Cornelius Ernst's Theological Seeds

Louis Roy OP

Cornelius Ernst (1924–77), a Dominican of the English Province, translated Thomas Aquinas's treatise on grace.[1] Towards the end of his treatise, Thomas declares: "The grace of the Holy Spirit as we have it in our present life, though not equal as actuality to glory, is equal in power, like the seed of a tree, in which there is power for the whole tree".[2] In addition to Thomas, Ernst cites Nicholas of Cusa, Erasmus and the Chandogya Upanishad as they speak of the virtue and strength of the seed.[3] Moreover, in an article which praises Karl Rahner's theological fertility, he writes: "Clearly the unity of vision of any really distinguished mind is not to be found only in an architectural structure; it is discovered in a style, in a local presence of the whole in the parts, in the achieved fruitfulness of germinal ideas or themes".[4] Even though Rahner's theological input is much larger than Ernst's, I think the latter's remark applies to himself as well.

Interestingly, without referring to those texts, a reviewer of Ernst's papers comments that "they are more like seeds sown rather unevenly for other hands to cultivate". He also states that they show "a mind of breadth, originality and assurance".[5] Another reviewer points out that "they reveal an unusually wide-ranging and penetrating theological mind, sensitive at once to the tradition of Catholic Christianity and also to the many strands of contemporary philosophical and cultural consciousness".[6]

Twenty-five years after the posthumous publication, in 1979, of his most seminal essays under the title of *Multiple Echo*, it might be of interest to ponder a few of his intuitions. Those insights are highly

[1] St Thomas Aquinas, "The Gospel of Grace", being vol. 30 of *Summa Theologiae*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, and New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).

[2] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 114, a. 3, ad 3.

[3] Cornelius Ernst, *Multiple Echo: Explorations in Theology*, ed. Fergus Kerr and Timothy Radcliffe (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 37–38; henceforth referred to as ME.

[4] "Some Themes in the Theology of Karl Rahner", *Irish Theological Quarterly* 32 (1965): 251–257, at 252.

[5] E. J. Yarnold, "The Whole Truth", *The Month* 24 (1980): 139.

[6] Brian Hebblethwaite, a review of *Multiple Echo*, in *Theology* 83 (1980): 374–375, at 374.

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valuable for contemporary theology. Some of them have been put to use in an original and free manner by Fergus Kerr.[7] Yet other inklings of Ernst's have hardly been explicated. Akin to seeds, they still await their time of growth.

Three Sources of Inspiration

Thomas Aquinas, Heidegger and Wittgenstein seem to have been the principal influences upon Ernst. He learnt from Aquinas that being and meaning are indissociable and that faith and reason must be fused in the intelligibility of the universe, in "the logic of Being" (ME, 19) or "an ontology of meaning".[8] Heidegger made him recognize the historicity of being-meaning in *Dasein*, namely in the human person. And thanks to Wittgenstein he came to discover the numerous plays of meaningful language. *Pace* Aquinas, however, it is not being but rather meaning that must be our starting point today; and yet this option in no way entails an antithesis between the subjectivity of meaning and the objectivity of being, which, instead, go hand in hand.[9]

In the mid-1960s, right after the Second Vatican Council, Ernst wanted to address the issue of the "failure to integrate our Thomist patrimony with contemporary thought and problems", as a report of his Dominican Province put it.[10] In particular, he was acutely aware of the inadequacy of "an archaic theory of meaning" (ME, 85) for theology. In his opinion, what we urgently need today is a post-Heideggerian and post-Wittgensteinian hermeneutics, that is, a certain manner of reading texts. With their emphasis on the literal sense, the neo-Thomists have been operating on the plane of the "ontic", namely of mere facts (not only the miracles of Jesus but even his resurrection and his appearances to his disciples are treated as proofs), at the expense of the "ontological", namely of the meaning deriving from the mysterious character of the realities disclosed in the Christian traditions (84–85, 140).[11]

Let us make it clear that Ernst does not rule out the literal sense; he simply believes it is not the typical sense, but only a minor case among the many language games. Moreover, when he examines

[7] See Robert Ombres and Mark Edney, "Consideration", *New Blackfriars* 82 (2001): 482–485, esp. 482.

