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## Can the Pope Change Tradition? On Tradition as a Principle of Progress in the Light of Thomas Aquinas' Theology

Czy papież może zmienić Tradycję?  
O Tradycji jako zasadzie postępu w świetle teologii  
św. Tomasza z Akwinu

**ABSTRACT:** The article analyses the Thomistic understanding of Tradition in the context of the contemporary theological discussion on the extent of changes proposed by recent papal texts, which for one group of theologians is a change of Tradition, and for another a faithful development of it. By recalling the 19<sup>th</sup>-century understanding of “developing” Tradition forged on the dispute with modernism by Newman, Möhler or Blondel, and juxtaposing it with a Thomistic approach, a conviction is shown that fidelity demands the theologian to develop what is conveyed in the Revelation. Contemporary debates, however, reveal old theological problems, including ultramontaniam, which is voiced when the primacy of the Bishop of Rome is reduced to guarding formulas, rather than receiving and illuminating the current problems with the light of Revelation. On the base of the biblical commentaries of St Thomas Aquinas to the Letters of St Paul, the vision of the exercising primacy of the Bishop of Rome will be analysed.

**KEY WORDS:** tradition, modernism, ultramontaniam, act of faith, collegiality, Blondel, McGrath, Thomas Aquinas

**ABSTRAKT:** Artykuł analizuje tomistyczne rozumienie Tradycji w kontekście współczesnej dyskusji teologicznej na temat zasięgu zmian proponowanych przez obecne teksty papieskie, które dla jednej strony sporu są zmianą Tradycji, a dla innej jej wiernym rozwinięciem. Przywołując XIX-wieczne rozumienie znaczenia „rozwoju Tradycji”, wykuwane przez Newmana, Möhlera czy Blondela na kanwie sporu z modernizmem, i zestawiając je z tomistycznym ujęciem, podkreśla, że wierność domaga się od teologa rozwijania tego, co przekazane w Objawieniu. Współczesne debaty odsłaniają jednak stare problemy teologiczne, w tym ultramontaniam, który dochodzi do głosu, gdy

prymat biskupa Rzymu sprowadza się do strzeżenia formuł, a nie przyjmowania i oświeclania światłem Objawienia współczesności z jej problemami. Niniejszy artykuł, odwołując się do komentarzy biblijnych św. Tomasza z Akwinu do Listów św. Pawła, przybliży wizję sprawowania prymatu przez biskupa Rzymu w ujęciu tomistycznym.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: tradycja, modernizm, ultramontanizm, akt wiary, kolegalność, Blodel, McGrath, Tomasz z Akwinu

St Thomas Aquinas' theological reflection was driven by disputes that might have put him at a risk of losing the trust of some and in a position of gaining the respect of others. St Thomas is said to have rejected few of the views of his opponents: he accepted many of them, and he always showed discernment (only the Arians and the Manichaeans appear to have stirred negative emotions in him).<sup>1</sup> Most often, however, Thomas surprises us with statements that a given claim – which has a hint of heresy – is correct from one angle, but not from another.<sup>2</sup>

From this perspective, the *Summa Theologiae* is an attempt at finding the bearings in the thicket of issues (which is what Aquinas says openly in the prologue to this work), which have ceased to be seen in an organic whole and which, if isolated and without reference to the whole of knowledge, lead to a harmful sense of loss.<sup>3</sup> Students of *sacra doctrina* do not know the interconnections, which is why they make mistakes. That is what Aquinas thinks and that is why he prepares the *Summa Theologiae* as an answer, which, however, he did not manage to test in the realities of didactic work. St Thomas did not want to solve only individual controversies, but to put them into a broader perspective, thanks to which everything gains legibility. After all, it is precisely this perception of things from the perspective of the whole, as Henry de Lubac remarked, that is an important feature of Catholic thinking.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. D. Turner, *Thomas Aquinas. Portret [Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait]*, transl. M. Romanek, Poznań–Warszawa 2017.

<sup>2</sup> A good example is the reflection in the Christological part of *Summa Theologiae*, when, for example, St Thomas asks in numerous articles q. 16 *Tertia Pars*: is the sentence “did man become God” true? (a. 7); is the sentence “Christ is a creature” true? (a. 8); is the phrase “Christ as man is a creature” true (a. 10)?

