

TRADITION AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT: CAN VINCENT OF LÉRINS STILL TEACH THE CHURCH?

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The article examines the thought of the fifth century theologian, Vincent of Lérins, particularly his claims that there is great progress and development in Christ's Church, and that this progress and development must be in fundamental continuity with what preceded it (eodem sensu eademque sententia). The author argues that Vincent's hermeneutical principles have been theologically influential in the past and, properly understood, offer significant insights for an apposite notion of doctrinal development today.

FROM THE BEGINNING of Christianity, theological reflection has been deeply concerned with the nature of tradition—how it serves as a warrant for truth and how it preserves a certain constancy amidst growth, development, and change.¹ But the questions surrounding the theology of tradition are multiple and ever more complex. The word *tradition* itself is polyvalent from the outset, referring to both the content of what is handed on as well as the process of handing on this content. Then, too, when one speaks of tradition, what exactly does one mean? Does one intend a set of continuous and enduring meanings? If so, to what extent is this kind of continuity possible in a world, as postmodernity teaches, deeply marked by finitude, historicity, rupture, and breach? And if we mean by tradition that something durable and abiding is handed on, then to what extent is this

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¹ The literature on the nature of tradition is voluminous. One *locus classicus* is Yves Congar's *Tradition and Traditions*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (London: Burns and Oates, 1966). Recent works include John Noonan, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2005); Kathryn Tanner, “Postmodern Challenges to ‘Tradition,’” *Louvain Studies* 28 (2003) 175–93; Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition* (Louvain: Peeters, 2003); John Thiel, *Senses of Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000); and Terrence Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000).

perduring “content” changeable and adaptive to new circumstances? Further, if tradition is somewhat changeable, then how does it function as a warrant or criterion for doctrinal truth, itself intended to be stable and secure? All these questions are matter for theological investigation.

I will discuss aspects of the thought of Vincent of Lérins on the nature of tradition. In particular, I will examine his axiom, which, I believe, may still be usefully invoked to advance and develop an understanding of tradition that properly balances the twin imperatives of continuity and change intrinsic to Christian life and thought while carefully avoiding the aporias of perceiving “living tradition” as either stolid repetition or protean heterogeneity. In my judgment, significant elements of Vincent’s theology of tradition bear creative reappropriation, perhaps allowing us once again to acknowledge Harnack’s insight about the monk of Lérins: “We really breathe freely when we study the attempt of this man to introduce light and certainty into the question [of tradition].”²

Vincent of Lérins’s work has suffered something of an eclipse in contemporary theological discourse. A generation ago Hermann Sieben observed that there was a paucity of research on Vincent, and this situation has not changed much in the ensuing years.³ When Vincent is studied, attention is normally paid to what has come to be known as the Vincentian Canon or “first rule,” that is, his controversial claim that ecclesial doctrine is validated by the criteriological norm of what has been attested *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus* (the warrants of antiquity, ubiquity, and universality). Much less time has been devoted to Vincent’s “second rule,” that is, his assertion that while there is, undeniably, significant progress in church teaching, this development must always be understood *in eodem sensu eademque sententia* with what has preceded it.⁴ The crucial passage from his *Commonitorium* reads:

² See Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7 vols., trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897) 3:229–32, at 229.

³ Hermann J. Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee der alten Kirche* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1979) 149. Vincent is little noted, for example, in a recent handbook of patrology (soon to appear in English): Hubertus R. Drobner, *Lehrbuch der Patrologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994).

⁴ In a recent *vade mecum* of patristic thought, Vincent’s first rule is adroitly summarized while his second rule is passed over in silence. See John Anthony McGuckin, “Vincent of Lerins” in *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004) 348–49. The same is true in the treatment of Vincent in Jaroslav Pelikan’s *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971) 333–39. While paying some attention to the role of the *Commonitorium* in the history of dogma, Peter Walter refers only very briefly to Vincent’s second rule. See “Dogma” in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 3 vols., ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (New York: Routledge, 2005) 1:447–52.

But someone will perhaps say: is there no progress of religion in the Church of Christ? Certainly there is progress, even exceedingly great progress. For who is so envious of others and so hateful toward God as to try to prohibit it? Yet, it must be an advance [*profectus*] in the proper sense of the word and not an alteration [*permutatio*] in faith. For progress means that each thing is enlarged within itself, while alteration implies that one thing is transformed into something else [*aliquid ex alio in aliud*]. It is necessary, therefore, that understanding, knowledge, and wisdom should grow [*crescat*] and advance [*proficiat*] vigorously in individuals as well as in the community, in a single person as well as in the whole Church and this gradually in the course of ages and centuries. But this progress must be made according to its own type, that is, in accord with the same doctrine, in the same meaning, and in the same judgment.⁵

Immediately after this passage Vincent goes on to discuss how the growth of religion is similar to the growth of the body, which over time develops and changes while still remaining the same. He also invokes the image of the seed that gradually comes to maturity as a full-grown plant. While there is considerable variation in the outward appearance of a seed and a plant, the nature of each perdures. Before examining the theological implications of Vincent's comments, it is worthwhile to review, at least briefly, the historical reception of his thought in general and of his second rule in particular.

THEOLOGICAL RECEPTION OF VINCENT'S RULES

The reception of Vincent of Lérins's two "rules" throughout theological history is a fascinating study.⁶ I will examine a few significant theologians,

⁵ Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* 23.1–12. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. The text reads: "Sed forsitan dicit aliquis: Nullusne ergo in ecclesia Christi profectus habebitur religionis? Habeatur plane et maximus. Nam quis ille est tam invidus hominibus, tam exosus Deo, qui istud prohibere conetur? Sed ita tamen, ut vere profectus sit ille fidei, non permutatio. Siquidem ad profectum pertinet, ut in semetipsa unaquaeque res amplificetur, ad permutationem vero ut aliquid ex alio in aliud transvertatur. Crescat igitur oportet et multum vehementerque proficiat tam singulorum quam omnium, tam unius hominis quam totius ecclesiae, aetatum ac saeculorum gradibus, intellegentia, scientia, sapientia, sed in suo dumtaxat genere, in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu eademque sententia" (*Commonitorium* in *Corpus Christianorum*, vol. 64, ed. Rolandus Demeulenaere [Turnholti: Brepols, 1985] 177–78; I have made a few slight orthographical changes. References to the *Commonitorium* will be to this now-standard edition; they will be embedded in the text and given by chapter and lines, e.g., [23.31–33]). English translations can be found in various sources, e.g., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 14 vols. ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969–1976) 11:131–56.

⁶ Two book-length studies are: P. José Madoz, *El concepto de la tradición en S. Vicente de Lérins* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1933) and Hubert Kremser, "Die Bedeutung des Vinzenz von Lerinum für die römisch-katholische Wertung der

generally limiting myself to the discussion of Vincent's second rule and the ancillary issues surrounding it, asking to what extent his thought might serve as a model for a contemporary understanding of doctrinal development.⁷

Vincent's reputation has suffered somewhat over the ages because he has traditionally been grouped with the semi-Pelagian opponents of Augustine.⁸ Consequently, he was not a favorite of medieval authors such as Aquinas, and it has been argued that the *Commonitorium* went virtually unread in the Middle Ages.⁹ Nonetheless, Vincent's short book was rediscovered in the 16th century and enjoyed a significant revival in the 19th.¹⁰ John Henry Newman, for example, whose name has become synonymous with the term "doctrinal development," was not shy about using Vincent's work.¹¹ His first rule, in particular, appealed to the early Newman, since the triple criteria of universality, ubiquity, and antiquity served, he claimed, as a theological bulwark for Anglicanism against the innovations of both Wittenberg and Rome.¹² Later, in his revisions to *The Via Media*, Newman

Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Hamburg, 1959). See also Serafino Prete, *Il Commonitorium nella letteratura cristiana antica* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1962) 52–58.

⁷ In an earlier article, I discussed the reception of Vincent's thought at certain critical moments in the history of Catholic theology. I concentrated on his citation in the varying schemata leading to the well-known allusion by *Dei Filius* of Vatican I (*Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Heinrich Denzinger, Helmut Hoping, and Peter Hünermann [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991] no. 3020). The present article has an explicitly constructive intent, namely, how Vincent's theory might serve as a model for a contemporary theology of doctrinal development. See Thomas G. Guarino, "Vincent of Lérins and the Hermeneutical Question," *Gregorianum* 75 (1994) 491–523.

⁸ The *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* is representative of this position when it asserts that it was against Augustine's teaching that the Vincentian canon (antiquity, ubiquity, and universality) was formulated. See vol. 15, cols. 3049, 3052. For a similar judgment on Vincent's semi-Pelagianism, see Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* 319.

⁹ See, for example, Adhémar d'Alès, "La fortune du *Commonitorium*," *Recherches de science religieuse* 26 (1936) 334–56.

¹⁰ Yves Congar notes that the *Commonitorium* was issued in 35 editions in the 16th century, followed by 13 editions in the 19th: *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third, 1985) 123.

¹¹ John Noonan opens his recent study on continuity and change in the Church with the sentence: "The inventor of the idea that Christian doctrine develops is John Henry Newman" (Noonan, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change* 3). Perhaps it would be more precise to say that Newman fully established and creatively expanded an idea already proposed by Vincent of Lérins in his *Commonitorium*.

¹² John Henry Newman, *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1911) 1:54–58.

spoke of Vincent as “so great an authority in the present controversy [development of doctrine],” citing verbatim his claim that in Christ’s Church, development must, indeed, constitute a *profectus* rather than a *permutatio*.¹³ The *Commonitorium* also had a decided influence on Newman’s well-known “notes” or “tests” for proper development.¹⁴ When discussing the first characteristic, for example, “preservation of type,” Newman invoked Vincent’s argument that the growth of religion resembles the growth of the body, which, as years go by, develops and enlarges, while remaining substantially identical: “Proportions of the developed form, however altered, correspond to those which belong to its rudiments.” Nonetheless, this “unity of type, characteristic as it is of faithful developments, must not be pressed to the extent of denying all variation.” For, as we know, the “butterfly is the development, but not in any sense the image, of the grub.”¹⁵

In Newman’s sixth note, “conservative action upon its past,” one again detects Vincent’s hand. In an important passage, Newman said that “a true development . . . is conservative of the course of antecedent developments, being really those antecedents and something besides them: it is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds; and this is characteristic as contrasted with a corruption.” This language, entirely reminiscent of Vincent’s argument for *both* preservation and renewal, for *both* continuity and commensurable novelty, is explicitly acknowledged as such when Newman says, “Vincen-tius of Lerins, in like manner, speaks of the development of Christian doctrine, as *profectus fidei non permutatio*.” Newman observes, for example, that Catholics conserve the traditional Christian belief in the Incarnation and Atonement while adding the cultus of Mary and the saints which “illustrates [and] protects the doctrine of our Lord’s loving kindness and mediation.”¹⁶

Vincent’s accent on change and growth appealed not only to 19th-century historians like Newman, but also to systematic theologians such as Johann Adam Möhler of the Catholic Tübingen school. When discussing the faith of antiquity, Möhler observed that the truth we possess in common with the early Christians has often been “more deeply investigated . . . so that Christian science makes continual progress, and the myster-

¹³ Ibid. 72–73 n. 4.

¹⁴ The Vincentian character of Newman’s language is unambiguous. Introducing the notes, Newman wrote, “modern Catholicism is nothing else but simply the legitimate growth and complement . . . of the doctrine of the early church.” John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 9th ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1894) 169. He argued that corruption, on the contrary, is “the reversal and undoing of what went before” (ibid. 171).

¹⁵ Ibid. 171, 174.