[8] "Meaning and Metaphor in Theology", *New Blackfriars* 61 (1980): 100–112, at 105; henceforth referred to as MMT. This all-important point is highlighted in Nicholas Lash's review of *Multiple Echo* in *New Blackfriars* 61 (1980): 89–93, at 91–93.

[9] *The Theology of Grace* (Cork: Mercier Press, and Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 66–69; henceforth referred to as TG.

[10] Cornelius Ernst's obituary, in Acts of the Provincial Chapter of the English Province, 1978, 40–42, at 41.

[11] See also "Faith and Reality: Two Major Works of Biblical Theology", *The Life of the Spirit* 16 (1961): 3–10, at 6.

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Aquinas's distinction between the metaphorical and the proper sense, he does not confuse, as so many do, the latter with the literal, since he recognizes that "God can be spoken of *proprie*, not *aequivoce*, because of a similitude of participation between creatures and God" (70). Nonetheless his construal of analogy "in terms of a four-term 'proportion' or 'proportionality'" (68) prevents him from fathoming its profound resources.[12] He also fails to appreciate the indispensability of Thomas's distinction between the metaphorical and the proper sense for systematic theology (70–74). This lack may partly account for his rejection of systematic theology, as we shall note later.

Nevertheless Ernst remains greatly inspired by Aquinas's achievement. With a Heideggerian ring he asserts: "Thomas's genuine and permanent originality was to display the internal consistency of a view of the world in which the world effortlessly shows itself for what it is, flowers into the light". And with a Wittgensteinian ring he adds: "What makes Thomas permanently valuable is his recognition that likeness is generated at all, that being, truth and meaning are indefinitely diverse and yet (this is the ultimate mystery) that being does disclose itself in meaning" (11).

Time and again, as he assesses Aquinas's contribution, Ernst is keen to bring to light both the continuity and the discontinuity. In the context of an analysis of meaning drawn from Wittgenstein, he utters the following judgment:

> It is time to look at some of the consequences such a view of meaning might have for theology. In the first place, it seems to preserve the ontological claims of Christian doctrine, its claim to declare the really real. However, it does so by locating the point of manifestation of the real not in substances but in the process and praxis of meaning, the *history* of the individual and of mankind, by which ... the world to which man belongs becomes the world which belongs to man (MMT, 109).

Having mused over Heidegger's thoughts on Hölderlin's phrase "poetically man dwells on this earth" (ME, 26–27),[13] Ernst repudiates any dualism between revelation and nature, or any disconnection between salvation-history and man's being-in-the-world. Following Aquinas, he maintains that theology should never dissociate religion from all other areas of experience and thinking. He rightly declares

[12] In the latter part of his career, Thomas Aquinas ceased using proportionality and instead kept only the analogy of attribution (a simple *proportio*) in his approach to God; see Albert Patfoort, "La place de l'analogie dans la pensée de S. Thomas d'Aquin', *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 76 (1992): 235–254. Older studies by George P. Klubertanz, Ralph McInerny, David Burrell and Bernard Montagnes support Patfoort's thesis.

[13] See Martin Heidegger, "... Poetically Man Dwells ...", in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 211–229; also "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry", in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 51–65.

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that both Heidegger and Wittgenstein "have overcome the division (which is an existential as well as a "philosophical" one) between inner and outer".[14] Here is the background for what he means:

> Once human inwardness is no longer sustained by the myth of a hierarchical cosmos of the spheres beyond which is God, its ultimate revelation tends to be one of self-enclosed finitude [Heidegger's position]; but there is no reason why we should not learn to seek God as the source of that marriage of man and earth which is consummated in the Event of truth, and which can serve as the sacramental sign of the revelation of the divine Truth itself. Our encounter with a Man can be the revelation of God; our inhabitation of the earth can be and is a sacred history.[15]

Like Aquinas, and spurred on by Heidegger and Wittgenstein, Ernst wishes to contribute to the emergence of a new cultural whole, of an overall worldview, of an incorporation of present-day thinking into the higher wisdom of the Gospel. Talking about the "praxis by which the world to which man belongs becomes the world which belongs to man", he confides: "My favourite metaphor for this is *gardening*". He explains: "It is the generation of a behavioural environment, the constitution of a context, the integration into a culture" (ME, 55).