<sup>3</sup> Cf. T. Huzarek, *Thomas Aquinas' Theory of Knowledge through Connaturality in a Dispute on the Anthropological Principles of Liberalism by John Rawls*, “Espiritu” 156 (2018), pp. 403–417.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. H. de Lubac, *Katolicyzm. Społeczny aspekt dogmatu [Catholicism: Social Aspects of Dogma]*, Krakow 1988, pp. 38–39.

thought of St Thomas Aquinas, I will try to answer the title question: *can the Pope change Tradition?*

The first surprise may be that St Thomas does not ask such a question at all, and yet he was not afraid of the questions: the whole *Summa Theologiae* is a series of challenging issues. Why? Perhaps because, in his opinion, such a question can only arise in someone who has the wrong vision of the role of St Peter and his successors in the Church, who sees the Pope in isolation from the College of Bishops, in other words (and using later terminology), someone who is an ultramontanist.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, it will be necessary to refer to Blondel, Newman or Möhler, who lived at a time when the question about the development of Tradition and consequently the meaning of papal statements, were the source of lively theological debates. Let us begin answering this question, however, from the end, by considering the individual components of the title question, that is to say: Tradition – change – Pope.

### Understanding of Tradition in the Church: subjective or objective?

The title question of the article deals with Tradition writ large and brings up fundamental disputes about understanding what is Greek *paradosis* or Latin *traditio* and how it relates to Scripture: do they each fifty-fifty make up Revelation or are they two overlapping sets, two ways, out of which one must be chosen?<sup>6</sup> For St Thomas, Tradition is an expression of the fact that God's Revelation is transmitted to man, and this transmission is vertical and horizontal because it includes the transmission from Christ to the Apostles and within the Church itself.<sup>7</sup> It is pleasing to God that his mystery (and the related call to live in his glory) is accomplished by others and by means of mediating realities. It was clear to Thomas in his doctrine of God: it is more appropriate that God, as the First Cause, acts not directly but through secondary causes.<sup>8</sup> The diversity of creation better expresses the goodness and perfection of the Creator than a one-off act of creation because it adds an aspect of goodness connected with being the cause of goodness for others, with the mutual relationship between

<sup>5</sup> On the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century disputes about the meaning of papal primacy – cf. J.R. Villar, *El Colegio Episcopal. Estructura teológica y pastoral*, Madrid 2004, pp. 69–73.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. C. Izquierdo, *Paradosis. Estudios sobre la Tradición*, Pamplona 2006, pp. 36–42.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. B. Sesboué, *Ewangelia i Tradycja [Gospel and Tradition]*, Poznań 2012, pp. 26–28.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. P. Roszak, *Analogical Understanding of Divine Causality in Thomas Aquinas*, "European Journal for Philosophy of Religion" 4 (2017), pp. 133–153.

the created beings. Tradition is a reflection of that logic of God's action which seems to shed light on the meaning of Christ's missionary command to the Apostles, in which there is an assurance that the Spirit will teach them everything (cf. Jn 14:26).

However, at a time when people are looking for certainty and documentary evidence, tradition by contrast is associated with verbal communication. This impression does not reflect what theology understands by this term because, as the Spanish theologian Cesar Izquierdo notes, the idea of tradition is to show the bond that is established between the roots, and therefore the source in the past, the present and the future.<sup>9</sup> In this way, it guards the identity of a given group and becomes necessary as a catalyst for assimilating new things without the threat of disintegrating what has been created so far.<sup>10</sup>

It is worth pointing out that although Christ's mission seemed to many to undermine an earlier tradition, Christ does not cancel it, but puts it in a broader context. In the Jewish approach to tradition at the time, there was a real danger of losing authenticity in relation to God. That is why Christ speaks negatively in the gospels (Mt 15:1-9) about traditions that obscure true religiousness, but at the same time he commands to pass on and observe his teaching. This is confirmed by the missionary mandate (Mt 28:19-20): the principle of tradition is thus established by *handing on* (1), *receiving* (2) and *observing* (3). It is not a purely intellectual act, as if it were a simple transfer of knowledge, but a "surrender," as the Latin *tradere* emphasises: Tradition speaks of surrendering Jesus, who is handed on.<sup>11</sup>

Often, however, Tradition is narrowed down to just one of these elements, such as observing. On the other hand, living in a culture of "evidence," it is difficult to understand why Jesus does not choose to write down for posterity, so that everyone has direct contact with such a "produced" message, but only writes with his finger in the sand in the scene of the castigation of the adulteress (Jn 8:6), sending His disciples into the world with an oral message about the Kingdom of God. This is one of the questions to which St Thomas answers

