

From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: the Fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-speaking North America*

Dionysius, 16 (1998), 157-188.

Gilson in North America

Étienne Gilson deeply loved North America. His retirement from the Collège de France in 1951 for the sake of his work at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto is evidence enough. When, to the astonishment of his colleagues, he left behind that institution which is the very summit of the French university system, Gilson said that he “fled” to Canada.¹ Though the circumstances of the 1951 flight indicate that North American attractions as well as European conflicts and disappointments drove him across the Atlantic, Henri de Lubac described him as “at home in Toronto ... where he was loved.”² According to his official biographer, Lawrence Shook at the Toronto Institute, Professor Gilson preferred to have his life story written in North America because there he had “established viable institutions for the advancement of medieval studies.”

These were the institutes founded at Toronto and Ottawa in 1929, and at Notre Dame, Indiana in 1946, where a Toronto colleague and brother in the philosophical cause of existential Thomism, Gerald Phelan, became the first president. In Toronto he realized what he conceived in France. His *exposé de titres* for his chair in the Collège de France may be viewed as “a commentary on the programme of medieval studies he was planning to establish in Toronto.” He chose Toronto over Harvard or Montreal “partly because of its willingness to comply with his plans.” His special requirements were that medieval thought be taught within “the whole range of medieval culture” and that the students “be able to read medieval texts.”³ Gilson, the historian, who opposed the texts of St. Thomas and other medievals to the received scholastic tradition, is the founding father.

In his own writing, however, history is the servant of philosophy and both are *ancillae theologiae*. History is used to create dialectical experiments leading toward, if never producing, his Thomistic metaphysics of *esse* derived from Exodus 3, 14.⁴

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¹ L.K. Shook, *Étienne Gilson*, The Étienne Gilson Series 6, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 309 refers to Gilson's own *apologia* after his retirement from the Collège de France: *Esprit*, 19 (1951), 590-596. This was after 26 ‘flights’; there were about 40 in all, *ibid.*, ix. For Gilson's relation to the Collège generally, see *ibid.*, 205-210.

² *Letters of Étienne Gilson to Henri de Lubac*, with commentary by Henri de Lubac, translated by M.E. Hamilton, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) [hereafter, *Letters*], 13; however, the personal recollections of de Lubac must be taken *cum grano salis*: see F. Van Steenberghe, *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 84, 2 (1989), 379-388; *idem*, *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 87 (1989), 324-331 and 612-625, also 89 (1991), 499-505.

³ Shook, *Gilson*, ix and 192-194; *idem*, *Mediaeval Studies*, 51 (1979), xi-xv; G.B. Flahiff, C.S.B., *Speculum*, 24 (1949), 251-255. *Mediaeval Studies*, 27 (1965) is dedicated to Gerald Bernard Phelan and contains essential biography and bibliography.

⁴ A.A. Maurer, “Gilson's Use of History in Philosophy,” with Appendix: E. Gilson, “Remarks on Experience in Metaphysics,” translation of “Remarques sur l'expérience en métaphysique,” *Actes du XIe*

Ironically, except for Father Joseph Owens, there are no longer protagonists of Gilsonian Thomism at the Toronto Institute nor at Notre Dame. There, as in other major centers, the study of mediaeval philosophy is no longer directed to the inculcation of Thomism. Still worse, such Thomism as remains has made its peace with personalist or other perspectives accommodating themselves to aspects of the modern subjectivity of which Gilson was the relentless opponent.⁵ These philosophical and theological perspectives cohere with the results of the Second Vatican Council which is authoritatively represented as having a personalist philosophy like that of the reigning Roman Pontiff.⁶ The Council also moved the Catholic Church away from Scholasticism generally and toward a recentering of theology in Biblical and Patristic studies. Evidently, then, there was a change in the ecclesiastical purposes and circumstances which Thomism, as Gilson understood it, served. But, in fact, the reversal was external neither to the conflicting dynamic of Gilson's own thought, nor to the internal dynamic of the Thomist revival more generally. The interplay is between history -- no one was more aware than Gilson that Thomism is based in the thought of an historical figure and is conveyed by traditions -- and philosophical and theological reflection, as well as ecclesiastical life and purposes. In English North America, historical study and the Heideggerian critique of metaphysical ontology have combined to draw Thomism away from both Aristotle and metaphysics toward neoplatonism and the good beyond being. Moreover, this appears appropriate to much in the current state of the Catholic Church. What is the character of this reversal?

Congrès international de philosophie, vol. 4 (Amsterdam and Louvain, 1953), 5-10 reprinted in *Thomistic Papers*, V, ed. T.A. Russman (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1990), 25-48. Also useful are Gilson, "Doctrinal History and its Interpretation," *Speculum*, 24 (1949), 483-492; idem, "Historical Research and the Future of Scholasticism," *The Modern Schoolman*, 29 (1951), 1-10 and Desmond J. Fitzgerald, "Etienne Gilson: From Historian to Philosopher," *Thomistic Papers*, II, (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1986), 29-58. Examples of the method, together with explanations, are found in these works of Gilson: *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, The William James Lectures at Harvard, 1936-37 (New York: Scribners, 1937), *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, The Richards Lectures in the University of Virginia for 1937 (New York: Scribners, 1938), *God and Philosophy*, Powell Lectures on Philosophy at Indiana University, 1939-40 (New Haven: Yale, 1941), *Being and Some Philosophers*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949).

⁵ At Notre Dame one finds, among others, Ralph McInerny (see below), M.D. Jordan (see below), David Burrell, and, until recently, Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame, 1988); idem, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition*, The Gifford Lectures, 1988 (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame, 1990). MacIntyre's defence of Thomism is significant. He is concerned to ground ethics in natural law but is neither an historian of philosophy nor a metaphysician. He is not concerned to produce an historically accurate representation of the thought of Thomas and he defends Thomism, not metaphysically, but as the best way to think within a tradition. On MacIntyre, and on the Canadian Catholic philosopher, Charles Taylor, who is also concerned to ground ethical and political discourse, see J.J. Buckley, "A Return to the Subject: The Theological Significance of Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*," *The Thomist*, 55 (1991), 497-509 and T.S. Hibbs, "MacIntyre, Tradition and the Christian Philosophers," *The Modern Schoolman*, 48 (1991), 211-223.

⁶ For a Papal representation of the Second Vatican Council as thinking within a personalist perspective, see the encyclical *Splendor Veritatis*; Martin Rhonheimer, "'Intrinsically Evil Acts' and the Moral Viewpoint: Clarifying a Central Teaching of *Veritatis Splendor*," *The Thomist*, 58, (1994), 1-39 is an example of the attempt to move Thomas in this direction. For a reaction against these developments see below and *Thomistic Papers*, VI, ed. John F.X. Knasas, (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1994) generally.

The reversal was not for want of industry, powers of communication, nor because of uncertainty or confusion on the part of Professor Gilson or of his disciples. Neither was it because of the obscurity or complexity of Gilson's doctrine as a philosophical position, nor was it for lack of important opportunities for prominent public exposition and of access to the popular or academic press. Nor yet was it for a deficiency in the number or the loyalty of the troops.

English-speaking North America felt the full benefit of Professor Gilson's teaching. All of his major works written in French were translated into English, an enterprise still continuing for correspondence, early and minor works.⁷ Indeed, some of his clearest, strongest, most loved and most polemical books were originally published in English. Some were the texts of lectures delivered from celebrated philosophical and theological podiums in the English-speaking world.⁸ One of his first North American students, Anton Pegis, later professor and President of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, edited for many years an important series of Catholic books for Doubleday. But it was not just on this account that Pegis could claim in 1957 that two of Gilson's books "rank among the best-selling serious works on philosophy in publishing history."⁹

Professor Gilson's thought entered the English North American intellectual world when it was ripe for popular exposition. He began to deliver his message in English at the same time as its main lines were becoming fixed.¹⁰ He had survived the European

⁷ Cf. M. McGrath, *Étienne Gilson. A Bibliography. Une Bibliographie*, The Étienne Gilson Series 3 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982); Étienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), idem, *Linguistics and Philosophy, An essay on the philosophical constants of language*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame, 1988) and notes 2 and 4 above. These provide an opportunity for some to replay the old battles, see L. Patrick, "Review Article" for *Thomist Realism*, in *New Scholasticism*, 63 (1989), 81-100.

⁸ The list of his lectureships is enormous. His *Exposé de titres pour une chaire d'histoire de la philosophie au moyen âge au Collège de France* (about 1930) gives for the English-speaking world among his "series de leçons ou de conférences aux Universités": Berkeley, Illinois, Columbia, Brown, Cornell, Virginia, Chicago, London, Cambridge, Oxford, and he had just begun. Besides those indicated in note 4 above, perhaps the most outstanding were the Gifford lectures for 1931-32 at Aberdeen and the A.W. Mellon lectures for 1955 at Princeton. The Gifford lectures became *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (1932, English: 1936). The Mellon lectures became *Painting and Reality*, (1957, French: 1958).

⁹ A.C. Pegis, ed., *A Gilson Reader. Selections from the Writings of Étienne Gilson*, (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 11. On Pegis at Doubleday, cf. Shook, *Gilson*, 318; on his own work, there are J.R. O'Donnell, ed., *Essays in Honour of Anton Charles Pegis*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974) and *Mediaeval Studies*, 41 (1979), xvii - xix. Pegis apparently persuaded Gilson to give up his opposition to textbooks.

¹⁰ See in M. Courtier, éd., *Étienne Gilson et Nous: La philosophie et son histoire*, (Paris: Vrin, 1980): Chenu, 45; Aubenque, 80; Beaufret, 93; Marion, 13-34. Marion in note 34 judges that some of Gilson's English writings: "vifs et parfois polémiques, mais très fins et souvent éclairants, n'aient pas reçu, en France l'accueil qu'ils méritent." In English there are John Noonan, *New Scholasticism*, 24 (1950), 417-38; C.R. Fay, *New Scholasticism*, 31 (1957), 172-188; N.J. Wells, *New Scholasticism*, 35 (1961), 172-190; H. LaPlante, *The Thomist*, 28 (1964), 307-337; Helen James John, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 2 (1962), 595-620; J.M. Quinn, *The Thomism of Étienne Gilson. A Critical Study*, (Villanova: Villanova, 1971); G.A. McCool, S.J., *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, (New York: Fordham, 1989), 164ff.; idem, "Is Thomas' Way of Philosophizing Still Viable Today," *The American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings* 64 (1990), 3-7 and A.A. Maurer, C.S.B., "The Legacy of

battles over his notion of Christian philosophy and his self-consciously dogmatic realism - even if some suggest that it was partly from these conflicts that he fled to Canada.¹¹ His views on the history of philosophy, the place and character of metaphysics in that history, were all achieving final formulation, and he was about to call Thomas' metaphysics of *esse* "existential." Existential Thomism seemed philosophically timely and yet claimed to be genuinely historical. It was also wonderfully simple conceptually and easily taught, even to undergraduates. It was the right thing at the right time. When this was combined with Gilson's attractive public personality and energy, his North American success seems to have been inevitable.