Towards a Theory of Meaning

Having meditated on the aphorisms of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Ernst observes that "the basis of Wittgenstein's later views is the awareness of meaning as a common and public world, since language has a bearer, the community or tribe, and thus is active as a form of the life of that community" (ME, 20–21). This awareness enables us to acknowledge the extraordinary flexibility of language and to rule out structuralism's thesis that "structure" is "the paradigm for meaning in general". As Wittgenstein found out that his representation of "picture" had held him captive for some time, so Ernst warns that a certain representation of "structure" may hold us captive in so far as it sets fixed limits. On the contrary, "the later Wittgenstein's 'limits' of language are only ever *provisional* boundaries, capable of indefinite expansion and contraction" (53). "The 'garden' can be set up and set out at an indefinite variety of levels, with an indefinite variety of boundaries" (55). Surely Ernst had in mind, not a French, Cartesian garden, but an English Garden!

[14] Introduction to Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (London: cDarton, Longman and Todd, 1961, and New York: Crossroad, 1982), vol. 1:xvii, note 1. In this introduction readers can find what Ernst thinks is significant in Heidegger's philosophy. At the end (xix) he also acknowledges his indebtedness to Rahner.

[15] Ibid., xvi-xvii.

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While not denying the presence of structures, Ernst sees them as functioning within communal contexts indicative of how words are applied or used. Only such contexts allow us to identify which of the numerous language-games are actually played (21). Likewise he adopts Chomsky's notion of "linguistic competence" as "the native speaker's capacity to generate and understand an infinite number of sentences in his own language" (54–55) and he extends that notion beyond the confines of structures.

Thus the most important Christian words behave freely in different situations. In "The Ontology of the Gospel" Ernst contends that "different words may refer to the same reality, . . . to a many-sided reality".[16] He finds very instructive Canon Kelly's assertion that we have no "primitive creed" in the New Testament (172; see ME, 33), but many formulations according to "the particular situations of the Church's life, the *Sitz im Leben* or sociological setting of the texts" (173). Taking language as essentially communicative, Ernst speaks of "different ways of referring to the same reality-in-communication, ways of reference which differ at least partly because of the different sociological styles of the communication" (174). The article concludes with a renewed understanding of the Christian tradition precisely as the "reality-in-communication". What is offered is "an indefinite complex of meanings", namely "the Gospel . . . sustained by a community life so various and so inextricably interwoven with the course of secular history" (181). As an example, he notes that "the richness of St. Paul's usage [of the word *euaggelion*, 'Gospel'] is such as to make brief description impossible" (176).

In Chapter One of *The Theology of Grace*, Ernst engages in fine descriptions of no fewer than thirteen New Testament "webs of association" which present grace – eleven in the Pauline corpus as well as one for the Synoptics and one in John. I consider these pages of Ernst's (TG, 13–29) as a first-rate literarily-sensitive introduction to Christian texts on grace. While perusing them we realize that there is more than one linguistic structure about grace, that each deserves to be appreciated on its own account, and that the structures often overlap.

Moreover, such key words as "grace", "God" and "Jesus" mediate between various contexts. In Thomas Aquinas, for instance, "grace" stands not only for "a habitual justifying gift" but also for "God"s very mercy itself" (TG, 12 and 53).[17] Prompted by this clue, Ernst perceives in the more comprehensive sense of "grace" an interesting virtuality for theology.

> The language of grace (*charis*) in the Pauline writings undergoes a kind of extension which allows us to review the whole of the revelation of God in

[16] "The Ontology of the Gospel", *The Thomist* 27 (1963): 170–181, at 171.

[17] *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 24, a. 14; see *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, vol. 3, trans. Robert W. Schmidt (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), 205–206.

