognize precisely the historical, sociological, and cultural elements that are integrally constitutive of the interpreter and inextricably intertwined with his or her observations. In fact, Kuhn argues, it is exactly the a priori, subjective commitment of the observer that allows certain “facts” to emerge, while others languish in obscurity. Phenomena that will not fit into the preconceived “box” [theory or paradigm] are often not seen at all.<sup>9</sup> Differing paradigms employed by individual interpreters are such that two scientists, even when observing the same data, can practice their trades “in different worlds” (150).

Kuhn famously calls this previously neglected dimension of science “theory-laden” interpretation, meaning, of course, that the scientist’s observations are already profoundly affected by a congeries of subjective elements. His point was simply that the encompassed and embedded subject is always surrounded by certain horizons, the forestructure of the inquiring interpreter, which inexorably and profoundly affect the researcher’s understanding of the “observed facts.” Because of the essential *Vorverständnis* of the scientist, Kuhn concluded that there was no “basic vocabulary consisting entirely of words which are attached to nature in ways

<sup>8</sup> Norwood Russell Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1958) 19.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970) 24. Kuhn’s original work was published in 1962 but he preferred that the later edition be cited. Page numbers in parentheses refer to this work.

that are unproblematic and, to the extent necessary, independent of theory.”<sup>10</sup>

To what extent do Kuhn’s theses illuminate the CDF’s recent Note revoking the condemnation of significant swaths of Rosmini’s work? There is much in the Note indicating accord with the principle of theory-ladenness. In essence, the document is admitting that two (speaking corporately about neo-Scholasticism) theological observers (and not merely observers, of course, but participants in Christian life and thought) lived “in different worlds” because of their a priori theoretical commitments. Indeed, Ratzinger concedes that the presuppositions of neo-Scholasticism, its inherited theoretical commitments, concepts, and terminology, occluded its ability to see those arguments of Rosmini which did not fit into the preconceptions of the neo-Scholastic “box” or paradigm. The Note makes clear that the theological observer (including the magisterial observer) no less than the scientific one, is subject to a particular *Denkstil*, to the horizons of finitude and preunderstanding which constitutively affect all theoretical construals.

Gerald McCool noted that Rosmini’s thought is strikingly similar to that of Bonaventure and is at a significant remove from the ontologism characteristic of a thinker like Vincenzo Gioberti, a philosopher with whom Rosmini was frequently lumped in theological manuals.<sup>11</sup> It is even more remarkable, then, that the Aristotelian-Thomistic presuppositions of neo-Scholasticism were so embedded that even a methodology benevolently approved by the Church, that of Bonaventure himself, went virtually unrecognized. This serves only to strengthen Kuhn’s point that the theory-laden subject is always profoundly wedded to conventions informing his or her interpretative conclusions.

The Note also gives support, seemingly, to Kuhn’s claim that there is no basic vocabulary “independent of theory.” Kuhn’s point, of course, is that the world is always articulated in and through our own terminological and taxonomical schemas. Once again, he is clearly differing with the positivist viewpoint that perceptual experiences are raw data, fixed occurrences, not depending in any way upon prior judgment or interpretation. By endorsing the plausibility of Rosmini’s thought, alongside that of neo-Scholasticism, the Note is also likely indicating its distance from a “theoretically unattached vocabulary.” Revelation is necessarily articulated from a variety of viewpoints as surely Nicaea, Trent, Vatican II, and the entire tradition witnesses. There exists no theory-independent observational language, only concepts and terminology that the Church has accepted, either ex-

<sup>10</sup> Kuhn, “Reflections on My Critics” in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970) 266.

<sup>11</sup> McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century* 124.

plicitly or implicitly, as properly mediating revelation. The CDF, then, acknowledges what Kuhn had argued for against Russell, seemingly Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, and the logical positivists, namely, the unlikelihood of a theory-free atomistic language.

Of course the problem with any wholesale endorsement of theory-laden interpretation (and the precise extent of Kuhn's endorsement is always the subject of debate) is that if every observer is indeed theory-laden, biased from the outset with his or her own preunderstanding, then how can "facts" or "criteria" serve to determine which theory is closer to the truth than another? On what basis is such a judgment made? Are all independent standards of rationality thereby undermined? It is these questions that give rise to reflection on the thorny relationship between "facts" and "theory."

#### FACT/THEORY

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Kuhn states clearly that one of the salient themes of his book will be to show that "fact and theory . . . are not categorically and permanently distinct" (66). And throughout his work, he is eager to demonstrate that a simple distinction between observable facts and their theoretical interpretation cannot be made, that we must beware of a naïve understanding of accessible "facta bruta." Kuhn is, for example, quick to reject the "layer-cake" thesis noted above, i.e., what changes with a new paradigm or conceptual system "is only the scientist's interpretation of observations that themselves are fixed once and for all by the nature of the environment and of the perceptual apparatus" (120). At the same time, he hardly argues for the claim that we are so entirely theory-laden that "facts" and "observations" are entirely protean and fluid. He insists, for example, that "observation and experience can and must drastically restrict the range of admissible scientific belief, else there would be no science" (4).

As with so much in Kuhn, commentators have understood him in a variety of ways. Alexander Bird, for example, interprets him sympathetically, while tending to support some distinction between fact and theory. Bird notes, for example, that Kuhn agrees with several elements of the earlier positivist program, one of which is that "judgment in science is founded on the observations we make (e.g., hypotheses are tested against observational evidence)."<sup>12</sup> Building on this, Bird argues that knowledge of the earth's rotation does not likely affect the vision one has at dawn. It still appears, on the observational level, that the sun is rising, as both Ptolemy and Tycho Brahe had argued. And for both Lavoisier and Priestley, the jar on the table still appears to be one filled with gas, although each scientist

<sup>12</sup> Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* 97.