At Toronto he educated a gifted, outstandingly hard-working group of students, mostly from the United States, some of whom became colleagues. These spread the gospel of existential Thomism, wrote text-books expositing it, extended its analysis and deepened the historical study on which it in part depended.¹² A.C. Pegis wrote on nature and grace in Aquinas, confirming that the state of pure nature was an invention of the neo-scholastics.¹³ Armand Maurer showed that Cajetan and Aquinas differed on the constitution of metaphysics.¹⁴ Joseph Owens, in what is the greatest book to come from the disciples, reconstructed the doctrine of being in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in order to demonstrate the difference which Gilson asserted between Aristotle and Aquinas, a difference absolutely essential to the Gilsonian representation of the history of philosophy

Étienne Gilson," in V.B. Brezick, C.S.B., ed., *One Hundred Years of Thomism. Aeterni Patris and Afterwards. A Symposium*, (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1981), 28 - 44 [hereafter *One Hundred Years*].

¹¹ Shook, *Gilson*, 198-201 and 219-223; John, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 2 (1962), 613; Fay, *New Scholasticism*, 31 (1957), 172-188.

¹² To be exhaustive is neither possible or necessary. One might begin with *An Étienne Gilson Tribute, Presented by his North American Students with a Response by Étienne Gilson*, C.J. O'Neil, editor, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1959) [hereafter *An Étienne Gilson Tribute*]. While not all are as thoroughly Gilsonian in doctrine as the first contributor, one might take him as an example: J.F. Anderson, Toronto M.A. (1938) and Ph.D. (1940): *The Bond of Being*, (St. Louis: Herder, 1949), *Reflections on the Analogy of Being*, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967), *St. Augustine and Being. A Metaphysical Essay*, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1965), *New Scholasticism*, 38 (1964), 435-444 and, in the war against O'Brien, "In Defense of Étienne Gilson: Concerning a Recent Book about Thomistic Metaphysics," *The Thomist*, 28 (1964), 373-380; Gerald Smith, S.J., see *Letters*, 186-202, with review of his *Natural Theology*, (New York, 1951) in *New Scholasticism*, 24 (1953), 205-209; the review is by C.J. O'Neil; for Smith on Gilson, see note 44 below. Three doctors of the University of Toronto write typical pieces in *New Scholasticism*, 35 (1961): Wells, 172-190, Turner, 210-224, Miller, 311-337. In his *Exposé de titres* (note 8 above), Gilson writes that Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies "est organisé sur le plan de notre Ecole pratique des Hautes-Etudes pour fournir aux universités américaines les professeurs d'histoire de la philosophie médiéval dont elles ont besoin."

¹³ See McCool, *From Unity*, and K.D. Staley, "Happiness: the Natural End of Man?" *The Thomist*, 53 (1989), 224 - 229. and Denis J.M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good. Reason and the Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), whose work comes out of the Toronto school.

¹⁴ In his work on Thomas' Commentary on Boethius *De Trinitate: The Divisions and Methods of the Sciences: Questions V and VI of the Commentary on the De Trinitate*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), xxvii-xxviii, on this see McCool, *From Unity*, 185; his attack on Quinn's study of Gilson's Thomism is *The Thomist* 37 (1973), 389-91; he judged it "worthless"; for late defences of the master, see notes 4 and 10 above.

and to the dialectical experiments by which he would lead us to the recognition of the philosophical necessity of the metaphysics of *esse*.¹⁵

Of course, the students denied that they were a philosophical school. When so identified, they protested that the master only taught them to read the texts and that the results were irreducibly diverse. Joseph Owens declared: “The notion of a ‘Gilsonian School’ can only be amusing to the master of the historical approach to philosophical texts. After three decades of training American students to analyze each text in its proper setting, it would indeed be frustrating for him to end as the head of a school of particular doctrinal interpretation.”¹⁶ But, when T.C. O’Brien published a series of articles in 1960, entitled “Reflexion on the Question of God’s Existence in Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics,”¹⁷ and John M. Quinn published, in 1971, *The Thomism of Étienne Gilson. A Critical Study*, both enormously respectful, although sharply critical of Gilson’s doctrine, the disciples rose in hurt and immoderate wrath. Reviews by Joseph Owens, Armand Maurer and others were so violent, patronizing and dogmatic that outsiders were forced to intervene to defend the embattled authors and to ensure that the profound problems of North American Thomism, so widely and publicly Gilsonian, were faced.¹⁸ It appeared that for the “sworn followers” not “one single line of his doctrinal deposit ... [could] be called into question.”¹⁹

Nonetheless, respect and admiration were universal. Professor Gilson’s books were called “landmarks.”²⁰ He and Jacques Maritain appeared in *Time* and *Newsweek*. “To the lay mind he [Gilson] is recognized as a kind of official spokesman of Thomism.”²¹ He became “the interpreter *par excellence* of historical Thomism to non-Thomists” and was credited with “changing the climate” in North America by replacing essentialist neo-scholasticism with the metaphysics of the *actus essendi*.²² A.C. Pegis

¹⁵ *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1951), which Gilson’s preface salutes as the first major fruit of his Toronto labours. For a bibliography see J.R. Caton, ed., *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God. Collected Papers of Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R.*, (Albany, N.Y., 1980). He has continued to publish since 1980, for example in *Thomistic Papers* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies): I (1984), III (1987), VI (1994); *New Scholasticism*, 60 (1986), 454-470. His harsh review of T.C. O’Brien is *New Scholasticism*, 36 (1962), 250-253; he responds to criticism *New Scholasticism*, 37 (1963), 359-363. In *The Thomist*, 45 (1981), 99-123, one finds exegesis of Gilson; interpreting the master succeeds interpreting Aquinas.

¹⁶ Owens, *New Scholasticism*, 36 (1962), 252; see also, Owens, *New Scholasticism*, 37 (1963), 360-361.

¹⁷ *The Thomist* 23(1960), 1-89, 211-285, 362-447; collected, the articles appeared as *Metaphysics and the Existence of God* which Owens reviewed (note 15 above).

¹⁸ For reviews see notes 12, 14 and 15 above and L.A. Kennedy, C.S.B., *New Scholasticism*, 49 (1975), 369-373; Father Kennedy became director of the Center for Thomistic Studies in Houston, Texas editing and contributing to *Thomistic Papers* volumes I to V. Defenders of the authors were William O. Wallace, O.P., *New Scholasticism*, 36 (1962), 529-531 and John D. Beach, *The Thomist*, 38 (1974), 187-191; *New Scholasticism*, 50 (1976), 522-528. O’Brien had an opportunity to continue his criticism in a review of Owens in *New Scholasticism*, 38 (1964), 270-273.

¹⁹ Beach, *New Scholasticism*, 50 (1976), 522.

²⁰ George Lindbeck, *Review of Metaphysics*, 422.

²¹ O’Brien, *The Thomist*, 23 (1960), 68, part of O’Brien’s evidence is *Time* (January 31, 1955, 31), *Newsweek* (February 7, 1955, 30-31).

²² Johns, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 2 (1962), 612.

asserted: “More than any other historian, Gilson brought to an end the notion of a scholastic synthesis, medieval or modern.”²³

History and Metaphysics

Though this deconstruction is, in fact, his surviving legacy in North America, it was not Professor Gilson’s ruling purpose. Rather, to continue with Pegis: “Gilson came out of the Middle Ages ... not to rejoin modern philosophy, but to help build a new philosophy in the wake of the death of rationalism and idealism.”²⁴ The aim of his historical work was metaphysical. But history serving metaphysics is distorted by lifting weights beyond its strength. As Jean-Luc Marion, puts it, Gilson chose “to deny the ‘end of metaphysics’” by a deforming reconstruction of Thomas “against the unanimous tradition that claims him as its own.”²⁵

Gilson said that he found this new philosophy by a textual study of Aquinas. And since the Thomistic metaphysics of *esse* began with a simple seeing, he would lead thinkers to this philosophy by means of dialectical experiments with the alternative philosophical beginnings and methods he found in history. Though, fatally, Gilson’s dialectical reasoning and the act of existence as the object of metaphysics were kept apart, the mixture of history and philosophy was essential to his philosophical position. For, in the end, Gilson needed to persuade us to attend to something simply given. We must believe that all philosophy before Aquinas had misunderstood not only the act of existence, but a fact of revelation and so missed the philosophy which these facts give. Further, we must be convinced that the tradition since Thomas had almost totally distorted his teaching. Thus, the praise Gilson received, even if some of it is astonishing, was, rightly and necessarily, both for the historian and the philosopher. For example, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, where his doctrine is called existential, was said to be “a humble historical presentation.”²⁶ In an editorial, he was called both “one of the leading historians of philosophy” and also “simply a philosopher.”²⁷ Again, *Being and Some Philosophers*, was named “a turning point in the philosophical speculation of our time” and its author “a great master of contemporary metaphysical thought.”²⁸

We are surprised that accounts of history which are so evidently determined by contemporary philosophic categories can be praised, but, in the philosophical world which defined and congratulated, and to some extent still defines and congratulates, itself

²³ Pegis, *A Gilson Reader*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1994), 578, note 10.

²⁶ C. O’Neil, *New Scholasticism*, 32 (1958), 388.

²⁷ J. Henle, S.J., “Gilson the Philosopher,” *Thought*, 24 (1949), 592-593; one might compare the judgment of V.E. Smith reviewing *L’Etre et l’essence* (1948), in *The Thomist*, 13 (1950), 106: “The reader not only learns facts, he learns lessons,” and contrast that of W. Norris Clarke, S.J. in *The Modern Schoolman*, 31 (1954), 235: “an excellent guide for the past, but not an equally sure guide for the future” Henle remained a faithful disciple and, though a Jesuit, criticised Transcendental Thomism harshly; see *One Hundred Years*, 90-116.

²⁸ L.M. Régis, O.P., *The Modern Schoolman*, 28 (1951), 111-112. One could multiply such citations endlessly.

as English-speaking (versus “Continental”) even to attempt to do history and philosophy together was extraordinary. In that world these are generally separated, and philosophy proceeds by, and is sometimes said to depend upon, historical ignorance. This is what he discovered at Harvard: Professor Gilson reported: “As for the history of philosophy, they don’t see any use for it. Perry is quite upset. He thinks that too much studying of the systems of others prevents young people from finding one of their own.”²⁹

Yet surely Gilson was right to unite them. How else shall we think philosophically in an intellectual world which has Hegel and Heidegger as its poles? And how else could one attach oneself to an historical tradition in philosophy? The alternatives are hermeneutical naïveté in history and philosophy as self-projection. Still the historical account and the philosophical understanding must be adequate to one another. Above all they must not be confused. Else history will imprison, and indeed prevent, thought, and philosophy will falsify, and hide, history. Gilsonian Thomism seemed finally to North Americans to do both. The courageous endeavour to unite them turned against him, as indeed, given his antimodern purposes, it must have done. There cannot be an antimodern retrieval of medieval metaphysics by means of modern critical scholarship.³⁰ But, before imitating Gilson, the historical dialectician, by following the self-destruction of his metaphysical edifice, we must discover its North American boundaries. We do this because the logic which made foundations out of these limits is the logic also of the destruction of the edifice.

