

CATHOLIC CURIOSITY

CHURCH HISTORY AS FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

“Nieuwsgierigheid is een prikkelende drijfveer”¹. Yet for an outstanding researcher on Augustine (354-430), should not “nieuwsgierigheid” or “curiosity” – *curiositas*² – be considered something negative³? Of course, the question is why and how to read Augustine⁴. Mathijs Lamberigts does not read our “‘voorlopers’ in het geloof”⁵ in search of “heldendom”⁶ or triumphalism, but in search of inspiration for his own Christian living and thinking⁷. One can presume that for Lamberigts, Vatican II plays a major role in this search. The Council, while acknowledging the significance of Augustine⁸, emphasizes the central role of Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-1274) in theology (*Optatam totius* 15)⁹. The

1. Mathijs Lamberigts, quoted in E. DE SMET, *Mathijs Lamberigts – “Nog meer experimenteren, ook al win je zo geen eerste prijs in rechtgelovigheid”*, in *Kerk & Leven*, June 7, 2017, p. 7.

2. G. BÖS, *Curiositas: Die Rezeption eines antiken Begriffes durch christliche Autoren bis Thomas von Aquin* (Veröffentlichungen des Grabmann-Instituts zur Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Theologie und Philosophie, 39), Paderborn, Schöningh, 1995; K. KRÜGER (ed.), *Curiositas: Welterfahrung und ästhetische Neugierde in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Göttinger Gespräche zur Geschichtswissenschaft, 15), Göttingen, Wallstein, 2002.

3. E.g., AUGUSTINUS, *Confessiones* 10,35,55. For a contextualization see J.N. TORCHIA, *Restless Mind: Curiositas and the Scope of Inquiry in Augustine’s Psychology* (Marquette Studies in Philosophy, 83), Milwaukee, WI, Marquette University Press, 2013.

4. L. BOEVE – M. LAMBERIGTS – M. WISSE (eds.), *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance against Modernity?* (BETL, 219), Leuven, Peeters, 2009.

5. M. LAMBERIGTS, *Geloven in de richting van*, in T. DEHAENE (ed.), *Wij hebben Hem herkend: Gelovigen getuigen*, Leuven, Peeters, 2001, 103-108, p. 106.

6. *Ibid.*

7. See Epilogue below.

8. A. DUPONT, *The Authority of Augustine of Hippo at the Second Vatican Council: A Comparative Analysis of the Use of Augustine in the Preparatory and the Promulgated Documents*, in G. ROUTHIER – P.J. ROY – K. SCHELKENS (eds.), *La théologie catholique entre intransigeance et renouveau: La réception des mouvements préconciliaires à Vatican II* (Bibliothèque de la RHE, 95), Louvain-la-Neuve, Collège Érasme; Leuven, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 2011, 11-48.

9. Beyond this observation, the question of how Augustinian and Thomistic positions interacted at Vatican II is elucidated by J.A. KOMONCHAK, *Thomism and the Second Vatican Council*, in A.J. CERNERA (ed.), *Continuity and Plurality in Catholic Theology: Essays in Honor of Gerald A. McCool*, Fairfield, Sacred Heart University Press, 1998, 53-73; ID., *Le valutazioni sulla Gaudium et spes: Chenu, Dossetti, Ratzinger*, in J. DORÉ – A. MELLONI (eds.), *Volti di fine Concilio: Studi di storia e teologia sulla conclusione del Vaticano II* (Testi e ricerche di scienze religiose, NS 27), Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000, 115-153; ID., *Augustine, Aquinas, or the Gospel sine glossa? Divisions over Gaudium et*

latter's concept of *studiositas* is still skeptical concerning *curiositas*¹⁰. Perhaps we do not need to go as far as Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990) did in his early years and oppose Augustine to Aquinas. But even though Chenu could later on appreciate the major achievements of Augustine, what he wrote about Aquinas in 1927 remains of interest:

L'Augustinien, plus mystique apparemment, n'avait pas su réaliser l'unité spirituelle d'une âme, dont l'acte premier de religion serait l'exercice même de sa raison: avec S. Thomas *l'immense curiosité de l'intelligence humaine devient acte religieux, bien mieux exercé de foi*¹¹.