¹⁶ Ibid. 200–2.

ies of God ever more clearly unfolded.”¹⁷ While the doctrines of salvation are immutable in themselves, the Church has by no means “prescribed any pause in the progress of inquiry.” Just at this point, Möhler adduced Vincent as the outstanding witness in this regard: “St. Vincent Lirinensis expresses himself on this subject with incomparable beauty and truth,” citing his exhortation to Christians to sculpt the precious gems of doctrine faithfully and wisely to give them splendor, grace, and beauty. The monk of Lérins concluded his counsel, saying, “*Eadem tamen quae didicisti, doce; ut cum dicas nove, non dicas nova.*”¹⁸ But, surely one may ask, does not this entreaty, “Teach the same things you were taught, so that when you speak in a new way you do not say new things,” bespeak a resolute immobilism and traditionalism? Not at all, for Möhler immediately advanced Vincent’s claim that there is progress, even great progress in Christ’s Church, but that this growth needs to be always “*eodem sensu eademque sententia.*” Enlargement surely occurs, then, but it must be a homogeneous and proportionate advance. Möhler finally makes his own the exclamation of a 19th-century editor of the *Commonitorium*, “How desirable it were, that we could everywhere find such clear notions of the progressive development of Christian dogmas as are here advanced by Vincentius!”¹⁹

Even more taken by Vincent’s work was one of Möhler’s successors at Tübingen, Johann Evangelist Kuhn. Josef Geiselman observes that the *Commonitorium* deeply influenced the young theologian: “The chief witness (*Kronzeuge*) on the development of church teaching is, for Kuhn, Vincent of Lérins who is the only writer of the early Church who treated the question of the historical development of dogmas *ex professo.*”²⁰ Kuhn was convinced that his own concept of a living tradition, guided by the Spirit, was essentially the same as the classical teaching found in Vincent’s *goldenes Büchlein.*²¹ With Vincent, Kuhn could discriminate between a development that altered the essence of the faith (*aliquid ex alio in aliud transvertatur*) and one that augured a true advance. With the monk of Lérins, Kuhn shared a concept of progress whereby something increased according to its own nature (*in se res amplificetur*). Kuhn concurred that

¹⁷ Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism*, trans. James Burton Robertson (New York: Crossroad, 1997; orig. pub. 1832) 301.

¹⁸ Ibid. 301 n. 1, citing the *Commonitorium* 22.23–30.

¹⁹ Möhler, *Symbolism* 301 n. 1.

²⁰ Josef Rupert Geiselman, *Die lebendige Überlieferung als Norm des christlichen Glaubens: Die apostolische Tradition in der Form der kirchlichen Verkündigung—das Formalprinzip des Katholizismus, dargestellt im Geiste der Traditionslehre von Joh. Ev. Kuhn* (Freiburg: Herder, 1959) 204.

²¹ Ibid. 209–10. The remainder of this paragraph summarizes Geiselman’s comments on Kuhn’s use of the *Commonitorium*. For Kuhn’s own thought, see his *Einleitung in die katholische Dogmatik*, 2 vols. (Tübingen, 1846–1847) 1:105–10.

while the truth of revelation remains intact, each age must stamp it with its own suitable imprint (*dicas nove*). And with Vincent, Kuhn knew that the precious gem of God's truth, always subject to deeper understanding (*cre-scat intelligentia*), was entrusted to the whole Church in general and to its teaching body in particular.²² Kuhn was acutely aware that the preaching of the Church's faith could not be a monotone, spiritless repetition of the truth in the same concepts and expressions; Christian doctrine must be made *zeitgemäß* and *geistlich*, timely and vigorous. Kuhn was convinced that Vincent had struck just the right note with his juxtaposition of *pro-fectus* and *permutatio*, for Catholicism should neither reject every development as corrosive nor permit the inroads of unalloyed Enlightenment thinking.²³ The crucial theological point was to ensure that any change was legitimate, allowing for an organic development of Christian truth.

More recently, Vincent and his second rule have been cited, at least in passing, by several contemporary theologians. Walter Kasper, for example, when discussing the issue of change and continuity, appeals to Vincent's maxim: "We must not deviate today from the path of the early and patristic Church; but neither can we stand still on it. We must follow the path further, though certainly, *eodem sensu*, in the same sense or direction."²⁴ Bernard Lonergan observes that Vatican I's *Dei Filius* was concerned with the permanence of dogmatic meaning as is clear from the constitution's chapter four. In his exegesis of this text, Lonergan says, "It would seem to be the understanding attained by reason when illumined by faith that is praised in the quotation from Vincent of Lerins. For such understanding . . . must be . . . '*eodem sensu eademque sententia*.'"²⁵ He then adds that this "permanence attaches to the meaning and not to the formula"; indeed, "it is permanence rather than immutability that is meant when there is

²² The truth of revelation is entrusted "either to the universal Church generally or, in particular, to the whole body of overseers" (*vel generaliter universa ecclesia vel specialiter totum corpus praepositorum*) (*Commonitorium* 22.5–7).

²³ Thomas O'Meara observes that Kuhn rejected the restoration of a comprehensive Scholasticism: "Was a speculative exploration of Christianity to be the possession of a past, privileged time? Or was Catholicism to be philosophically alive, accepting thought-forms that emerged from the ongoing panorama of culture? The Tübingen faculty was the strongest proponent of the response that thought must be one with Rome in faith but not in theological expression" (*Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982] 190).

²⁴ Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 103.

²⁵ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1971) 320–32, at 321. Lonergan is referring to the selection of Vincent's *Commonitorium* cited by *Dei Filius*. For the complete text, see *Enchiridion symbolorum* no. 3020.

desired [by Vatican I] an ever better understanding of the same dogma, the same meaning and the same pronouncement.”²⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, for his part, astutely observes that Vincent has always appealed to Catholics because he “saw clearly that the issue was the identity of the matter, not the formulation.”²⁷ More laudatory (and yet deeply critical) of Vincent than any other recent theologian is the Reformed thinker, Karl Barth, who has some perceptive pages on the *Commonitorium*. Specifically referring to Vincent’s theory of development, Barth states, “We cannot assess too highly the contribution made by Vincent of Lerins in his theoretical elucidation of this matter, even when we remember that he was only formulating what had already been put into practical effect in the Church of his time.”²⁸

VINCENT AND CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Vincent’s second rule has also been cited at crucial times in the history of the Church including: the definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (*Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854), the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907), the Oath against Modernism (*Sacrorum antistitum*, 1910) and, of course, Vatican I’s dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* (1870).²⁹ Given such significant moments, one may wonder why Vincent did not make a more forceful appearance at Vatican II. Is not his emphasis on development over time congruent with conciliar themes? If Kuhn could laud him as the *Kronzeuge* for proper maturation, and if Newman could find in Vincent’s

²⁶ Ibid. 323. For similar comments on Vincent’s second rule, see Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Doctrinal Pluralism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1971) 43. For Lonergan on “permanence of meaning,” see Donna Teevan, *Lonergan, Hermeneutics, and Theological Method* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2005) especially 181–83.

²⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 1:11. Pannenberg is referring to Vincent’s aforementioned counsel, *dicas nove non dicas nova*.

²⁸ Barth rightly sees Vincent as arguing for organic growth. But he is equally convinced that this emphasis on a living *depositum* that continually develops is tightly conjoined to an illegitimate marriage between Scripture and tradition. Vincent’s audacity, Barth claims, in his strict linkage of Scripture, tradition, and development, is unmatched even by Trent itself. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2*, trans. George Thomas Thomson and Harold Knight (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004) 548–51. Barth appreciates Vincent’s accent on homogeneous growth more than some Catholic thinkers do, as we shall see.

²⁹ For the invocation of *eodem sensu* in the bull defining the Immaculate Conception of Mary and for the significant role Vincent’s rule played in Johannes Baptist Franzelin’s drafts leading to *Dei Filius*, see Guarino, “Vincent of Lérins and the Hermeneutical Question” 498–511.

work a harbinger for his own theory, then why does Vincent virtually disappear at Vatican II (a council sometimes described as embodying the historical, developmental ideas of Newman and the Tübingen school?).³⁰ In fact, Vincent's thought was not entirely absent from the conciliar acts. John XXIII, for example, in his opening allocution *Gaudet mater ecclesia*, famously said, "The *depositum fidei* or the truths in which our venerated doctrine is contained is one thing, the manner in which these truths are formulated is another, *eodem tamen sensu eademque sententia*."³¹ But there was also a call—which was rejected—to include Vincent's second rule in the text of *Dei Verbum*, Vatican II's counterpart to *Dei Filius*. Why was the request for its inclusion in *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, rejected? Part of the answer, I believe, has to do with the disagreements that played out on the council floor and in the theological commission. When the revised schema on revelation was sent to the bishops in July, 1964, one sentence of the text referred to the "living Tradition" that "advances": *Viva haec Traditio in Ecclesia sub assistentia Spiritus Sancti proficit*.³² The next sentence spoke of growth in understanding the deeds and words that have been handed down: *Crescit enim tam rerum quam verborum traditorum intelligentia*. The theological *relatio* or explanation attached to this schema observed that, with these sentences, the movement of tradition is affirmed under a "dynamic aspect," so that something living is displayed. For continually, and with the assistance of

³⁰ Robert Murray observes that, although Vatican II never refers to Newman, "many commentators have discerned his presence behind its teachings" ("Vatican II and the Bible," *Downside Review* 121 [2003] 14–25, at 20). Murray cites Basil Christopher Butler, *The Theology of Vatican II*, 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1981), chap. 2. Vatican II's indebtedness to the Tübingen School has been well documented; see, e.g., Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Vatican II and the Aggiornamento of Roman Catholic Theology," in *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 2, *The Twentieth Century*, ed. James C. Livingston et al., 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2000) 233–71, at 239.

³¹ *Acta apostolicae sedis* 54 (1962) 792. Giuseppe Alberigo and Alberto Melloni have observed that the Vincentian rule was not mentioned in the original Johannine manuscript. See Alberigo and Melloni, "L'allocuzione *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* di Giovanni XXIII," in *Fede tradizione profezia: Studi su Giovanni XXIII e sul Vaticano II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo et al. (Brescia: Paideia, 1984) 187–283, at 212 n. 52. Because of this absence, the rule was not included in the Italian translations of the opening speech distributed to various agencies. This is likely why *eodem sensu eademque sententia* is missing from the English translation found in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966) 715.

³² *Acta synodalia sacrosancti concilii oecumenici Vaticani II*, 5 vols. (Vatican City: Typis polyglottis Vaticanus, 1970–1978) vol. 3, part 3, 69–105, at 80. On Vatican II's appeals to Vincent see my "Vincent of Lérins and the Hermeneutical Question" 511–18.

the Holy Spirit, the Church progresses and grows, “always retaining, however, its original identity.”³³ The profoundly Vincentian character of both the schema and the *relatio* is transparent. Tradition is affirmed as living and advancing (the words *proficere* and *creocere* are Vincent’s own) without losing its original identity, that is, without mutating into something different.

Nonetheless, when the debates on this proposed schema began (September 30–October 6, 1964) Cardinal Ruffini rose and let it be known that he was deeply troubled by how *vivere* and *creocere* were used to describe tradition. Recognizing the influence of Vincent on the text, Ruffini flatly asserted, “Here we find the judgment of Trent severely mutilated and changed” (Ruffini intended to say “Vatican I”; Trent never cited Vincent). Ruffini then read in its entirety the last paragraph of chapter four of *Dei Filius*, where *eodem sensu* occurs, concluding that it is difficult to square the earlier council with everything in the proposed schema.³⁴ Without fully explaining himself, Ruffini’s implication is that the notions of tradition as “living” and understanding as “growing” are irreconcilable with the very idea of the perduring stability and solidity of Catholic doctrine. The new schema on revelation (November 1964), perhaps in response to Ruffini’s plaint, dropped the phrase *viva haec traditio* while allowing the sentence affirming *crecit intelligentia* to stand with minor alterations.³⁵ In a final attempt to include Vincent’s second rule explicitly (apparently hoping that it would serve as a bulwark against unchecked growth) 175 Fathers (many aligned with the *Coetus internationalis patrum*) submitted a written request asking the theological commission to add *eodem sensu eademque sententia* to the final text of *Dei Verbum*. The commission responded laconically, remarking simply that the “interpretation of Vincent of Lérins is controverted.”³⁶

The use of Vincent’s thought in this conciliar tableau is of theological interest. Ruffini and the *Coetus* clearly placed the accent on the *idem sensus*, on the fact that Vincent holds for a continuity of meaning that cannot condone a transformative reversal. While they were surely correct

³³ *Acta synodalia*, vol. 3, part 3, 85 n. H.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 144–45.