has a different interpretation of the matter therein. Bird concludes that, in these cases at least, “there is little reason to think that . . . one’s theoretical beliefs or knowledge affect one’s perceptual experiences. There is, therefore, no general rule that perceptual experience is theory-laden or paradigm dependent.”<sup>13</sup> Bird’s fundamental intention here is not so much to argue against theory-ladenness as to emphasize that there can be no complete collapse of observation into theory. While recognizing the importance of preunderstanding, Bird also wishes also to make some clear and lasting distinction between the observational and theoretical levels.<sup>14</sup>

Anthony O’Hear, somewhat more alarmed about Kuhn than Bird, is concerned that Kuhn has in mind the entire dissolution of the “observation/theory” distinction. While certainly conceding that observation is always suffused by theory, O’Hear rejects what he takes to be the Kuhnian thesis that two observers cannot see the same thing. On the contrary, he claims, “theories presenting incompatible accounts of how the world is at the deep level can all agree at the observational level. . . .”<sup>15</sup> O’Hear insists that the theory-laden interpreter does not so dominate the “facts” that the “facts” themselves disappear, melting into various theoretical construals. He asserts that despite our different prejudices and histories, “our common humanity and common world makes communication possible across theoretical and cultural divides.”<sup>16</sup>

Finally, Karl Popper, an adamant critic of Kuhn, was convinced that the latter was undermining science altogether. For Popper, Kuhn’s adherence to the strong *Weltanschauung* position, i.e., to the claim that the theory-laden subject was reasoning from a determinative matrix of socio-cultural-ideological factors, made it impossible to speak of intersubjective data, shared facts or a common observational basis. Popper labeled this position the Myth of the Framework and he accuses Kuhn of being vic-

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 117–18.

<sup>14</sup> I wrote to Kuhn in 1991 asking him whether a version of this “softer” distinction between fact and theory was possibly attributable to him. He replied that he did not see how even this “soft” distinction significantly differed from the positivism he was trying to overcome (Correspondence of April, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Anthony O’Hear, *The Element of Fire: Science, Art and the Human World* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 51.

<sup>16</sup> O’Hear, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Oxford University, 1989) 103. O’Hear’s comment leads us, ultimately, to deeper metaphysical issues, such as the notion of a common human nature, which are not the subject of this article. Among the many contemporary thinkers who deny such a possibility, however, is Clifford Geertz, who concedes biological similarity “men can’t fly and pigeons can’t talk” but who warns against “wiring your theories into something called the Structure of Reason” or the “Constitution of Man” thereby insulating them from history and culture. See *Available Light* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000) 51–60.

timized by it. Popper does concede that “we are prisoners caught in the framework of our theories; our expectations; our past experiences; our language.” He adds, however: “But we are prisoners in a Pickwickian sense: if we try, we can break out of our framework at any time.” He concludes: “The Myth of the Framework is, in our time, the central bulwark of irrationalism. My counter-thesis is that it simply exaggerates a difficulty into an impossibility.”<sup>17</sup>

How does this debate over Kuhn’s intertwining of fact and theory shed light on the Note on Rosmini? Although he does not address the issue explicitly it is, I believe, legitimate to conclude that Ratzinger would certainly agree with Kuhn that the nature of observation is more complex than a positivistic understanding allows. Indeed, if there were not some clear co-inherence of “fact” and “theory” (transposed now into the terms of deposit of faith and theological/philosophical construal), Rosmini would not have been condemned in the first place. His orthodoxy would have been entirely transparent. What the Note is conceding is that, on further reflection, the 19th-century magisterium condemned, under pressure from neo-Scholasticism, not a Rosminian misunderstanding of the deposit of faith, but a theoretical construct with which it disagreed. Ratzinger is implicitly acknowledging that, unlike positivism, one cannot simply speak of a *depositum fidei* that is surgically removable from its theoretical construal. Rosmini’s synthesis of the Christian faith was profoundly interwoven with a philosophical point of view often unfamiliar, and considered threatening to neo-Scholasticism. In this instance, at least, the 19th-century magisterium was immobilized by its own theoretical preunderstanding.<sup>18</sup>

While the Note indicates areas of agreement with Kuhn on the circumsession of fact and theory, the Congregation would likely want to hold for at least some distinction between the two elements, perhaps somewhat akin to Bird’s position. So, for example, Bird argues that “if there is no general rule that observation is dependent, then it is possible that on some occasions at least observations will be able to decide between competing theories or be an appropriate measure of the quality of both an older and a

<sup>17</sup> Karl Popper, “Normal Science and Its Dangers,” in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* 56–57. Popper’s book on this theme, *The Myth of the Framework*, originally published in 1965, was reissued by Routledge in 1994. Popper is there responding not only to Kuhn but also to Wilfred Sellars’s polemic against the polar antithesis of the Myth of the Framework, what Sellars’s calls the Myth of the Given. Fuller rightly says that this latter “myth,” that the world is not “given” to us, has been turned into “a mantra of postmodernism” by Richard Rorty. See Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn* 268.

<sup>18</sup> As Gerald McCool has noted, “Rosmini’s neo-Scholastic adversaries impugned his orthodoxy during the 19th century and finally secured his condemnation by the Holy See” (“From Leo XIII to John Paul II: Continuity and Development,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 40 [June, 2000] 176 n. 12).

newer paradigm.”<sup>19</sup> Perhaps a better formulation, but preserving Bird’s fundamental insight, is to recognize the importance of subjectivity for all notice acts while, at the same time asserting that subjectivity is not so determinative of thought that one cannot make comparisons between paradigms based on observations, presuming, in the process, at least some fact/theory distinction.<sup>20</sup> If, theologically speaking, one were to collapse *tout court* the fundamentals of the Christian faith into particular theoretical construals of them, one would be left only with incommensurable theories having no common touchstone, criteria, or standards by which they could be evaluated. There would exist only incommensurable, independent but discontinuous, standards of theological rationality. While it is clear that Rosmini’s philosophical system is quite different from neo-Scholasticism, a complete collapse of facts into theory would make it impossible to judge the adequacy of either on the basis of a common measure. Ecumenical agreements would also founder on this understanding of incommensurability. This lack of a common measure, of course, is at the root of Popper’s criticism of Kuhn’s philosophy of science. Whether Kuhn himself holds for such a complete collapse is a debatable point. After all, as noted above, he insists at the very outset of his book that “observation and experience can and must drastically restrict the range of admissible scientific belief else there would be no science” (4).