North American Thomism for Catholics only

Thomism in the English-speaking world generally was for Roman Catholics only. Despite the wide diffusion of Étienne Gilson’s thought, this remained true for his

²⁹ See Gilson in Shook, *Gilson*, 150: despite Gilson’s optimism about the effect of his own work, the attitude continued, being deeply ingrained; see P.G. Kuntz, “The Dialectic of Historicism and Anti-historicism,” *Thomist*, 53 (1969), 656-669 where Wittgenstein and Gilson are pitted against one another. Both from continental Europe, Wittgenstein, not Gilson, became the philosopher of the English-speaking world generally. Wittgenstein was, nonetheless, probably, too big a thinker for the Anglo-American philosophy which depended on his genius. See Robert C. Trundle, “Twentieth-Century Despair and Thomas’ *Sound* Argument for God,” *Laval Théologique et philosophique*, 52 (1996), 112 note 23, which says of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “On Heidegger on Being and Dread,” published in *Heidegger & Modern Philosophy*, Michael Murray, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978, p. 80-83): “This little-known article was preserved by Friedrich Waismann and first published in the *Philosophical Review* (January 1965). However, it was a ‘sanitized’ version in which Heidegger’s name was deleted to make it ‘acceptable’ to Wittgenstein’s Anglo-American followers. Since the time of Rudolph Carnap’s “The Overcoming of Metaphysics” (1931) and A.J. Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), Heidegger’s thought was held to be a ‘paradigm of the worst.’”

³⁰ On the problems in representing the premodern from anti- and post- modern perspectives, see W.J. Hankey, “Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot,” *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, edited by Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, Studies in Christian Origins (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 139-184; idem, “ReChristianizing Augustine Postmodern Style: Readings by Jacques Derrida, Robert Dodaro, Jean-Luc Marion, Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayes and John Milbank,” *Animus* 2 (1997) an electronic journal at <http://www.mun.ca/animus> and idem, “Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation,” *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident, Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994*, édités Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 405-438.

existential Thomism. An observer reported in 1948: “Historical realities of the recent past seem to justify the conclusion that, aside from the activities of the group at the University of Virginia, and perhaps St. John’s College at Annapolis, this Thomistic revival has taken place in exclusively Catholic circles despite much boast of its influence elsewhere in the American university scene.”³¹ In the United Kingdom, the established churches continued teaching theology as if the Middle Ages did not exist. The philosophers also carried on defining an English-speaking way of philosophizing which closed them not only to a great part of the history of philosophy, but even to much of the work of their contemporaries. My arrival at Oxford in 1978 to write a thesis on Aquinas was preceded by the abolition of the single position in medieval philosophy upon the retirement of the sole occupant of the readership, L. Minio-Paluello. However, the Anglo-Catholic party of the Church of England possessed two Thomist academics: Austin Farrer at Oxford, who was not a Gilsonian,³² and Eric Mascall at the University of London, a Gilsonian *ne plus ultra*.³³ These Anglo-Catholic exceptions prove the rule, as the precipitous decline within the Church of England of the party to which they once belonged now makes clear.

In North America two distinguished Lutheran theologians, both at Yale, acknowledged great intellectual debts to Professor Gilson: Yaroslav Pelikan, the celebrated historian of Christian doctrine, and George Lindbeck. Professor Pelikan, in fact, once planned to study under Gilson in Toronto, but both he and Gilson were prevented by the aftermath of the Second World War.³⁴ Professor Lindbeck, whose book on *The Nature of Doctrine* develops a ‘post-liberal’ or ‘post-modern’ Thomism, began as

³¹ See C.A. Hart, *New Scholasticism*, 22 (1948), 352; idem, *New Scholasticism*, 25 (1951), 3-45. Hart adds at 42 a reference to efforts directed to the University of Chicago “but with little real success.” There is also a useful report of a communication by Jesse Mann in *New Scholasticism*, 33 (1959), 92-93. The histories of Thomism by G.A. McCool assume that twentieth century Thomism is a Roman Catholic phenomenon bound up with the logic of *Aeterni Patris*; on this see also: W.J. Hankey, *God In Himself, Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 1-17 and idem, “Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival,” *Dionysius*, 9 (1985), 133-172; idem, “Pope Leo’s Purposes and St. Thomas’ Platonism,” *Atti del’ VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale sull’ Enciclica ‘Aeterni Patris’ e nel centenario della fondazione dell’ Accademia S. Tommaso, Roma, 1980*, ed. A. Piolanti, 8 vols., Studi tomistici 17, viii (Vatican City, 1982), 39-52. By the 1950’s it seemed clear that Gilsonian Thomism would keep it there; see J. Collins, *New Scholasticism*, 32 (1950), 301-326; Fay, *New Scholasticism*, 31 (1957), 172-188; J. Bobik, *New Scholasticism*, 33 (1959), 68-85; G. Grisez, *The Thomist*, 23 (1960), 448-476; T.C. O’Brien, *The Thomist*, 23 (1960), 53-85, 281-285, 370-374, 383-391, 431-446.

³² *Finite and Infinite*, (Westminster, 1943), on its place, see Hankey, “Making,” 125-126 and W.M. Wilson, “A Different Method, A Different Case: The Theological Program of Julian Hartt and Austin Farrer,” *The Thomist*, 53 (1989), 599 - 633.

³³ *He Who Is*, (London, 1943), *Existence and Analogy*, (London, 1949), *The Openness of Being*, Gifford Lectures 1970-71 (London, 1971); see his review of *Being and Some Philosophers* in *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s.1 (1950), 227-29, where he simply repeats the doctrine of Gilson, and also *The Thomist*, 38 (1974), 8-26. He is explicit about his dependence on Gilson: *He Who Is*, xii. See Hankey, “Making,” 94-99, 105-107, 125-126.

³⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Medieval Theology*, The Étienne Gilson Series 8, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1985).

a student of the theology of Duns Scotus and played an important early role in the criticism of Gilsonian existential Thomism.³⁵

It is significant that what initially moved Professor Lindbeck's criticism was the sense that Gilson's standard of judgment was inappropriate and distorting when he was treating mediaeval Augustinians like Bonaventure and Duns Scotus. After criticizing the perspective of judgment in Gilson's *Jean Duns Scot*, he went on to show in 1957, following Cornelio Fabro and explicitly against Gilson,³⁶ that: "It is more enlightening to characterize the philosophy of being in Aquinas as basically participationist rather than existential ... the *actus essendi* is best viewed as resulting from a combination of participationist, creationist and Aristotelian presuppositions." Professor Lindbeck supposed that his freedom as a non-Catholic from any of the Thomistic schools helped him to see that to which Gilson was blind: "From a non-Thomistic perspective, original Thomism is not existential in such a way as to generate an historically meaningful contrast with 'various degrees of de-existentialized metaphysics'."³⁷

As the youngest of a trio of Canadian academics, who learned or derived our St. Thomas from Gilson, but within an Anglo-Catholic rather than a neoscholastic tradition, I feel a kinship with Lindbeck.³⁸ Not being committed to one of the Catholic schools with their usual hostility to Thomas' neoplatonism, I arrived at views like Lindbeck's. However, what influenced me has been different: the historical scholarship of Pierre Hadot, Jean Trouillard and H.-D. Saffrey. This scholarship belongs together with the flight from metaphysical ontology of French philosophers and theologians like Pierre Aubenque, Stanislas Breton, and Jean-Luc Marion urged by the whip of Heidegger's critique of onto-theology.³⁹ As we shall see, the result of a later point of departure from Gilsonian orthodoxy, as compared to Professor Lindbeck's, is that the inadequacy of "existential" Thomism to the Proclean and pseudo-Dionysian side of Thomas' thought, rather than to its Augustinian side, is more strongly perceived.

³⁵ *The Nature of Doctrine, Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), see Hankey, "Making," 122-123 and the recent discussion about Aquinas as a "post-liberal theologian" in *The Thomist*: B. Marshall, 53 (1989), 352-402 and 56 (1992), 499-524; Lindbeck, 53 (1989), 403-406; L. Roy, 56 (1992), 473-480; F.J. Crosson, 56 (1992), 481-498; Lindbeck's review, "A Great Scotist Study," is in *Review of Metaphysics*, 7 (1953), 422-435.

³⁶ "Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas," *Franciscan Studies*, 17 (1957), 1-22 and 107-125. On his following Fabro, see Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good*, 122, note 95.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, he is quoting J. Collins, "History in the Service of Metaphysics," *Review of Metaphysics*, 2 (1949), 107.

³⁸ The other two are my teachers, Robert D. Crouse (see below) and Eugene R. Fairweather. Fairweather, like Crouse and Hankey, a Nova Scotian, published *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, Library of Christian Classics 10, (London, 1956) as well as some articles and reviews on medieval theology. He was, from the beginning of the 1950's for more than thirty years, Keble Professor of Divinity at Trinity College, Toronto which is just across Queen's Park from the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. To my questioning of his Gilsonian orthodoxy, Dr Fairweather responded that he saw no reason to go further than across the park for his Thomism. The experience of being an official Anglican observer at Vatican II had the same effect on him as on most Catholic Thomists..

³⁹ See notes 30 and 31 above and Hankey, "Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 64 (1997), 59-93.

The Thomist revival initiated by Leo XIII had generally no effect on non-Roman Catholic philosophers in North America. They were glad to hear from Gilson that Thomism and its medieval alternatives were Christian philosophies created for, to be carried on within, and according to the order of, Christian theology. This was not their philosophies' prevailing, desired, or possible situation. So, at Harvard, Cornell, Berkeley, and the rest, having cordially thanked the distinguished medieval historian for his learned discourse, they congratulated themselves for their liberality in giving him a hearing. Rejoicing that he had released them from any need to take medieval philosophy seriously, the philosophers went back, undisturbed, to their world.

C.A. Hart judged that the invitations of Gilson and other Thomists to Harvard and the like were "with a view to demonstrating their reputation for broadmindedness." He complains that none but neoscholastics attended the meetings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association. There is evidence that he was right in thinking that Gilson had not been taken very seriously by the American philosophical establishment, and that it, with its faith in autonomous secularity, the positive sciences, and technological progress, was incapable of doing so.

A review of *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* in *The Yale Review* agreed with Gilson that modern philosophy has been self-destructively skeptical, but continues: "for all its inadequacy the modern world has at least moved on, and in the process it has tremendously increased its positive knowledge and its technical skill." As a result, "the possibility is again open of reason developing the logical consequences of the positive knowledge of empirical science without destroying itself in the process." Richard McKeon in the same journal, when reviewing *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, concluded: "... the exposition of a Christian philosophy, based on a religious foundation, which Professor Gilson himself recognizes ... will not again, in the absence of that religious spirit, serve for unification for mankind ... Most modern readers ... will find little in the doctrines of the Middle Ages ... which can be recognized as directly relevant to modern problems. For the justification of philosophy is by the reason it employs, not the faith which it may seek to understand."⁴⁰

Gilson's antimodernism had no power over this American confidence in modernity. We wait to see whether a postmodern skepticism, some of whose accounts of history derive from Gilson, will be more effective.⁴¹

The Institutional Situation

However, there was another world in North America, an enormous system of education administered by the Roman Catholic Church. As opposed to the France from which he departed, Gilson discovered that, in the United States, the most distinguished

⁴⁰ C.A. Hart, *New Scholasticism*, 25 (1951), 42. The review of *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* is in *The Yale Review*, 28 (1938), 203-205; Richard McKeon's review is in *The Yale Review*, 26 (1936-37), 396-397. See also note 28 above.

⁴¹ See Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 146; idem, "The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism in Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank and the Origins of Western Subjectivity in Augustine and Eriugena," *Hermathena*, 165 (Winter, 1998), 9-70; and idem, "Theoria versus Poesis: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas," *Modern Theology*, 15:4 (October 1999), 387-415.

universities were frequently private institutions, often with religious origins and connections. Moreover, the constitutionally required separation of church and state prevented the assimilation of public and religiously organized education.