³⁵ For the changes made in the text of November 1964 in response to the interventions of Ruffini and others, see the comments in the theological *relatio* found in *Acta synodalia*, vol. 4, part 1, 353.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, part 5, 696. The *Coetus partum* was a large group of bishops, conservative in tendency, who often spoke in unison on disputed conciliar questions. For more on the *Coetus*, see *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, *The Formation of the Council’s Identity—First Period and Intersession, October 1962–September 1963*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 195–200.

to insist on this point, they failed to see that Vincent was also concerned with growth and development, that he compares religion to a living organism that *needs* to change in order to remain true to its essential nature (23.13–17, 45–49). Vincent argued that Christian doctrine should follow this law of the body, which is consolidated by the passing of years, enlarged by time, and made more perfect with age (23.31–33). It is highly ironic, then, that his own words, even the brief selection cited by Vatican I, strike at the core of Ruffini's objection, rendering his highly defensive citation of *Dei Filius* cramped and difficult to understand.³⁷ It is certainly true that Vincent did not want to countenance developments that are incommensurable with prior, fundamental teachings, and so "growth," for Vincent, cannot mean mutation, understood as a reversal of a previously held authoritative (conciliar) teaching. Nonetheless, his own words force the conclusion that he would, without hesitation, sanction phrases such as *viva traditio* and *crescit intelligentia* which in fact come very close to his own formulations.³⁸

In his commentary on *Dei Verbum*, Joseph Ratzinger also makes noteworthy comments about Vincent's omission from the dogmatic constitution, but from a very different perspective than that of Ruffini and the *Coetus patrum*. He says, for example, that the monk of Lérins is now seen in a "dubious light" by historical research and "no longer appears as an authentic representative of the Catholic idea of tradition." He continues: Vatican II "has another conception of the nature of historical identity and continuity. Vincent de Lérins's static *semper* no longer seems the right way of expressing [this] problem."³⁹ Ratzinger is surely right that, in the light of continuing research, Vincent's *semper* and his first rule in general (espe-

³⁷ Ruffini (and virtually all the conciliar participants) would also have been familiar with the citation of Vincent's second rule by *Pascendi* and by the Oath against Modernism. The latter reads: "I sincerely receive the doctrine of the faith handed down to us from the Apostles through the orthodox Fathers, *eodem sensu eademque semper sententia*" (Denzinger-Hünemann, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, no. 3541). The paragraph goes on to condemn those who change the meanings of dogmas; however, the oath, unlike the selection in *Dei Filius*, is silent about homogeneous growth and progress, which is precisely what Vincent was using the rule to guide and direct. To emphasize only the *idem sensus*, without adding the context of organic development, truncates Vincent's thought.

³⁸ John Paul II recently affirmed the concepts of living and growing when he described tradition as a "living reality which grows and develops, and which the Spirit guarantees precisely because it has something to say to the people of every age." See *Oriente Lumen*, *Acta apostolicae sedis* 87 (1995) 745–74, at 752 para. 8 (hereafter cited as AAS).

³⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols., ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York:

cially when taken *sensu stricto*) had outlived their usefulness, a fact that Newman had recognized.⁴⁰ Curiously, however, the published conciliar debates on chapter eight of *Dei Verbum* were not about Vincent's first rule (which had never been cited by an ecumenical council) but about his second rule, eulogistically adduced by Vatican I, on the nature of doctrinal development. Further, the very phrases that found their way into *Dei Verbum*—*traditio proficit* and *crescit perceptio*, expressions praised by Ratzinger—are drawn nearly verbatim from Vincent himself. One wonders, then, if certain of Ratzinger's reservations about Vincent have a provenance other than the conciliar discussions.⁴¹

In my judgment, Vincent's second rule, that all development must be *in eodem sensu eademque sententia*, taken together with the *Communitorium's* entire paragraph on growth and progress, is entirely consistent with Vatican II's emphasis on dynamic development, on proportionate change within history, on a vibrant and living tradition, on a legitimate plurality of viewpoints maintaining a fundamental doctrinal content. His work, unfortunately, when taken in a truncated version, became a battle cry for those who would even resist the word *viva* as a modifier of *traditio* and who found the phrase *crescit intelligentia* to be pernicious. Understandably, then, the theological commission decided to forego the rule's explicit citation in *Dei Verbum*. But this omission should not suggest its ineffectiveness. The phrase reappeared soon after the council's conclusion—for example, in the declaration *Mysterium ecclesiae* of 1973 and in the statement "On the Interpretation of Dogmas" issued by the International Theological

Herder and Herder, 1969) 3:187. Yves Congar, too, commenting on Vincent's first rule, says, "It is because the principle is too static that Vatican II avoided quoting it in its constitution *Dei Verbum* 8" (*Diversity and Communion* 124).

⁴⁰ Despite his earlier remarks, Ratzinger, in his *Responsum ad dubium* of October 1995, found Vincent's first rule useful not as a past warrant but as a future prescription for Catholics. He states that John Paul II, in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* (1994), has handed on the teaching of the ordinary and universal magisterium, "explicitly stating what is to be held always, everywhere, and by all (*quod semper, quod ubique, et quod ab omnibus tenendum est*) as pertaining to the deposit of faith" (AAS 87 [1995] 1114; see Newman, *Development* 27).

⁴¹ Part of Ratzinger's distaste for Vincent, and especially for his first rule, is surely conjoined to the unverifiable nature of the *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*. At the same time, Ratzinger's (and Congar's) reservations are also likely connected with determinate historical circumstances. It cannot be discounted that Vincent's second rule (cited by *Pascendi* and the anti-Modernist oath) was still ringing in the ears of many during the council—when the oath was still in force—and that theologians like de Lubac and Congar had themselves been accused of Modernist tendencies. In this climate (and with Ruffini and the *Coetus patrum* commandeering Vincent's thought for their own purposes) one understands how the monk of Lérins could have become something of a *persona non grata* at Vatican II.

Commission in 1989.⁴² Liturgically, *eodem sensu* is cited in the 1970 edition of the *General Instruction to the Roman Missal* and in all subsequent revisions.

Most recently, one finds Vincent's second rule adduced in several significant documents of John Paul II. In *Veritatis splendor* (1993), for example, the pope argues for the objective permanence of moral norms, basing this assertion on the claim that human beings, while always determined by history and culture, nonetheless share a common "human nature."⁴³ The encyclical acknowledges a need to discover the most adequate formulation for universal norms, given the differences among societies. All principles, therefore, must be specified according to historical circumstances, *eodem sensu eademque sententia*. The crucial issue, of course, is the adaptation of permanent norms to communities constituted by culturally specific criteriologies and lexica, while maintaining the *idem sensus* of the norm itself. Whether such adaptation does, in fact, hew to the same meaning and judgment as the fundamental principle is, the document notes, a work of reason and reflection by believers and theologians whose insights accompany the decision of the magisterium.

In *Ut unum sint* (1995) the pope affirms, in continuity with Vatican II (and with his own earlier encyclical *Slavorum apostoli* [1985]), that the message of the gospel may be legitimately communicated in a variety of languages and theological forms. So, he insists, Cyril and Methodius did not impose the Greek language and Byzantine culture on those they evangelized; rather, they translated the "content of faith" into quite different contexts. With Vatican II, then, the pope declares that *the meaning of truth* determines a communion among peoples, while "the expression of truth can take different forms." Socio-cultural patterns may be varied even while retaining "the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning." Here, in a footnote, the pope appeals to the relevant passage with Vincent's second rule.⁴⁴

Several other recent instances could be cited, but the point, I believe, is sufficiently clear: Vincent's thought in general and his second rule in particular, asserting that growth and change necessarily occur but must be *in eodem sensu* with what has preceded it, has played and continues to play a significant role in theological reasoning.

⁴² See *Mysterium ecclesiae*, AAS 65 (1973) 396–408, at 404. See International Theological Commission, "On the Interpretation of Dogmas," *Origins* 20 (May 17, 1990) 1–14, at 6. The ITC document invokes not only *eodem sensu*, but also Vincent's *dicas nove* when it states that "the Church adds nothing new [*nihil addit*] to the Gospel [*non nova*] but it proclaims the newness of Christ in a way that is constantly new [*noviter*]."

⁴³ *Veritatis splendor*, AAS 85 (1993), 1133–1228 at 1176, para. 53.

⁴⁴ *Ut unum sint*, AAS 87 (1995) 932–33, para. 19, no. 38.

VINCENT'S SECOND RULE AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

By countenancing development that maintains an *idem sensus* and an *eadem sententia*, Vincent, and the Church after him, is appealing to a same meaning or judgment that perdures from generation to generation. There is development, to be sure, Vincent tells us; indeed, he virtually exclaims to us that this development exists *plane et maximus*. But he struggles with the question of continuity within change. How can this growth be self-identical with what preceded it, while still being really an enlargement and not just wooden iteration or repetition? How can Vincent say, on the one hand, that the Church, the guardian of dogmas, “never changes anything in them, never detracts and never adds” while, on the other hand, allowing seed sown by the early Christians “to flourish and mature and advance to perfection”? Vincent’s struggle to understand this problem in the 5th century is not very different from our own in the 21st. How is tradition truly dynamic and developmental? How is it not simply leaden repetition and a ponderous, lifeless dogmatism, “*die geistlose Monotonie*” that Kuhn deplored? How is the notion of tradition that Congar and de Lubac labored so arduously to recover, one that is dynamic and life-giving, even while preserving the integrity of the *depositum fidei*, deeply similar to Vincent’s own notion of development conjoined with continuity? In one passage, representative of his life-long work, de Lubac states: “Tradition, according to the fathers of the church, is in fact just the opposite of a burden of the past; it is a vital energy, a propulsive as much as a protective force, acting within an entire community as at the heart of each of the faithful because it is none other than the very Word of God both perpetuating and renewing itself under the action of the Spirit of God.”⁴⁵

De Lubac’s comment is itself deeply Vincentian. Tradition is a force “within an entire community” and “at the heart of each of the faithful”—phrases borrowed almost verbatim from the *Commonitorium* which holds that understanding and wisdom grow in a single person as well as in the whole Church (*Crescat . . . tam singulorum quam omnium, tam unius hominis quam totius ecclesiae* [23.7–9]). De Lubac’s dyadic linking of “protective and propulsive” and “perpetuating and renewing” also reflect Vincent’s twin goals of identity and creative development. Tradition conserves the achievements of the past, while always allowing them to grow to full flower over the course of time.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sr. Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982) 91.

⁴⁶ Maurice Blondel, a significant influence on the entire *nouvelle théologie*, also recalled Vincentian themes: “I would say that Tradition’s powers of conservation

But simply citing Vincent or alluding to his images is not to explain his thought. How does his second rule actually function in a theory of doctrinal development? Vincent's fundamental argument is that a doctrinal meaning or judgment (the *sensus* and *sententia*) is both (1) able to be recovered and (2) capable of being amplified and augmented. I now discuss these elements more fully.