This insight could be extended and developed by one of the main intuitions of Vatican II, namely, the signs of the times. Chenu anticipated this conciliar achievement in 1937 when he spoke of the "sainte curiosité"¹² with which a theologian ought to consider what Chenu then called the "lieux théologiques en acte". Later on, *Gaudium et spes* 4 made this intuition official. In line with this official approbation, *Gaudium et spes* 36 legitimates the autonomy of terrestrial realities¹³, which includes a modern conception of *curiositas*, as the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* explains in the article "Neugierde (lat. curiositas)":

Mit der neuzeitlichen Bindung des Erkenntnisstrebens an die wissenschaftliche Methode und an den gemeinsamen Wissensfortschritt der Menschheit wird die Neugier zur positiven Triebfeder der modernen Forschungs- und Bildungskultur und die Anerkennung der Neugier zum kritischen Potential gegen überkommene Denktraditionen und Ideologien (Blumenberg, Lübke)¹⁴.

spes, in J. WILKINS (ed.), *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years after Vatican II*, London, Bloomsbury, 2004, 102-118; ID., *A Postmodern Augustinian Thomism*, in BOEVE – LAMBERIGTS – WISSE (eds.), *Augustine and Postmodern Thought* (n. 4), 123-146.

10. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* II-II, 166-167.

11. M.-D. CHENU, *La théologie comme science au XIII^e siècle*, in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 2 (1927) 31-71, p. 71. As a pastor, historian, and fundamental theologian, Chenu gradually learned to appreciate Augustine, thanks in part to the Dominican's dialogue with Yves Congar and Henri-Marie Féret, see M. QUINSKY, *Geschichtlicher Glaube in einer geschichtlichen Welt: Der Beitrag von M.-D. Chenu, Y. Congar und H.-M. Féret zum II. Vatikanum* (Dogma und Geschichte, 6), Münster, Lit, 2007, pp. 220-227.

12. M.-D. CHENU, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir. Avec les études de Giuseppe Alberigo, Étienne Fouilloux, Jean Ladrière et Jean-Pierre Jossua*, Paris, Cerf, 1985, p. 142.

13. On this topic see A. LOSINGER, "*Iusta autonomia*": *Studien zu einem Schlüsselbegriff des II. Vatikanischen Konzils* (Abhandlungen zur Sozialethik, 28), Paderborn, Schöningh, 1989.

14. C. SCHRÖER, *Neugierde (lat. curiositas)*, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 7 (3¹⁹⁹⁸), col. 759. It is noteworthy that in earlier editions of the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* there is no article on "Neugierde" or "curiositas".

These words describe the scientific and spiritual *habitus* of Mathijs Lamberigts quite well. As a theologian, he specifies that *habitus* in the following way: “In a sense, God offers a ‘more’, an ‘extra’, which presupposes recognition of what we are: imperfect images of God. ... Christian faith is, or better, should be characterized by search and thus by modesty, if not humility”¹⁵.

Reflecting on *curiositas* thus seems to help us understand the intrinsic relationship between church history and fundamental theology¹⁶. Moreover, I think that we can postulate a kind of “Catholic curiosity” which is at the origin of both and which links them together. That said, Catholic curiosity is by no means limited to theology, but rather underlies theology, which is at the same time one of its expressions. In what follows, I develop how this notion facilitates understanding theology as a contribution to the abovementioned culture of research and education. For this purpose, some observations about Catholicity and curiosity (I) will help us to consider the duty to scrutinize the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel (*Gaudium et spes* 4) and in light of Jesus as an “evangelizer” (*Evangelii gaudium* 12 and 209) (II) in order to deal with history and historicity in a Catholic” way – both spiritually and scientifically (III).