<sup>9</sup> Cf. C. Izquierdo, *Paradosis...*, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. T. Huzarek, *Implikacje narracyjnej koncepcji tożsamości Paula Ricoeura* [*Implications of Paul Ricoeur's Narrative Concept of Identity*], "Studia Gdańskie" 40 (2017), pp. 189-201.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. H. Verweyen, *La parola difinitiva di Dios*, Brescia 2001, p. 56; the author draws attention to three dimensions of the surrender: the surrender of the just to the violence (an example is John the Baptist, Mk 6:14-29), the handing over of the Son by the Father for us all (Rom 4:25) and the offering of himself that Christ makes of himself (Eph 5:2) and the whole Church (Eph 5:25).

in the Christological part of the *Summa Theologiae* defending Jesus' failure to write the Gospel and giving some interesting arguments.<sup>12</sup>

The apostolic message, as illustrated by the attitude of St Paul (especially his words "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received" – 1Cor 15:3), is not simply putting the exhibit behind in a showcase as a relic of the past but is connected with the Lord's current presence. The Apostle views himself as a link in a chain that cannot be broken. Tradition is not only about the way of conveying, but also about the content of the Gospel itself. It expresses the idea of a "deposit" which Timothy is to guard by the power of the Holy Spirit (2Tim 1:14; 1Tim 6:20). The idea of deposit, however, does not mean freezing or fossilising the formulas, but indicating that there is a set of basic truths which build the relationship with the Father in Christ: in a sense, they cannot grow because they were given once and for all by the Apostles. Nothing of substance can be added to the apostolic tradition. It functions as a rule of faith which, especially for St Irenaeus, will be the criterion for authenticity. It evokes the metaphor of a mosaic: you can build different images with coloured pieces of stone, so you need to have a rule, a certain pattern that will ensure that you do not create a different image from the intended one.<sup>13</sup> Christian tradition is therefore a combination of two elements: *vis tradendi* and *res tradita*.

In this theological perspective, Tradition is not an untouchable rule or habit to be applied. It cannot be reduced to a photograph, which can then be simply copy-pasted. The desire for "simple Christianity," in which one rule is applied to everything, is still present.<sup>14</sup> God treats us as rational beings, in accordance with our (rational) nature, which means that the way of conducting to good is not automatic.<sup>15</sup> I flourish when I make free decisions, when there are more and more of them in my life. Natural law is not similar to the repetitive law describing the fall of a stone; rather, natural law resembles the control over an aeroplane, where the pilot constantly and attentively tracks objective data in the cockpit. Both natural law and tradition are a call to watch the equipment, especially if the pilot cannot see the ground and flies through the clouds.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.*, III, q. 42, a. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses* 2, 27, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the broader context of the debate on God in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, taking into account the thoughts of M. Heidegger: S. Horvat, *Heideggerov posljednji Bog [Heidegger's Last God]*, "Bogoslovska smotra" 4 (2017), pp. 745–766.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. S. Brock, *The Light that Binds. A Study in Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Natural Law*, Eugene 2020.

There is also the temptation to disturb Paul's balance between the subjective and objective message in that we hypostasise Tradition: when we separate it and treat it as independent of anything else, a brick that has to be passed on untouched, clean, without its own trace, to future generations. This phenomenon was pointed out by Ratzinger, who mentioned the medieval practice – probably close to Aquinas – of *traditio instrumentorum*.<sup>17</sup> It formed the basis of the relationship between the liege lord and his vassal, and thus established a feudal order. The act of such a “tradition” was illustrated by the custom of the vassal putting his hands in his liege lord's hands, which signified the former becoming involved in the latter's affairs. This relation was then passed on. One cannot fail to notice an analogy with the liturgical gesture from the sacrament of Holy Orders, which, to put it briefly, expresses the understanding of tradition under discussion. To pass on Tradition in the liturgy, to be faithful to Tradition, to be a “traditionalist” in the right sense is therefore not so much to stick to a set of fixed quotations or phrases, but a tool for further action and faithful development of what is received.

So which model better reflects Tradition? Is it a concern for sterility and fidelity to details, on the basis of an open-air museum, which is “traditional” because it preserves elements from that era, as if time had stopped; or is Tradition, this dynamic of transmission, similar to a vehicle that rushes through history, a vehicle that transfers the same deposit to successive generations, initiating processes of interpretation and development, splitting like light in a prism into many coloured rays, which are, however, one white light, though split?<sup>18</sup>

## Changing or developing Tradition?

This brings us to the second element of the title question, which shifts the interest from what tradition is to the question of its (in)alterability. Shouldn't

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Formalne zasady chrześcijaństwa. Szkice do teologii fundamentalnej* [*Formal Principles of Christianity. Sketches for Fundamental Theology*], Poznań 2009.