It is one thing to admit that such a distinction is possible; it is altogether another matter to carry it out. What Kuhn is certainly saying, and what the Note is irrefragably admitting, is that *even the distinction* between fact and theory (in science) and the deposit of faith and its theoretical construal (in theology) is a difficult maneuver, certainly not reducible to mathematical precision. The Rosmini case, if nothing else, shows how very difficult it is to distinguish, even notionally, the Christian tradition from a particular formulation of it. The Note makes clear as well how far the CDF is from the Popperian position that the “myth of the framework” makes of us Pickwickian prisoners; that we can “break out” of it at any time. The predecessor body to the CDF could hardly “step out of its framework” without difficulty, leading precisely to the condemnation of the 40 propositions. Although it would likely agree with Popper, then, that such a distinction is required, the recent Note is much more sophisticated than Popper with his rather hasty dismissal of the problem.<sup>21</sup>

In so many words, the Note admits that the process of determining the

<sup>19</sup> Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* 118.

<sup>20</sup> Bird tries to develop a new way of looking at the observation/theory dilemma that shows promise.

<sup>21</sup> See my “Rahner, Popper and Kuhn: A Note on Some Critical Parallels in Science and Theology,” *Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1993) 83–89.

truth of a new conceptual system takes time, precisely because there is no algorithmic formula by which the deposit of faith and its theoretical construal may be distinguished. As Newman pointed out, Catholicism must be dynamic because the “vital element” in doctrine needs disengaging from what is “foreign or temporary.” And this process, of harmonizing and assimilating the essential from the marginal takes time involving “the voice of the Schola Theologorum and the whole Church diffusive.”<sup>22</sup> Not only does this take time; it occasionally causes friction—as the entire Church, and ultimately the magisterium, decides, as Vincent of Lérins had already said in the fifth century, what is a *profectus fidei* and what is a *permutatio fidei*, what is *sensus alienus* and what is *in eodem sensu* with the deposit of faith. Oscar Cullmann, commenting on Vatican II soon after it ended, went to the heart of the matter: It is useless, he claimed, to make a distinction between form and content if we cannot say what is the form and what is the content.<sup>23</sup> But Cullmann, I believe, was too pessimistic. While there is no precise equation for determining this distinction, it is something that happens in the Church slowly, under the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit.

#### INCOMMENSURABILITY

Kuhn’s claims about theory-laden interpretation and the fact/theory co-inherence give rise to further assertions concerning the incommensurability of theories or paradigms, a point that has been touched on briefly above. While the precise meaning of incommensurability is still debated (like so much else in Kuhn’s work) one widely accepted understanding is that in varying construals of reality there exist profound differences in perception, standards of evaluation and the meaning of key theoretical terms. Kuhn, as noted, goes so far as to say that those with incompatible paradigms, such as Priestley and Lavoisier, Einstein and Newton, live “in different worlds.” What are the ramifications of paradigmatic incommensurability?

Kuhn’s critics, as expected, have little use for the idea. Anthony O’Hear is concerned that incommensurability, built as it is on the twin pillars of theory-laden interpretation and the commingling of fact and theory, leads ineluctably to the incomparability and, indeed, the mutual incomprehensibility of theories or paradigms. This reading conceives of incommensurability as a series of incommunicable theoretical structures, such that, O’Hear asserts: “Western science look(s) like a rationally unjustifiable series of lurches from one closed theoretical and perceptual framework to

<sup>22</sup> See Ian Kerr, “Newman, the Councils and Vatican II,” *Communio* 28 (2001) 708–28.

<sup>23</sup> O. Cullmann, “Sind unsere Erwartungen erfüllt?” in *Sind die Erwartungen erfüllt?*, ed. K. Rahner, O. Cullmann, H. Fries (Munich: Max Hueber, 1966) 41.

another with no possibility of mutual communication or evaluation”<sup>24</sup> Howard Sankey has much the same opinion, namely that truly incommensurable theories render impossible mutual understanding and make all standards of appraisal internal to particular theories, paradigms and lexicons.<sup>25</sup>

Of course the question is, does theoretical incommensurability necessarily imply totally incommunicable cultural/linguistic systems incomparable with others? Bird claims that this is not the case, arguing that incommensurability does not mean that theories or paradigms are incomparable or mutually incomprehensible; rather, he says, it means only that one cannot be rationally compelled to choose one system over another.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Paul Hoyningen-Huene, an astute interpreter of the Kuhnian corpus, claims that, for Kuhn, theories are incommensurable only in certain ways, e.g., the meaning of “planet” changed in the Ptolemaic and Copernican systems because in the latter, the sun and moon were no longer planets and earth was now so classified. This hardly means that theories cannot be compared or that there are no continuities between incommensurable systems.<sup>27</sup>

But, if incommensurability is taken in this mild form, what does it mean to say, as Kuhn did in 1962, that, after a scientific revolution, “the world changes.” Surely this image implies more discontinuity than continuity; it seems to indicate a totally different way of understanding reality. Kuhn admitted that he was unable to explain precisely the meaning of the assertion that after a revolution scientists practice their trade in different worlds, but he insists that we must learn to make sense of these kinds of claims (121).

The debate on incommensurability is broad and deep, with Kuhn’s commentators and epigones taking a wide variety of positions. From our perspective, however, the primary point is to ask how this term, and the subsequent debate over it, can shed light on the recent Note of the CDF.

If by incommensurability one means differences in key theoretical terminology and standards of evaluation, then it can be said, conclusively, that Rosmini’s thought is incommensurable with that of neo-Scholasticism. The same could be said, of course, of the thought of Newman and Möhler, both of whom stayed at arm’s length from the neo-Scholastic revival. The Congregation’s Note clearly admits the incommensurability of the two systems under discussion and concedes that the one theological construal, framed

<sup>24</sup> O’Hear, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* 75.

<sup>25</sup> Howard Sankey, *The Incommensurability Thesis* (Avebury, England: Aldershot, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* 149.

