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Introduction

When Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected pope in March 2013, many wrote about the significance of the choice of his papal name—Francis. Commentators insisted that this symbolized his indebtedness to the ideals of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis Xavier, the famous Jesuit missionary. He himself explained his choice of name by his profound veneration of St. Francis of Assisi. But there may be an overlooked "third" Francis: St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622), the great master of spirituality, doctor of the Church, and bishop of Geneva. For both Pope Francis and St. Francis de Sales, reform is central: St. Francis de Sales studied theology and worked as a priest and preacher in the wake of the Council of Trent (1543–65). Reform was in the air; attempts were being made to retrieve the spiritual power sources of faith and to eliminate sources of scandal from within. De Sales called this the "cutting of the aqueducts." Pope Francis, likewise, emphasizes reform. Yet, for both men, "reform" has not been primarily a political matter: it is the constant struggle to let the church be the salt of the earth and light of the world. Both have realized that a self-contented church that is not dynamically reaching out beyond the pews is doomed to wither

away. The Catholic Church is always in need of reform, of weeding its theological and ecclesiastical garden, and updating its methods of evangelization. The Tridentine reform ideas of de Sales, Charles Borromeo (1538–84), and others were, therefore, adapted to the needs of the time and complemented by new concepts, which lived on in the eighteenth century and merged with Enlightenment ideals to forge a Catholic Enlightenment that was to rejuvenate a complacent church.

These Tridentine reform ideas heavily influenced the Second Vatican Council. Giuseppe Roncalli (1881–1963)—later, Pope St. John XXIII (1958–63)—had studied the Tridentine reforms in depth and even edited Borromeo's records after visiting the parishes of Bergamo. In the introduction to the edition of 1937, he wrote:

> The Council of Trent offered the spectacle of a vigorous renewal of Catholic life [in] a period of mysterious and fruitful rejuvenation and, what seemed still more marvelous, of efforts by the most remarkable individuals of the Church to implement the new legislation. The pastoral ardor burning in them drove them to realize as perfectly as possible the conciliar mandates aimed at the perfection and spiritual elevation of the clergy and people. . . . [It was] a time of potent reawakening of energies that has no equal in any other period of church history.[1]

One cannot overestimate the last sentence of the future pope's statement. If the Tridentine period had, for him, no equal in church history in regard to the "potent reawakening of energies," then it must have been his guiding star for a rejuvenation of Catholicism too in the twentieth century. And indeed, when he was appointed patriarch of Venice in 1953, Roncalli emulated Borromeo by regular visitations of the parishes in his diocese and performing the role of "shepherd and father" for the faithful entrusted to him. In his diary, he explicitly referenced his pastoral ideas to "the spirit of the Council of Trent."[2] This became even more obvious when, in 1957, he called for a diocesan synod, just as Trent had advised. He envisioned another Tridentine moment in the Church's history, a "reestablishment of Catholic life."

1. Jared Wicks, "Tridentine Motivations of John XXIII before and during Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 75 (2014):847–62, at 852.
2. Ibid., 849.

It was in the announcement of the synod that he first used the term *aggiornamento* (updating), which became the crucial terminological key to understanding the Second Vatican Council:

> Have you not heard the word aggiornamento repeated many times? Here is our church, always young and ready to follow different changes in the circumstances of life, with the intention of adapting, correcting, improving, and arousing enthusiasm. In summary, this is the nature of the synod, this is its purpose.[3]

Could there be a better description of what Vatican II tried to realize than the description Roncalli gave of a Tridentine synod? Even the often-invoked pastoral style of Vatican II has its roots in the Tridentine role models of Borromeo and de Sales, albeit not in the documents of the Council of Trent. Yet, despite the importance of the Tridentine reform, and especially, its application in the eighteenth century for understanding the event and meaning of Vatican II, it has been completely marginalized by theologians because the twentieth-century roots of the Council have been overemphasized as its *only* roots.

Trent's Aftermath

The Council of Trent not only addressed the Protestant Reformation, but also its homemade problems of corruption and decay. It identified what was necessary to reform—for example, it determined that future priests should be properly educated and guided to become authentic pastors—but it also codified what Catholics believed, in contrast to Protestants. Thus, for example, the Council stressed that human freedom is a crucial feature of theology. This particular teaching was part of a new, more optimistic view of the human person: one could do good deeds without faith or divine help, and could freely reject God's grace. While this prepared the ground for ongoing controversies over the question of predestination, most importantly, it became the foundation of the Enlightenment belief in individual freedom and the

3. Ibid., 850.

natural capacities of the human person. It was the beginning of Catholic reform.