I. CATHOLICITY AND CURIOSITY

1. Catholicity

While the history of the Church led to a confessionalist understanding of Catholicity, the Church’s mission implies rather the contrary. Beyond details of linguistic definition throughout history¹⁷, the Catholicity of the Church is founded in its universal outreach. Indeed, the word “Catholic”

15. M. LAMBERIGTS, *The Dechristianisation of Europe: A Challenge for the Church*, in G. TANGORRA (ed.), *La Chiesa, mistero e missione: A cinquant’anni dalla ‘Lumen gentium’ (1964-2014)* (Centro studi sul Concilio Vaticano II, 6), Città del Vaticano, Lateran University Press, 2016, 221-249, p. 246.

16. See M. LAMBERIGTS – L. BOEVE – T. MERRIGAN (eds.), *Theology and the Quest for Truth: Historical- and Systematic-theological Studies* (BETL, 202), Leuven, Leuven University Press – Peeters, 2006; ID. (eds.), *Orthodoxy, Process and Product* (BETL, 226), Leuven, Peeters, 2009; ID. (eds.), *The Normativity of History: Theological Truth and Tradition in the Tension between Church History and Systematic Theology* (BETL, 282), Leuven, Peeters, 2016.

17. See P. WALTER, *Katholizität: Allgemeinheit, Einheitlichkeit, Fülle? Wandlungen eines Begriffs in der jüngeren Theologiegeschichte*, in C. BÖTTIGHEIMER (ed.), *Globalität und Katholizität: Weltkirchlichkeit unter den Bedingungen des 21. Jahrhunderts* (Quaestiones disputatae, 276), Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2016, 31-66.

means “fullness”¹⁸. Yet this outreach is not just ecclesiological. Since the Church is not an end in itself, but rather a sacrament of salvation (*Lumen gentium* 1; *Lumen gentium* 48; *Gaudium et spes* 45 etc.), the universality at which the Church aims in its concrete human realizations is connected to salvation. In no way, then, is universality an imperial or colonialist ambition, but rather the horizon of salvation as the will and gift of God for the whole world. In this sense, universality is also the horizon of faith, which can only exist concretely but whose concretizations aim at nothing less than all. More exactly, faith in its concrete expressions and journeys has its origin in God and seeks the fullness of life, which is the fullness of God¹⁹. The theocentric origin and outreach of salvation clear the road for faith as a Catholic and human way of dealing with universality and concreteness. The fundamental perspective is not what is missing; instead, from the belief that God is the giver and fullness of life, there arises the testimony of joy; more exactly it is an “erlöste und erlösende Freude an der göttlichen Gabe des fremden und eigenen Lebens, dessen Entstehung, Entfaltung und freie Vollendung in einer Haltung dankbarer Großzügigkeit sie [die Christen] bejahen, fördern und erhoffen”. Faith also involves a “gönnende Wertschätzung und freudvolle Wertschätzung an der vielfältigen Lebendigkeit des Kosmos”²⁰.

Conceiving of fullness as the divine horizon of salvation includes a recognition that there is no human way to entirely grasp that for which faith seeks. That said, every concrete search for universality can be understood as enabled and empowered by what in classical theological terminology is called grace. This classical notion of grace, central for Augustine as well as for Aquinas, marks faith as a special relationship between God and creation²¹. This relationship, revealed in Jesus Christ, valorizes every moment and aspect of human life, every human

18. K. WENZEL, *Katholisch*, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 5 (3/1996) 1345-1346, col. 1345.

19. See the groundbreaking study of R. MIGGELBRINK, *Lebensfülle: Für die Wiederentdeckung einer theologischen Kategorie* (Quaestiones disputatae, 235), Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2009.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 260s.

21. That is why Christoph Theobald can establish a link between faith (i.e., belief) in the sense of a fundamental confidence in life (or, simply put, of a “Yes” to life) and faith in the theological sense of a commitment; see C. THEOBALD, *L'Europe, terre de mission: Vivre et penser la foi dans un espace d'hospitalité messianique*, Paris, Cerf, 2019, pp. 85-144. One can nuance this definition as follows: “When it comes to ultimate questions, believing will be on the program of all sensible people until further notice, whether they believe in the direction of yes or no” (“Geloven zal tot nader order op het vlak van zin vragen op het programma van alle verstandige mensen staan, of ze nu geloven in de richting van het ja of het neen”) (LAMBERIGTS, *Geloven in de richting van* [n. 5], p. 105).

encounter, and thus every human being with worth. For all of these are due to God's fullness, which is nevertheless more than just the sum of all these moments and aspects of human life, all these human encounters, and all these human beings.