In Canada, there was no constitutionally required separation of church and state. The country was more than fifty percent Roman Catholic, and that Church had actually been formally established in Québec. Further, for a time after the conquest of Québec by the British, in the last third of the eighteenth century, until the Canadian Confederation, one hundred years later, the Protestant English Crown paid the salaries of Catholic bishops in that Province. Some Canadian provinces fund the universities, seminaries and other educational institutions of the churches. During Gilson's time in Toronto, only secular educational institutions were directly funded by the Ontario government. Nonetheless, St. Michael's College, in which the Pontifical Institute is contained, is owned and administered by the Congregation of St. Basil and is also a constituent part of the greatest of the provincial secular universities, the University of Toronto. So, despite the Canadian contradictions, and her difference from the United States, the result was the same. Throughout North America, there was a vast Roman Catholic system of education at all levels ready to receive the gospel of Thomism as Christian philosophy, which, for Gilson, really meant Roman Catholic philosophy.

There was, therein, also an obstacle, overcome for a time, but later reasserting its force. Many of the Catholic institutions and journals for advanced philosophical work were in the control of religious orders, notably the Jesuits, the Dominicans, the Augustinians and the Franciscans. The natural bias of these orders, with their own Scholastic traditions, was against a Thomism which claimed to be the first to have been correctly established historically and the first to reproduce Thomas' original metaphysic. By finally understanding this metaphysic, this "existential" Thomism asserted itself to possess the key to Thomas' philosophy, and claimed to occupy the place where philosophy, theology and revelation meet. Gilson demolished the common scholastic *philosophia perennis* which would embrace the Franciscan doctors, and he sharply distinguished authentic Thomism from that of the great Dominican and Jesuit commentators. So, it is not surprising that the original center in Toronto from which Gilson's Thomism was disseminated, as well as one of its last remaining North American citadels, St. Thomas University in Houston, Texas, are both Basilian foundations. The Basilians have no scholastic tradition of their own. Significantly, the Transcendental Thomism, declaring itself triumphant in North America *après Gilson*, is a Jesuit phenomenon.

The Jesuits and the Problem of Christian Philosophy

The Jesuits controlled four major American Catholic reviews for philosophy and theology, as well as contributing extensively to the others. There were *America, Thought*, from Fordham University, *The Modern Schoolman*, from St. Louis University, and *Theological Studies*. In 1961, they founded the *International Philosophical Quarterly*, jointly edited at Fordham and Louvain. This journal aimed to restore philosophical communication between Europe and America, which some supposed had been arrested by the dominance of Gilsonian Thomism in the new world. In 1974, J. Donceél, S.J., an editor of the quarterly complained: "Gilson's enormous influence on American Thomists

explains why the latter, until quite recently, have never taken to Transcendental Thomism.”⁴²

The Jesuits also controlled universities important for American Catholic philosophy: besides Fordham and St. Louis, there were Georgetown and Marquette. Gilson always opposed Transcendental Thomism, though one critic convincingly maintained both that he never understood its relations to Kant, and had also learned what he knew about Kant and Hume from it.⁴³ Some Jesuit disciples copied his most dogmatic positions. For example, one wrote: Gilson’s books “are a date, *ante* Gilson, *post* Gilson, in the history of epistemology.” “If idealists persist in demanding how we know all this we must hasten to assure them with M. Gilson that we do not know any of this without the evidence of sensation, and if one still seeks the evidence of the evident, *res sunt*, we must resolutely refuse to pursue the inquiry.”⁴⁴ And they did.

But others thought that Gilson was not at his best in epistemological debates. When engaged against Marechal he refused to see differences, when debating Noël he created them where none existed. At least that is how things appeared to some American historians after the battles in Europe were over.⁴⁵ C. A. Fay wrote about the controversy with Leon Noël: “In 1940 their epistemological differences have lost substance. And after reading *On Being and Some Philosophers* (1949), one may well ask how deep is the remaining difference ... Gilson asserts that the being of things is sensibly and intellectually evident, a position indistinguishable in substance from that of Domet de Vorges and Leon Noël ... Perhaps Gilson will have been the last major scholastic to attempt to maintain that a critique of knowledge is impossible. ... One refuses to involve oneself in a discussion with modern idealism. [And maintains that] For hundreds of years modern philosophy has been asking ‘foolish questions’ and scholastics have been trying to give them answers, or actually giving foolish answers.” This is the position of the “old dogmatism” with which Fay associates Gilson.

Bernard Lonergan, the Canadian Jesuit, whose Transcendental writings are the only creative philosophical work undoubtedly of the first class to come out of North American Thomism, was sharply critical of the dogmatic realism at which Gilson had arrived. It was philosophically inadequate. He judged: “... if Professor Gilson agrees with Kant in holding that *de facto* we have perceptions of reality, one must not think that he attempts to refute Kant by appealing to a fact that Kant overlooked. Professor Gilson’s realism is dogmatic: the course he advocates is ... the blunt affirmation of the dogmatic realism whose validity was denied by Kant’s critique.”⁴⁶

⁴² *The Monist*, 58 (1974), 70, note 4.

⁴³ La Plante, *The Thomist*, 28 (1964), 308-315; de Lubac judges that Gilson had not read Teilhard de Chardin before judging him, *Letters*, 64, note 1, 137, note 2 and 138-9, note 5.

⁴⁴ G. Smith, S.J., “A Date in the History of Epistemology,” *Thomist*, 5 (1943), 248.

⁴⁵ La Plant, *The Thomist*, 28 (1964), 308-315 and C.R. Fay, “The Possibility of Critical Realism: Noël vs Gilson,” *New Scholasticism*, 31 (1957), 185-187.

⁴⁶ “Metaphysics as Horizon,” in E. Coreth, *Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. by J. Donceel, (New York, 1968), 207-209; see Hankey, “Making,” 94-98 and 117-121. Lonergan’s most important work of Thomistic interpretation is *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. D.B. Burrell, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame, 1967). He reviewed *Being and Some Philosophers* very favourably: *Theological Studies*, 11 (1950), 122-125. But later he became very critical.

At first, however, the Jesuits were prepared to concede the historical ground to Gilson. Their Thomism was not textual and did not reproduce St. Thomas' doctrinal positions, rather, within their own tradition of interpretation, it carried forward what they believed to be fundamental in his approaches and directions and adapted them to contemporary philosophical, human and ecclesiastical realities. So, at the beginning, those who wrote from Jesuit universities accepted the Gilsonian position on Thomas' philosophy of *esse*.⁴⁷ Later, especially under the influence of W. Norris Clarke, S.J., at Fordham, who in 1952 had come to conclusions like those of George Lindbeck, they judged that Gilson's blindness to the neoplatonic and participationist character of *esse* in Aquinas made him an unreliable historical guide.⁴⁸ They judged, equally, that Gilson's Thomism was not suited to the needs of Catholic theology in the second half of the twentieth century. Consistently with the Jesuit approach, this judgment could not in the end be separated from their evaluation of his historical scholarship.

Gilson's teaching on Thomism as Christian philosophy, and its consequences for the relation of historical and philosophical studies, they could never abide. Here the Jesuits, who were working to justify American democracy in terms of Catholic political teaching, thus making John F. Kennedy's election as President possible, grasped what was necessary to the Catholic Church and Catholic intellectuals in this period. True to their own evangelical tradition, the Jesuits were leading Catholics out of their religious ghettos into the general stream of American life. Gilson's notion of Christian philosophy arose out of the conditions of French intellectual life in the first third of this century. It matched the institutional circumstances of North American Catholic education which he discovered when he arrived. These conditions did not endure. The institutional problematic revealed itself intellectually in the debate about "Christian philosophy." This notion presented as much a problem for Catholic Thomists as it had for Professor Gilson's auditors among Ivy League philosophers.

The criticism of Gilson on the questions of whether there was a "Christian philosophy", and whether Thomas' teaching should be placed in that category, was early and persistent. In 1946, Elizabeth Salmon of Fordham, reacting in *Thought* to the fourth edition of *Le Thomisme*, rejoiced to learn that "the chief characteristic of Thomistic

⁴⁷ See E.G. Salmon, *Thought*, 21 (1946), 667-678; Henri Renard, S.J., *New Scholasticism*, 23 (1949), 62-70; J. Collins, (St. Louis), *New Scholasticism*, 32 (1958), 301-326 [reprinted in James Collins, *Three Paths in Philosophy*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1962), 280-299]; idem, *Review of Metaphysics*, 2 (1948), 105-125, idem, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 11 (1950-51), 134-136 and Gerald Smith, S.J., notes 12 and 44 above; and R.J. Henle, S.J.

⁴⁸ W. Norris Clarke, S.J., "The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?" *New Scholasticism*, 26 (1952), 167-194; in the same issue are M. Annice, "Historical Sketch of the Theory of Participation," *New Scholasticism*, 26 (1952), 49-79 and C.A. Hart, "Participation and the Thomistic Five Ways," *New Scholasticism*, 26 (1952), 267-282. See also: W. Norris Clarke, *New Scholasticism*, 32 (1958), 264-66; idem, *New Scholasticism*, 48 (1974), 19-39; idem, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1974), 411-434. Two Jesuit students of Gilson play different roles in this development: R.J. Henle's, *Saint Thomas and Platonism: A Study of the Plato and Platonic Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas*, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1956) diminishes the Platonic influence by understanding Platonism narrowly, but L. Sweeney's studies of the *Liber de Causis* move the argument forward: see "Doctrine of Creation in *Liber de Causis*," in *An Étienne Gilson Tribute*, 274-289; idem, "Esse Primum Creatum in Albert the Great's *Liber de Causis et Processu Universitatis*," *The Thomist*, 44 (1980), 599-646, especially note 80 at 644-645.

metaphysics is its existentialism.”⁴⁹ But, she strongly opposed the idea that philosophy must be done within theology and must follow its order. She protested: “Gilson admits that St. Thomas himself assigns an order to philosophy and yet to seek that order in St. Thomas’ philosophy would be to denature his philosophy and theology.”⁵⁰ After all, are not the metaphysical principles the important things? she asked. “Truth is not to be identified with the history of philosophy, yet, when the most authentic expression of truth with its own specific philosophical character is found, Gilson holds its philosophical meaning will be betrayed if it is given an exposition according to a philosophical order ... Gilson seems to overemphasize history to the detriment of truth and its communication when he tends to turn each expression of the truth into history.”⁵¹

In 1958, James Collins of St. Louis University wrestled to escape from the impossible situation of the contemporary Thomist philosopher created by Gilson’s notion of how Christian philosophy must proceed. In an article entitled “Toward a Philosophically Ordered Thomism,” he wrote: “The work of philosophizing is never totally governed by the laws discovered by the historian of philosophy.”⁵² Even one of Gilson’s Jesuit students, George Klubertanz at St. Louis University, was by this time breaking away, if not explicitly from Gilson, at least from the disciples. Reviewing *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, he urged that: “Fidelity to our best Christian heritage is therefore not a mere aping of any historical solution.” Our solutions must be open to “a wholly new mode of knowing (modern science) and the technological advances it has brought about.”