One of the most important products of the Council was the *Roman Catechism*, a handbook that allowed parish priests to teach doctrine intelligently and with clarity. A new edition of the Bible followed later. The Church emerged, as Roncalli correctly stated, stronger from the shock of the Reformation than it had ever been before.

Yet, just as the implementation of Vatican II took time, so the reforms of Trent were not embraced overnight. In fact, the Council faced a massive problem virtually unknown at the time of Vatican II: many early modern states, where sovereigns enjoyed strong influence over the Church, perceived Trent as a threat because it called old privileges into question. The Council insisted on the freedom to choose one's own spouse, and declared that no one could force a Catholic to legally marry another person. This undermined the rights of the French kings, who openly opposed the publication of the decrees of the Council for a long time. As a consequence, generations of bishops and priests passed until the Council's decrees were accepted in France, and even then, only partially. Similar things could be said of other states. While in the midst of the seventeenth century, the zeal for reform had weakened in many places, largely because of the devastating effects of the Thirty Years' War in Central Europe, it was again rekindled in the eighteenth century. Now, however, it faced another problem—namely, that of modern philosophies and a mindset that made faith only one option among many others. The South American Catholic Enlightener Pablo de Olavide (1725–1803) astutely realized the danger of the "secular option" (two hundred years before Charles Taylor). He lamented that as long as theologians did not understand this, until they produced a catechism that addressed this change in mentality, there was no hope for a religious revival.[4] Reform Catholicism in the eighteenth century—as one could call the movement that tried for a rejuvenation of the Church in the spirit of Trent—could not ignore

4. Pablo de Olavide, *Triumph des Evangeliums. Memoiren eines von den Verirrungen der heutigen Philosophie zurückgekommenen Weltmenschen*, trans. J. des Echelles (Regensburg: 1848), 4:322–79; cf. for the "secular option," Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

Enlightenment thinkers and ideas if it wanted to remain an intelligent and alternative worldview. The result was the Catholic Enlightenment—a movement that tried to reform the Church, rearticulate its dogmas in modern language, and update and correct its teachings. At the same time, this movement was so diverse that it is impossible to describe it as a unified program, apart from encompassing these broader ideas.

It is here that the importance of eighteenth-century Catholicism and Catholic Enlightenment for the Church today lies: like today, the Church faced the staunch opposition of leading thinkers, and for the first time, the faithful had to answer for themselves the question: "how can I remain faithful to the faith and be part of the modern world?"

What Enlightenment Project?

Some might wonder why they should care about the Enlightenment. After all, is it not conventional wisdom that "the Enlightenment project"—a phrase invented by Alasdair MacIntyre and Jürgen Habermas in the 1980s—has failed?[5] Not so fast. Intellectual and cultural historians of the past three decades have shown that it would be overly simplistic to state that the project of modernity, namely "relentless development of the objectivating sciences, of the universalistic foundations of morality and law, of autonomous art," which results in "releasing the cognitive potentials accumulated in the process from their esoteric high forms and attempting to apply them on the sphere of praxis, that is to encourage the rational organization of social relations" was solely created by Enlightenment philosophers.[6] In other words, Habermas (and MacIntyre) state the existence of a unified Enlightenment that divinizes reason so that it can rationalize

5. James Schmidt, "What Enlightenment Project?" accessed May 18, 2015, https://persistentenlightenment.wordpress.com/2013/05/15/revisiting-the-enlightenment-project-inspired-by-anthony-pagden-and-armed-with-some-ngrams.
6. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves and Seyla Benhabib, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 44–46.

misogyny, colonialism, racism, and beliefs in the limitless pursuit of human perfection.

There are many problems with such a view, one of which is that there never was a homogenous Enlightenment. By going beyond the established literary canon of Enlightenment writers, historians have found that it is impossible to determine the distinctively common themes, arguments, or ideas of these Enlighteners. Only broad concepts, such as the fight against conceptual opacity or superstition, could be discerned—but it has been questioned whether these qualify as a unified "project." Many have, therefore, looked at the overall cultural process of Enlightenment with its correspondence networks and publishing ventures as a way of defining the Enlightenment more broadly. Although some still hold up the flag for a unified vision of Enlightenment, most historians have moved on, and now, accept a variety of Enlightenments and even families of different Enlightenments.[7] The biggest revision in the historiography of the eighteenth century, however, was the realization that there was a religious Enlightenment, which was more widespread than that of the elitist propagators of the "objectivating sciences" that was of such concern to Habermas. God was not pushed out of the equation during the Enlightenment, as Peter Gay had thought,[8] but put back in. Religious Enlighteners in Judaism and Christianity thought about how to articulate the faith under new premises. Christopher Dawson gets it exactly right: "The age of Voltaire and Bolingbroke and Frederick the Great was also the age of Wesley, Tersteegen and St. Paul of the Cross."[9]