<sup>18</sup> This understanding of Tradition brings with it a number of pastoral challenges, including those relating to the secularisation of the sacrum or to proper mystagogy: Cf. K. Pilarz, *Sekularyzacja sacrum i jej konsekwencje pastoralno-wychowawcze* [*Secularisation of the Sacrum and its Pastoral and Educational Consequences*], “Teologia i Człowiek” 4 (2014), pp. 11–26; P. Roszak, *Thomas Aquinas on mystagogy and growing in faith*, [in:] *Initiation and mystagogy in Thomas Aquinas: scriptural, systematic, sacramental and moral, and pastoral perspectives*, H. Schoot, J. Verburg, and J. Vijgen (eds.), Leuven–Paris–Bristol 2019, pp. 41–59.

this perception of Tradition with its deposit be understood as something static? To what extent can it be changed? Are we not facing the paradox of the ship of Theseus (or Neurath in its modern version) that the replacement of individual parts of the ship will make us ask the question whether it is still the same ship? After all, it sails, but in the meantime, all the elements have been changed, during the voyage, without calling at the port... So: is faith given “once in its entirety”? (in the spirit of Judah’s Letter 1:3 “the faith that was once for all handed down to the holy ones”) or as a seed that grows, in which case it must be read within the meaning of 1Thes 5,21: “Study everything, and what is noble, preserve it”?

The message of faith in the Church is closely linked to Tradition, which is a principle of progress: “This tradition which comes from the Apostles develop in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit” (*Dei Verbum* 8). Identity and adaptation are not oppositions. Therefore, Tradition has a certain dynamism which, as Izquierdo claims, “cushions itself only in eschatology.”<sup>19</sup> It is therefore not fully expressed in history, but there is a tension towards future fulfilment. This is due to the logic of faith, the act of which, as Aquinas wrote, attains the reality that is the object of faith (*res*) and does not stop at its verbal manifestation: therefore Christians do not believe in formulas, but in what they mean: *actus credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile sed ad rem*.<sup>20</sup> An article of faith is the divine truth itself, but it is not so much statically fixed in words as it dynamically strives for truth (*tendens in ipsam*).<sup>21</sup> The Pope can therefore reformulate *enuntiabilia*, not *res*. Tradition is not a list of truths that have reached the peak of their explication because they are still open, since our theological language is based on analogies in the adjudication of God, and not on the univocity that the Scottish school in the Middle Ages and today’s open theists advocated.<sup>22</sup> Theological (dogmatic) formulas are open to improvement: it is stated, after all, that they are without error, but not that they perfectly describe reality. The dogma does not put an end to but rather opens a theological reflection.

In the case of Tradition, we have two models of its development; one is dialectic, in which the previous forms of assuming a given truth of faith are treated as merely provisional and should therefore be abandoned when a higher threshold is reached. This is reminiscent of the situation in computer games when you jump to a higher level, forgetting the previous one. Such an understanding seems to suggest that Revelation is given “in instalments.” In this

<sup>19</sup> C. Izquierdo, *Paradosis...*, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.*, II-II, a. 6 s.c.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. C. Kaczor, *Thomas Aquinas on the Development of Doctrine*, “Theological Studies” 62 (2001), pp. 283–302.

approach, “tradition” is identified dialectically with what is old and what must be overcome (in the spirit of Hegel): it is not surprising, therefore, that over time the term “traditional theologian” has become, at least in certain circles, almost offensive.

The second understanding of progress is based on updating the whole message in new realities or contexts. It is not about detachment from the source, but about continuity, although here, too, there is an element of novelty. This is indicated by the Council’s Constitution *Dei Verbum* 8, which uses the language of “growth.”

For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her (*Dei Verbum* 8).

From the conciliar text, which does not abandon the language of “experience” (it is worth remembering the pressures of that time to reduce everything to experience), it follows that the guardianship and transmission of Tradition is entrusted to the whole Church, which is supposed to make the Revelation of God present, so this service of the Church is carried out by all the members of the Mystical Body through the charism of prophecy.

What is the development of Tradition then? When can this development morph into a betrayal of Tradition?<sup>23</sup> Does a Catholic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century believe in the same way as a Catholic of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century after Christ? A full answer to this question must make a distinction between the “change” (i.e.