In fact, of necessity in this Thomistic world where history, philosophy and theology are always intertwined, Gilson’s historical judgments on Christian philosophy in Aquinas were not universally accepted either. First, there was a problem of reconciling Gilson’s assimilation of philosophy to theology with Aquinas’ own statements about the order of philosophical reasoning. Thomas contrasted, on the one hand, the order of the theology which was part of philosophy, (which moves from below, from sensible creatures to their cause), to the order of reasoning in the theology which is sacred doctrine, (which moves from above, from God’s revelation to the apostles and prophets), on the other hand. Second, the Gilsonians never adequately explained what Thomas was doing in his commentaries on Aristotle’s works. John Beach, judged: “Gilson’s theologism forced him into the odd unhistorical corollary that Aquinas does no substantial philosophizing in the commentaries. ... So ... in the commentaries Aquinas has to be ‘a polytheist’ who denies ‘divine providence in respect of singulars’. Surely an historical blunder, for the merest perusal of the commentaries suffices to prove the opposite.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Salmon, “Theological Order and the Philosophy of St. Thomas,” *Thought*, 21 (1946), 667.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 671.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 675-677. Salmon’s review of *La philosophe et la théologie* and *Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne*, in the *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 (1961), 697-713 continues her original critique.

⁵² James Collins, *New Scholasticism*, 32 (1958), 317; George Klubertanz, *New Scholasticism*, 30 (1956), 110.

⁵³ John Beach, *New Scholasticism*, 50 (1976), 524. Louvain and Gilson battled about this ceaselessly. Leo Elders does not accept Gilson’s views on the commentaries; his analysis may be found in “Le Commentaire sur le quatrième livre de la *Métaphysique*,” *Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso d’Aquino nel suo*

This was not, finally, a dispute about historical facts, Catholic philosophy wanted to get beyond reading reality through past philosophies, or thinking philosophically from within past theologies. American Catholics wished to confront being directly, and to philosophize from the beginning. When Germain G. Grisez at Jesuit Georgetown reviewed the *Elements of Christian Philosophy* in 1960, he was no longer, like Collins and Salmon, prepared to detach Gilson's "interpretation on substantive points ... from his thesis concerning the relation between revelation and philosophy in Aquinas' work."⁵⁴ In Grisez's judgment, we must not just receive what Thomas did, we must do what he did. "One cannot know Aquinas' philosophy without knowing things as he knew them. ... [H]istory is an insufficient discipline for learning philosophy. ... [T]he method of metaphysics is not a theological use of history."⁵⁵

Gerald McCool, a Fordham Jesuit, has recently written the history of Thomism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in order to demonstrate the victory of the Transcendental variety. He brings home all the spoils from the battle with Gilson. So Gilson's demolition of the notion of a scholastic synthesis leaves us not with his existential Thomism but with pluralism. In consequence, Thomism cannot be identified with a doctrinal content or a given philosophical order, instead, it is only an approach or direction.⁵⁶ Moreover, among the Thomisms, the Transcendental is demonstrably the authentic continuation of the Jesuit tradition deriving from Suarez, a point which Gilson would not wish to dispute, though for him it would be the opposite of praise.⁵⁷ The pluralism leaves them free and the Jesuits can congratulate themselves on having remained faithful to themselves.

But we have skipped a step in the movement to such a position. Germain Grisez thinks substance and form go together in Gilson: the metaphysics of *esse* derived from Exodus follows from the form and order he gives to Christian philosophy. Gerald McCool assumes that the Gilsonian metaphysic is not the only one which might be developed from the texts. These criticisms were first elaborated together by T.C. O'Brien, in 1960.⁵⁸ It appeared then already not only that philosophy was impossibly distorted by being tied to history in the Gilsonian manner, but also that history had been falsified by his philosophical use of it.

The History of Philosophy and the Metaphysic of *Esse*

Some leading criticism of Gilson as historian of the philosophy of being came from outside the American Catholic world. John Wild, the Harvard Aristotelian, reviewing *Being and Some Philosophers* in 1949, said what would be repeated and

settimo centenario, 9 vols., i (Naples, 1975), 203-214 and in *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Leiden: Brill, 1990). In the North American literature, there are, for example, T.R. Heath, *New Scholasticism* 34 (1960) and 35 (1961), 525-526 and the literature on T.C. O'Brien's criticism and those of Quinn (see notes 12ff. above).

⁵⁴ *The Thomist*, 23 (1960), 473, he said that it would be "a sign of disrespect for Gilson's competence."

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 474-475.

⁵⁶ McCool, *From Unity*, 226-229; *Thomistic Papers*, VI (1994) is directed against McCool's analysis.

⁵⁷ McCool, "Why St. Thomas Stays Alive," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 30(1990), 275-287, especially 286-287 and idem, *The Modern Schoolman*, 65 (1988), 185-206.

⁵⁸ See notes 17ff. above.

painstakingly demonstrated over the next forty years. Gilson was unjust to Plato because Gilson's: "own view seems to require the distinction of diverse modes of existence, some more perfect than others."⁵⁹ But the treatment of Plato was not the only problem; Professor Wild judged that the interpretation of Aristotle was "the weakest part of the book." In sum: "the careful reader must at least reserve judgement with respect to Gilson's thesis that both Plato and Aristotle were nothing but abstract essentialists, and that the whole history of philosophy of existence, as developed by Aquinas, was a unique creation with no background in Greek thought."⁶⁰

Louis-Marie Régis, the Dominican head of the Ottawa medieval institute which had united with the Dominicans at Albert le Grand in Montreal, also discovered errors in the interpretation of Aristotle. The Dominicans were prominent in this critique. T.C. O'Brien belonged to the Order of Preachers, his articles were published in the Dominican journal, *The Thomist*, which was issued from the Order's Washington House of Studies. William Wallace, a Dominican professor at The Catholic University of America came to O'Brien's defense during the Gilsonian counter-attack. Lawrence Dewan, a Canadian Dominican, is still carrying on the war with Joseph Owens.⁶¹ Just last year, a Dominican teaching at Notre Dame published a book on Aquinas which gives a good short survey of the various Thomistic schools and indicates where one might find critiques of Gilson by "the Dominican school." It contains this harsh criticism: "Gilson was uninformed about and excessively critical of modern philosophy ... he fashioned a theological context (one never accepted) for metaphysics which was eccentric; he thought that insights on being were derived from the revelation on Sinai ..."⁶²

In 1951, Father Régis found it "impossible to admit that Aristotelianism is nothing but a Platonism descended from the skies."⁶³ Like many after him, he judged that the categories in which Gilson stated his teaching, and the criteria he employed for his evaluations were anachronistic. "It is impossible [he wrote] to find an Aristotelian solution to a Neoplatonic problem ... [Gilson's] dilemma would be valid in Platonism but

⁵⁹ *Speculum*, 24 (1949), 575; other objections to Gilson's treatment of Plato are in K.F. Doherty, S.J., *New Scholasticism*, 30 (1956), 441-60.

⁶⁰ *Speculum*, 24, 576.

⁶¹ Examples of Father Dewan's elegant and careful essays are: "St. Thomas and the Causality of God's Goodness," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, 34 (1978), 291-304; "St. Thomas and the Divine Names," *Science et esprit*, 32 (1980), 19-33; "Objectum. Notes on the Invention of a Word," *AHDLM*, 48 (1981), 37-96, which traces the Platonist transformations of Aristotle that result in Aquinas' understanding of the object of science; "St. Thomas, Joseph Owens, and Existence," *New Scholasticism*, 56 (1982), 399-441, which shows that existence deprived of form in Owens is reduced to a flux and that this does not have support in the texts of St. Thomas: "I see, then, in the texts on conservation, with the rigorous use of form as form as the approach to absolute existence, an antidote to Father Owen's tendency to allow existence a peculiar visibility of its own, as a flux contrasted with essential stability (440);" "St. Thomas, Metaphysical Procedure, and the Formal Cause," *New Scholasticism*, 63 (1989), 173-182 continues the criticism of the division of form and *esse* in Owen's interpretation of Aquinas; "St. Thomas, Aristotle, and Creation," *Dionysius*, 15 (1991), 81-90 which defends St. Thomas' own understanding of Aristotle against that of Gilson and Owens.

⁶² T.F. O'Meara, O.P., *Thomas Aquinas Theologian*, (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 277, note 36 and 181.

⁶³ *The Modern Schoolman*, 28 (1951), 119.

has no value in Aristotelianism.”⁶⁴ A crucial point could not be supported from the texts. Gilson was wrong to deny that the act of existence could be known because it is an act and so is expressed in verbal form. Verbs also are concepts for Aquinas. Indeed, “the truth in Thomism is that the verb is the predicate *par excellence*.”⁶⁵ Father Régis actually forced a concession on this point in Gilson’s second edition. It did not augment Gilson’s reputation as an historian when it was later shown that in subsequent works he covertly retracted this concession.⁶⁶

In 1952, Robert Crouse, a Canadian Anglo-Catholic who had studied under Wild at Harvard, repeated his criticisms and raised questions about the appropriateness of Gilson’s existentialist - essentialist categories for comparing Aquinas and the medieval Augustinians.⁶⁷ In the next year, George Lindbeck developed these questions in the review of *Jean Duns Scot* already mentioned. *Franciscan Studies* published Lindbeck’s 1957 criticism of the existential interpretation of being in Aquinas. He judged that only attachment to a particular Thomist tradition, not accurate textual study, could justify it.⁶⁸ In this context, an endeavour to do justice to the Augustinian tradition among the Scholastics, the appreciation of the neoplatonic aspects of Thomas’ own thought begins to be demanding.

In the 1940’s and 1950’s, *Franciscan Studies* and *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* published a number of studies by Franciscan scholars rejecting Gilson’s treatment of the Franciscan doctors.⁶⁹ Laval’s review prints articles in both French and English, and her School of Philosophy, strongly influenced by Louvain, graduated both French and English Thomists.

One of these, John Beach, who taught at Jesuit universities, was an important critic.⁷⁰ In his review of Owen’s *St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics* (1957) in *The*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 120, one might compare D. Aubenque in M. Courtier, éd., *Étienne Gilson et Nous*, 87.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶⁶ H. La Plante, “Étienne Gilson and the Concept of Existence,” *The Thomist*, 28 (1964), 307-337.

⁶⁷ Dr Crouse, the reviewer of *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* in *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 4 (1952), 61-63, acquired his Thomism subversively at King’s College in Halifax and at Harvard from the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, a community of Anglo-Catholic socialists who revered Karl Marx and Thomas Aquinas equally. After studies and teaching at Harvard, Trinity and Bishop’s College, P.Q., he returned to Dalhousie University and King’s College in 1963 where he taught until his retirement in 1996.

⁶⁸ See notes 35 and 36 above.

⁶⁹ P. Robert, O.F.M., “St. Bonaventure, Defender of Christian Wisdom,” *Franciscan Studies*, 24 (1943), 159-179; idem, “Le problème de la philosophie bonaventurienne,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, 6 (1950), 145-163, 7 (1951), 9-58; A. Nemetz, “What Saint Bonaventure has given to Philosophers Today,” *Franciscan Studies*, 19 (1959), 1-12; R.J. Roch, S.J., “The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure - A Controversy,” *Franciscan Studies*, 19 (1959), 209-226: treats Gilson, Van Steenberghe and Patrick Robert. There was criticism of this kind from outside Franciscan circles; see, e.g., J.F. Quinn, *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure’s Philosophy*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1973); T.A. Fay, “Bonaventure and Aquinas on God’s Existence: Points of Conversion,” *The Thomist*, 41, (1977), 585-595.