<sup>27</sup> See Paul Hoyningen-Huene, “Kuhn’s Conception of Incommensurability,” *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 21 (1990) 481–92.

by its own theory-laden presuppositions, failed to see the truth of the other. The entire Note, in fact, is a witness to the claim that even the magisterium can be so committed to a particular *Denkstil* that it cannot recognize another, incommensurable one, as protective of the *depositum fidei*. Rosmini was asked to satisfy criteria and standards idiosyncratic to one paradigm, while thinking and writing in the lexicon of another.

Of incommensurability, then, there is no doubt. A further question is: if two theories are not to be entirely incommunicable and incomparable, i.e., radically incommensurable, what then allows for continuity between them, what accounts for sameness amidst difference? Hoyningen-Huene argues that Kuhn insists that any new paradigm must conserve most of the problem-solving ability of the old one, i.e., at least *some* of the empirical and perceptual data can, in fact, be immediately compared.<sup>28</sup> Sankey, an ardent opponent of radical incommensurability, argues that there can be significant differences among theories, as regards terminological and conceptual style, but asserts that, ultimately, there must be some referential stability among them. By this he means that even though theoretical statements may have considerable semantic variance, they must, in the last analysis, share a common reference.

While agreeing with much of Kuhn, the Note, in a mode similar to Sankey, would likely place emphasis on referential continuity. So while the Note clearly sanctions pluralism, even incommensurable pluralism, with its linguistic and conceptual variance, and while two researchers may indeed live “in different worlds,” entertaining very different theoretical construals, the indubitable assumption is that there is maintained a certain referential stability, a fundamental commensurability with the *depositum fidei*.

Of course what is not discussed in the Rosmini document, but a central lesson to be drawn from it is the time it takes to judge a new theory properly, given that it may be incommensurable with prevailing paradigms. It is always difficult to determine whether a particular articulation of Christian truth, incommensurable as it may be with prevailing paradigms, is in fact a legitimate mediation of revelation. Only now is it clear that there is no rationally compelling reason to reject Rosminian thought on the basis of the Church’s two primary criteria, Scripture and tradition. The Note, then, stands as a monument to that process.

In rehabilitating Rosmini, the CDF could also have brought out that even if two incommensurable systems are equally commensurable with the deposit of faith, the fact remains that new frames of reference will necessarily uncover different ways of “seeing” revelation. New perspectives, shadings, and points of view will be uncovered among paradigms that are deeply incommensurable with each other. This is precisely the *chiaroscuro*

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 489.

effect of knowing, constitutively related to the socio-cultural horizons of human subjectivity. It is precisely through such conceptual pluralism that doctrine develops, that new elements of the faith, previously obscurely seen, are now brought to light.

In one sense, this Note on Rosmini may be seen as the unfolding of precisely what Vatican II intended in those neuralgic passages in which theological pluralism was warmly endorsed. The pluralism endorsed by the Council had been called for by the *nouvelle théologie*, a movement that encountered problems like those of Rosmini, some 60 years later, by similarly running afoul of the conceptual hegemony of neo-Scholasticism. This pluralism has stood as the foundation of various ecumenical agreements, such as the Joint Declaration on Justification. John Paul II has often been a defender of it both in his ecumenical statements and again in *Fides et ratio*. As with the Note on Rosmini, all of the documents strive for the same goal: affirming a variety of perspectives, lexicons, and conceptual systems in and through which the central Christian mysteries are affirmed.

### THEORY-CHOICE

One of Kuhn's enduring questions is this: inasmuch as several theories can sometimes account for all of the available facts or evidence, why then is one theory chosen over another? It is here that Kuhn is at his best, invoking the non-cognitive factors involved in theory-choice. Kuhn argued that there is often no rationally compelling reason to choose one theory over another; it is frequently the case that neither theory is rationally decisive. Two positions cannot offer an independent arbiter that would irrefragably clinch the argument between them. Socio-cultural-ideological reasons here intrude upon theory-choice, thereby giving the lie to the claim, against positivism, that such choice is simply a cognitive and methodological matter. Kuhn argues that one theory is often preferred to another because of conative rather than intellectual factors such as one's attachment to a particular system, the time one has invested in it, its importance for one's peers, the methodology acceptable to the professional guild, the political allegiances of thinkers, their class interests, indoctrination, and so the list continues.

Kuhn reinforces this emphasis on the volitional and projective, rather than purely cognitive aspects of theory-choice, when he makes statements such as a new paradigm "cannot be made logically or even probabilistically compelling for those who refuse to step into the circle" (94). And, the "competition between paradigms is not the sort of battle that can be resolved by proofs" (148). Kuhn intensifies this emphasis even further when he adduces political maxims such as "might makes right" to explain an allegiance to a particular paradigm. It is at this point that he has been

accused of sheer voluntarism and even of irrationality, for it now seems as if the “winning” paradigm is simply the result of purely ideological rather than evidential forces. But is theory-choice simply the result of projective, non-cognitive factors? Is paradigm change, ultimately, driven by ideology, rationality or both?

Fuller thinks that Kuhn has given altogether too great a weight to ideology over rationality. The danger in Kuhn’s thought, he argues, is that the winning paradigm “depended entirely on which of the contesting sides turns out to have the most followers.” The most important moment in any inquiry, how best to proceed, “was removed from the realm of rational deliberation to an apparently blind process . . . the so-called *Planck effect*.”<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, it must be remembered that Kuhn insisted that new paradigms are likely to succeed “if the new paradigm displays a quantitative precision strikingly better than its older competitor” (153). And, as Bird points out, Kuhn was somewhat ambiguous on theory-choice and continued to distance himself from the view that all theory-choice is reducible to power and politics.<sup>30</sup>

The argument on this issue will no doubt continue, but at least it may be said with certainty that Kuhn helped to show the methodological proximity of the natural and social sciences inasmuch as both were subject to strong ideological and not merely evidential forces. Parallels here with the recent Note on Rosmini loom large.