<sup>23</sup> And this was at the root of the so-called “oath against modernism” of Pius X: “Fourthly, I sincerely hold that the doctrine of faith was handed down to us from the apostles through the orthodox Fathers in exactly the same meaning and always in the same purport. Therefore, I entirely reject the heretical’ misrepresentation that dogmas evolve and change from one meaning to another different from the one which the Church held previously. I also condemn every error according to which, in place of the divine deposit which has been given to the spouse of Christ to be carefully guarded by her, there is put a philosophical figment or product of a human conscience that has gradually been developed by human effort and will continue to develop indefinitely” – quoted after: <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius10/promoath.htm> [access: 14.12.2020].



replacement of one content with another, opposite to the earlier one) and the “development” of Tradition, which brings out in new contexts what was virtually hidden in the earlier one. From a historical perspective, the opinions of several authors are worth noting, authors who have reflected on this thread in their thoughts: St Thomas Aquinas, Maurice Blondel, John H. Newman and Alister McGrath.

We can seek answers to these questions from St Thomas Aquinas on matters of faith. Thomas sees the development of the history of salvation as a passage from believing in Christ *implicite* (in the Old Testament) to the stage of believing in Him *explicitite*. Making faith distinct, more pronounced is a way of development.<sup>24</sup> Faith in Christ was already in the life of the Old Testament figures because believing in the deliverer they believed implicitly in Christ, who was to come. The truth did not change but developed from what was initially (*inchoative*) transmitted. The theologian’s effort is therefore the opposite to that of the prism: it is to see the first truth, which split into many particular truths. The progress in theology will therefore be a synthesis and will gain a better understanding of details thanks to the knowledge of the general vision.

According to Aquinas it is essential to distinguish between “abandonment” and “fulfilment:” has the Old Testament been changed, for example, in the fulfilment of the ritual commandments, so detailed in the Bible? Does the Christian follow the Torah? St Thomas affirms, but in a spiritual, not a literal, way that is appropriate for another era. It is not a betrayal of Tradition, but its fulfilment. In this spirit, St Thomas reads the words of Christ, who said that “not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law” (Mt 5:18).<sup>25</sup> Tradition is comparable to the father of the house, who takes old and new things from his storeroom (Mt 13:54). The New Testament is not born out of the abandonment of the Old One, which has become old, notes

<sup>24</sup> Cf. P. Roszak, *Odkupiciel i Przyjaciel. U podstaw chrystologii soteriologicznej św. Tomasza z Akwinu w świetle Super Psalmos* [Redeemer and Friend: At the Basis of Soteriological Christology of St Thomas Aquinas in the Light of Super Psalmos], Poznań–Warszawa 2020, p. 152.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Super Mt.*, cap. 5 v. 17: *Nota hic quod dominus quinque modis adimplevit legem: primo quia ea quae erant praefigurata ipse adimplevit, Luc. ult. (XXII 37): oportet implere; secundo legalia observando, Gal. IV 4: cum venerit plenitudo; tertio operando per gratiam, scilicet in sanctificando per spiritum sanctum, quod lex facere non poterat, Rom. VIII 3: nam quod impossibile erat; quarto satisfaciendo pro peccatis per quae eramus facti transgressores legis: unde transgressione sublata implevit legem, Rom. III 25: quem proposuit Deus propitiationem; quinto quaedam perfectiones legi apponendo quae vel erant de intellectu legis, vel ad maiorem iustitiae perfectionem. Nota quod lex solvit tripliciter: negando totaliter, vel eam male exponendo, vel moralia non adimplendo.*

Thomas in his Commentary to the Galatians.<sup>26</sup> The New Testament is born out of a profound reading of the Old Testament, and theology does not develop through abandonment, but through deepening, or fulfilling. St Paul's words to Thessalonians are worth reading within the meaning of such a spirit:

Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace, encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good deed and word (2Thes 2:15-17).