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> Jesus Christ from the vantage point of grace. Grace becomes then an open concept capable of embracing the whole of God's gift of himself to man, and so capable of indefinitely various further particularization. It is not as though we were to itemize God's gifts and call one of them "grace"; it is rather that "grace" qualifies the whole of God's self-communication as a gift beyond all telling. We might call "grace" a *second-level* concept, one which indicates a wholly new dimension of relationship between God and his creation, a transposition of the relationship between Creator and creature into a new mode (TG, 29).

As far as the term "God" is concerned, "we might more usefully look for 'God' as the Meaning of the indefinite variety of meanings in the indefinite variety of ways we talk" (ME, 51). Similarly for the name "Jesus": "When we claim that "Jesus is the Christ", we are claiming that the element 'Jesus' can be picked out as the common element of various orders of meaning; we are saying *here* that various gardens overlap" (56).

Ernst brings the three terms (and other themes linked with grace) together in the following paragraph:

> It is in Jesus Christ, given in our experience of faith, that we are to try to understand more deeply the terms "God", "man", "preordained" and "union", these terms which reverberate in our experience today with associations which could not have occurred to our Christian forerunners. In Jesus Christ these terms come together as a family, as a web of associations; and it is as a member of this family that we wish to try to locate the term "grace" (TG, 66).

As the "various orders of meaning" are interactively juxtaposed, meaning acquires more thickness, as it were. In "new combinations and new applications", there happens an "amplification of meaning" (ME, 33), a "multiple echo" (35), a "concentration of multiple meanings", as in poetry and in the Gospel according to John (40, 141). Here is a pregnant example of two orders of meaning which interact:

> The universal instance may serve as the point of departure for a two-way process of interpretation: for what is universally human, while remaining universal, becomes particularized as an expression of grace, freely bestowing love. The Christian experience of the genetic moment is seen to be capable of assuming and transforming the universally human; and secondly, the universally human is rediscovered at the heart of the Christian experience (39; see TG, 74–75).

This practice corresponds to the Thomist use of metaphor as *translatio*, i.e. as "transference from one order or reality – sensible and material – to a higher order of reality – intelligible and immaterial" (67). Still, Thomas's understanding remains restricted to metaphor-predicate, whereas much of biblical literature as well as Shakespeare's later plays must be characterized as "extended metaphors" (69).

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Thus Ernst's understanding of metaphor enables him to perceive its full ontological import, that is, the human creating of being in meaningful praxis.

> On the view of being suggested here, metaphor is the typical linguistic expression of the praxis of meaning, which could itself be described as an ontological "metaphor". The "transference" of one world into another realized in the activity of human existence and behaviour: cosmos becoming environment: so "metaphor" not only as a mode of language but as a mode of life (MMT, 109).

The correspondence between meaning and being is more clearly expressed in the following excerpt, which applied it to religious experience:

> If we take seriously the suggestion that meaning is primarily a process and a praxis, then the possibility at least arises that the new sense of meaning disclosed in our experience of Jesus Christ may involve a transformation of our lives as real as, or more real than, any human activity of transforming the world. And if by "grace" we understand primarily the novelty introduced into our lives in our experience of Jesus Christ, then grace too will be "real" (TG, 73).

The Meaning of Meaning

"The Meaning of meaning" is a refrain in Ernst's writings. It seems to have been suggested by a remark made by Lévi-Strauss to the philosopher Ricoeur: "what you are looking for . . . is a *meaning of meaning* (*un sens du sens*), a meaning behind meaning" (ME, 52). Lévi-Strauss disallows this idea whereas Ernst gives it an interpretation of his own, independently of Ricoeur.

He characterizes it as the "source of meaning" (55), "the original genesis of meaning" (27), "the genetic moment of articulate enlargement of insight and experience" (34), and hence "the nativity of the word" (27). He elaborates: "the phrase is to be understood not as referring to some permanent store, treasury or bank of meaning on which one may draw as one likes (though this may be a way of referring to a tradition of constituted meanings) but of the actual conceiving and conceptualization of meaning, the exercise of 'competence'" (55–56). It is not primarily something static, a store of information, a data-bank, but something dynamic, a process of the human mind, of "mind in action",[18] "at the origin, at that point at which praxis transfigures the world" (56).