Recovery of Meaning

If all development is to fundamentally accord with the original meaning and judgment of the Church's teaching, as Vincent says, then a presupposition of this approach is that the original meaning and judgment are recoverable and, at least in some important sense, normative. To cite a theological example: Francis Sullivan, when discussing infallible statements, avers, "Of course, a belief in infallibility presupposes the possibility of true propositions concerning matters of divine revelation. A proposition is the *meaning* of a statement; to say that a proposition is true is to say that what a statement *means* is true. Infallibility guarantees the truth of the proposition."⁴⁷ Without entering into the hermeneutical issues, Sullivan's argument is that the meaning of constative propositions may be recovered from age to age—a hermeneutical theorist might call this "re-cognitive understanding."⁴⁸ By this term, I mean that an interpreter or reader can legitimately recover the original meaning intended by the text itself.⁴⁹ It

are equaled by its powers of conquest: that it discovers and formulates truths on which the past lived, though unable as yet to evaluate or define them explicitly." See Blondel, "History and Dogma" in his *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Ilyd Trethowan (New York: Holt, Rinehard, and Winston, 1964) 267. Blondel even alluded to something like Vincent's law of the body, echoing his appeal for a *via media* between stultification and transformation: "Thus, we are no longer exposed to the objections of those who would tie us to a bed of Procrustes, mutilating us and forbidding us growth, or of those who see only the Protean metamorphoses of an indefinite evolution where they should see a development governed and unified by the internal finality of an organism" (*ibid.* 270).

⁴⁷ Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1983) 80.

⁴⁸ In aspects of what follows, I rely on the hermeneutical thought of Emilio Betti, an interlocutor with and at times opponent of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical theories. In my *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005) 172–208, I have outlined their similarities and differences, as well as the reasons why I think Betti is, in many ways, an excellent hermeneutical partner for Catholic theology. He and Gadamer are close on several points, and the latter has insights congruent with Catholic thought, especially on overcoming a traditionless modernity.

⁴⁹ I use "textual intention" rather than "*mens auctoris*" or "authorial intention"

must immediately be added, however, that this recovery of an original textual intention is not achieved by somehow stripping ourselves of our own history, tradition, and culture, if such a feat were even possible. It is not a defense, futile in any case, of a “worldless” or “traditionless” interpreting subject. On the contrary, we can discern the meaning of a text only in our own categories, that is, from our particular point of view and perspective.⁵⁰ As Betti observes, it would be absurd to aspire to strip oneself of one’s subjectivity, as if the interpreter were able to achieve a noncontextual access to reality.⁵¹ We can then say, with Gadamer, that in any understanding there always results a *Horizontverschmelzung* or fusion of horizons, since the recovery of the textual intention may be accomplished only within the socio-cultural-historical specificity of our own place and time. Betti, however, would add (and Vincent, I believe, would agree) that this reception must protect the originally intended meaning and judgment.⁵²

At this point, one might legitimately protest that, if one is discerning the original textual intention (even if it is admitted that such recovery always occurs within the horizons of a specific socio-cultural *Lebenswelt*), how is

for two reasons: (1) A text represents a communicative act by a particular agent. One understands its meaning by averting to a variety of factors, such as the text’s and the author’s issues of concern. I avoid “authorial intention” since this term gives the impression that the goal of interpretation is to peer into the author’s mind, or that psychological recovery of the author is essential to the hermeneutical task; (2) Betti is often accused of being interested solely in recovering “authorial intention.” While at times he does speak in this manner, my own reading of him indicates that his greater emphasis is on understanding the intention of the text-in-the-world rather than recovering the mind of an author, even if the author’s world necessarily plays an important role in discerning the text’s meaning. Betti was strongly influenced by Nicolai Hartmann who took an interest in ontology and phenomenology and was trying to overcome neo-Kantian transcendental idealism.

⁵⁰ As the well-known and apropos maxim of Aquinas has it, *receptum est in recipiente per modum recipientis* (*Summa theologiae* 1, q. 84, a. 1, corpus).

⁵¹ Regarding our subjectivity as a hurdle to understanding, Betti continues, would be akin to the dove imagining the air beneath its wings as an obstacle to flight (as Kant saw). These comments can be found in Betti’s reflections on the actuality of understanding: *Teoria generale della interpretazione*, 2 vols. (Milan: Giuffrè, 1990; orig. publ. 1955) 1:315–16.

⁵² The question of how such recovery is possible, given widely different socio-cultural circumstances and the finitude and facticity of human beings, leads us inevitably to the metaphysical questions at the heart of a hermeneutics of doctrine. I have treated these questions at greater length in my *Foundations of Systematic Theology* 39–71, 179–80. John Thiel is right when he says that various metaphors for congruency, such as the distinction between form and content or the fusion of past and present, are not grounds for continuity. In fact, the grounds for any living context/content distinction must be ultimately found in some commodious understanding of metaphysics. For Thiel’s comments, see his “The Analogy of Tradition: Method and Theological Judgment,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005) 358–80, at 364.

there actual development? Have we not recovered only the *idem sensus*, simply repeating an earlier meaning and judgment in new words? Is not re-cognitive understanding itself largely mimetic? Where is Vincent's emphasis on development? In fact, the very grasping of textual meaning from our own historical standpoint and with our unique *Denkstil* necessarily results in a shift in perspective and accent, in categories and point of view. This, of itself, indicates that there will be some development over the course of time.

Organic Growth

As already noted, at the end of chapter 22 of his *Commonitorium*, Vincent wrote, "The same things, then, that you were taught, teach, so that when you speak newly, you do not say new things." This is the *noviter non nova* that was cited by the 1989 document of the International Theological Commission. In *Ut unum sint*, John Paul II similarly emphasized that the same meaning can be expressed in different ways, that, as Vincent said, one may designate an older meaning of the faith by means of a new name (23.92–93). The issue is to maintain, at least in fundamentals, the same content of the faith while using a different "form" or "context," often involving a unique semantic lexicon.⁵³ There is no need to repeat the long litany of how this approach has been sanctioned by John XXIII and Vatican II or to recount the plaudits and careful consideration the distinction has received from Congar, Lonergan, Alberigo, Kasper, Dulles, Rahner (cautiously), and many other theologians.⁵⁴

On the other hand, there are few affirmations so widespread today as the one holding that a change in form necessarily means a change in content. But to what extent is this actually true? Of course, form and content are deeply interlaced, as several disciplines—art and music for example—rightly teach. Any attempt at a new form will surely be accompanied by a chiaroscuro effect: some new elements will be brought to light, while others, previously clearly seen, will now appear more obscure and less finely

⁵³Dulles observes that Newman "argued vigorously for the irreversibility of dogmas, not necessarily in their wording, but in their meaning. His balanced position represents a middle course between a fluid historicism and a rigid dogmatism" (*Newman* [New York: Continuum, 2002] 79). Does this distinction between meaning and formulation perhaps indicate, once again, Newman's proximity to Vincent's thought?

⁵⁴I have treated several thinkers (and issues) related to this question in *Foundations of Systematic Theology* 188–98. The International Theological Commission also registers some legitimate concerns about the context/content distinction. For an analysis of this statement, see my *Revelation and Truth: Unity and Plurality in Contemporary Theology* (Scranton: University of Scranton, 1993) 34–37; attention to the document's reservations can be found at 183–84 n. 37.

drawn. For example, one theology might accent the ontological constitutiveness of Christ for salvation while another might emphasize the truth and grace found in other religions. Such positions, of course, need not be at antipodes. The ecumenical movement, too, turns on at least some type of context/content distinction. Such agreements recognize that past dogmatic formulas, modes of expression, and semantic lexica are able to be reconceptualized and reformulated to achieve further agreement without deforming original doctrinal meanings—as witness the early Lutheran/Catholic dialogue on the Eucharist up to the recent *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.⁵⁵ It is this very context/content distinction that Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism intends by its assertion that complementary theological formulations often proclaim the same faith.⁵⁶ It is what *Ut unum sint* strongly reinforces in its bid to foster continuing ecumenical progress. And it is what has been valiantly tried in various attempts at explaining the meaning of the *Filioque*.⁵⁷ Does saying that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son necessarily jeopardize the monarchy of the Father? Gilles Emery observes that Aquinas “is convinced that the *doctores Graecorum* are teaching the procession of the Holy Spirit *a Filio* in the same way, although using other words.”⁵⁸

Of course, those who insist that there can be no question of an hypostatized “content” floating in a disembodied state are surely correct.⁵⁹ Further, as Pierre Hadot has rightly observed, the form is always a significant clue to the content. If one does not see, for example, that the form of ancient philosophy was essentially “therapeutic,” one will miss the primary intention of its message.⁶⁰ But I do not think that the context/content distinction intends either the instantiation of a free-floating body or an artless negligence of the difficulties inherent in this kind of discernment. The distinction indicates, rather, the possibility of re-cognitive understanding, even while acknowledging that such re-cognition takes place only

⁵⁵ See *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue I-III*, ed. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965) 187–97; also, Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, *Origins* 28 (July 16, 1998) 120–27.

⁵⁶ *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 17.

⁵⁷ See, for example, the excellent statement, “The Greek and Latin Traditions regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit,” *Information Service* 89 (1995/II–III) 88–92.

⁵⁸ Gilles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, Mich.: Sapientia, 2003) 265, citing Aquinas, *Contra errores Graecorum* 2, chap. 28. Emery also cites *De potentia* q. 10, a. 5, c., wherein Aquinas says that the Greeks *magis differunt in verbis quam in sensu*. This was the position taken by Westerners at the council of Florence where Athanasius and others were adduced as witnesses for the *Filioque*.

⁵⁹ Thiel, *Senses of Tradition* 88.

⁶⁰ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

within determined historical horizons.⁶¹ As such, development is necessary because the “same meaning” will always be appropriated in new circumstances, which will place the accent differently, bring out new dimensions formerly hidden, and, therefore, will necessarily be productive. This is the truth found in Gadamer’s axiom: “Understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well.”⁶²

Organic growth, then, occurs in several ways. One way, as we shall see, is the addition of commensurable developments to church teachings. Another way is the continual balancing of doctrinal statements that inevitably occurs over time. Karl Mannheim, for example, observed that, insofar as every statement and idea is conditioned by its socio-cultural context, it necessarily bears the “scars of its origins.”⁶³ There is, then, always room for expansion and counterbalance, for insights from different and unique perspectives, for reconceptualization and reformulation, while still maintaining the continuity of fundamental meaning. To further illustrate the point, when discussing infallibly taught propositions, Sullivan observes: “it might become necessary to express this meaning [of the proposition] differently, in order to make it intelligible to a new culture or a new mentality, because every formulation of a meaning is necessarily conditioned by a historical and cultural context which makes it less well adapted to a different context.”⁶⁴ That every formulation, even of the most solemn dogma, is highly conditioned by cultural context and so may be limited, restricted, one-sided, and open to further correction was also vigorously championed by Karl Rahner in his disagreement with Hans Küng in the 1970s.⁶⁵ It is also the point Rahner defended in his well-known essay on the Christology of Chalcedon as both end and beginning, where he insists that every mystery

⁶¹ I again note that the possibility of re-cognition of meaning within infeasibly delimited socio-historical contexts inevitably brings metaphysical questions to the fore.

⁶² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004) 296. Betti can agree with this axiom as it stands, since it properly accents the actuality of interpretation, the unique *Denkstil* of the interpreter, but Betti would also argue for a distinction between the originally intended meaning and its contemporary significance, a distinction that Gadamer, I believe, would claim rests on mistaken ontological grounds.

⁶³ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1936) 297–98.

⁶⁴ Sullivan, *Magisterium* 81.

⁶⁵ Rahner insisted that even a solemn papal or conciliar statement was subject to further correction and balance, but he could not accept Küng’s position that such judgments could also be fundamentally erroneous. For a useful summary of the debate, see Carl Peter, “A Rahner-Küng Debate and Ecumenical Possibilities” in *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, ed. Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 159–68.

of faith is necessarily open to further questions and developments.⁶⁶ Is Rahner's position, at base, very different from Vincent's claim that the *depositum fidei* must be preserved, but that there is also always growth and development, indeed, even *plane et maximus*? For while Vincent encouraged the *noviter non nova*, it is clear that this dictum was not to be adhered to apodictically, without grace or élan, for immediately after enunciating it he insisted that there is, indeed, great progress in Christ's Church; Vincent even averred that those who deny such growth are "envious of others and hateful towards God." Therefore, the avoidance of "new things" cannot mean a lack of development. On the contrary, it is just this development that Vincent's second rule sanctions. It means avoiding growth that fails to adhere to the substance of the original meaning or judgment. It means avoiding evolution that is heterogeneous, thereby constituting a *permutatio*. It hardly means that teachings cannot be clarified, balanced, and amplified.