Several centuries after St Thomas, the theme of the progress of Tradition in the context of the modernist controversy was developed by Maurice Blondel (1861–1949), who distinguished “development” from “evolution.” The latter is the result of external pressures and influences which, in a Spinoasian way, explain becoming as a movement without conditions, whose successive historical manifestations have less and less in common with the original source. On the other hand, development involves creating, although always based on the nucleus that permeates all elements. In this way Blondel points to the existence of a certain “ruling idea,” the inner core of the process in which Tradition develops. How does it develop? Blondel notes that some truths are revealed within us, not in themselves (this is the thesis he presented in his *Letter on Apologetics*). Through the practice of life, something that was implicitly present in the dogma is revealed. In this sense, what was at the beginning will be fully achieved only at the end. Tradition therefore always has something “new” to teach us when it expresses the truth. For Blondel, the development of Tradition in an active sense does not mean doctrinal progress, but the revelation of the truth in the life of the Church, which was in it from the beginning. The image that the French philosopher evokes is a bar of gold, which is used in every era in different monetary systems: but in the end you have no more than the beginning. It is still the same gold bar, although it is converted differently in each era.<sup>27</sup>

St John Henry Newman (1801–1890) is also involved in changing Tradition, and his attitude is well reflected in the image of the river, built on the opposition to the Protestants perception of Catholic understanding of Tradition as a treasury of written theological statements. The riverbed does not disturb the

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Gal.*, prol.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. C. Izquierdo, *Paradosis...*, op. cit., p. 72.

river, but gives it speed, otherwise it spills around. Tradition is quiet but alive: like a water current until it is smashed against stones.

However, the whole discussion has a lot in common – as the contemporary British theologian Alister McGrath (b. 1953) analysed – with the transfer of Darwinism to cultural and theological issues, particularly the development of doctrine.<sup>28</sup> In his view, tensions in the modern era were born for many reasons. On the one hand, the position of Bousset (1627–1704) has become established. He claimed that the deposit was the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and that Protestant innovation and heretical novelties were a degradation of that deposit. Why such strong claims? At a time of predominantly deductive thinking, the concept of doctrinal change was an indication of some error, an imperfection.<sup>29</sup> Attempts have been made to see development in Hegelian categories (F.C. Baur) or in ways represented by the Tübingen school (Drey, Möhler) – organically – following the natural process of grain growth. This did not mean taking a progressive Revelation, which leads to the emergence of new claims. Nevertheless, modern theories of progress, such as those of Edward B. Taylor (who considers that progress is the replacement of lower beliefs, *inferior beliefs*, with higher ones, e.g. polytheism by monotheism) do not fully reflect either the nature of theology or even the process of evolution itself, in which there is a certain stability, certain – to use Simon Conway Morris’s phrase, quoted by McGrath – “island of stability.” Just because doctrine develops through contingencies (e.g. the emergence of some heresy, a dispute between theologians, political circumstances, etc.) does not mean that doctrine itself is contingencies and is the work of chance. There is an internal logic of tradition which, in a way, “waits” for the best formulation. Questions can be multiplied in this spirit: was the use of Greek metaphysics a “change” of tradition? The use of Greek metaphysics was secondary to the development itself: it was like setting up architectural pillars and decoration. As McGrath suggests in theology, too, there are islands of stability at the sea of contingency.

## Pope: an active service to Tradition

The question “can the Pope fall into heresies” or “can he change Tradition” is often – so it seems – raised from an ultramontane approach (or at least the

<sup>28</sup> Cf. A. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology 1: Nature*, London 2001, p. 81.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. A. McGrath, *The Order of Things. Exploration in Scientific Theology*, Oxford 2006, p. 122.

remnants of it), which has seen the same theological value in every statement the Pope makes. The Pope's ministry is, in a way, taken out of the College of Bishops, whose head is after all the Pope. It is therefore worth recalling the doctrine of the value of theological theorems, in which we accept by theological faith, the solemn teaching of the College of Bishops with its head at the Council or the *ex cathedra* statements in one way (1), and in the other – the ordinary and universal teaching in matters of faith and morals, in accordance with the College, which should be accompanied with a permanent and definitive witness (2): neither the head alone nor the headless body alone are capable of transmitting Tradition.

Seeing the Pope as imposing something on a college, shaping a college, is an ecclesiological simplification and reduction. Also in the past, when detailed questions were asked and the Pontiff was requested to answer them, the Pope responded to them as shepherd of the Church in Rome (because this Church enjoyed the privilege of priority because of the death of St Peter and St Paul), and so on behalf of the Synod of this Church. Ultramontanism, as Y. Congar diagnosed, was understandable in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when, under the influence of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the falling authority of the Church, the conviction was born that it was necessary to strengthen the authority of the Pope, to isolate oneself from a world that was sinking into evil, to close oneself in a fortress and listen to the shepherd.<sup>30</sup> In such circumstances, everything the Pope says is of equal value, whereas for St Thomas it was not. For a medieval theologian, the Pope, as Bishop of Rome, may fall into heresy, as was the case with Honorius I and his monotheism (the argument of his opponents when he was called to proclaim the dogma of papal infallibility in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), but it must be remembered that he did not say this as the shepherd of the whole Church. Paradoxically, the dogma of infallibility is an attempt to limit ultramontanism so that it does not go too far and treat every statement as infallible.