[18] In "A Preface to Theology", *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 2 (1971): 1–8, at 4, Ernst praises Wittgenstein's later philosophy as "a disclosure of mind in action, of "mind" as an indefinitely fluid activity of meaning".

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The Meaning of meaning is the beginning of an answer, of at least of a stance, to "the ultimate question: 'What does it all mean?' This is not only an abstractly intellectual matter but also something to do with the seriousness with which we take ourselves and the way we lead our lives" (152). Elsewhere he elucidates the question: "When we ask 'What does it all mean?' we reject, by using the word 'all', the ordinary limitation of the context; we are generalizing the question".[19]

He tells us that because of our "common humanity", a religious text gives us a "horizon or *Woraufhin*", namely "the meaning of what it is to be human".[20] And going back to *Multiple Echo* we notice that for Ernst "an ultimate meaning, the Meaning of meaning, God" can unify all the meanings entertained and exchanged by a community of faith (79). Some may hear an "echo" of Thomas's famous refrain at the end of each of his five ways: "and this we call 'God'".[21] Ernst also says: "We have, in contemplative engagement, to search for a focus of meaning, that Meaning of meaning to which we already have access in faith, God in Christ" (152). Let us become aware of the several levels of Meaning in Ernst's garden: what it is to be human; God; Christ (see also TG, 69).

These three levels are discernible in the conclusion of a talk he gave towards the end of his life:

> In thinking about Jesus Christ, one is trying to bring together one's own sense of what it is to be human; to allow this sense of what it is to be human to be illuminated and criticised by whatever one can discover about the humanity of Jesus himself, in his first century context, and also as far as he becomes accessible to us in our immediate experience of Jesus Christ. And having done this, one also I think makes this constant affirmation, that in doing this one is being invited to – and expected to – revalue one's sense of who and what God might be. And it is in the attempt to locate Jesus historically, and also to rediscover him as the source of one's own possible transfiguration, it is in this kind of attempt to establish here a new identity both for ourselves and for Jesus himself, that one hopes, I suggest, to rediscover who and what God might be.[22]

So we may want to ask: how does Ernst relate the meanings discovered in human experience, in God and in Jesus Christ? His general principle is enunciated as follows.

> Christianity is the consecration of the genetic moment, the living centre from which it reviews and renews the indefinitely various and shifting perspectives of human experience in history. That, at least, is or ought to

[19] Introduction to Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1:xiii-xiv.
[20] "A Preface to Theology", 6.
[21] *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 3. As a matter of fact, Ernst cites this refrain in MMT, 101.
[22] "Thinking about Jesus", *New Blackfriars* 61 (1980): 208–215, at 215.

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> be its claim: that it is the power to transform and renew all things: "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21.5) (ME, 34–35).

Jesus Christ plays the decisive role in an "indefinitely expansible experience of the divine", as a "life" which gains new meaning:

> So what I am proposing here is a reading of the Bible which focuses on Yahweh-Jesus [= "Jesus" as the fulfilment of "Yahweh", in ME, 74], which allows Yahweh-Jesus to become the key to the indefinitely expansible experience of the divine. Jesus became the key by the significant shape of his life and destiny, what we have called above the ontological metaphor of his praxis of meaning, culminating in the metaphor of the Resurrection, in which "life" has been given a uniquely new meaning, accessible only in its repetition in the ontological metaphor of faith (MMT, 112).

Or, put more simply: "The heart of Jesus is the centre of the world to which man belongs and the world which belongs to man: his is the human heart in which we discover that God is love" (TG, 88).

Concretely both our humanity and God are redefined in our experience of Jesus' death. With respect to our humanity:

> The whole of the discourse in chapters 13–17 of St John's Gospel is a reflective disclosure of the final sense of the why-question: how it is to be asked and how answered. And it is a farewell discourse, which reveals the answer through a separation permanently disclosed in the death of Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life: the answer is a way of life through death, the death of Jesus which is the final fulfilment of his destiny, his sending by the Father (TG, 71).