Conceptual Pluralism

There is another reason for organic development *in eodem sensu*, which, although not directly treated by Vincent, strengthens his central argument.⁶⁷ It is the reason advanced by those who sought to break the conceptual univocity that had characterized neo-Scholasticism and had restrained the possibilities for a proper notion of conceptual plurality. Neo-Scholasticism had assigned to the concept a preeminent role in the philosophical representation of reality. Because conceptualization was an abstractive process that exhausted the intelligibility of the real, to speak of a plurality of conceptual systems or paradigms was to introduce an unwarranted relativism. No philosophical grounds existed to justify this attenuation of the representational value of the concept or, therefore, to justify theoretically conceptual pluralism. To insist on such plurality was philosophically unstable and theologically insidious.⁶⁸

Other thinkers, to the contrary, argued that the actuality of existence, the mystery and surintelligibility of being, superseded any one conceptualiza-

⁶⁶ Rahner states, "The clearest formulations, the most sanctified formulas, the classic condensations of the centuries-long work of the Church in prayer, reflection and struggle concerning God's mysteries: all these derive their life from the fact that they are not end but beginning." Rahner's original essay, "Chalkedon—Ende oder Anfang?" was redacted as "Current Problems in Christology" in *God, Christ, Mary, and Grace*, vol. 1 of *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 149–200, at 149.

⁶⁷ While not specifically treating conceptual plurality, Vincent endorsed it indirectly when encouraging Christians to reconceptualize (as both the *dicās nove* and the entreaty for "new names preserving older meanings" testify).

⁶⁸ Gerald McCool pinpoints the neo-Scholastic dilemma: "How can the same revelation come to its hearer through *essentially different concepts* and still retain

tion of reality. Because actuality eludes conceptualization, one conceptual system or framework cannot exhaust the intelligibility of the existing real. In the 20th century both the “existential Thomists” and the “transcendental Thomists” recognized, in different ways, the ultimate insufficiency of such univocity. Existential Thomists such as Étienne Gilson and Cornelio Fabro argued that Aquinas developed his notion of being in the order of actuality rather than substantiality. To remain at the level of forms or essences reached by conceptual abstraction does not take account of the “ontological marrow of things which is given by actuality.”⁶⁹ Gilson, for his part, offered careful historical studies on Bonaventure, Scotus, and Aquinas, demonstrating that significant diversity existed even within medieval thought. Further, Gilson tirelessly argued that the Scholasticism following upon Aquinas, preeminently that of Cajetan, entirely missed Thomas’s central and essential metaphysical discovery, *esse ut actus*.⁷⁰ But by failing to see that, for Aquinas, *esse* was the act of acts and the perfection of perfections, that the order of actuality surpassed conceptualization, neo-Scholasticism lacked the resources to support even the *possibility* of conceptual plurality or paradigmatic change.

Transcendental Thomism, from its own perspective, provided a more transparently self-conscious argument for pluralism. This justification, however, was found not—at least not primarily—in the elucidation of the authentic meaning of the *actus essendi*, but in the emphasis on the dynamism of the intellect to the horizon of being. Central was this question: If the concept is an abstraction from contingent matter that occurs in a determinate temporal and spatial moment, how can it have universal cognitive value? Further, could the concept account—as Henri Bergson had earlier wondered—for the dynamic thrust of life and spirit, for the *élan vital*? To answer these questions, Pierre Rousselot explored in Aquinas the difference between *ratio* and *intellectus*.⁷¹ The former is “abstractive,” yielding only imperfect knowledge of the real. The latter bespeaks the intellect’s dynamism toward the synthetic unity of being and so its intuitive

the same sense?” (*From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* [New York: Fordham University, 1989] 222).

⁶⁹ Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*, 2nd ed. (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1949) 137. For an updated version of the participationist themes central to Fabro’s work, see W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2001).

⁷⁰ Étienne Gilson, “Cajetan et l’existence,” *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 15 (1953) 267–86, at 273. Even in those passages where Thomas argued forcefully for the centrality of the act of being, such as *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 4, a.1, ad 3, Cajetan allowed Aquinas’s understanding to languish in the shadows.

⁷¹ For Rousselot’s thought, see McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism* 46–56.

grasp of God as its actual term. Joseph Maréchal developed these insights, as Gerald McCool indicates: “Even though the entire content of the mind’s ideas is derived from sense experience, the dynamic finality of the mind itself . . . refers these [abstracted conceptual] objects to an infinite, unconditioned absolute in the judgment that affirms them.”⁷² Only with this grounding, then, in an unconditioned source, can the concept, itself abstracted in finite conditions, attain validity. One must proceed beyond abstraction and conceptualization to the absolute source of the intellect’s own dynamism. This position provided a basis for the concept’s validity, even while it undermined conceptual univocity. Through the work of both the existential and transcendental Thomists, the possibility of a legitimate conceptual plurality, disassociated from its former relativistic connotations, began slowly to emerge.⁷³

Neither the existential nor transcendental Thomists sought to denigrate the epistemological value of the concept. At the same time, insofar as all concepts represent abstractions, at a certain distance from the existing real, they offer only partial rather than exhaustive intelligibility. This recognition opened up the possibility of theological pluralism. Reconceptualization allows for new viewpoints and perspectives; development occurs when particular teachings are rethought from varying social locations, within different systemic frameworks. Such theological plurality, endorsed by Vatican II and subsequent ecclesial teaching, recognizes that many philosophical and theological perspectives may be consonant with the fundamental affirmations of Christian faith.⁷⁴ One need not subscribe to a particular conceptual system in order to mediate successfully the truth of revelation. If the abstracted concept represents a real but limited dimension of intelligibility, then the Church may surely sanction a variety of commensurable conceptual systems that themselves sustain Christian truth. Inexorably, such plurality leads to new insights that are creatively, organically, and architectonically related to the “original judgment” of doctrine. Theological proposals will be made that are thought to be consonant with the tradition of the Church, while adding some new viewpoint or creatively appropriating some existing teaching. Ultimately the entire Church will make a judgment as to whether a new proposal is, in fact, adequately protective of the *idem sensus*, even while homogeneously developing the existing tradition.

⁷² Ibid. 92.

⁷³ I say “slowly” because Henri Bouillard’s relatively mild comments in 1944 on legitimate pluralism caused an outbreak of hostilities, ultimately leading to some unnuanced statements in Pius XII’s encyclical *Humani generis* (1950). See Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d’Aquin: Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944).

⁷⁴ E.g., *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 4.

INSTANCES OF DEVELOPMENT

What, then, are some actual instances of doctrinal growth *eodem sensu eademque sententia*? When thinking about the issue of continuity and change in the early fifth century, Vincent had before his eyes the *homousios* of Nicaea, the symbol of Constantinople, and the conclusions of Ephesus which, he tells us, occurred three years prior to his writing the *Commonitorium* (29.33). Surely Vincent would have seen the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople as developments *in eodem sensu*, preserving intact the authentic meaning of Scripture. Undoubtedly, though, the council of Ephesus, with its anti-Nestorian avowals and its endorsement of Mary as *Theotokos*, was uppermost in his mind. He tells us that whereas Nestorius, because of his Christological errors, denies this title to the holy Virgin Mary, Ephesus cites as witnesses against him Athanasius, Cyril, Cyprian, and the Cappadocians (30.4–21). One may surmise, then, that Vincent had precisely these central councils in mind when he writes, “This, I say . . . aroused by the novelties of heretics, is what the conciliar decrees of the Catholic Church have accomplished . . . saying great matters through few words and for a better understanding, designating an older meaning of the faith by means of a new name” (23.87–93). A few years afterwards, Chalcedon would surely have provided Vincent with another example of homogeneous development. And, as Congar has argued, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist would also likely conform to Vincent’s second rule.⁷⁵ The *Filioque*, too, insofar as it represents a significant attempt to clarify the eternal mode of origin of the Holy Spirit, would probably have corresponded to Vincent’s criterion as well.⁷⁶ And, as was argued in the early 20th century—in one of the few articles to reflect theologically on the *Commonitorium*—perhaps the infallibility of the papal magisterium provides an example of the kind of development sanctioned by *eodem sensu eademque sententia*.⁷⁷

Given these considerations, one may say that development is authorized, according to Vincent, when there is no reversal of a previous, definitively

⁷⁵ Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004; orig. publ. 1963) 120.

⁷⁶ To affirm that the *Filioque* is a legitimate theological development, sanctioned by Vincent’s second rule, is not to say that ways to overcoming its offensiveness to many Eastern Orthodox Christians should not be vigorously pursued. Olivier Clément, an Orthodox theologian, says, “In the end, it is not a question of denying the Latin tradition, but of showing that there are two differing approaches, of which both are legitimate and neither in any way contradicts the other” (*You Are Peter: An Orthodox Theologian’s Reflection on the Exercise of Papal Primacy*, trans. M. S. Laird [New York: New City, 2003] 81).

⁷⁷ Nicholas Dausse, “Le développement du dogme d’après saint Vincent de Lérins,” *Revue Thomiste*, part 2, 17 (1909) 692–710.

held meaning (especially when such meaning is sanctioned by great authority such as a general council [27.15–21; 29.23–4]) even if an original idea or meaning may be, indeed likely will be, supplemented by commensurable growth. In other words, productive development will be *beyond but in hermeneutical consonance with* the originally intended doctrinal meaning.⁷⁸ Newman may be of help here for, as he says in his sixth note, a true development is one that conserves antecedent developments “being really those antecedents and something besides them.”⁷⁹ In other words, the “something besides them” is an enriching augmentation indicating neither simple repetition, nor transformative mutation, but a true Vincentian *profectus fidei*.

At Vatican II one sees several new—and some only apparently new—perspectives authorized; developments are added without deforming original teachings, thereby indicating organic growth *in eodem sensu*. For example, the council clearly accents the baptismal participation of the laity in the priesthood of Christ (contrary to an early schema’s implication that “priesthood” was improperly attributed to the laity) without jeopardizing the unique participation in Christ’s priestly office conferred by the sacrament of Holy Orders; it restores and highlights essential elements of episcopal collegiality, without injury to the uniqueness of Petrine primacy; it accents the word of God mediated through Scripture (even Barth observed that *Dei Verbum* dedicates most of its chapters to Scripture) without prejudicing the significance of the *Verbum Dei traditum*; it sanctions a legitimate plurality of theological formulations, without detracting from a fundamental unity of doctrinal content; it makes clear that many elements of sanctification and truth can be found outside the Roman Catholic Church, without violating the affirmation that it is in the Catholic Church that Christ’s Church exists fully;⁸⁰ and, as Claude Geffré has said, the council, “for the first time in the history of Christian thought . . . pronounced a positive verdict on the non-Christian religions” without denying Christ’s constitutive importance for salvation.⁸¹

While far from an exhaustive list, these examples indicate what archi-

⁷⁸ So Vincent says, “The Church of Christ, that sober and cautious guardian of dogmas given to its care . . . does not amputate what is necessary nor admit what is superfluous, does not lose what belongs to it, nor take on what is foreign to it” (23.75–78).

⁷⁹ Newman, *Development* 200.

⁸⁰ Francis Sullivan’s exegesis of the *subsistit* passage in *Lumen gentium* no. 8 is, in my judgment, the most fully rounded. *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (New York: Paulist, 1988) 26–33.

⁸¹ Claude Geffré, “The Christological Paradox as a Hermeneutic Key to Inter-religious Dialogue,” in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Confessing the Mystery of Christ*, ed. John C. Cavadini and Laura Holt (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2004) 155–72, at 155.

tectonic growth *in eodem sensu* actually looks like. Would Vincent have sanctioned these teachings of Vatican II as conforming to his second rule? There is no way of knowing with certainty, but they seem to be entirely congruent with his criteria, as the developments are in accord with the meaning of prior authoritative teaching while adding some apposite insight, some *profectus*, homogeneously related to the prior teaching's judgment.