Although Thomas in his description of the Pope's power and his service in the Church stresses the imperative of obedience to the successor of St Peter,<sup>31</sup> often refers in his *sed contra* arguments to specific papal texts, seeing in him the *episcopus summus*, who has power not over Christ – the Word of God (*corpus verum*), but the Mystical Body,<sup>32</sup> he is not without a sense of reality. This is

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J.A. Berry, *Yves Congar's Vision of Faith*, Rome 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. C. Zuckerman, *Aquinas' Conception of the Papal Primacy in Ecclesiastical Government*, "Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age" 40 (1973), pp. 97–134.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, d. 7, q. 3, a. 1, qc. 3c. *Sed haec opinio videtur nimis ampla; et ideo media via secundum alios tenenda est. Et ideo sciendum est, quod cum episcopatus non addat*

evidenced by his questions, e.g. about the situation in which the Pope commits a simony,<sup>33</sup> treating the Church's matters as his own, although he only has to manage them.<sup>34</sup>

In this perspective, one can better understand the situation in Antioch, described in the Letter to the Galatians, when St Paul, seeing the "hypocrisy" of St Peter, begins to admonish him. This is due to their equality in the apostolic ministry. As St Thomas notes:

(...) so Paul would not have withstood Peter then, unless he were in some way his equal as regards the defense of the faith. But one who is not an equal can reprove privately and respectfully. Hence the Apostle in writing to the Colossians (4:17) tells them to admonish their prelate: "Say to Archippus: Fulfil thy ministry. It must be observed, however, that if the faith were endangered, a subject ought to rebuke his prelate even publicly. Hence Paul, who was Peter's subject, rebuked him in public, on account of the imminent danger of scandal concerning faith, and, as the gloss of Augustine says on Galatians 2:11, "Peter gave an example to superiors, that if at any time they should happen to stray from the straight path, they should not disdain to be reproved by their subjects."<sup>35</sup>

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*aliquid supra sacerdotium per relationem ad corpus domini verum, sed solum per relationem ad corpus mysticum, Papa per hoc quod est episcoporum summus, non dicitur habere plenitudinem potestatis per relationem ad corpus domini verum, sed per relationem ad corpus mysticum. Et quia gratia sacramentalis descendit in corpus mysticum a capite, ideo omnis operatio in corpus mysticum sacramentalis, per quam gratia datur, dependet ab operatione sacramentali super corpus domini verum; et ideo solus sacerdos potest absolvere in foro poenitentiali, et baptizare ex officio.*

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 100 a. 1 ad 7: *Ad septimum dicendum quod Papa potest incurrere vitium simoniae, sicut et quilibet alius homo, peccatum enim tanto in aliqua persona est gravius quanto maiorem obtinet locum. Quamvis enim res Ecclesiae sint eius ut principalis dispensatoris, non tamen sunt eius ut domini et possessoris.*

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, d. 25, q. 3, a. 3, ad 2. *Ad secundum dicendum, quod opinio illa erronea est. Si enim Papa pro aliquo spirituali munus acciperet, simoniam committeret sicut et alius homo: quia sub Petro, cui Papa succedit, simoniae vitium damnationem inchoavit in novo testamento: et quamvis res Ecclesiae sint aliquo modo Papae, non sunt tamen ejus omnibus modis habendi, sicut illud quod ad manum habet. Non est autem dubium quod simoniam committeret, si quis aliquod spirituale debitori suo daret, ut quod suum est recuperaret; et ita etiam in proposito Papa a simonia non excusaretur, si (quod absit) spiritualia pro temporalibus rebus Ecclesiarum daret.*

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 33

In his Commentary to the Letter to the Galatians, St Thomas will compare the position of the Church Fathers regarding this situation<sup>36</sup> and wonder whether Peter has sinned by “pretending” or not. If so, was it a venial or mortal sin? The positions of the Fathers are combined into larger groups, so that we actually have two teams assessing the event differently, and the result is a “draw” with an indication:

Thirdly, they disagree on the sin of Peter. For Jerome says that in the dissimulation previously mentioned, Peter did not sin, because he did this from charity and, as has been said, not from mundane fear. Augustine, on the other hand, says, that he did sin – venially, however – on account of the lack of discretion he had by adhering overmuch to one side, namely, to the Jews, in order to avoid scandalizing them. But the stronger of Augustine’s arguments against Jerome is that Jerome adduces on his own behalf seven doctors, four of whom, namely, Laudicens, Alexander, Origen, and Didymus, Augustine rejects as known heretics. To the other three he opposes three of his own, who held with him and his opinion, namely, Ambrose, Cyprian, and Paul himself, who plainly teaches that Peter was deserving of rebuke. Therefore, if it is unlawful to say that anything false is contained in Sacred Scripture, it will not be lawful to say that Peter was not deserving of rebuke. For this reason, the opinion and statement of Augustine is the truer, because it is more in accord with the words of the Apostle.<sup>37</sup>

It can be said that the Pope’s task in the context of Tradition is not so much to guard the ashes but to guarantee the future. Therefore, fidelity to Tradition means being like leaven, initiating processes which make Tradition communicate with modern times.<sup>38</sup> This is a task that Pope Francis constantly reminds us of, so that we begin to act in a spirit of fidelity to Tradition, but without the paralysing fear of departing from the old formulas to which we have become accustomed or, as he calls it, of “a needless hallowing of our own culture.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Gal.*, cap. II, lect. 3: *...non parva controversia est orta inter Hieronymum et Augustinum*. Cf. P. Roszak, *The place and function of biblical citation in Thomas Aquinas’ exegesis*, [in:] *Reading sacred scripture with Thomas Aquinas. Hermeneutical tools, theological questions and new perspectives*, P. Roszak, J. Vijgen (eds.), Turnhout 2015, pp. 115–139.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Gal.*, cap. II, lect. 3, quoted after: <https://sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/galatians/st-thomas-aquinas-on-galatians/chapter-1/chapter-2> [access: 22.01.2020].

<sup>38</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 129.

<sup>39</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 117.

If the Lord Jesus says *go and make disciples – euntes enim docete* (cf. Mt 28:19), he does not leave a simple message: repeat or copy without thinking. Rather, he calls: speak where you have not yet been heard, for this is where the apostles must, in new cultural (or, for example, linguistic) realities, calibrate the Gospel message. There, as it were, at this very meeting point with another culture, something new is born, although it is still the same Gospel. It is telling that the parables of Jesus passed on in the gospels are usually about growth, about leaven, not about petrifying. Finding a treasure is to let it circulate, to bring forth fruit. Was he who received gifts or talents and did not multiply them, but buried them, was he “faithful”? Formally speaking, he did not breach the deposit, but was that the point? In what sense were those who multiplied denarii or talents in the parable of Jesus faithful? After all, they did not give their Lord the treasure entrusted to them in exactly the same form... To be faithful to Tradition is to make it bear fruit.

## Conclusions

Recalling contemporary, well-known situations, it seems that concern for Tradition reminds us of the actions taken today in connection with the revitalisation of heritage buildings. Although our Polish conservators-restorers are very conservative, they do not insist that a building must have exactly the same functions as it did 500 years ago, that there must be no running water, no electricity, and that certain solutions cannot be changed inside. In different countries, some are very liberal (just look at some of the bars in Rome, where antique monuments are suddenly growing up), others are restrictive, protecting the historical heritage and not allowing contact with the present. Nevertheless, sometimes the historical substance is supplemented, purified, developed if it turns out that it needs to be strengthened, layers are added (marking them as new). The building grows, but its layers are visible...

Does St Peter’s successor develop Tradition? Yes, but it is not a change understood as a replacement for something earlier. How does this happen? It may be helpful to understand what is changeable and unchangeable, and it may be helpful to understand the distinction that Aristotle proposed when considering the causes. There are, in a way, two groups among them: one kind of cause answers the question “how” (efficient, material) and others answer the question “why” (final, formal). Probably a similar tendency to “how” is observed in the approach to Tradition, while “why” is forgotten. In current

disputes, it is worthwhile to constantly return to reflect on what Tradition is in order to discover its meaning in the life and mission of the Church, and to make disputes in the Church a mechanism for the development of Tradition, paradoxical though this may sound to many ears.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> It was researched and written as part of the grant "Biblical Exegesis and Jewish-Christian relations from the perspective of Thomas Aquinas' Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews" funded from the resources of the National Science Centre, Poland, no. 2019/35/B/HS1/00305.



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