As a "sign and instrument" (cf. *Lumen gentium* 1) of God's gracefully enabled way of dealing with fullness and universality, which is humanly unreachable, Catholicity is realized in a multitude of concretizations without being limited to their sum. Catholicity thus fundamentally implies and values historicity and contingency, diversity and plurality. In our agitated times, Catholicity thus opens up the possibility for global identities, for honoring multiple individual identities rather than planishing them²². In this Catholic sense, universality "opens"²³ us up to the value of concreteness and concreteness "opens" us up to the search for universality. Moreover, this relationship between universality and concreteness implies a paradoxical dynamic of faith in the world: the more faith is concrete, the more it aims at universality; the more faith aims at universality, the more it becomes concrete.

Of course, this paradoxical dynamic includes acceptance of the countless and various limitations and boundaries encountered in human life. Yet the paradoxical dynamic also means that such limitations and boundaries do not have the last word. Grounded in the Chalcedonian principle, inspired by Pope Francis' groundbreaking understanding of theology "on a frontier"²⁴, and adopting Lieven Boeve's intuition of a "mutual interruption"²⁵ between God and History, Church and World, Faith and Culture, one could therefore define "Catholic" and "Catholicity" as

22. See K. RUHSTORFER, *Befreiung des "Katholischen": An der Schwelle zu globaler Identität*, Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2019.

23. With this term, allusion is made to Lieven Boeve's notion of "open narratives"; see L. BOEVE, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (LTPM, 30), Leuven, Peeters, 2003, pp. 101-183.

24. Pope FRANCIS, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Grand Chancellor of the "Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina" for the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the Faculty of Theology*, 3 March 2015 (http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150303_lettera-universita-cattolica-argentina.html).

25. See, among others, BOEVE, *Interrupting Tradition* (n. 23); ID., *La vérité de l'Incarnation et l'incarnation de la Vérité: Épistémologie théologique, particularité et pluralité*, in B. VAN MEENEN (ed.), *La Vérité* (Théologie), Bruxelles, Facultés Saint-Louis, 2005, 29-47; ID., *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval*, New York, Continuum, 2007; for some further reflections, see M. QUINSKY, *Can Tradition (Not) Change? Truth in the History between God and Humanity*, in ID. *Katholizität der Inkarnation – Catholicité de l'Incarnation: Christliches Leben und Denken zwischen Universalität und Konkrektion "nach" dem II. Vaticanum – Vie et pensée chrétiennes entre universalité et concrétion (d')après Vatican II* (Studia Oecumenica Friburgensia, 68), Münster, Aschendorff, 2016, 292-326, pp. 303-319.

a process of “mutual de-limitation” (wechselseitige Ent-Grenzung)²⁶: faith does not negate the different limitations and frontiers of human life; rather, faith transcends them by establishing ever-new relationships and interactions between what is on both sides of these frontiers. The frontier then becomes in some sense liquid²⁷ (which does not mean less historic)²⁸. In an ongoing and Catholicizing dynamic of a mutual de-limitation, both sides can be enriched. A third space then opens up, in which one can perceive “more”²⁹ (at least a little bit more). Without any human or rationalizing automatism, this enrichment brings about a kenotic-pleromatic dynamic which is concretized throughout history and which tends towards its promised yet graceful fulfillment.

Respecting the different contexts, the dynamic of mutual de-limitation can also be applied analogically (in a general sense), for example, to the conception of Tradition as a mutual de-limitation of past, present, and future. As to an application of mutual de-limitation to the history of God and humanity, analogy (in the sense used by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215)³⁰ helps us to deal with this major challenge of Christian living and thinking. That said, are not Abraham (Gen 18,22-33) and Jacob (Gen 32,27) models for an analogical understanding of this history of God and humanity as a history of mutual de-limitation? The fundamental questions raised here cannot but deepen and broaden Catholic curiosity.