And with respect to God:

> The Christian experience of the genetic moment is at once an experience of the creatively new become manifest in human articulation, and an experience of an ultimate source, the hidden God, *Deus absconditus* who has made his transcendence known in the darkness of a death (ME, 35; see 37).

The death of Jesus, of course, is inseparable from his resurrection and our partaking of it: "There is . . . a hole at the centre of the genetic moment, a void, which turns out to be plenary, superabundant: a radiant darkness" (ME, 35).[23] "The genetic moment of the resurrection of Jesus is shared in by men who themselves undergo transformation in a genetic moment which Christians call the presence of the Spirit of Jesus" (217). With his strong sense of metaphor in mind, Ernst makes bold to assert: "In the resurrection, the world which belongs to man becomes the world which belongs to God; the Resurrection is the ultimate 'metaphor' of the world, its translation and trans-figuration" (75).

[23] On the connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the meaning of human destiny, see Ernst, "A Theological Chronicle", *Blackfriars* 41 (1960): 220–227, at 222.

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A "Thematic" Theology

Ernst did not appreciate the significance of Bernard Lonergan's systematic treatment of theological method. Nevertheless a reviewer of *Multiple Echo* is right on target when he mentions their similarity, albeit in terms that are too vague: "a common profundity in their Godwardness, humanity and rigorous sincerity".[24] More precisely, I would say that the similarity resides in their common conviction that the post-Vatican II theology requires, in Ernst's own words, a new "theological methodology" (ME, 76) or a "reformulation of theological epistemology" (85). Ernst also mentions, in passing, "the existential aspect of questioning" and the "growth *inwards*, a growth in comprehension" which are central to theologizing.[25] Talking about Rahner's method, he characterizes it as "an appeal to that sort of insight which precedes argument, though it may be clarified by argument".[26] All this is very close to Lonergan's views on questioning and understanding.[27]

The resemblance between Ernst and Lonergan, however, is accompanied by a major divergence in their construal of Aquinas and in their vision of our theological future. Both wanted to augment the Angelic Doctor's thought, albeit in very different fashions. Lonergan viewed Aquinas's achievement as systematic and he intended to transpose it into "the ongoing context of modern science, modern scholarship, and modern philosophy".[28] As we saw, Ernst too aimed at supplementing Aquinas's achievement, mostly with the help of twentieth-century philosophers such as Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Yet he argues that since the Latin infinitive "*esse* is the unifying theme" in Thomas's later works, his thinking is not "systematic", but "thematic". The reason he gives very succinctly (with a few key terms unfortunately left unexplained) might perhaps be rephrased as follows: since there is no community of genus between the divine *esse* and the created beings,[29] Thomas's writings do not provide "a unified world-picture" of "a bounded whole" (which would be univocal); instead, they offer us a "unifying theme" (an analogical *esse*) about a whole ("the community of the infinite variety of all that is in *esse*") whose "boundaries are open to indefinite revision".[30]

[24] B. R. Brinkman, a review of *Multiple Echo*, in *The Heythrop Journal* 22 (1981): 346–348, at 348.

[25] "Truth and Verification in Theology", *Blackfriars* 40 (1959): 100–111, at 107 and 111.

[26] "Some Themes in the Theology of Karl Rahner", 252.

[27] See Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 3: *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

[28] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Longman, Darton & Todd, 1972; reprint by University of Toronto Press, 1992), 347; see 345–347.

[29] See *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 3, a. 5.

[30] Introduction to "The Gospel of Grace", xx.