⁷⁰ The review is in *The Thomist*, 21 (1958), 215-220; the later judgment is in *New Scholasticism*, 50 (1976), 528; his “Separate Entity as the Subject of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,” *The Thomist*, 20 (1957), 75-95 and “Aristotle’s notion of Being,” *The Thomist*, 21 (1958), 29-43 are important attacks on the textual evidence provided by Gilson and Owens. See also note 17 above

Thomist, Dr. Beach attacked the “quasi-collective effort” at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies “to manifest the properly Thomistic insight into reality.” Like T.C. O’Brien, Germain Grisez, and others, he wanted both fidelity to texts in historical exposition and real philosophical reasoning, not a new school hiding behind its master. In an article published almost 20 years later, his judgment of Gilson himself was even more harsh. He wrote: “Were metaphysical ideas of this character seriously proposed by a mind of lesser gifts, they would probably be accorded scant attention. Only a talent of Gilson’s power and dexterity could clothe them in a seeming cogency. But such prestigiously endorsed ideas must in turn invite sound criticism, lest mere promotion by so celebrated an historian and Thomist lend them automatic authority and acceptance.” Another graduate of Laval, Ralph McInerny, hugely influential at Notre Dame, helped build alternatives. His Thomism, as antimodern of that of Gilson, followed Cornelio Fabro, who began in the 1960s to provide another Thomistic philosophy to North Americans. Critical of Gilson in particular and Existential Thomism in general, McInerny aligned himself, against them, with the tradition of Cajetan and John of St. Thomas.⁷¹

Joseph Owens and philosophical pluralism

When John Beach entered the fray, Gilson’s torch had been passed to Joseph Owens. For forty-five years he has defended characteristic positions of his master not only on the understanding of being, and on the subjects of metaphysics and theology in Aristotle and in Aquinas, but also on the interpretation of Thomas’ proofs for God’s existence. As well, he has developed and defended an exegesis of the argument of the *De Ente et Essentia* necessary to these positions. He has maintained the Gilsonian representation of Aristotle’s conception of efficient cause and of Thomas’ conception of creation essential to these interpretations. Father Owens is remarkably tenacious and painstaking. But the kind of criticism directed by Professor Beach against Professor Gilson is now sent against Father Owens.

Notable is T.C. O’Brien’s long review of Owen’s collected papers in *The Thomist*.⁷² He writes: “This review has questioned the use of texts in support of fundamental elements in the Owen’s version of St. Thomas’ thought. Acceptance of the texts as supportive would seem to require ignorance of St. Thomas’ language, usage, methodology, and epistemology, both philosophical and theological. ... This review does not dispute Owen’s right to philosophize inventively; but to expound St. Thomas’ texts inventively hardly authenticates the resulting interpretation of St. Thomas’ thought.” O’Brien had made similar charges in respect to Gilson in his major series of articles. Gilson had prevented Thomas’ philosophy from really functioning as philosophy and had

⁷¹ McInerny’s “The Logic of Analogy,” *New Scholasticism*, 31 (1957), note 36, 167-168, finds Gilson rather than the text being used as an authority. His *Thomism in an Age of Renewal*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), 7, arises out of admiration of an article of Fabro and begins with reference to a visit by Fabro to Notre Dame in 1965. He makes his difference from Gilsonian metaphysical fundamentals clear in “Being and Predication,” *Being and Predication: Thomistic Interpretations*, ed. Jude P. Dougherty, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 173-228.

⁷² T.C. O’Brien, *The Thomist*, 46 (1982), at 653 and *The Thomist*, 23 (1960), 445. See also notes 15 to 19, 53, 61 and 69 above for Owens and his combatants.

at the same time misinterpreted the texts: “it is not surprising that within the Gilsonian system there should be an assumption and appropriation of truths not available to metaphysics at the point of its employment of the *quinque viae*. Given the Gilsonian concept of St. Thomas’ philosophy, such an assumption is inevitable. But the misinterpretation, not of subtle nuances, but of the clear letter of texts, the subversion of the order of discovery; the neutralization of much that is basic in St. Thomas’ terminology - these indicate the questionable consequences both of the total Gilsonian thesis, and of its application in the preconception of the question of God’s existence in metaphysics, with its resultant interpretation of the *quinque viae*.”⁷³

Despite his pains to defend the Gilsonian interpretations and philosophical positions, Fr. Owens has conceded that Thomism must be plural and that these disputed interpretations depend upon the interpreter’s idea of being. Historical scholarship cannot be appealed to as an independent judge. In treating the relation of Gilson’s existential Thomism to that of C. Fabro and the Transcendental writers; he concludes that the differences are not merely verbal and that “the metaphysical thinking in each interpreter is the key.” A return to the texts is required, but its result is not already known. Similarly, in his dispute with John F. Wippel about the interpretation of *De ente et essentia*, he concedes that the differences about the meaning of the text are philosophically determined. In “Aquinas on Being and Thing,” Fr. Owens wrote: “Today, of course, the notion of ‘Christian philosophy,’ where admitted at all, has to be recognized as radically pluralistic in nature.” He continued to defend Gilson, but compromising with Fabro, he made this crucial concession: “... it is correct to say that the distinction between essential being and existential being is not found in Aquinas but originated in other thinkers. Though that gladly registered acknowledgment leaves intact the real distinction between being and thing that is present in the text of Aquinas himself, a distinction that remains undiminished in its importance for metaphysical thinking.”

Two decades earlier, Fr. Owens had used differences in the notion of being to explain T.C. O’Brien’s criticism of Gilson. He judged that O’Brien’s notion was “difficult to discover.” Supporting Owens, J.F. Anderson had been very direct: “The real problem, as Father Owens observes in his review of Father O’Brien’s book, lies in the notion of being with which the author is actually operating.” Recently, Fr. Owens puts the plurality of Christian philosophies, (he had in mind particularly the Thomist and Augustinian), and their diverse views of being together succinctly: “They all come into immediate contact with being. But the way each conceives the starting point determines its whole subsequent course. ... Nothing in their procedure can make the one come to grips with the other. The result is that the great Christian philosophies continue to subsist

⁷³ Beside O’Brien, Beach and Dewan, there were other critics of the Gilson-Owens’ line: e.g. Joseph Bobik, *New Scholasticism*, 37 (1963), 59-63 and 411-430; J.F. Wippel, “Aquinas’ Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on *De ente et essentia*,” *The Thomist*, 43 (1979), 279-295 and A. McNicholl, O.P., “On Judging Existence,” *Thomist*, 43 (1979), 507-580, especially 555-557. More recently, criticism comes also from outside the Thomist philosophical world: S. MacDonald, “The *Esse/Essentia* Argument in Aquinas’ *De ente et essentia*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 22 (1984), 157-172 finds in Owens “a confusion about the structure and nature of the argument.” W. Pattin “Aquinas’s Real Distinction and Some Interpretations,” *New Scholasticism*, 62 (1988), 1-29 surveyed the Wippel-Owens dispute and attempted to resolve it; M.B. Ewbank, sympathetic to Gilsonian position, has surveyed criticisms of Owens by O’Brien and L. Azar and how Owens responded to them in *New Scholasticism*, 62 (1988), 474-479.

side by side ...”⁷⁴ Exactly this same approach is now taken by J.F.X. Knasas in his controversies. It seems to escape Owens, Knasas, and the continuing defenders of Gilson, that their way of using the hermeneutical circle polemically against their enemies would also make it impossible to call Gilson’s, or any, Thomism historically founded. One’s history of philosophy is a projection of one’s notion of being.

So even from within the school, the Gilsonian positions can no longer be regarded as mere history. The history is the instrument of philosophy supposing itself to be in the service of theology. The characteristic positions of the school belong to Gilson’s conception of Thomism as Christian philosophy to which they have been definitively linked by O’Brien and Quinn. This conception of the relation of philosophy to church and world proved intolerable to many American Catholic intellectuals as they worked out a new relation of church and world. Their opposition to a Thomism conceived in these terms, and their determination to think, as they said Aquinas did, from the beginning, logically, not historically, was expressed in, and given impetus by, the Second Vatican Council.

Gilson placed great value on the choice of Thomism as the official Christian philosophy by the Roman *magisterium*; indeed, he spoke as if this choice belonged to its infallible teaching. It was impossible both that the Church of Rome was the true Church and also that it had made a error about the thinker it had chosen to be its “common doctor”.⁷⁵ But, in fact, this choice by the Church and Gilson’s Thomistic philosophy tied to revelation, disappeared into the flux of history together.⁷⁶

Since 1984, defences of Gilson by Pegis, Maurer, Owens and others have been published by the Centre for Thomistic Studies at the Basilian university in Houston, Texas. The present editor of *Thomistic Papers*, J.F.X. Knasas, a Toronto graduate, has joined this defence.⁷⁷ He is strongly critical of the Transcendental Thomism which, in his

⁷⁴ J. Owens, “Aquinas on Being and Thing,” *Thomistic Papers*, III (1987), 21 and “*Deo Intus Pendente*,” *The Modern Schoolman*, 69 (1992), 376; see idem, “Aquinas on Knowing Existence,” *Review of Metaphysics*, 29 (1976), 670-690; idem, “Stages and Distinction in *De ente*: A Rejoinder,” *The Thomist*, 45 (1981), 99-123; his review of T.C. O’Brien is in *New Scholasticism*, 36 (1962), 250-253; J.F. Anderson’s remarks are in *The Thomist*, 28 (1964), 378.

⁷⁵ É. Gilson, *Le philosophe et la théologie* (Paris: Fayard, 1960), 61: “Il était improbable que l’Église se fût trompée à ce point dans le choix d’un docteur commun et d’un patron de toutes les écoles catholiques. Trois propositions s’offraient ensemble à notre esprit: l’Église de Rome est la véritable Église; Thomas d’Aquin, comme le disait parfois le P. Laberthonnière, a fait à cette Église plus de mal que ne lui en a fait Luther; en philosophie comme en théologie, la norme de l’enseignement de l’Église est la doctrine de saint Thomas d’Aquin. L’une ou l’autre de ces propositions pouvait être vraie, elles ne pouvaient être vraies toutes à la fois.” There is much else of a similar kind in the book, see 94-95, 142-143, 191 ff. The pluralism of Christian philosophies identified by Gilson makes a choice by authority necessary.

⁷⁶ For Thomism and the Second Vatican Council and Gilson’s reaction to the effects of the Council, see *Le philosophe, passim*; Gilson, *Les Tribulations de Sophie*, (Paris: Vrin, 1967), 35-54, 139 ff.; Gilson and Maritain, *Correspondance, 1923-1971*, ed. G. Prouvost, (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 214-252; Letter of 14 August, 1965 in G. Kalinowski, *L’Impossible métaphysique*, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), 247-248, *Letters*, 12-19, 80 ff., J. Kalinowski et S. Swiezawski, *La philosophie à l’heure du Concile*, (Paris: Editions Internationales, 1965) - this analysis is Gilsonian; there are also Shook, *Gilson*, 367 ff., idem, *Mediaeval Studies*, 51 (1979), xiii.

⁷⁷ J.F.X. Knasas, “*Esse* as the Target of Judgement in Rahner and Aquinas,” *The Thomist*, 51 (1987), 222-245; idem, “Aquinas and the Liberationist Critique of Maritain’s New Christendom,” *The Thomist*, 52

view, has prevailed in the Roman church since Vatican II. This continuation of the essentialism of Suarez he supposes underlies what is, for him, the collapse of grace into nature in Henri de Lubac which in turn lies, he supposes, behind Liberation Theology. His contribution to *Thomistic Papers VI* directed against Gerald McCool's *From Unity to Pluralism* is an attempt to show that the epistemological and ontological foundations of Transcendental Thomism lack textual support in Aquinas. In general, the essays in the volume, which he edited, oppose a pluralism which would allow Transcendental Thomism to stand alongside a realist one of the Gilsonian kind and they certainly oppose a pluralism on the Transcendental terms which include an opening to modern epistemological perspectives.