Enlightenment theology is still conceived by many as rationalist, with a naïve belief in human perfection. It is as if a nuanced view of eighteenth-century theologians is not possible without polemics. This is only all the more so in Catholicism. Since the Catholic Church felt embarrassed by its dialogue with modernity, it felt the need to

7. The most prominent voice in favor of a unified Enlightenment is John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment. Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Robertson, *Enlightenment: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
8. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation,* 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1966–69).
9. Christopher Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution* [1972] (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 30.

denounce it as a deficient form of Catholicism. How could a rationalist and obsolete theology have influenced Vatican II, the "most important event in the history of modern Catholicism after the Council of Trent"?[10] Already on the defensive against conservative critics of Vatican II, who claimed that heretical modernists had undermined the bishops' gathering,[11] historically traceable contributions to the Council's theology—like those of Catholic Enlightenment, Febronianism, Conciliarism, and Jansenism—were downplayed or eclipsed. Theological debates today are oblivious to Vatican II's indebtedness to the Tridentine zeal for reform and its eighteenth-century application. Yet, how profound can an understanding of Vatican II be if, as often happens, its own roots and theological forerunners are denied, as if it was an entirely twentieth-century invention? Trent and Vatican II are taught to theology students as contrasting (even conflicting) councils without consulting the history of Trent's practical implementation. It is as if one compares two different wines and judges them simply from the labels, without opening the bottles and tasting the results of the fermentation process.

Was the Catholic Enlightenment Rationalist or Reactionary?

How do Catholic Enlighteners fit into the historiography of theology? They (at least most) were neither rationalists nor reactionaries. Most are best classified as moderates, favoring a modernization that compromised with tradition and reigning authorities. Their aims were: (a) to use the newest achievements of philosophy and science to defend the essential dogmas of Catholic Christianity by explaining them in a new language, and (b) to reconcile Catholicism with modern culture. If anything held these diverse thinkers together, it was their belief that Catholicism had to modernize if it wanted to be a viable intellectual alternative to the persuasive arguments of the anti-clerical

10. Massimo Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 1.
11. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Trojan Horse in the City of God* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1967); Ralph Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber. The Unknown Council* (New York: Hawthorn, 1967); Roberto de Mattei, *The Second Vatican Council: An Unwritten Story* (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto, 2012).

Enlighteners. Catholic Enlighteners differed among themselves as to how such a modernization should be brought about, but all agreed that Aristotelian scholasticism could no longer serve as the universal foundation for theology. Not only did the philosophical approaches to theology and faith change and vary, but the styles did so even more. Some still wrote in Latin, many in the vernacular, while a few even tried to put their thoughts in prose form and wrote theological novels.[12]

This sounds all too familiar: in the decades before the Second Vatican Council, many identified neo-Thomism as a stumbling block for the Church in continuing her journey through the twentieth century. It was overhauled by engaging and appropriating the philosophies of Kant, Heidegger, and others to create transcendental Thomism. Others preferred a more phenomenological approach. The debates about the reform of theology from the 1940s to 1960s restored diversity in thought—last seen to such extent and vigor in the eighteenth century. Although the core of the debate is the same—namely, the alleged insufficiency of scholasticism to deal with the problems of the modern world—twentieth- and twenty-first-century theologians have ignored the attempts of their eighteenth-century predecessors to address this question. If they actually read their works, they would discover that a number of recent syntheses of thought sound dramatically similar to those of the Catholic Enlightenment. Let us take Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) as a simple example: he argued that religious education should be withheld from children so that they are not brainwashed into a religion and can freely make up their minds when they are of age. Men such as Cardinal Gerdil (1718–1802) rejected such a notion, and instead developed a Catholic vision of education—a work that has been ignored by modern scholars although it was widely read two hundred years ago. For Rousseau, an adolescent was incapable of distinguishing between good and evil until at least the age of fifteen. Gerdil, a close follower of John Locke

12. See, for example, the works of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, Stéphanie de Genlis, but also (usually forgotten) Lorenz Westenrieder, *Leben des guten Jüngling's Engelhof,* 2 vols. (Munich: 1782).