In the present Note, the CDF admits the importance of non-cognitive factors in theory-choice when it lists the “historical-cultural factors that influenced this distancing [from Rosmini] which culminated in the condemnation of the . . . Decree *Post obitum* of 1887” and concedes that the promotion of Thomism by *Aeterni Patris* “created the premises for a nega-

<sup>29</sup> Fuller explains that the “Planck effect” means that scientific truth does not triumph by convincing opponents, but because opponents die. See Fuller, 289 n.59. For Lonergan on the “Planck effect” see *Insight* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958) 526. Fuller, a champion of critical rationality, sees the Enlightenment spirit dampened in the research of Kuhn. He is irritated by one author’s comparison of Kuhn to Galileo, to which he responds: “there is simply no evidence that Kuhn ever carried himself in Galilean opposition to the scientific orthodoxy of his day. . . . Kuhn’s intellectual demeanor is closer to Bellarmine’s jesuitical circumspection” (303). Fuller is not arguing, as many do, against Kuhn’s alleged relativism, but against a kind of scientific authoritarianism present in his understanding of paradigm-based reasoning which is, at base, anti-democratic.

<sup>30</sup> Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* 271. One of Kuhn’s fundamental theses was that paradigms are challenged when they develop too many anomalies, when they are incapable of taking account of all the evidence. The continual addition of epicycles to the Ptolemaic model, making it circuitous and complicated, was one reason a challenger was developed. This itself militates against the claim that, for Kuhn, only sociocultural reasons are involved in theory-choice.

tive judgment . . . of Rosmini” (no. 4). Ratzinger is clearly agreeing, therefore, that a socially reinforced way of thinking played an important part, even if not the only one, in the proscription of a large part of Rosmini’s work. Ultimately, there is little doubt that the battle between Rosmini and the neo-Scholastics in the 19th century was one decided more on non-cognitive bases rather than on than strictly rational ones, perhaps even coming close to the concern that Kuhn had voiced about science, “might makes right.”<sup>31</sup>

But while the CDF makes clear in the Note that ideological forces certainly had a role in choosing the “winning paradigm,” it is clear as well that, generally speaking, evidential factors must be involved. Ratzinger would claim, not without reason, that even if non-cognitive elements are involved in theory-choice, and were certainly so involved in the Rosmini case, there are also other constitutive elements, such as Scripture and tradition, especially the creedal statements of the Church which, in many instances, serve to provide ultimately determinative criteria. The point is that standards of appraisal cannot be entirely internal to a particular paradigm or lexical structure; there exist enduring standards of theological rationality that cannot be discarded. Even here one makes this claim with a certain reserve inasmuch as a wide berth for theological interpretation must be allowed. This is, after all, the point of theological distinctions such as theological notes, the hierarchy of truths, the hierarchy of ecumenical councils, of sacraments, and so on.<sup>32</sup> In addition, creedal statements themselves, as well as other dogmatic assertions, are open to further interpretation. Indeed, every theological and historical development in the hermeneutics of dogmatic statements attests to this fact. At the same time, even when working within such a hermeneutical approach, one stands at some distance from a very strong interpretation of the role of ideology in theory-choice, such that evidential factors are severely limited.

In theology, criteria are necessary, otherwise there would be no possibility of distinguishing between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, anymore than between science and non-science. It would simply be a matter of remaining a bien-pensant member of the proper circle. Nonetheless, as Kuhn has shown with regard to science, and as the Note had conceded with regard to

<sup>31</sup> Walter Kasper, for example, writing on *Fides et ratio* and with specific reference to Rosmini, asks whether the magisterium’s interventions in philosophical matters “were influenced by other passions than the love of truth; ultimately, whether they were made in a way which—at least to the contemporary mind—could hardly be described as encouraging” (“Magisterium’s Interventions in Philosophical Matters,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition [April 28, 1999] 5–6).

<sup>32</sup> Yves Congar, “The Notion of ‘Major’ or ‘Principal’ Sacraments” in *The Sacraments in General*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx and B. Willems, *Concilium* 31 (New York: Paulist, 1968) 21–32.

theology, one must be careful that, when proscribing a theory, it is done, in fact, on the basis of cognitive reasons and not simply cultural, sociological, or ideological ones. And, of course, as has been noted, such discrimination is an elongated process taking account of the liturgy, creeds, the *sensus fidelium*, *schola theologorum*, and an entire range of theological *loci*.

Is Kuhn right, then, when he says that the decision for a new paradigm “can only be made on faith” (158)? One can certainly see what Kuhn is groping for here, namely, given several legitimate theories, theories that have accounted for a good part of the evidence, it is difficult to single out specific and determinative criteria for choosing one theory over another. On the other hand, it is not likely that we choose one over the other on blind faith, but because of an “informed and reasoned faith,” i.e., because one appears to handle Scripture, tradition, experience, and other dimensions more carefully, clearly, and relevantly. Is our choice of one over another rationally decisive, in the sense that one can adduce a triumphant proof that another cannot? This is not usually the case.

For example, one can invoke the classic axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. This affirmation, or something close to it, is found in Cyprian, the Council of Florence, at Vatican II, and throughout the tradition. Can one choose among theories utilizing this axiom with absolute clarity? It is not likely that this is possible; rather, a decision is made that one use of the axiom is preferable, let us say the Rahnerian one, because it preserves many elements of the tradition in and through diachronic theory-change.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, Kuhn uses the language of “winning paradigm,” and, once again, his aim is understandable. Kuhn says that, for a variety of reasons, one paradigm eventually becomes dominant during which time there is a period of “normal” as opposed to “revolutionary” science. In theology, for reasons both cognitive and ideological, neo-Scholasticism was a hegemonic paradigm for a long time. Since Vatican II sanctioned a legitimate theological pluralism, no methodology has as yet emerged as a “winner,” at least in the same sense that neo-Scholasticism did. For a time after the council, and still today, transcendental Thomism, with roots in Maréchal and Blondel, thereafter developed with unique accents by Lonergan and Rahner, seemed to consolidate many elements of the tradition and contemporary thought, handling several of the “anomalies” that had plagued neo-Thomism: the relationship between nature and grace; the salvation of non-Christians; the “natural” orientation of men and women to God; and the constitutive epistemological dimensions of human subjectivity and his-

<sup>33</sup> Francis Sullivan has examined the ways in which the axiom has been historically and theologically understood in *Salvation Outside the Church?* (New York: Paulist, 1992). For a quite different claim about this principle, see Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997).

tory. As is well known, Heideggerian and postmodern thinkers have called the very foundations of this method into question. Whether, in fact, there needs to be a “winning” paradigm at all is a different issue. The central point here is simply that, as both Kuhn and the Rosmini case testify, theory-choice is a complex process, not easily reducible to blatantly obvious factors.