At the same time, all the issues mentioned here have themselves been the subject of continuing creative proposals, undergoing the process of theological and ecclesial sifting to determine whether, in fact, the *idem sensus* is legitimately maintained even while adding some proportionately developed enrichment. How, for example, is the analogically predicated participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ by both the laity and the ordained to be properly understood? How do episcopal conferences and universal synods exercise authentic magisterial authority, thereby keeping the primacy and prelaty in proper collegial balance? Can Catholics and Protestants find common ground by speaking of *prima Scriptura* without violating the Tridentine "*pari pietatis affectu*" or the Reformation's "*sola Scriptura*"?⁸² And how does one assign a truly salvific role to other religions without jeopardizing the ontologically constitutive mediation of Jesus Christ?

What is a beneficial *profectus*, and what is a pernicious *permutatio*? These are Vincent's fundamental queries, and they remain ours. A *permutatio*, he says, is the change of something from one thing into another (*aliquid ex alio in aliud*). It amounts to a reversal or an adulteration of a previously essential teaching. A *profectus*, on the other hand, is an organic development, which Vincent describes as "something that is enlarged within itself." How is tradition, then, to be understood so that there is, indeed, true development, but expansion that is in material continuity with what preceded it, evolution that is *in eodem sensu* and not *in alieno sensu*? How is doctrinal growth at the same time protection and propulsion, conservation and invention, constraint and creation?

Perhaps one way of thinking about the issue is by recognizing that each generation, in its appropriation of the prior tradition, truly "performs the faith."⁸³ This is to say that each generation receives, lives, and thinks the tradition in its own determinate circumstances. There is, then, a "performance," a "practice," an "appropriation" that is always, in some real sense,

⁸² John Paul II, for example, in *Ut unum sint*, speaks of Sacred Scripture as "the highest authority in matters of faith" (AAS 87 [1995] 968 para. 79).

⁸³ I take this phrase from Stanley Hauerwas's *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), but Hauerwas uses the expression in a different context.

an “invention” and “creation.”⁸⁴ There must always be an application of any Christian doctrine to contemporary life. New challenges, both practical and theoretical, will call forth from each generation creative ideas and imaginative insights, themselves reflective of, while advancing upon, the earlier tradition. At the same time, this appropriation, interpretation, invention, and creation will necessarily be grounded in, even while adding to, teachings having a prior *fundamentum in re*. An “interpretative performance,” then, will be both new and yet deeply congruent with fundamental prior meanings. This is the element of conservancy that is also always a part of development. It is de Lubac’s “preservative” dimension that balances the “propulsive force” and Blondel’s power of “conservation” that is always dyadically paired with the tradition’s power of “conquest.” “Performance” cannot be construed, then, as a kind of rhetorical bravura or playfulness that ignores or misshapes prior definitive teaching. This received meaning becomes the “platform” from which authentic development occurs, even while this “platform” itself receives further balancing and proportion.⁸⁵ The prior understanding and judgment becomes, in some actual sense, the measure by which growth is normed, the criterion with which a true development must be commensurable.⁸⁶

It would be difficult to discern, then, how Vincent’s second rule could

⁸⁴ This is the truth behind Gadamer’s claim that understanding is always interpretation. Betti endorses his position, insisting that we can understand a text only from our unique standpoint in history. He cautions, however, that we should not subordinate the originally creative moment to the later interpretative moment—thus his monitory codicil, *sensus non est inferendus sed efferendus*.

⁸⁵ One thinks, for example, of how Aquinas adjusted his teaching on grace after publishing his commentary on Lombard’s *Sentences*, when he discovered the Second Council of Orange’s condemnations of semi-Pelagianism. See Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce* 92–122. From that time onward, the prior meaning of the provincial council became the normative “platform” for Aquinas’s thought, even as he took Orange into his own perspective and categories.

⁸⁶ “In some actual sense” is not meant to be a vague qualifier. The phrase is intended to indicate the fact that the nature of this “growth” is not always clearly visible—certainly not in any mathematical or demonstrative way. At the same time, a fundamental teaching, proposed with the highest level of authority, will not be subject to a development clearly able to be construed as a reversal; in this case the original meaning acts as an adjudicatory norm. So, for example, Constantinople or Chalcedon could not jeopardize the truth of Nicaea. Nor could the development of the *Filioque* imperil the monarchy of the Father. Nor could the recognition that salvation is not limited to Christians endanger the instrumental salvific role of Christ. I wonder if, analogically speaking, one may invoke here the philosophical difference between nature and purpose. Just as human purposes cannot conflict with human nature (without necessarily baneful effects) so, analogously, proper development cannot conflict with (even though it might certainly add commensurable perspectives to) prior authoritative meanings. In other words, if human purposes must be finally adjudged by natural ends, so, *mutatis mutandis*, proper theo-

sanction reversals of definitive dogmatic teachings such as the divinity of Christ, the preexistence of the Word, or the triune nature of the Godhead—Christian beliefs with scriptural, conciliar, and credal warrant. Vincent's second rule, while encouraging consonant developments, is also intended as a barrier against interpretative reversals of fundamental dogmatic meaning. To again invoke Rahner, even the most solemn teachings of the Church remain open to amplification and correction. There is, in fact, no end to Vincent's *profectus* when properly understood, and so one may even speak of a carefully circumscribed fallibilism in his thought. A proper "performance," therefore, will respect an original, definitive teaching while seeking to develop and supplement that doctrine with fertile new insights and previously unseen, although vital, dimensions. Recognizing which developments are, in fact, properly congruent with the Church's faith is not a matter of positivistic demonstration, for the Church has not only to conclude that some development does not reverse an original authoritative teaching (an element often clearly visible) but also that a particular development is indeed commensurable with the deposit of faith (requiring elements of practical reason and judgment).⁸⁷

CONTINUING QUESTIONS

Legitimate theological questions, in which Vincent's distinction is vital, continue to be raised. Is every development worthy of preservation, in the sense that all future growth must be measured by the *idem sensus* of earlier teaching? In fact, as history witnesses, organic, architectonic development is not always the goal of the living tradition. On the contrary, reversals of original meaning are always possible, especially of those teachings not

logical development must be ultimately congruent with authoritatively defined teaching. A suggestive article on purposes and ends is Robert Sokolowski's "What Is Natural Law? Human Purposes and Natural Ends," *Thomist* 68 (October, 2004) 507–29.

⁸⁷ Worth examining is the role of practical reason in doctrinal development. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, speaks of those principles that "admit of being other than they are" (6.1139a8). He further observes, "No one deliberates about things that cannot vary" (6.1140a33–34). Such comments offer a clue to understanding how organic growth occurs. Development takes place in the realm of the contingent, of what is not yet certain. The Church lacks clarity on whether some proposed development is, in fact, an invariable principle just emerging from vagueness or is, rather, a matter that still belongs in the domain of the variable, admitting of being otherwise, and so not (at least yet) clearly worthy of sanction. Any approved development must be consonant with what is certain (and so is, in some fundamental sense, invariable) but whether a proposed teaching is in fact a commensurable evolution is still in the realm of practical reason which, of its very nature, deals with *endechomena*, things admitting of being otherwise.

proffered with the Church's fullest authority. In these cases, clearly, there is less constraint of meaning, since the theological authority attached to such teachings does not call forth the highest levels of assent. As Rahner has noted, "It cannot be denied that such an authentic doctrinal pronouncement not only *can* in principle be erroneous, but in the course of history often *has been* actually erroneous."⁸⁸ At Vatican II, for example, one thinks of the reversals of ordinary teaching on such matters as ecumenism, the inclusive nature of church membership and the *objective right* to worship God other than as revealed in Christ.⁸⁹ In these and other reversible matters, it became clear that the goal was clearly not growth *in eodem sensu*. This reversal of ordinary teaching that occurred at Vatican II remains, of course, possible today.

Then, too, one may ask if the proposed ordination of women to the priesthood constitutes a significant *profectus in eodem sensu* or an unfortunate *permutatio in alieno sensu*. This issue remains in discussion at several levels in the life of the Church. One may not, solely on an a priori basis, proscribe this possibility as not conforming to Vincent's second rule since it is difficult to see how such ordination would, in fact, be considered incommensurable (in the sense of a noncomplementary practice) with the tradition that preceded it. Since Vincent is saying that development must be organic and proportionate, with "seeds" necessarily ripening and maturing in the Church over the course of time, then surely an argument can and may be legitimately sustained that the ordination of women to the priesthood constitutes just the homogeneous "enlargement within itself" that Vincent sanctions. Inasmuch as sedimented teaching in the life of the Church cannot be immobile, but is always capable of being brought to further fruition and perfection by consonant and analogous developments, there may still be room for organic growth in this regard. At the same time, it should be equally recognized that the prior meaning and judgment, Vincent's *idem sensus* and *eadem sententia*, is itself binding to the extent that it is taught as binding, that is, the Church as a whole, and finally the magisterium (or as Vincent would say, the Church in general or the overseers in particular [22.5–7]) must authoritatively decide which developments belong constitutively to the *depositum fidei* and which proposals are no longer considered commensurate with it.⁹⁰ For just this reason, much effort has been devoted to determining the exact status of John Paul II's

⁸⁸ Karl Rahner, "Magisterium and Theology," in *God and Revelation*, vol. 18 of *Theological Investigations*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 54–73, at 57.

⁸⁹ See the instances cited by J. Robert Dionne, *The Papacy and the Church: A Study of Praxis and Reception in Ecumenical Perspective* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1987) 147–94 and by Sullivan, *Magisterium* 209–10.

⁹⁰ Some theologians have sought to provide other warrants for theological truth

Ordinatio sacerdotalis, since the authority with which the apostolic letter is taught will inexorably affect the extent to which any future development or doctrinal enrichment is constrained by prior meaning and authoritative judgment.⁹¹

Another contemporary disputed question concerns the salvific value of non-Christian religions. Here too one finds an issue that has profoundly preoccupied theologians—as well as the entire Church in various ways—in their attempt to understand how other religions can themselves mediate salvation or at least share more fully in the salvation mediated by Christ. What does it mean, as Vatican II said, that creatures exercise a “manifold cooperation” that shares in the mediation of the Redeemer?⁹² How are we to understand the “participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees” of which the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (no. 5) speaks? It is

than simply “authority systems,” since to rely on authority (whether Scripture, tradition, or the magisterium) is to place religious claims outside the sphere of the continuing conversation characteristic of democratic societies. Religious systems insist they “know” the truth a priori so their claims are, at least purportedly, beyond discussion and challenge. Truth, then, including the truth purveyed by religion, needs publicly available and justifiable warrants. Examples of such publicly illuminative criteria are the liberative and emancipatory function of certain positions as well as the ability of certain ideas to make a continuing claim in and through history. Insofar as theologians have pursued this line of thought, they continue in the classical Catholic tradition of validating at least some truth-claims on the basis of publicly redeemable grounds. Further, such methodology has the advantage of conjoining at points with explicitly theological ideas such as the *sensus fidelium* and reception. Publicly available validation, when sought for specifically doctrinal teachings of Christianity, serves, in my judgment, an important if ultimately adjunct role. I pursue the issue of truth-claims at greater length in *Foundations of Systematic Theology* 73–105.

⁹¹ Since the issuance of *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* (May 1994) there has been much debate on the doctrinal weight this teaching is to be accorded. The *Responsum ad dubium* (October 1995) of Cardinal Ratzinger states that the apostolic letter is a papal confirmation of the infallible teaching of the ordinary and universal magisterium. Ratzinger reiterated this position in his doctrinal commentary on *Ad tuendam fidem* (May 1998), a *motu proprio* of John Paul II. See “*Nota doctrinalis*,” *AAS* 90 (1998) 544–51 (English translation in *Origins* 28 [1998] 116–19). Francis Sullivan, in reply to the *Responsum*, argues that the criteria for establishing *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* as an infallible teaching have not been clearly invoked, thereby leaving room for uncertainty as to whether the exclusion of women from the priesthood has, indeed, been infallibly taught. See Francis A. Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (New York: Paulist, 1996) 181–84. It is not our intention to enter the marrow of the debates here. Our goal is to indicate that there exists a theological process in the Church—both regarding the authority of the teaching and its consequent reception—to determine if the proposed priestly ordination of women is, in fact, a proportionate *profectus* of the tradition or a heterogeneous *permutatio* of it.