(1632–1704), did not think so: "Children distinguish the evil that was done inadvertently from that which was done by design. They excuse the one, but not pardon the other."[13] For Rousseau, a child of ten years did not need reason to make judgments, because reason was a "bridle of strength" a child does not need; instead, he should follow his instincts. Gerdil, however, saw that while animals were immediately ruled by natural instincts, in humans, such immediate authority was the role of reason:

> Why then should reason be entirely useless to a child of ten years old? This interior propensity that stirs and agitates him, which prompts him to continual action and keeps him always out of breath—does it not need some restraint? It is true that at this age reason is too weak to suffice by itself. It needs to be assisted and fortified by precepts, examples, and appropriate practices. "We are born weak . . . we need judgment . . . , [and it is] given to us by education."[14]

Gerdil also rejects Rousseau's denial of objective teleology on epistemological grounds: "Man is naturally a friend of order, and wherever he finds it he approves it and delights in it."[15] Humans are dependent in their understanding of the world on finding order; without discerning order via sensory perception, humans could never gain any knowledge at all. Gerdil argues, however, that it is through society that such order is further advanced and enables the progress of the sciences; without having established rules and order, the business of scientific endeavor would be impossible. Consequently, society is not the root of all evil and man's corruption, as Rousseau taught, but the seedbed of his perfection.

Or, take the discussion about the possibility of salvation for members of other religions, or the idea of revelation in the works of the great Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier (1718–90). Instead of realizing that Bergier

13. Sigismond Gerdil, *The Anti-Emile: Reflections on Theory and Practice of Education against the Principles of Rousseau* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2011), 48.
14. Ibid. The quotation is contributed to Eugene of Savoy. The best, and to my knowledge only, history of teleological thought is Robert Spaemann and Reinhard Löw, *Natürliche Ziele. Geschichte und Wiederentdeckung teleologischen Denkens* (Stuttgart: 2005). A translation of this important book into English would be highly desirable.
15. Gerdil, *The Anti-Emile,* 35.

had articulated important insights that refute the simplistic view that the Catholic Church never dealt with the challenges of Enlightenment thought until 1962, many theologians still cling to this old tale.

The Catholic Enlightenment also teaches a valuable lesson with regard to the perception of Catholics in academia: in the eighteenth century, Catholic intellectuals felt uneasy with how their Protestant or secular peers perceived them. Old prejudices against their faith were still alive, but the charge that Catholics had fallen behind the natural sciences during the eighteenth century was correct. Nobody outside the Church cared much for enlightened Catholic thought, unless it could be proven that Catholics were also receptive to modern science. After all, the natural sciences had opened up so many fields of new research that the old university curriculum became obsolete. With admirable vigor, Catholic scientists tried to catch up—some, quite successfully. Against the resistance of conservatives, Catholic Enlighteners urged the Church not to bind itself to outdated science, and instead introduce the sciences into the curriculum of its universities. The Benedictine University of Salzburg in Austria was the first European institution of higher learning to introduce the discipline of experimental physics in the 1740s. Lectures in this field focused on demonstration experiments in hydrostatics, electricity, mechanics, pneumatics, and optics, and often, attracted a wide public. Roger Boscovich (1711–87), one of the greatest astronomers of the century and a Jesuit priest, said that "the greatest harm that can be done to religion is to connect religion with the things in physics which are considered wrong. . . . The youth then . . . say that such and such a thing in physics is wrong and consequently religion is wrong."[16] Instead, the Church had to be, according to the Jesuit, in a dialogue with scientists, and it had to abandon disproven theories from the past, such as the pre-Copernican worldview.

I suggest that Catholic theology is trapped in a similar perception as it was three hundred years ago. Our sophisticated attempts to preach

16. Marcus Hellyer, *Catholic Physics: Jesuit Natural Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 178.

the message of Christ will fall on rocky ground among those who believe that Catholicism is premised or connected to outdated science, or is simply anti-scientific or anti-intellectual altogether. By studying the eighteenth century, contemporary theologians can learn how their predecessors approached the same problem, often with the same methods—and often, encountering the same misfortunes. From eighteenth-century theology, Catholic theologians can learn how to be open to discussion, to science, to new philosophies, to everything—just as long as the truths of faith are not undermined. Moreover, the Catholic Enlightenment reminds us that it was not Vatican II that invented the celebrated "embrace" of the modern world summarized by *Lumen Gentium*, namely that "whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men, whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples, is not only saved from destruction" by the actions of the Church, but "also cleansed, raised up and perfected."[17] Such "exchange between the Church and the diverse cultures of people,"[18] as the document *Gaudium et Spes* calls it, had always been practiced by Catholic theologians, but in particular by Catholic Enlighteners, for whom this practice was simply called "eclecticism."