### MASKING

One element that Kuhn exposes with unremitting vigor is the phenomenon of “masking.” By this he means that the textbook tradition in science, eager to establish science’s credibility, its linear progress and continuity, tends to mute or suppress the competition that historically occurred among divergent paradigms. The unhappy result of such masking is that the history of theory-change or conceptual mutability is either ignored or glossed over. The impression is then given that the “winning” paradigm was really the one visible all along to any objective observer of the obvious and incontrovertible “facts.”

The parallels here with the history of theology are difficult to miss. Theological manuals, while carefully illuminating the struggles between heresy and orthodoxy, rarely, if ever, showed the struggles between different incommensurable paradigms to succeed each other. One need not refer again to the resistance by the University of Paris to Aristotelian categories in the 13th century. Or the Reformation attempt to balance Scholasticism with existential approaches. Closer to our own times, Henri Bouillard’s famous work sought precisely an unmasking of conceptual mutability in Catholic theology on the question of grace and sanctification.<sup>34</sup> The reaction to Bouillard was so intense, at least in part, because of a desire to prolong an untenable Whig history, the fiction of conceptual immutability. Garrigou-Lagrange invoked a metaphor from the history of science, claiming, in essence, that the *nouvelle théologie*, given its desire to seek new linguistic formulations (especially regarding the language of causality in justification), sought to relegate neo-Scholasticism to the ranks of a now surpassed Ptolemaic system.<sup>35</sup> And, although it certainly raised some legitimate issues, *Humani generis* was fundamentally a reaction to the unveiling of conceptual mutability and to the parallel call for theological plurality.

<sup>34</sup> *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d’Aquin: étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), especially 211–24. Among the many then-controversial points in Bouillard’s conclusions is his assertion that “theology is linked to its times, linked to history—at the same time exposed to their risks and so capable of progress” (223).

<sup>35</sup> R. Garrigou-Lagrange, “Vérité et immutabilité du dogme,” *Angelicum* 24 (1947) 124–39, at 132.

Of course, the temptation to mask paradigm-switches and theory-choices in theology is particularly intense insofar as the content of the discipline is God's revelation which, ipso facto, can be regarded as immutable and eternal (even in conceptual form). And while the issuance of *Aeterni Patris* may certainly be defended on the grounds that the Church needed to meet the onslaught of rationalism and speculative idealism that struck at the heart of the Church's historical and incarnational reality, its effect was to suppress other ways of examining the mystery of faith. This was to have a deleterious effect not only on Rosmini, but on theology in general and on the very possibility of ecumenical involvement by the Catholic Church. Again, this kind of conceptual monism was to end with Vatican II, and its effective endorsement of pluralism, opening the way for both greater theological creativity and full-throated ecumenism. The present Note displays the merit of forthrightly admitting that the hegemonic and dominant neo-Scholastic paradigm masked the truth of Rosmini's theology. Of course, this very occurrence will no doubt alert the CDF to similar possibilities in the future.

#### REALISM

Kuhn's alleged idealism has been a continuous topic of debate in the 40 years that have succeeded the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. What are the salient issues? Virtually every commentator is in agreement that Kuhn is not a full-blown idealist, in the sense of denying the existence of, to use an unfortunate phrase, a "mind-independent" world. On the other hand, virtually all are similarly unanimous on the assertion that two "worlds" are operative in Kuhn's thought, one world which is independent of theory, and another which changes with theory, that is to say, between the world in itself and the phenomenal world, the one that is constituted by Kant's "totality of appearances." The two-world theory helps to explain Kuhn's assertion that "though the world does not change with a change of paradigm, the scientist afterward works in a different world" (121). This second world is the constructed one of the theory-laden scientist.

Hoyningen-Huene finds strong affinities between Kuhn and Kant noting, however, that while the Kantian transcendental nature is stable, Kuhn has continually referred to himself as a "dynamic Kantian" since at least 1979.<sup>36</sup> Several thinkers have also called attention to Kuhn's reliance on Wittgenstein claiming that there are deep affinities between their posi-

<sup>36</sup> For Kuhn's close relationship to Kant, see Paul Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993) 31–42. See also Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* 129.

tions.<sup>37</sup> Of course, Kuhn's celebration in several nonfoundationalist quarters, and his philosophical affinities with Wittgenstein, Quine, and Sellars is understandable given his position, stated rather bluntly in *The Road Since Structure*, that "what is fundamentally at stake is . . . the correspondence theory of truth." "It is that notion . . . that I'm persuaded must vanish together with foundationalism. What replaces it will still require a strong conception of truth, but not, except in the most trivial sense, correspondence truth." And again, "I earlier said that we must learn to get along together without anything like a correspondence theory of truth."<sup>38</sup>

Bird hazards that Kuhn's rejection of both the correspondence theory of truth and of foundationalism in general is of a piece with his anti-realism. Why does Kuhn reject them? His complaint is "we could not *know* of the existence of such a match [between our theories and the world], because we could not have theory-less access to reality." Kuhn's anti-realism is not, primarily, a consequence of his rejection of the correspondence theory; it is instead caused by his "concern about our access to reality."<sup>39</sup> Hoyningen-Huene echoes this idea arguing that for Kuhn, "it's essentially meaningless to talk of what there really is, beyond (or outside) of all theory. . . . It's impossible to see how talk of a 'match' between theories and absolute, or theory-free, purely object-sided reality could have any discernible meaning."<sup>40</sup> Kuhn clinches the argument with his comment: "There is, I think, no theory-independent way to reconstruct phrases like 'really there'; the notion of a match between the ontology of a theory and its 'real' counterpart in nature now seems to me illusive in principle" (206).