2. Curiosity

Considering Catholicity to be a mutual de-limitation of fullness and multitude (or of universality and concreteness, respectively) quite automatically provokes and nourishes an ongoing search to understand the reality that surrounds the one seeking understanding. The concept of mutual de-limitation makes very clear that this human search cannot come to an end. In other words, mutual de-limitation provokes and nourishes curiosity far beyond any natural reflex of human intelligence.

For if fullness is a property of God as the Creator and Redeemer, creation cannot but aim at this fullness without being itself the fullness for which it longs. This relationship between creation and fullness implies that every single aspect of creation has its own dignity and is thus worthy

26. M. QUISINSKY, “Katholisch” – *Leben und Denken zwischen “De-finition” und “Ent-Grenzung”*, in *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 70 (2019) 239-253, especially p. 249.

27. Z. BAUMAN, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity, 2000.

28. Thus, one should not underestimate that a “liquid Church” is also part of history.

29. See above, n. 15.

30. *DH* 806.

of interest. “Curiosity” in this sense does not refer to an all-too-human interest in chit-chat. Neither does it refer to any indiscrete desire to be like God. “Curiosity” rather refers to being interested in every moment and aspect of human life, in every human encounter, and in every human being. This breadth of interest includes being open to any insight into life. So if curiosity is open to God as the giver of life, curiosity could even be interpreted as a contemporary adaptation of the intuition expressed in Augustine’s famous sentence “Inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te, Domine”³¹.

Curiosity – and even more so Catholic curiosity as a mutually de-limiting openness – is thus an expression of a mystical way of life³². This mysticism is pointed out by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si’*. Referring to the sixteenth-century Sufi poet Ali al-Khawwas, Pope Francis states: “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face”³³. One must of course emphasize that this mysticism does not lead away from the world but rather establishes a relationship with the world, incidentally making of the world a *locus theologicus*: “The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things”³⁴. While this statement could be read in a thoroughly Thomistic or Ignatian way, Pope Francis continues by referring to Bonaventure (1221-1274), who “teaches us that ‘contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God’s grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves’”³⁵. Then, appealing to John of the Cross (1542-1591), the pope states

that all the goodness present in the realities and experiences of this world “is present in God eminently and infinitely, or more properly, in each of these sublime realities is God”. This is not because the finite things of this world are really divine, but because the mystic experiences the intimate connection between God and all beings, and thus feels that “all things are God”³⁶.

31. AUGUSTINUS, *Confessiones* 1,1.

32. On understanding what it means to be a mystic, see M. QUINSKY, “*Lebensfülle*” – *Ermöglichung und Herausforderung einer Theologie als Lebenswissenschaft* (forthcoming), which goes along with Karl Rahner’s dictum that the Christian of the twenty-first century will be a mystic.

33. Pope FRANCIS, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si’ of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home* 233 (https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.* 234.

In this way, Catholicity as a mutual de-limitation is part of and expresses a mystical perception of reality, which is at the same time the realism of mysticism; Catholicity therefore holds together concreteness and universality not in a closed and closing way, but in an open and opening way. Catholicity accepts its limitations but does not abstain from understanding them analogically within a horizon of fullness. The more realistic this mysticism is, the more Trinitarian it is: "Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity"³⁷.

3. Catholic Curiosity

In a more prosaic way, one can conclude that a Christian way to deal with universality is to be interested in the concrete and vice versa. In this sense, Catholic curiosity both implies and expresses a Christian vision of reality, in which believers want to understand what they perceive of creation. They do so following the possibilities and limitations of human reason and thus pass beyond any sectarian or ideological way of dealing with reality. On the contrary, openness to every insight generated by reason can prevent the sectarian and ideological dangers of both religious and non-religious living and thinking.

If faith conceives of fullness as resulting from God and leading to God, then reason can consider that life is fundamentally a relationship with God, who, as fullness, is the horizon of this life and thus of this very reality. Therefore within the contemporary pluralistic world, Catholic curiosity is the way to scrutinize the horizon of reality in a mutual de-limitation between the "Trinitarian key"³⁸ on the one hand and the "rational tools"³⁹ that Christians share with every human being on the other. If Catholic curiosity as Christian realism is open to every insight into reality, then Catholic curiosity can in turn open up these insights and their connectedness to the notion of fullness. This Catholic curiosity of course implies a special *habitus* of Christian living and thinking, in which Catholicity and sacramentality both require and promote dialogue⁴⁰.