The Lost Quest for a Biblical Hermeneutic

Catholic Enlighteners, however, also faced an internal battle: how far could the philosophical insights of Enlightenment be applied? Some radical and moderate Enlighteners pushed Church teachings—some of which were not yet defined—to their limits and uncomfortably questioned the established status quo of some theological disciplines. This is an important task in theology: to help the church to think. A good example of this is the engagement with historical criticism in exegetical questions. Spinoza's (1632–77) radical claim was that the biblical books were the product of a long process of editing and development. The French Oratorian Richard Simon (1638–1712) productively engaged with this charge and attempted to defeat it, but

17. *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 17.
18. *Gaudium et Spes,* ch. 44.

not without reinforcing his own theology with what we today call "historical criticism." Likewise, Johann Lorenz Isenbiehl (1744–1818) used his historical training to suggest a new way of reading Isaiah 7:14 and the prophecy about the virgin who will bear a child. He did not have in mind a rejection of the virgin birth, but simply an honest reading of Matthew 1 where Isaiah is quoted. In his arguments, he showed that the original text of the Hebrew Bible likely referred not to a virgin, but a young woman. A firestorm of criticism silenced the young researcher; his book was censored and his career as an academic destroyed. Isenbiehl's case, which we discuss in this collection, was similar to many others over the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even, early twentieth centuries.

If we fast-forward the history of Catholic exegesis to the 1960s, we suddenly find Bible scholars slowly coming out of their defensive corner as they try to implement the research of their (mostly) Protestant peers. Yet, almost none of them were (and are) aware of the initial discussion about historical criticism in the eighteenth century. The attempts of someone such as Simon in the seventeenth century to proffer a biblical hermeneutic that is conscious of history and criticism—but also of the rule of faith—has been passed over by conservatives because they believed him to be a Spinozian, and by progressives because they believed he could not have anything insightful to offer because he was a thinker of the Tridentine era.

Has Catholic theology really achieved anything over the last decades when it comes to reconciling historical criticism and theological exegesis? Some, such as the German exegetes Marius Reiser and Klaus Berger, think not.[19] While scholars and church leaders have no problem with labeling biblical accounts as "poetic tales," which, two hundred years ago, brought Johann Jahn (1750–1816) into serious trouble, "we still have not established what this means for their theological interpretation and the truth of their story," Reiser laments.[20] Looking,

19. Klaus Berger, *Die Bibelfälscher wie wir um die Wahrheit betrogen werden* (Munich: Pattloch, 2013).
20. Marius Reiser, "The History of Catholic Exegesis, 1600–1800," in *Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology*, ed. Ulrich L. Lehner, A. G. Roeber, and Richard Muller (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

in particular, at historical figures of the Catholic Enlightenment, such as Richard Simon and Aloysius Sandbichler (1751–1820), would demonstrate that both perspectives could stimulate a renewed attempt to bring historical and theological exegesis into dialogue.

Would it not be time, then, to ask the witnesses of early modernity how they dealt with the challenge of historical criticism as they tried to reconcile tradition and history? The work of Sandbichler could serve as a lesson in how to take philology and history seriously without setting aside the theological dimension of a text. I think it is here, where perhaps the greatest importance of the history of modern exegesis lies: while a number of contemporary theologians rediscover patristic and medieval exegesis in a "resourcement" movement, they usually dismiss early modern interpreters in almost total ignorance of them. However, it is precisely these early modern exegetes—in particular, those wrestling with theological interpretation in the face of historical criticism—who offer the best lessons in how both approaches can be mutually inclusive. These theologians were, after all, much closer to the questions that haunt us today than were the medievals, and to dismiss them is tantamount to downplaying the need for theology to constructively wrestle with modernity, instead of romanticizing the past or giving in to mere rationalism or fideism. Furthermore, ignorance of the past usually produces pride; one boasts of achievements such as the allegedly radically new twentieth-century concept of divine inspiration espoused in *Dei Verbum* (chapter 11) without realizing its roots in Richard Simon's works.[21] How seriously is one to take such a theologian who forgets that he stands on the shoulders of giants and is just one link in a long line of men and women searching for truth? If Catholic exegesis refuses to acknowledge such indebtedness to the past and is unaware of its own more recent history, how can it really claim to be a critical enterprise? After all, the core meaning of criticism is the ability to discern truth from error. Without knowledge of earlier scholarly achievements and erroneous journeys,

21. Marius Reiser, "Richard Simons biblische Hermeneutik," in *Bibelkritik und Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift*, ed. Marius Reiser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 185–218.

one deprives oneself of necessary knowledge and catapults one's discipline into an ivory tower. How would one perceive a biologist who redid Gregor Mendel's (1822–84) basic genetic lab tests, and afterwards, published his findings in a peer-reviewed journal as "new" and original research? This might seem like an extreme example, but we cannot deny the parallels if one reads seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature in consort with the exegetical literature of the present.