<sup>37</sup> For Kuhn's debt to Wittgenstein, see *Structure* 44–45. Fuller emphasizes Kuhn's philosophical indebtedness to Quine on 391 n. 24. Grouping Kuhn with nonfoundationalist thinkers like Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars, and others seeking to overcome "Cartesian anxiety" is a theme that was fully explored by Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988). More recently, Trish Glazebrook's work, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science* (New York: Fordham University, 2000) makes useful points comparing Kuhn and Heidegger, especially with regard to the relationship between thinking and technology.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Road Since Structure* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000) 95, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* 237. Bird claims that Kuhn's arguments against correspondence have a distinct similarity to Otto Neurath's enduring image that science is like a boat that must constantly be rebuilt at sea: "There is no dry dock that allows rebuilding from the keel up" (ibid. 234). This nautical image may remind some readers of Habermas' similar claim that reason is "a rocking hull—but it does not go under in the sea of contingencies, even if shuddering in the high seas is the only mode in which it 'copes' with these contingencies" (Jürgen Habermas, *Post-metaphysical Thinking*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1992] 44).

<sup>40</sup> Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing Scientific Revolutions* 263–64.

These comments help explain Kuhn's commitments to "two worlds," the world in itself and the phenomenal one available to us. At the same time, they point to a continuing concern that truth and falsity, for Kuhn, are simply relative to particular paradigms. It is not clear how the "world" serves as a norm for theoretical truth. If truth becomes purely intra-lexical, there are no independent standards of evaluation by which a theory may be judged. Bird argues that Kuhn rejects such universal standards for there is no "Archimedean platform outside of history, outside of time and space."<sup>41</sup> Bird wonders, however, if this attack on realism is not tantamount to a deep, metaphysical form of skepticism, or given Kuhn's lexicon-relative notion of truth, even of relativism. Kuhn himself, it should be noted, comes quite close to relativism in his original work, without, however, fully committing himself to it (207). Needless to add, there has been a pitched debate for several decades now, spawned by hermeneutics and postmodernism, concerning truth, our access to it, the "yield" of knowing, and so on. The point here is simply that Kuhn was an early and influential thinker on these issues and his thought continues to have penetrating influence.<sup>42</sup>

In the CDF's Note, the issue of realism is not explicitly treated and it is only mentioned here because so many of the debates surrounding Kuhn's other theses involve the question of his alleged idealism. I think one can safely say that the CDF has realistic metaphysical commitments, given that, for example, the encyclical *Fides et ratio*, placed a strong emphasis on both epistemological realism and the renewal of metaphysics. I do think, however, that the Note shows the Doctrinal Congregation adopting a more sophisticated version of realism. Human subjectivity is now truly constitutive of the world and this is reflected in a stronger emphasis on the constructive and ideological elements of knowing. The Note admits, both explicitly and implicitly, that the world is co-constituted and co-mediated by the knower. It is precisely historicity, finitude, and ideology, indeed all of the horizons conveniently grouped under hermeneutical or postmodern thought, that have a profound influence on noetic acts. In this sense, at least, there are elements of convergence between the Note and Kuhn's work.

Of course, for theology, the question comes back to this: To what extent do our doctrinal articulations grasp states of affairs? Do they truly lay hold of, at least in some limited sense, the mysteries of faith? What is their cognitive status? It is here that the CDF and Kuhn likely part company. The Doctrinal Congregation would no doubt argue that the theology's

<sup>41</sup> Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* 254.

<sup>42</sup> On the relationship between Kuhn and several hermeneutical and postmodern trends, see the insightful article of Tian Yu Cao, "The Kuhnian Revolution and the Postmodernist Turn in the History of Science," *Physis* 30 (1993) 476–504.

formal object, the God who manifests himself, is known by us, with, of course, all of the qualifications that must be attached to such limited knowing. The Kantian “totality of appearances” would not suffice for it would leave us with perceptions and paradigms, often conflicting, but without certain referential stability.

It is undoubtedly true that Ratzinger intends to defend the fact that church doctrine accurately, if certainly not exhaustively, articulates revelation; that doctrine is, in fact, God’s manifestation to humanity now linguistically articulated. The CDF, then, would likely agree with Bird who argues that “knowledge of the truth of a theory can be had without some independent, theory-less access to reality with which to compare the theory.”<sup>43</sup> After all, the very point of any theory is to provide us with access to truth and reality.

A further question might be: If the magisterium is committed to realism, then is there progress toward truth given the wide variety of legitimate conceptual systems that flourish in contemporary theology? Kuhn tells us, in his 1969 Postscript: “I do not doubt . . . that Newton’s mechanics improves on Aristotle’s and that Einstein’s improves on Newton’s as instruments for puzzle solving. But I can see in their succession no coherent direction of ontological development” (206). For Kuhn, theories help to solve puzzles in the phenomenal world, the world of appearances; they tell us virtually nothing about the world in itself. He would no doubt add that the world in itself is irrelevant because we have no theory-free access to it. One can understand from this citation why Popper relentlessly opposed Kuhn, fearing that for the latter science was only an exercise in solving phenomenal puzzles, not a movement toward increasing verisimilitude.<sup>44</sup>

Are theological theories, then, simply puzzle solvers? Do they tell us something about the world, about God? And what of theories that clearly supplant others, thinking now not so much of Rosmini but of the relationship between neo-Scholasticism and transcendental Thomism? Bird makes an attractive case for what he calls “convergent realism,” noting that while it would be foolish to maintain that all successions of theories converge on the truth in all respects, there is evidence that this does happen rather frequently. Bird is considering here, using Kuhn’s own example, the significant advance in truth of Newton’s mechanics over that of Aristotle’s and Einstein’s over Newton’s: “the origin of anomalies is that the world is

<sup>43</sup> Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* 229. He argues: “Even if truth is a matter of a match between statement and reality, it does not follow that knowing a statement to be true requires a direct comparison of both together” (234). Bird offers inferential reasoning as another possibility.