Gilson opposed Transcendental Thomism, and what happened to Thomism, the liturgy and much else after Vatican II provoked him to bitter outbursts. But, he was the friend and supporter of M.D. Chenu, de Lubac and others whose historical studies made them masters of the Council.⁷⁸ Perhaps here too the historian and the philosopher are in conflict.

The debate with Joseph Owens about Aristotle and Aquinas is a North American Catholic affair. And in that world the question of Christian philosophy has its own dynamic. But the criticisms which now prove fatal to Gilsonian Thomism depend on European developments: the uncovering of Thomas' neoplatonism and Heidegger's critique of onto-theology.⁷⁹ These developments are independent but related. Both criticisms have two stages.

The Neoplatonism of St. Thomas

W. Norris Clarke had been reading Cornelio Fabro, L.B. Geiger, Joseph de Finance and others when he published, in 1952, the first of his studies of the neoplatonic logic structuring Thomas' metaphysical doctrines: "The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?" Thus, it began to be realized that one need not choose between Platonism, on the one hand, and Thomas' doctrine of being, on the other. Gerald McCool, pressing the Transcendental cause, which proposes to be Platonic, Thomistic and contemporary all at once, writes: "Rahner's metaphysics of being's self-expression

(1988), 247-267; idem, "Transcendental Thomism and the Thomistic Texts," *The Thomist*, 54 (1990), 81-95; idem, "Does Gilson Theologize Thomistic Metaphysics?" *Thomistic Papers*, V (1990), 3-19; idem, "Transcendental Thomism and *De Veritate* I, 9," *Thomistic Papers*, VI (1994), 229-50; idem, "Thomistic Existentialism and the Proofs *Ex Motu* at *Contra Gentiles* I, c.13," *The Thomist*, 59 (1995), 591-615. On the Houston establishment, there is V.J. Bourke, "The New Center and the Intellectualism of St. Thomas," in *One Hundred Years*, 165-172. Its first president was A.C. Pegis; Bourke, a faithful disciple of Gilson, was the second. For his relation to Gilson, see *The Modern Schoolman*, 52, (1974), 49-52. For Bourke's intellectual biography and bibliography, see *The Modern Schoolman*, 69 (March/May, 1992) presented to him. His contribution to *Thomistic Papers*, VI is significantly entitled "Thomistic Philosophy is not Pluralistic."

⁷⁸ On Chenu: see *Letters* 74, note 11, 164-165, note 5; *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu*, (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 263-264; Chenu in M. Courtier, éd., *Étienne Gilson et Nous*, 43-48. On Thomism and "the 'New Theology' crisis," see McCool in *ACPA Proceedings*, note 10 above, 7.

⁷⁹ See M. Courtier, éd., *Étienne Gilson et Nous*: the articles by Aubenque, Beaufret, Courtine, Hadot, Marion and also Vignaux, Hadot, zum Brunn in Centre d'Études des Religions du Livre, *Dieu et l'être, Exégèses d'Exode 3, 14 et de Coran 20, 11-24*, (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1978) and Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy," 405-16; idem, "Denys and Aquinas," 143ff.

in its other is much closer to Neo-Platonism than St. Thomas' metaphysics is usually thought to be. ... Thomas' metaphysics of *esse*, at least in Gilson's understanding of it is considered to be distinct from and incompatible with the Neo-Platonic metaphysics of the good."⁸⁰

The Transcendental Thomism had more sympathy for some of the neoplatonic aspects of Thomas' thought than the Gilsonians had. Remarkably, this was just because the Transcendental school was more open to modernity than Gilson was. Because the school was not so dogmatically and narrowly realist in its epistemology, nor so determined to establish being outside the self, the Transcendental Thomists shared something of the neoplatonic assumption that the hierarchy of intellectual forms and the hierarchy of being were the same. Karl Rahner took into the center of his Thomism the equation from the *Liber de causis* between the perfection of being and intellect's complete self-return. Moreover, because, like the neoplatonists, they came to being through the self, and, with the neoplatonists, unified the cosmos in accord with the structure of the self, the Transcendental Thomists did not deny that the *summae* were systems.

By the 1960's Cornelio Fabro was writing in English for American Catholic journals.⁸¹ Mark Jordan at Notre Dame, who does not want to go down the Transcendental path, finds this a way to continue what he regards as Thomas' "anti-modern claim about the domination of being over mind."⁸² Fabro and Jordan emphasize

⁸⁰ "Is St. Thomas' 'Science of God' Still Relevant Today," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1974), 453. In fact I think he is right, but the contemporary position to which Transcendental Thomism most nearly conforms is Heidegger's, see Luis Cortest, "Was St. Thomas Aquinas a Platonist?" *The Thomist* 52, (1988), 209-19; W. J. Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle, Being or Unity?" *Dionysius*, 4 (1980), 133-172; idem, "Making," 101-122; idem, "Dionysian Hierarchy," 404-406; idem, "Denys and Aquinas," 144-45; J. M. McDermott, S.J., "The Analogy of Knowing in Karl Rahner," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXVI, 2 (June, 1996), 201-216; idem, "The Analogy of Human Knowing in the *Prima Pars*," *Gregorianum* 77, 2&3, (1996), 284-85. I refer only to literature in English.

⁸¹ "The Problem of Being and the Destiny of Man," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 (1961), 407-436; "The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 6 (1966), 389-427; "Platonism, Neoplatonism and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies," *New Scholasticism*, 44 (1970), 69-100 [essential: critical of Gilson but also of Kremer's treatment of Gilson and of neoplatonism]; "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy. The Notion of Participation," *Review of Metaphysics*, 27 (1974), 449-491 [like *New Scholasticism*, 44, but more extensive, includes agreement with Lindbeck (*Franciscan Studies*, 17) and works out his strong difference from Transcendental Thomism]. There were Gilsonian responses, e.g., J.Owens, *Review of Metaphysics*, 29 (1976), 670-690, which accepts that the plurality of Thomism is well founded philosophically, and F.D. Wilhelmsen, "Existence and *Esse*," *New Scholasticism*, 50 (1976), 20-45. For a recent collection of the work of this follower of Gilsonian Existential Thomism, see F.D. Wilhelmsen, *Being and Knowing: Reflections of a Thomist*, (Albany, N.Y.: Preserving Christian Publications, 1991).

⁸² "The Grammar of *Esse*: Re-Reading Thomas on the Transcendentals," *The Thomist*, 44 (1980), 17; he goes on to write that his position "tries to discover the grounds for the possibility of *ens* as ordinable, insisting that such order is inherent in *ens*. The starting point is not with the possibility for human experience, but with the foundation for the hierarchy within which human experience will stand." On the question of Thomas' Aristotelianism, see Mark D. Jordan, *The Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas*, The Etienne Gilson Series 15 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1992), and idem, "Aquinas in Aristotle's *Ethics*," *Ad Litteram. Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*," ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies 3 (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1992), 242-245.

the Proclean and Dionysian character of Thomas' neoplatonism. Fran O'Rourke, an Irish scholar published "*Virtus Essendi: Intensive Being in Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas*" in a Canadian journal, and followed it with a book from Brill on Aquinas and Dionysius.⁸³ In carrying forward Fabro's thought, he was critical of Gilson.

I have referred already to the second stage of the uncovering of Thomas' neoplatonism: studies of Aquinas dependent on French neoplatonic scholarship since the Second World War.⁸⁴ English-speaking scholars are conscious of the explicit criticism of Gilson's metaphysic of Exodus by Pierre Hadot, Emile zum Brunn and others.⁸⁵ We know that it makes Gilson's account of the anti-Platonic, anti-essentialist structure of Thomas' metaphysic of *esse* historically untenable. With these scholars there is a shift. Whereas the initial recognition of the essentialist or neoplatonic aspect of Thomas' thought involved appreciating his positive relation to Augustine, and affirming the value of the Augustinian tradition in mediaeval scholasticism, it is now the turn of the Proclean neoplatonism and its Christian extension in the pseudo-Dionysius to have its due.

Heidegger and Onto-theology

As in Europe, so in America, the confrontation of Thomism and Heidegger's critique of onto-theology has also had two stages. At first, Heidegger was viewed from within a Thomist and metaphysical perspective. He seemed to provide existential Thomism with its most profound confirmation in contemporary thought. If only, Gilson and Maritain would say, if only Heidegger knew the Aquinas we have discovered, and not the essentialist of decadent scholasticism.⁸⁶ When, however, the study of Heidegger

⁸³ *Dionysius*, 15 (1991), 31-80; on Gilson, see 44-46; *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

⁸⁴ See E. Booth, O.P., *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983); Hankey, *God*; idem, "Aquinas' First Principle;" idem, "Making;" idem, "'Dionysius dixit, Lex divinitatis est ultima per media reducere': Aquinas, hierocracy and the 'augustinisme politique'," *Tommaso D'Aquino: proposte nuove di lettura. Festschrift Antonio Tognolo*, ed. Ilario Tolomio, *Medioevo. Rivista di Storia della Filosofia Medievale*; 18 (Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1992), 119-150; idem, "Dionysian Hierarchy;" idem, "Denys and Aquinas." Hankey and Booth are treated at length in "Was Thomas Aquinas a Platonist?" *The Thomist*, 52 (1988), 209-219 and placed within the context of earlier studies in this century. Recently there are M.B. Ewbank, "Diverse Orderings of Dionysius' *Triplex via* by St. Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies*, 52 (1990), 82-109 and idem, "Remarks on Being in St. Thomas Aquinas' *Expositio de divinis nominibus*," *AHDLM*, 56 (1989), 123-149; Eileen C. Sweeney, "Thomas Aquinas' Double Metaphysics of Simplicity and Infinity," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXIII (1993), 297-317; Rudi A. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1995); Vivian Boland, OP, *Ideas in God According to St Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought LXIX (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Patrick Quinn, "Aquinas's Model of Mind," *New Blackfriars*, 77, (1996), idem, *Aquinas, Platonism and the Knowledge of God*, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996).

⁸⁵ See Hankey, *God*, and "Dionysian Hierarchy," 408-13 for bibliography, and P. Hadot, "Dieu comme acte d'être. A propos des théories d'Étienne Gilson sur la 'métaphysique'," *Étienne Gilson et nous*, 117-121 with the "boomerang" demonstrated by E. zum Brunn, "Le Dieu de Platon et le Dieu le Moïse," *Saint Augustin*, ed. P. Ranson, Les Dossiers H, (Girromagny: L'Age d'homme, 1988), 38, 281-284.