Likewise, twentieth-century theology is often credited with correcting a Catholic theological view that left out the dimension of salvation history in the revelation of God. While historians have tried to show that the Catholic Tübingen School dealt with the idea of the kingdom of God as a basic theological term right after the turn of the eighteenth century, and others have pointed to its roots in the Catholic Enlightenment, systematic theology has hitherto ignored such findings. A close reading and integration of late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theology may retrieve a theology willing to be simultaneously original and faithful.[22] A good example of such faithful creativity is the work of Aloysius Sandbichler, whose concept of salvation history from the 1790s we outline in this volume. The fact that not all exegetical literature was open to dialogue, but actually sometimes fits the caricatures painted by critics can be found in the exegetical commentary on the book of Revelation by Alphonsus Frey of 1762.

Going back to the sources of the past will enable Catholic theologians to better understand the shortcomings of their own approaches to biblical hermeneutics: like their predecessors, they are walking a fine line between rationalist flattening of the Bible or theological eisegesis. By taking the work of Catholic Enlightenment scripture scholars seriously, we can pick up where the conversation about a biblical hermeneutic has stopped (very much due to papal censorship).

22. An insightful criticism of "salvation history" is provided by Martin Hengel, "Heilsgeschichte," in *Theologische, historische und biographische Skizzen. Kleine Schriften*, ed. Martin Hengel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 7:1–34.

Ecclesiology and Ecumenism

The Catholic Enlightenment not only initiated a retrieval of the biblical sources of the faith, but also led to the realization that the Church lacked a theology of the episcopal office. Not yet equipped with the proper theological vocabulary, the discussion about the role bishops should play in the Church used concepts that had been developed a few hundred years earlier by the Conciliarist movement. Nevertheless, it also adopted ideas of French Gallicanism and Jansenism, especially in regard to the role of the papacy. It has been widely forgotten that the understanding of the pope as the "center of unity" had been stressed so much by Gallican thinkers (even though it did not originate with them), that by the eighteenth century, no supporter of papal primacy would use it. By 1763, it had become the programmatic term for a new ecclesiology by way of the Trier auxiliary bishop Nikolaus von Hontheim and his manifesto *Febronius*: instead of a monarchical papacy, the Church should be governed in a more collegial way by the authority of local bishops, while the pope should remain a spiritual center of unity without real jurisdiction. Because of its connection to Febronianism, the term "center of unity" was avoided in the Catholic restoration of the early nineteenth century and only revived at the end of the century, before it was reinterpreted at Vatican II.[23] Febronius's (1701–90) main theological problem, however, was that he built his criticism of the papacy on the claim that the papacy built its primacy of jurisdiction solely with the help of the pseudo-Isidorian decretals. As the eminent law historian Georg May has pointed out, this is incorrect: the decretals were not the reason for the increasing authority of the papacy, but a symptom of it.[24] Would not a more sincere look into the history of the term also help current ecclesiologists understand and appreciate better the Conciliarist tradition, as Francis Oakley has

23. Peter Frowein, "Primat und Episkopat," *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 69 (1974): 227–29; Klaus Schatz, *Kirchenbild und Päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit bei den deutschsprachigen Minoritätsbischöfen auf dem I. Vatikanum* (Rome: Universita Gregoriana Editrice, 1975), 460; Bernward Schmidt, *Die Konzilien und der Papst* (Freiburg: Herder, 2013), 182, 278.
24. Georg May, *Die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen den Mainzer Erzbischöfen und dem Heiligen Stuhl um die Dispensbefugnis im 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007), 45–46.

pointed out?[25] Yet, a look at the sometimes selfish intentions of the German Febronian bishops and their failures to withstand the onslaught of Napoleon's attack on the Church should also remind us that neither a romantic view of the early church as "authority-free" nor a romanticizing of Ultramontanism help, but only a sincere look at the historical fact that local churches and papal leaders can fail miserably.