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Several readers will readily remember what Ernst said earlier about the moveable limits of meaning. Hence his remarks: "It is in the sense that *meaning* is the unifying theme of the *Investigations* that I should like to suggest that *esse* is the unifying theme of St Thomas's later philosophical thinking in his theology". And: "Thus what has been called 'the analogy of Being' corresponds to the indefinite variety of language-games in the later Wittgenstein".[31] Over against the procrustean bed of rationalist thought, one cannot but welcome this appeal to a pluralistic creativity. Nonetheless I would venture to suggest that for the future of theology, a distinction between the interpretation of sacred texts couched in a literary style and the production of systematic reflections is in order. Wittgenstein's insights are most helpful for the former task, which consists in a hermeneutics of symbolic texts; Lonergan's insights are most helpful for the latter task, which consists in a systematic treatment of questions to which the literary style simply does not lend itself.[32]

Furthermore, by relating the terms humanness, God and Jesus, Ernst bequeaths us a recurrent, heuristic and, I would contend, systematic scheme in which each of the three terms represents an area or source of insight that is communicated to the two other areas. In each area, since the meaning may be deepened in an enduring interpretive process, it is never fixed within only one possible formula. Still, I wonder how he would have reconciled the indefiniteness due to the lack of fixed boundaries, which is advantageous regarding the manifold apprehension of meaning, with the definiteness of truth conveyed by dogma. *Pace* Ernst, it seems to me that having recourse to Aquinas's "proper sense" helps us clarify truth by relating systematically the realities of Christian belief.

Regrettably Ernst is not clear about the difference between Thomas Aquinas and the modern scholastics in their interpretive practice. For instance, he writes: "What seems to be true of all prephenomenological philosophy, including scholastic epistemology, is that it conceives of all knowledge on the model of our knowledge of things, physical realities. In their very different ways, philosophy in England since Wittgenstein, and phenomenology, have abandoned this model".[33] This is much more exact regarding modern scholasticism than regarding its medieval form, which was bathed in symbolism.[34]

[31] Ibid., xx-xxi.

[32] See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 82–83 and 304–305 on the systematic exigence, to be recast in light of the critical exigence. For more on this issue, see Louis Roy, "Can We Thematize Mysticism?" *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 21 (2003): 47–66, esp. 48–49 and 61–66.

[33] "Foreword" to E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), xv.

[34] See Louis Roy, "Medieval Latin Scholasticism: Some Comparative Features", in *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), 19–34; and "Scholasticism" in *Christianity: A Complete Guide*, ed. John Bowden (London and New York: Continuum), forthcoming.

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Whereas the modern scholastics, influenced by Scotus, are overly insistent on the literal, univocal sense, Thomas continually goes beyond the model just described, thanks to his employment of analogical discourse with its plurality of senses.[35]

Conclusion

Readers of Ernst cannot but be impressed by his vast culture – literature, social sciences, philosophy, theology. As a reviewer puts it: "He seems to have read and thought about an astonishing number of books and articles; on most occasions (though not always) one is struck by the high degree of his critical assimilation of a daunting acreage of print".[36] The words "critical assimilation" are apposite. And besides this notable quality, he had the rare gift of being able to identify and articulate the most pertinent and fundamental questions, especially in so far as the practice of theology was concerned.

Ernst should be praised for having been one of the first Catholic theologians to engage in hermeneutics. In fact, his handling of issues is akin to Ricoeur's. It is dialogic, acutely aware of the fact of difference, and punctuated by laboriously achieved, precarious syntheses. There is a side of him that is postmodernist. As someone who knew him well explains: "His was the complex fate of a man permanently open to, because indelibly marked by, a radical diversity of traditions".[37] Hence the tensions which characterize his style of thinking.[38] By setting in interaction so many profound intuitions, he has located doors through which we can enter into the edifice of Christian symbols and doctrines, which seems so opaque and impenetrable at times.

Rev. Louis Roy OP
21 Campanella Way
Room 340C
Boston College
Chestnut Hill
MA 02467
USA

[35] See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

[36] Lubor Velecky, a review of *Multiple Echo*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, N. S., 32 (1981): 310–313, at 312.

[37] "Cornelius Ernst: Sermon Preached by Fergus Kerr O.P. at the Requiem Mass at Blackfriars, Oxford, on 26th January 1978", *New Blackfriars* 59 (1978): 549–554, at 549.

[38] "Tension" is a word that recurs in the sermon just quoted as well as in the brief memoir by Simon Tugwell, entitled "Cornelius Ernst", *New Blackfriars* 59 (1978): 2–4.

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