⁹² *Lumen gentium* no. 62.

safe to say that most theologians find Jacques Dupuis's recent attempt to develop this question to be highly creative and insightful, moving a step beyond generally accepted theological wisdom and worthy of continuing investigation.⁹³ To what extent his proposals constitute homogeneous, organic growth *in eodem sensu* will, I suspect, remain under theological discussion and evaluation for some time to come.⁹⁴

Still other issues could be mentioned almost at random: May one properly predicate suffering and change in the Godhead, especially insofar as several authors, for decades now, have sought to move beyond the traditional attributes of impassibility and immutability? Should the Catholic Church insist that a condition for corporate Christian unity be that Orthodox and Protestant Christians accept all the ecclesial structures and teachings of Catholicism? To what extent may theologians accept contemporary sociology of knowledge theory with its assertion that certain ecclesiological constructions are the result of cultural forces that have now been surpassed or, indeed, unmasked as oppressive? These questions, and countless others (bioethical issues, for example) are in the process of undergoing the kind of careful theological and ecclesial sifting and analysis before authoritative judgments are rendered as to their homogeneous or heterogeneous status.

And just this task of rendering judgment raises another central question of contemporary theology: Who decides what is a proper *profectus* and what is an improper *permutatio*? Surely, as the tradition witnesses, the entire Church has some role in this process. Pius IX, in his bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854), famously speaks of the *singularis conspiratio* of Catholic bishops and faithful as one reason for the suitability of the definition. Newman, in his *Rambler* article of 1859, found this part of the encyclical to be profoundly traditional and highly instructive. Commenting on the passage, he said, "*Conspiratio*; the two, the Church teaching and the Church taught, are put together, as one twofold testimony, illustrating each other and never to be divided."⁹⁵ These two facets of the Church are necessarily conjoined, Newman argued, "because the body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine, and because their *consensus* through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church." None of the channels of tradition "may be treated with disrespect," Newman insisted, since the apostolic tradition is variously manifested in bishops,

⁹³ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001).

⁹⁴ A succinct explanation of Dupuis's theological achievement (as well as its relationship to *Redemptoris missio*) can be found in Gerald O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis: His Person and Work," in *In Many and Diverse Ways*, ed. Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003) 18–29.

⁹⁵ John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, ed. John Coulson (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961) 71.

theological doctors, people, liturgies and even the events of history. All must be esteemed, even while recognizing that “the gift of . . . defining, promulgating and enforcing any portion of that tradition resides solely in the *Ecclesia docens*.” Newman went on to speak of this *consensus* as “a sort of instinct, or *phrónema*, deep in the bosom of the mystical body of Christ.”⁹⁶

Newman’s desire to knit together the faithful and their pastors, as the bull of 1854 had done, to have them “breathe together,” was in many ways duplicated by Vatican II which, in its own way, accents this *conspiratio pastorum ac fidelium*. In outlining the teaching role of the magisterium, the council speaks of bishops as the “authentic teachers . . . endowed with the authority of Christ”⁹⁷ and recalls that bishops have received, through episcopal succession, the *charisma veritatis certum* or sure gift of truth.⁹⁸ The council also affirms that the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, “has been entrusted solely to the living teaching authority of the Church whose authority is exercised in Christ’s name.”⁹⁹ Since one of the tasks of Vatican II was to contextualize the profound stress on the Petrine office tendered by Vatican I, it is no surprise that the teaching role of the episcopacy is emphasized, as numerous conciliar statements attest.¹⁰⁰

But this emphasis on episcopal authority does not ignore the *conspiratio* which is essential to the Church’s judgment in deciding between a propitious *profectus* and an ominous *permutatio*. Besides promulgating an ecclesiology accenting the unity of the baptized, Vatican II affirms that the people of God participate in both Christ’s priestly and prophetic offices. Consequently, as a well-known passage has it, this people, anointed by the Holy One, “are unable to err in matters of belief” and manifest this property “by means of the supernatural sense of faith of all the people, when ‘from the bishops to the last of the lay faithful’ they show their universal consensus in matters of faith and morals.” *Lumen gentium* adds that by this *sensus fidei*, itself sustained by the Spirit, the faithful “adhere indefectibly to ‘the faith once delivered to the saints’ penetrating it more profoundly with right judgment and applying it more fully to life.”¹⁰¹ These passages stress the Spirit-guided instinct or *phrónema* of the faithful for Christian truth, their charism for discerning it more acutely, and their catholic consensus which cannot be ultimately flawed. Congar astutely observes that, in every age, this consensus of the faithful, as well as the consensus of those

⁹⁶ Ibid. 63, 73. As a parallel, Clément notes that the encyclical of the Orthodox patriarchs of 1848 refers to the bishops as the “judges” and the faithful as the “shields” of truth, “thus extending the fundamental theme of ‘reception’ to the entire people of God” (*You Are Peter* 13).

⁹⁷ *Lumen gentium* no. 25.

⁹⁸ *Dei verbum* no. 8.

⁹⁹ Ibid. no. 10.

¹⁰⁰ See, e.g., *Lumen gentium* no 25.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. no. 12.

charged to teach them, has been regarded as a guarantee of truth “not because of some *mystique* of universal suffrage,” but because of the gospel principle that unanimity in Christian matters indicates the work of the Spirit.¹⁰² Other conciliar texts could be cited on this matter, but it is not our intention to offer a complete examination of the coinherence between pastors and faithful envisioned by Vatican II. My point is that the “breathing together” that Newman insisted characterized the patristic tradition finds a significant place in the council’s thinking, even if, in this area as in others, the conciliar statements themselves give rise to further insight and development.

Within this theological synergy of pastors and faithful, Newman assigned to theologians a particularly significant role in determining whether some proposal is in fact a *profectus*, and how it is to be understood. In his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, Newman argued that when the Church teaches magisterially, theologians immediately begin to explain the exact meaning of the text, “in order to make it [the teaching] as tolerable as possible.” Such an approach, he insisted, is not minimalism, but a doctrinal moderation consistent with sound faith.¹⁰³ The *schola theologorum*, he averred, has carefully explained teachings such as *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* and the Council of Vienne’s prohibition against usury, showing how these admit of unique considerations.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Newman had a fine sense that only a proper coinherence of various elements in the Church could lead to a clear determination of what constitutes a legitimate *profectus*. He endorsed a variety of theological “courts” and praised the elongated sifting of theological questions that took place when a diversity of faculties flourished.¹⁰⁵ Newman recognized, then, that only an exacting and finely honed process could clarify whether some development is legitimately *in eodem sensu* with the teachings that preceded it. Only a procedure recognizing several imbricating levels prior to final judgment could distinguish clearly between a development and a deformation of Christian truth.

¹⁰² See *Tradition and Traditions* 397. Of course, unanimity is not always easily achieved. As Clément observes, sometimes a single individual testifies to the truth, as Maximus the Confessor did in 658 during the Monothelite controversy. Eventually the episcopacy hears the voice of the prophet, giving “to this seemingly isolated opinion an ecclesial weight” (*You Are Peter* 14).

¹⁰³ John Henry Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching Considered*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1910) 2:321; cited by Dulles, *Newman* 102. Earlier in the same letter, Newman observed, “None but the *Schola Theologorum* is competent to determine the force of Papal and Synodal utterances, and the exact interpretation of them is a work of time” (*Certain Difficulties* 176).

¹⁰⁴ See *ibid.* 334–37.

¹⁰⁵ John Henry Newman, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, 31 vols., ed. Charles Stephen Dessain (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1961–) 20:391; cited by Dulles, *Newman* 105.

While the *conspiratio* between pastors and faithful is not a central theme of the *Commonitorium*, Vincent is far from silent on the issue. The *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus creditum est* itself, Vincent's oft-maligned first rule, surely foreshadows the "universal consensus" explicitly endorsed by *Lumen gentium* no. 12. With this maxim, Vincent was groping for an explanation of what he implicitly recognized as true: only the faith of the universal Church can adequately warrant an authoritative doctrine. He even reminded us that this is the very meaning of the word "catholic" (2.26–28). Along the same lines, Vincent asked: *Quis est hodie Timotheus?* Who is the scriptural Timothy of today charged with guarding the deposit of faith (see 1 Tim 6:20)? He is, Vincent answered, either the universal Church in general or the whole body of overseers in particular, thereby offering his own version of the *conspiratio singularis*, which in fact is not very different from that endorsed by Newman and Vatican II.¹⁰⁶ When commenting more fully on the 1 Timothy passage, a pericope encouraging Christians to avoid profane novelties and false knowledge, Vincent argued, "[Such novelties], were they accepted, would necessarily defile the faith of the blessed fathers. . . . If they were accepted, then it must be stated that the faithful of all ages, all the saints, all the chaste, continent virgins, all the clerical levites and priests, so many thousands of confessors, so great an army of martyrs . . . almost the entire world incorporated in Christ the Head through the Catholic faith for so many centuries, would have erred, would have blasphemed, would not have known what to believe" (24.18–25). Vincent's *consensus fidelium*, then, is one that recognizes a general continuity of church teaching through the ages, a continuity that must resist fundamental reversals and heterogeneous distortions.¹⁰⁷ Vincent eagerly acknowledged that growth is necessary but he wanted Christians to be watchful lest an alleged *profectus* become the "false knowledge" of which Paul admonished Timothy.

CONCLUSIONS

Vincent's *Commonitorium* in general and his hermeneutics of dogma in particular still have something important to say to theology today. The monk of Lérins insisted that development, even exceedingly great progress, occurs in the life of the Church; but it must be homogeneous in kind,

¹⁰⁶ "vel generaliter universa ecclesia vel specialiter totum corpus praepositorum" (22.5–7).

¹⁰⁷ Vincent's language here is reminiscent of what some Orthodox writers have called an "ecumenism in time," i.e., "the need to be consistent with the theological tradition of the Church from the earliest centuries." See Valerie Karras, "Beyond Justification: An Orthodox Perspective," in *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. William G. Rusch (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2003) 99–131, at 100.

architecturally related to prior fundamental teaching. Christian doctrine, then, may always be further clarified, be open to new perspectives, take account of fresh insights, respond to distinct historical moments. In this sense, Gadamer is right when he says we should “recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work.”¹⁰⁸ It is precisely this historical efficacy that calls forth further amplification and novel points of view, building on what is already securely in the Church’s possession.

Of course, just this “possession” is at the heart of Vincent’s accent on *idem sensus* and *eadem sententia*, for the same meaning and same judgment are the materially identical “platform” from which architectonic development occurs. Vincent intended to secure this perduring meaning and judgment, I think, because of his proper concern for the cognitive content of doctrinal statements; such affirmations cannot be illegitimately transformed into something alien and unrecognizable. This is not to say that doctrinal claims exhaust theological truth. On the contrary, such assertions can neither encompass their formal object, nor proscribe an authentic plurality indefeasibly born of the social location of the knower. It is to say, however, that authoritative teachings also mediate reality, actually reflect (given all the analogical qualifications) states of affairs. They cannot be understood simply as doxological in character, even if doxology and dogma are always necessarily conjoined. Nor can they be understood (especially when conclusively tendered) merely as provisional affirmations, open to reversal in their fundamental meaning, as if such claims were simply pragmatic and prudential judgments, having the status of Aristotle’s *endechomena*, matters that could be otherwise. Growth that is not *in eodem sensu*, as Vincent clearly saw, tends to modify *aliquid ex alio in aliud*, changing one thing into something quite different, a transformative alteration that would depreciate the limited but actual cognitive penetration of dogmatic statements.