That the ecumenical dimension of Vatican II was prepared by a thorough discussion of the Christian churches, even and especially under the pressure of the Nazi regime,[26] is a well-known fact. But it is almost forgotten that the Catholic Enlightenment produced serious ecumenical projects worth remembering. The first one is a project that evolved between Protestant and Catholic theologians and has been called the Fulda- or Piderit-Böhm-Plan for a reunification of the churches. Its core idea was to overcome confessional polemics and come to a mutual appreciation of doctrinal differences and possible solutions. It was not the plan for "lowest common denominator" ecumenism, but a sincere attempt to overcome schism by searching for truth. The failure of the project, in large part due to papal censorship and the disinterest of most Protestant theologians, poses an important question: do academic societies dedicated to ecumenism, such as the one Piderit and Böhm envisioned, help to obtain the goal of reunification if the majority of the guild is disinterested in it? Is the feeling of shame and scandal about the separation of the churches that these early ecumenists felt not something worth rediscovering? The Piderit-Böhm plan was based on prayer and the willingness of the participants to suffer for the truth of Christ. By consciously following in the footsteps of previously failed ecumenical attempts through a process of historical appropriation, we begin to develop more empathy, and perhaps, feel the pain of separation more strongly, and hopefully, begin the journey with fortitude that does not shy away from suffering. But paying attention to the ecumenical discussions of

25. Francis Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
26. Jörg Ernesti, *Ökumene im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2007).

the past also reminds us how easily the desire for union can result in a compromise of the truth, and ultimately, relativism or syncretism.

Another article in the section on ecumenism follows the insight that true ecumenical theology grows out of prayerful reflection. An example of this is the Bavarian Benedictine Beda Mayr (1742–94), who not only came up with a plan for an academy dedicated to ecumenical questions, but also with a remarkable ecumenical methodology: nothing that was not dogmatically defined should stand in the way of a reunification of the churches. This included hotly debated issues such as papal infallibility—a good one hundred years before it became a dogma. Mayr did not dislike the papacy or distrust the popes, as one might assume. Instead, he saw in the monarchical office of the papacy, as it was exercised in the 1780s, a stumbling block for Protestants and Catholics coming together in one Church. Consequently, he developed the concept of a limited and essentially negative infallibility. For him, infallibility could not extend beyond the *necessary* elements of faith and morals:[27]

> I call *infallibility* the privilege which Christ gave to his church: to teach everything without the danger of falling into error and to teach what is necessary or useful for the faithful to achieve eternal blessedness. This also includes that she cannot teach anything that leads the faithful away from the order of salvation.[28]

Consequently, the Church was fallible when it came to the formal aspects of dogmatic facts; for example, if the Church were to declare an unrevealed doctrine to be revealed. Such a formal error would not affect the holy order of salvation, even if the doctrine in question was useful for the advancement of saving one's soul.[29] Therefore, even an "erroneous" teaching—that is, a wrong proposition about the revelation status of a doctrine—would not be completely wrong, because the Church can never err in teaching something helpful for

27. Cf. Beda Mayr, *Apologie seiner Vertheidigung der katholischen Religion; eine Beylage zu seiner Vertheidigung der natürlichen, christlichen und katholischen Religion* (Augsburg: 1790), 210–11.
28. Beda Mayr, *Vertheidigung der natürlichen, christlichen und katholischen Religion,* (Augsburg: 1789), 3:269.
29. Ibid., 3:270–71.

achieving eternal bliss. Certainly, such a view contains the theological contradiction, as Giovanni Sala pointed out, that the Holy Spirit would assist the Church in formulating fallible teachings,[30] but the value of Mayr's work lies elsewhere: he offered his ideas to the Church and was willing to accept her final judgment over them. Moreover, he engaged with Protestant peers to answer theological problems that had arisen for the Christian message through Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau and Lessing (1729–81). Openness to new ways of thought, an ecumenism based on prayer and reflection, and the willingness to recant if the Magisterium orders obedience, are, in my view, the three most valuable insights we can gain from his work.

How Enlightened Can a Catholic Be?

The most daunting question is surely: "How enlightened can we be?" or to what extent can a Christian theologian engage positively with the cultural process of Enlightenment, its philosophies, its new ways of life and thought. Some Catholic Enlighteners were radical in their approach: rather than slow, gentle, pastoral, and theological reforms, they tried to restructure the entire Church overnight. This gave their projects an elitist patina, which the masses of the faithful rejected. By "radical," I refer to the original meaning of the word, deriving from the Latin "radix," or root: radical Catholic Enlighteners tended to uproot central tenets of the faith and central traditions, or in the case of the liturgical Enlighteners, their attitude lacked roots among the faithful.