⁸⁶ E.g. *Les Tribulations de Sophie*, 69-72, and "Sur les vicissitudes des principes," *Mélanges offert a M.D. Chenu, maître en théologie*, Bibliothèque thomiste 37, (Paris: Vrin, 1967), 281-284. On the relation to Heidegger see, Shook, *Gilson*, 227-228, 334-335, 359-360; Hankey, "Making," 94-100; Aubenque, Beaufret and Courtine in *Gilson et nous*; J. Beaufret, *Dialogue avec Heidegger, I. Philosophie grecque*,

deepened, and Thomism was regarded by Catholics from his perspective, everything turned upside down. In fact, the Christian philosophy of Thomas was profoundly understood by Heidegger and was not exempt from his critique of Greek metaphysics, which is not saved from but rather became more problematically onto-theological by union with Christianity. Now those who accept Heidegger's critique, but want to save something of Thomism, endeavour to draw it together with the mystical theology of Denys, theology above metaphysics.⁸⁷ Here too Cornelio Fabro provided guidance for those who do not wish to escape Heidegger by the Transcendental route, because Fabro both appreciated the Dionysian character of Thomas' thought and had confronted Heidegger with greater clarity than Gilson had.⁸⁸

Fr. Fabro was one of the first Thomists of the Leonine revival to notice and to give positive attention to the role of a neoplatonic pattern of participation in the thought of St. Thomas. Although he also paid great attention to developing a Thomistic ontology and to working out the exact relation between essence and existence in it, he was critical of Gilson. In general Fabro was much more careful about how the construction of that ontology stood to philosophy both in Thomas' time and in our own. In respect to our circumstances, Fabro realized that, in fact, Heidegger not only made no exception for Thomas in his history of onto-theology, but also that this was not caused by a simple ignorance of Thomas' doctrine. Defending Thomas required a criticism of Heidegger. Further, he was clear that the genuine engagement with contemporary philosophy which is necessary for the construction and defense of Thomism in our time demanded that the result be more than the representation of a past historical position.

What was true for our time was equally the case for the thirteenth century. The philosophic logic Thomas gave to the metaphysic of Exodus 3.14 could not come out of Scripture itself. Fabro did not hold with Gilson that Scripture revealed a philosophical metaphysic which both was privileged as the true Christian philosophy and was therefore protected against dissolution in the movement of rational reflection. Not only was

(Paris: Minuit, 1974), 109-112, 130, 141-144; idem, *Dialogue avec Heidegger*, 2. *Philosophie moderne*, (Paris: Minuit, 1973), 9-27, 123; G. Prouvost, *Correspondence*, 292-295. For the first stage in North America one might consider J.D. Caputo, "The Problem of Being in Heidegger and the Scholastics," *The Thomist*, 41 (1977), 62-91, especially 84 and 88 to which corresponds "Document: M. Heidegger, 'Le retour au fondement de la metaphysique'" *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Theologiques*, 43 (1959), 401-433.

⁸⁷ Hankey, "Making," 100-110; idem, *God*, 13-15; idem, "Dionysian Hierarchy," 413-16; idem, "Denys and Aquinas," *passim*. Examples of the second stage in North America are J.D. Jones, "The Ontological Difference for St. Thomas and Pseudo-Dionysius," *Dionysius*, 4 (1980), 133-172; idem, "A Non-Entitative Understanding of Being and Unity: Heidegger and Neoplatonism," *Dionysius*, 6 (1982), 94-110; J.D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay in Overcoming Metaphysics*, (New York: Fordham, 1980). There are those who concede the content of metaphysics to the Heideggerian critique and attempt a Transcendental retrieval of theology, e.g. R.L. Hurd, "Heidegger and Aquinas: A Rahnerian Bridge," *Philosophy Today*, 28 (1984), 105-37; idem, "Being is Being - Present - to - Self: Rahner's key to Aquinas' Metaphysics," *The Thomist*, 52 (1988), 63-78. There is also a thoughtful reaction, e.g. O. Blanchette, "Are There Two Questions of Being," *Review of Metaphysics*, 45 (1992), 259-287.

⁸⁸ E.g.: "Il nuovo problema dell'essere e la fondazione della metafisica," *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies*, ed. A.A. Maurer, 2 vols., ii, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 423-457; idem, "L'interpretazione dell'atto in S. Tommaso e Heidegger," *Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo settimo centenario*, 9 vols., i (Naples, 1975), 119-128.

Thomas' ontology a philosophical construction related to his situation in history, but further, its particular matrix was primarily neoplatonic and decisively Dionysian.⁸⁹ Because of this recognition, Fabro's Thomism, unlike that of Gilson, has not been rendered untenable by the historians' discovery that Thomas' ontology does not stand against the so-called 'essentialism' of earlier pagan, Islamic and Christian Neoplatonists, but rather is anticipated by their developments and is dependent on them.

As a result both of its relation to contemporary and to medieval philosophy, Fabro's Thomistic ontology is not polemically anti-Platonic, the identity of *esse* and *essentia* in the Divine simplicity is not interpreted, as in Gilson, as if *essentia* had finally been squeezed out. Still, Fabro goes far enough with Heidegger that his formulation of the hierarchy of being in terms of 'intensity' is intended to meet something of the Heideggerian criticism of onto-theology. The consequent interpretation of Thomas has just been criticized by Rudi Te Velde for dividing being and form in a way foreign to Aquinas. Te Velde is equally critical of Gilson.

Decisively for the future of Fabro's position, given that the most recent developments in the discovery of a neoplatonic Thomas have been made by those whose relation to the history of philosophy is primarily determined by Heidegger, negation, even the negative theology of the Pseudo-Dionysius, stands, for Fabro, within ontology, not against it. Having followed the various criticisms of Gilsonian Thomism in English-speaking North America, it is not difficult to see why Fabro's position provided a way of exit, even if it is only transitional and temporary. Many do not now find Fabro radical enough: metaphysics remains. But this is among the questions for the future. It is indubitable that, in this situation, Gilson's Thomism belongs to the past.

Esse and the dialectic of History

Gilson's construction of Thomism as Christian philosophy rose out of the historical conditions in France in which he created the study of the history of medieval philosophy. He is clear about this and about the way in which these intellectual circumstances determined his questions. His anger over the diminution, by clerical authority, of the place of Thomas in the Catholic Church pushed him to remark that he, Blondel, Maritain, and Marcel were products of the state educational system. And, indeed, it was in that secular world, with its intellectual norms and historical disciplines, that he sought to show the positive, decisive, and necessary consequences for philosophy of thinking within Catholic faith and theology. Historical scholarship, using modern norms and methods, led toward Christian philosophy. Reasons for "Christian philosophy" could be established.

Ultimately, however, the purposes of Leo XIII's Thomistic revival to which Gilson was dedicated could not be carried out within the system of state education. The Leonine revival was, after all, directed primarily to limiting the modern state. So, in North America, where the system of Catholic education was well adapted to the reception of his Thomistic Christian philosophy, Gilson promoted "Christian schools." He remarked that "our liberal societies persist in considering as 'separate' the only schools which can

⁸⁹ On Fabro in contrast to Gilson, see Andrea Robiglio, "Gilson e Fabro. Appunti per un confronto," *Divus Thomas*, 17/2 (1997), 75 and against both of them, Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 184-6, 221-6, 252, and Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 147-8 and 171-2.

provide them with the very type of citizens they need, namely Christian schools ... it is sheer nonsense.” He saw in the new world a future for French Catholicism. However, Catholicism in North America was not moving toward separation but in the opposite direction, and most radically of all in the Province of Québec.⁹⁰

The dependence of Thomas’ metaphysic on revelation belonged to the logic of Gilson’s Christian philosophy. For him, this logic also determined that, despite its coherence with French and German thought in the middle of this century, the existentialism Gilson found in St. Thomas was free from the vicissitudes of history. Exodus guaranteed Thomas’ metaphysic of *esse*. Nothing philosophy or empirical science could discover could touch it. It was both metaphysical and revealed. Other philosophies had their origin in the natural tendency to error in man’s knowing of being, but this metaphysic was founded on the eternal rock: God’s self-revelation.⁹¹

In North America, at least, while the historical circumstances of Catholic intellectual life initially favoured Gilson’s Thomism, in time they turned against it. The historical dialectic to which Gilson subjected all other philosophies has now overwhelmed his own. *Esse* too has become historical. Aristotle required of Parmenides, that Being and the way to Being not be kept apart. The same necessity of metaphysics has imposed itself on Gilson. The metaphysic of *esse* no longer has the Roman *magisterium* to protect it from philosophical criticism, the formation of the concept now has a history - fundamentally neoplatonic - and, ironically, in its more extreme Gilsonian anti-essentialist characterizations, it moves toward flux.⁹² Against Gilson, all except the self-consciously reactionary agree that Thomism’s future requires it to recognize and embrace its neoplatonism. Most look to the negative or mystical theology present there to enable an escape from the fate of metaphysics. I and a few others look to the systematic relation of all which is under the One in order to transcend historicism. But, let us pain the spirit of our good master Gilson no further. I shall say nothing of modern idealism.⁹³

⁹⁰ See particularly in *La philosophe et la théologie*. His anger was expressed thus: “Après avoir enseigné leurs thomismes à la place de saint Thomas d’Aquin, ils veulent à présent exclure de l’enseignement le vrai thomisme pour se délivrer des faux qu’ils y ont installés de force à sa place.” He went on “incidentment, Blondel, Maritain, Marcel et moi-même (moi, seulement pour l’enseignement supérieur,) sommes des produits de l’enseignement de l’Etat.” (Letter of 14 August, 1965 reproduced in Kalinowski, *L’impossible*, 248). The quotation on Christian schools is from: *The Breakdown of Morals and Christian Education*, A lecture in the Adult Education Program of St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto, (Toronto: St. Michael’s College, 1952), 9; on French Canada: “Les armes de la France n’y sont plus, mais ses arts et ses lois y sont encore, et la croix plantée par Jacques Cartier voit croître sans cesse la foule de ses adorateurs. Rien n’est perdu de ce qui méritait d’être sauvé.” -- from Gilson’s Préface in J. Bruchési, *Canada. Réalités d’hier et aujourd’hui*, (Montreal: Éditions variétés, 1948), 13.

⁹¹ See, for example, “Historical Research,” and much else. I follow Paul Vignaux in thinking this is “quasi-Barthian,” see Hankey, “Making,” 96, note 44 and idem, “Denys and Aquinas,” 150.

⁹² See note 61 above. There is a development of existential Thomism inspired by Gilson’s anti-essentialism which is too extreme even for Joseph Owens: W.E. Carlo, “The Role of Essence in Existential Metaphysics: A Reappraisal,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 2 (1962), 557-590; for a judgment and bibliography, see W. Norris Clarke, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1974), 424.

⁹³ The movement toward a revaluation of the relations between Thomism and Hegelian idealism may be indicted by the following: Hankey, *God*, 155-161; idem, “Tradition and Development of Doctrine,” *Tradition; Received and Handed On*, ed. D. A. Petley, (Charlottetown: St. Peter Publications, 1994), 32-38; E. Booth, O.P., “A Confrontation between the Neoplatonism of St. Thomas Aquinas and Hegel,”

Angelicum, 63 (1986), 57-89; idem, *Saint Augustine and the Western Tradition of Self-Knowing*, The Saint Augustine Lecture 1986 (Villanova: Augustinian Institute, Villanova University, 1989); E. Brito, *Dieu et l'être d'après Thomas d'Aquin et Hegel*, (Paris: PUF, 1991); McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*; idem, *From Unity*; McDermott, "The Analogy of Human Knowing," 520, n. 17. On the anti-idealist biases of the Thomist revival, see Thomas F. O'Meara, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) and *Church and Culture: German Catholic Theology, 1860-1914*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). The recent series of issues devoted to individual philosophers in *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* are worth noting; Kenneth L. Schmitz edited lxiv, #4 (1990) dealing with Hegel. It includes an article in English by Emilio Brito.