This contention is hardly a manifestation of naïve realism; it is a recognition that Christian doctrine has a cognitive dimension, perpetually mediating something of reality itself. This is the essential realism and finality that is at the heart of the Christian faith and is attested, in varying ways, by Lonergan, Rahner, Pannenberg, and others.¹⁰⁹ Such affirmation, of course, does not preclude the significant open-endedness connected even with the

¹⁰⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 301.

¹⁰⁹ I have treated these thinkers on the nature of doctrinal truth in *Foundations of Systematic Theology* 107–39. All of them, I believe, would agree with John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock when they say, “For while, certainly, human access to truth can only be time-bound, if truth has no connotations of the eternal and abiding, then it is hard to see why it is called truth at all” (*Truth in Aquinas* [New York: Routledge, 2001] xii).

most solemnly defined dogmas, precisely because of the infinity of God and the finitude of human thought and language. This provisional dimension is ably articulated by Aquinas who defined the *articulus fidei* as *perceptio divinae veritatis tendens in ipsam*.¹¹⁰ It is just this “*tendens*” that recognizes the limited epistemological yield and ultimately eschatological nature of doctrinal statements.¹¹¹

May the foregoing comments be built on Vincent’s *Commonitorium* in general and his second rule in particular? I believe they can, even while recognizing that Vincent’s work continues to raise nagging doubts and further questions. For example, is the claim, deeply entrenched in the ecclesial and theological tradition, that doctrinal growth must be *in eodem sensu eademque sententia*, merely an age-old shibboleth that may now be jettisoned without baneful consequences? Is it a shopworn slogan trotted out on occasion by some obscure apparatchik and mechanically inserted into contemporary magisterial statements to lend a patina of age and venerable patristic endorsement? Or perhaps the *idem sensus* is little more than a theological club intended to beat back the ineluctable effects of historicity and finitude. Ovid teaches us that “*tempus edax rerum*.”¹¹² But if time does indeed devour all things, was Vincent, even in the early fifth century, futilely seeking to impede time’s ravenous appetite? Or was he acknowledging Ovid’s insight, but showing how the Church could properly understand it? The latter, I think, is actually the case. Vincent explicitly acknowledged that history is productive, that development and growth will occur, but he recognized that growth and development must be in fundamental continuity with the great tradition that preceded him. He never tired of repeating Scripture’s counsel, “Guard the deposit, Timothy!” (1 Tim 6:20) while perceptively recognizing that such guarding is never reducible to mere repetition and must allow for fresh answers to new questions.

Second, Newman, in his *Essay on Development*, when noting the “scanty” ante-Nicene testimonies to papal supremacy and the real presence, remarked, “True as the dictum [the first rule] of Vincentius must be considered in the abstract . . . it is hardly available now, or effective of any satisfactory result.”¹¹³ One must ask if this impotence extends to Vincent’s second rule as well. Is its “solution” so diffuse and open-ended that it

¹¹⁰ *Summa theologiae* 2-2, q. 1, a. 6.

¹¹¹ We can agree with Pannenberg who, commenting on just this limited yield says, “Christians should not need to be taught this by modern reflection on the finitude of knowledge that goes with the historicity of experience” (*Systematic Theology* 1:55).

¹¹² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.234.

¹¹³ Newman, *Development* 24, 27. Newman’s own seven notes or criteria for development have also been accused of ineffectiveness. As Owen Chadwick has

provides small relevance for any contemporary notion of development? Does Vincent's second rule have a wax nose, able to be shaped in any direction and, therefore, useless as a guide to the nature of doctrinal growth? I do not think that either is the case, because Vincent provides us with two essentials: first, the platform from which authentic development must occur, that is, the *idem sensus* of authoritative teachings (themselves always open to further refinement) and, second, the necessary growth that indicates commensurable developments, only slowly discerned by the entire Church as proportionate to and analogous with secure doctrine.¹¹⁴ As Vincent said, a rose garden cannot become a thornbush, but neither can the Church be satisfied with mere seeds; it must cultivate them until they reach full growth. Of course, it must be acknowledged that Vincent did not offer an equation that allows us to track the course of development with algebraic precision. He suggested general guidelines that establish both the deposit of faith and future growth, without circumscribing such development too narrowly.

Third, was Vincent too conservative, not making quite enough room for legitimate development? Are the *noviter non nova*, the *quae didicisti, doce*, and the *depositum custodi* too mired in a quest for immobile preservation and petrification, failing to encourage theological progress and continued insight? Congar, for example, observes that the Jansenists, literal followers of Augustine, liked to appeal—ironically, given Vincent's anti-Augustinian reputation—to Vincent's first rule, with its triple criteria of universality, ubiquity, and antiquity. The same was true of Ignaz von Döllinger, with his denial of papal infallibility, on the grounds of lack of antiquity. Congar adds that Vincent's second rule, cited by Vatican I, has this same preservative intention. So, he continues, while one might legitimately see Nicaea and the real presence as clarifying the content of Scripture (and so holding fast to the *idem sensus*), one can hardly explain the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption in this manner.¹¹⁵ But Congar, I

said, "No one believed in them [the notes] when the book first came out and no one has believed in them since" (*Newman* [Oxford: Oxford University, 1983] 47). Cited by John T. Ford, "Faithfulness to Type in Newman's 'Essay on Development,'" in *Newman Today*, ed. Stanley L. Jaki (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989) 17–48, at 35.

¹¹⁴ I cannot here discuss how the conciliar "hierarchy of truths" (*Unitatis redintegratio* no. 11) that finds resonance in a "hierarchy of ecumenical councils" as well as in a "hierarchy of sacraments" would more finely hone the term "authoritative teaching." But see Yves Congar, "The Notion of 'Major' or 'Principal' Sacraments," in *The Sacraments in General: A New Perspective*, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx and Boniface Willems, *Concilium*, vol. 31 (New York: Paulist, 1968) 21–32.

¹¹⁵ Congar, *Meaning of Tradition* 118–120. And yet, cannot one see the Immaculate Conception and Assumption as developments entirely commensurable with the *idem sensus* of both Scripture and the earlier tradition? This, in fact, is what the

think, while surely right that Vincent had deeply preservative instincts, takes him in too restrictive a sense.¹¹⁶ It bears repeating that the conscription of Vincent into *Pascendi* and the Oath against Modernism understandably colored his reception by Catholic theologians of Congar's generation.¹¹⁷ As a counterpoint, it is worth recalling that Newman, Möhler, Kuhn, and Rosmini certainly never saw Vincent or his second rule as only preservative; indeed, the exact opposite is the case.¹¹⁸ Surely Vincent's analogies—seeds maturing over time and the body gradually coming to full stature—indicate that he was well aware of evolution according to type, and so his undoubtedly preservative instincts are balanced by his recognition of propulsive, genetic development. Would Vincent, then, who wrote soon after the council of Ephesus and who stoutly defended that council's bestowal of the title *Theotokos* on Mary, have in fact found the Marian

Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission recently concluded. See ARCIC, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 2005) 58.

¹¹⁶ Congar insightfully tells us that "tradition . . . comprises two equally vital aspects: one of development and one of conservation. This is why some see tradition eminently as a safeguard for the purity of the deposit, at the risk of cutting the present off from the future, while others see it eminently as a way of opening the present to the future, in the search for a total synthesis. There is a sort of tension or dialectic between purity and totality, neither of which should be sacrificed" (*Meaning of Tradition* 117). Surprisingly, Congar does not recognize these wise words as reflective of Vincent's own thought. There is no doubt that the deposit is to be guarded, as Scripture counsels, but in such a way that progress and growth are equally sanctioned. At the same time, Congar may be right, when, citing Jean-Louis Leuba, he observes that Vincent did not sufficiently articulate how his first and second rules are interrelated. See *Diversity and Communion* 124.

¹¹⁷ Ratzinger, for example, notes that Vatican II's original (rejected) schema on revelation reflected the "embattled atmosphere" in the Church that "reaches its zenith" in *Lamentabili*, *Pascendi*, and the Oath against Modernism. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, trans. Henry Traub (New York: Paulist, 1966) 20–21. Overcoming this reactionary atmosphere likely meant jettisoning Vincent of Lérins along with certain strictures of *Pascendi* and the Oath. Karl Barth, on the contrary, unencumbered by anti-Modernist decrees, sees more incisively than Congar that Vincent is as much interested in continuing development as in careful preservation (leading, ironically, to Barth's deep suspicion of the *Commonitorium*). Barth finds the *noviter non nova* to be insidious because hidden in that *noviter*, he rightly perceives, is an accent on development. Barth concludes with his usual vigor, that "the Reformation was needed for the lie [that apostolic tradition could develop beyond the letter of Scripture] to come to fruition even in the measure in which it did so at Trent." At the same time, he forthrightly admits that Trent's position was already held by several Christian writers long before Vincent's own bold formulation (*Church Dogmatics* I/2, 548, 551).

¹¹⁸ Antonio Rosmini, for example, praised Vincent's thought on development: "The matter could not be expressed more correctly or precisely" (*Theological Language*, trans. Denis Cleary [Durham: Rosmini House, 2004] 30–35, at 34).

dogmas of later centuries to be “changing one thing into something else,” or would he instead have seen them as constituting a legitimate *profectus*, an organic development of the seeds originally sown in the Church?

Theology does not simply guard the deposit, although it surely does that, as Vincent, with Scripture itself, insists. In receiving the Catholic faith, he declares, you accepted gold; now hand on this precious treasure to others (22.17–22). At the same time, Vincent saw clearly that theology defends the *depositum fidei* precisely by encouraging its proportionate and living development, by determining those areas that may be fruitfully enhanced. Theology, then, must be timely and vigorous, for God acts in each age, and each epoch in its turn appropriates and “performs” the truth of revelation for its own time, even while in material (and not simply formal) continuity with the past. Theology must be able to respond to its times, to be lively and dynamic, to develop new insights that foster organic growth and homogeneous doctrinal development. It is precisely this idea that finds resonance in Newman’s oft-quoted, “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often,” as well as in Bouillard’s once vilified but equally pertinent comment, “Une théologie qui ne serait pas actuelle serait un théologie fausse.”¹¹⁹

Vincent’s thought remains instructive because development is clearly encouraged, although always from within the purlieu of the Church’s most fundamental prior convictions. Liberation theology? Feminist thought? Radical orthodoxy? Postmodernism? The process of determining which of their insights constitute a collective *profectus fidei* and which do not is still undergoing, as every creative and robust theological idea must, an elongated period of discernment and judgment. As *Dei Verbum* says, and as Vincent would fully agree, “The Church, through the unrolling centuries, continuously tends toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God come to fulfillment in her” (no. 8). He refused a static notion of faith and doctrine, even while developing a principle for architectonic growth. He recognized, even in the early fifth century, that there is an indefeasible impulse to development in doctrine—as there is in human life—but it is an impulse that must be properly husbanded if it is to bear good fruit.

If Vincent did not, with his second rule, bequeath us a positivistic criteriological principle for development, then he did, I think, offer some highly useful insights for theological epistemology. Vincent saw the absolute necessity of development (*profectus, proficere, crescere*) while at the same time standing on the solid ground of perduring meanings and judgments (*in eodem sensu eademque sententia*). Newman astutely observed that “one cause of corruption in religion is the refusal to follow the course of doctrine

¹¹⁹ Newman, *Development* 40; Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce* 219.

as it moves on, and an obstinacy in the notions of the past.”¹²⁰ Vincent’s evolutionary metaphors insist on the same point: stunted growth inevitably follows from arrested development.

The monk of Lérins, *avant la lettre*, was a theologian of the hermeneutics of doctrine—seeking to understand how doctrine is both always evolving, yet always remaining true to the prior judgments of Scripture and the Church. He was like the wise steward in the Gospel, able to take from his storehouse both new and old (Matt 13:52). While making no claims for Vincent’s exhaustiveness, it is fair to say that he has inspired theologians and church teaching for centuries and still has something essential to teach theology today.

¹²⁰ Newman, *Development* 177.