A good example of how to study the extent to which Christian theology and lifestyle can adapt to the Enlightenment world is the microcosm of monasticism. After all, monasteries were (and still are) a vital part of the Church's life; they strive for a dedicated imitation of Christ, or in St. Benedict's words, to be a "school of the Lord." By sanctifying community life by prayer and work, religious men and women sought to become transformed by Christ. The Enlightenment culture, however, also infiltrated monastic life. It permeated the walls

30. Giovanni Sala, "Fallible Teachings and the Assistance of the Holy Spirit," *Kontroverse Theologie* (Cologne: Nova & Vetera, 2005), 237–58.

of the cloister and inspired many to question old forms of obedience and traditional life. In communities, this was social dynamite. In the study on Benedictine monks, it is demonstrated how helpless superiors looked upon the new resistance to their commands, wondered how they could restructure traditions intelligibly, or how they simply abandoned them without replacing them with untested or unproven innovations. A good example of the latter is the abolition of the holy silence during meals in the cloister of Melk in favor of small talk in order to create a "community atmosphere." In my book *Enlightened Monks,*[31] I traced the mostly bad influence Enlightenment culture had on monasteries as an assimilation to the world. Lawrence Cunningham wrote in a review: "These German Benedictine reforms anticipated so many later changes in religious life that it is hard not to think of the period covered by Lehner's book as a kind of dress rehearsal for the period after Vatican II."[32] Adoption of contemporaneous cultures is nothing bad, to be sure, but it can be a sign of weakness and failure if such assimilation is done without much reflection about the value of traditions or beliefs.

This, of course, brings us to the bigger question of how enlightened Catholicism can be today and how much it can adapt to contemporaneous culture; that is, how can it modernize itself? Consequently, the cultural history of the Catholic Enlightenment and its theology poses the question: to what extent Catholic thought and life should adapt to "worldly" expectations. Some theologians point to Romans 12:2 as a verdict against any such assimilation, yet most read only the first seven words, "Do not conform yourselves to this age." They fail to recognize that the sentence continues: "but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." It is, after all, Paul himself who established new forms for his own message and theology—so, it cannot mean a complete denial of interaction with culture and

31. Ulrich Lehner, *Enlightened Monks: The German Benedictines, 1740–1803* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
32. Lawrence Cunningham, "Review of Ulrich Lehner, *Enlightened Monks*," *Commonweal* 139 (September 3, 2012): 26–27.

thought. Instead, it seems to point to a careful discernment of spirits and a theological eclecticism: whatever is good in a culture can be adopted if it is pleasing to God's will. This reminds us of the perennial question of how to be in the world, and yet, not of it. Yet, the Catholic Enlightenment teaches us a lesson more valuable than, perhaps, other periods in history, because it also faced the daunting questions of modernity that were alien to antiquity and the Middle Ages. The eminent German sociologist and philosopher Hans Joas rightly stated that the academic consensus is that modernization as envisioned by Catholic Enlighteners does *not* necessarily lead to secularization. Moreover, he successfully questions whether there are homogenous concepts of modernization and secularization.[33] If this is true, it complicates our questions even more: can we even identify expectations as "merely worldly" or could it be that some have religious roots? If that is the case, both the historian and the theologian must be careful not to interpret the past through teleological lenses, but rather abstain from value judgments as much as possible.

Research on Catholicism in the eighteenth century shows that much of what we consider contemporary problems (even the question of divorce and remarriage) was already discussed at that time. Even questions about the state's expectations of religion, such as the acceptance of divorce and remarriage, echo contemporary political concerns. Likewise, the question of tax exemption for religious entities was on the agenda of Catholic Enlightenment thinkers. By not listening to these intellectual controversies, historians and religion scholars not only deprive themselves of a vast amount of learning, but also silence several generations of thinkers, believers, and skeptics, and therefore, arrive at a caricatured view of the Enlightenment world.

Almost no history or religion university department in the United States has an expert on early modern Catholicism or Catholicism between the Middle Ages and Vatican II. Even in thriving doctoral programs, this historical period is marginalized. It is treated as though

33. Hans Joas, *Faith as an Option: Possible Futures for Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

it is a blip on the screen and played no part in the becoming of the modern world. Theology department curriculums joined the bandwagon of those who jump from the Council of Trent to Vatican I as if nothing happened in the intervening four centuries. How can this be anything but a-historical? The "unfinished business and trailing ends"[34] of the Catholic Enlightenment are still with us: how do we post-Vatican II Catholics address the faithful and demonstrate that faith is an intelligible option worth pursuing? How do we overcome the lethargy to reform and begin trying out new things after sincere discernment? I believe the eighteenth century offers some invaluable insights: not necessarily recipes for how to solve problems, but rather a model for how to intellectually identify and discuss problems and how to empathize with our opponents.

34. Francis Oakley, *Conciliarism: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church, 1300–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 262.