<sup>44</sup> For a well-told journalistic account of Popper’s disagreement with Wittgenstein over precisely this point of the “yield” of philosophy, see David Edmonds and John Eidinow, *Wittgenstein’s Poker* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

not exactly as our theories say it is. . . . There must be a way things are that is “beyond” theory.”<sup>45</sup> Theologically speaking, this would be the recognition that new theories achieving widespread ecclesial (including magisterial) acceptance likely achieve at least some elements of progress and converge on some dimensions of theological truth.

Even though it was not a central concern of the Note, the CDF’s document, by endorsing the thought of Rosmini, gives impetus to the question of truth and realism as grasped in and through a variety of theological frameworks.

### CONCLUSIONS

Although several conclusions drawn from the Note on Rosmini may be found in my article, a few further words are in order. I am not aware of another magisterial document which makes this kind of concession, namely that the presuppositions of the magisterium, its theory-ladenness, clouded its ability to recognize the truth of a philosopher/theologian’s teaching, leading first to the condemnation of significant portions of this thinker’s work and then to his subsequent exoneration. Something like this concession of partially myopic theory-ladenness is at work on the part of both Catholics and Protestants in all bilateral ecumenical dialogues, but not quite on the scale as with the present Rosmini admission. One may speculate that this is a phenomenon that was envisaged by Vatican II when it spoke of the “continual reformation” of which the Church has need even “in the formulation of doctrine” which, nonetheless, “must be distinguished from the deposit of faith itself” (*Unitatis redintegratio* no. 6). The Note on Rosmini, then, is a denial, in the line of Vatican II and *Mysterium ecclesiae*, of a “worldless” magisterium, i.e., a magisterium unaffected by the horizons of historicity and linguisticity that encompass all interpreters. This emphasis on the variety of elements saturating all knowing supplements an epistemological dimension largely missing from *Fides et ratio*.

The Note’s admission with regard to Rosmini is also a continued affirmation of the importance of theological pluralism and conceptual mutability, although always within the context of referential stability. Vatican II had endorsed this point of view in well-known passages, and a wide variety of magisterial documents has continued this endorsement. Ecumenical agreements as well constitute a theological witness to incommensurable frameworks that make a common affirmation of faith. These mutable frameworks, which nonetheless refer to a common *depositum fidei*, are perhaps one aspect of what Newman had in mind when making his oft-quoted comment “to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed

<sup>45</sup> Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* 229.

often.” Kerr points out that for Newman, this means that the continuing identity of an idea, the Christian faith, is only assured when there is change and development; in order to remain the same, an idea itself must be subject to generation and evolution.<sup>46</sup> In the 1940s, Bouillard referred to this as the “law of the incarnation,” i.e., our historical immersion will necessarily result in conceptual mutability, while nonetheless preserving, although always from a new, revealing and, therefore, genetically progressive perspective, a fundamental affirmation of faith. Newman and Bouillard represent a reprise of what Vincent of Lérins had said in the fifth century, namely that the Church changes, indeed, *plane et maximus*, but always with an evangelical caution, which, when understood properly, is not what Rahner rightly called “theological mummification” but is nothing more than insistence on the identity of Christ and the Gospel: *dicas nove non dicas nova*.

Social and cultural constructivism, then, is necessarily admitted in theological epistemology, while at the same time maintaining the importance of a fundamental stability.<sup>47</sup> This demands that there is a significant element of continuity along with the requisite discontinuity of differing terminological and taxonomical matrices. The clear lesson from the Rosmini case is that determining the extent of continuity and discontinuity is a difficult process, involving theologians, the “church diffusive,” a variety of essential *loci*, which must not be short-circuited, and ultimately the magisterium. Determining that which is *in eodem sensu* and that which is *in alieno sensu* with the deposit of faith is not immediately transparent, especially given all of the elements saturating every human act of knowing. John Paul II’s statement regarding the Galileo case, Kuhn’s apposite comments on “masking,” and now the Note on Rosmini all remind us of the non-cognitive elements involved in theory choice; they remind us as well of the dangers of precipitously determining the boundaries of theological truth.

The Note on Rosmini has implications for ecumenism as well. If the present magisterium clearly admits that it was difficult for its 19th-century predecessor to make a distinction between the deposit of faith and one theoretical construal of it (a construal strongly influenced by Bonaventure), then surely this problem is compounded when reading those who

<sup>46</sup> Kerr, “Newman, the Councils and Vatican II” [cited above in n. 22] 722–23.

<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting that a veteran ecumenist like Geoffrey Wainwright, in his Père Marquette Lecture, registers some dissatisfaction with both Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) and K. Rahner’s and H. Fries’s *Unity of the Churches—An Actual Possibility* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) because, while both books make advances, their authors are less than clear on whether an acceptable “incommensurability” between churches extends even to substantive matters. See Wainwright, *Is the Reformation Over?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2000) 22–26.

write and think outside of traditional Catholic frameworks. This is the point Avery Dulles has made when endorsing Congar's call for a re-reception of church doctrine, i.e., of re-appropriating doctrine in terms of a fuller reflection on Scripture and tradition, thereby seeking to overcome the limitations of controverted doctrinal formulations.<sup>48</sup> Many Protestant documents use a conceptual form and theological lexicon alien to the communal Catholic ear. Yet, as the Joint Declaration on Justification witnesses, these may frequently be recognized, at least on many significant points, as commensurable with the deposit of faith. As with Rosmini, it is a matter of recognizing the truth of a theoretical formulation different from the prevailing one.

The Note on Rosmini validates, at least in a partial manner, many of the epistemological elements that Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* brought to the fore over 40 years ago. It also makes clear that many of these elements, although surely in a modified form, provide essential characteristics of theological reasoning today.

<sup>48</sup> Avery Dulles, "Paths to Doctrinal Agreement: Ten Theses," *Theological Studies* 47 (1986) 32–47.