37. *Ibid.* 236.

38. *Ibid.* 239.

39. CHENU, *Une école de théologie* (n. 12), 149; see also ID., *La théologie est-elle une science* (Je sais – je crois, 2), Paris, Fayard, 1957, p. 68.

40. See also F. GMAINER-PRANZL, "Universale salutis sacramentum" (LG 48): *Katholizität als Modell diskursiver, responsiver und polyloger Universalität*, in H. SCHELKSHORN – F. WOLFRAM – R. LANGTHALER (eds.), *Religion in der globalen Moderne: Philosophische Erkundungen* (Religion and Transformation in Contemporary European Society, 7), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014, 75-105.

Hence, theology is dialogue. Furthermore, Christian living and thinking occur in history, are historically situated, and are thus contingent. Theology must consider history and historicity not only by conglomerating interesting facts about the past, but also by asking how to understand our own place in a history that is ongoing. For Catholic curiosity, a fundamental question thus is how to deal with history and historicity.

II. THE HISTORICITY OF THE GOSPEL AND THE EVANGELIZATION OF HISTORY

1. *Scrutinizing the Signs of the Times in Light of the Gospel*

As a “Council of history”⁴¹, Vatican II opened the door for a Christian way of dealing with history and historicity. In the history of the Christian faith, this Council is situated in a certain way at the crossroads of past and future, pre-conciliar movements and post-conciliar reception, local churches and the universal Church. As an expression of Tradition, the Council opened up new perspectives for fundamental reflection on historicity, as expressed in terms such as “history of salvation” or “economy of salvation”⁴². It belongs to the legacy of Vatican II to take up these reflections as an expression of Tradition⁴³.

Vatican II was also a Council on Catholicity⁴⁴. As a matter of fact, as a dynamic of mutual de-limitation, and even though it is a *nota ecclesiae*⁴⁵, Catholicity cannot be defined in primarily ecclesiological terms. On the contrary, connected as it is with the sacramentality of the Church, Catholicity ought to be conceived of as transcending the Church out of a grace-given, kenotic-pleromatic horizon of fullness to which the Church

41. B. FORTE, *Le prospettive della ricerca teologica*, in R. FISICHELLA (ed.), *Il Concilio Vaticano II: Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, Milano, San Paolo, 2000, 419-429, p. 423.

42. For further developments see M. QUINSKY, “*La relation entre l’histoire humaine et l’histoire du salut doit être expliquée à la lumière du mystère pascal*”: *Une contribution du synode extraordinaire de 1985 à l’horizon théologique de la réception de Vatican II*, in ID., *Katholizität der Inkarnation* (n. 25), 265-290.

43. M. LAMBERIGTS – L. KENIS (eds.), *Vatican II and Its Legacy* (BETL, 166), Leuven, Peeters, 2002; L. BOEVE – M. LAMBERIGTS – T. MERRIGAN (eds.), *The Contested Legacy of Vatican II: Lessons and Prospects* (LTPM, 43), Leuven – Paris – Bristol, CT, Peeters, 2015.

44. M. LAMBERIGTS – G. ROUTHIER – P.R. FERREIRA OLIVEIRA – C. THEOBALD – D. BOSSCHAERT (eds.), *50 Years after the Vatican II Council: Theologians from All over the World Deliberate*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, p. 43.

45. D. SCHULTHEIS, *Die Katholizität der Kirche: Versuch einer Bestimmung der dritten nota ecclesiae in der deutschsprachigen Systematischen Theologie seit dem Zweiten Vatikanum* (Bonner dogmatische Studien, 53), Würzburg, Echter, 2014.

testifies. Conceiving of Catholicity in this way is not an easy task, and therefore Gerard Philips was right to predict that “des flots d’encre”⁴⁶ would flow concerning the subject of the now famous words *subsistit in* from *Lumen gentium* 8⁴⁷. Much ink also continues to flow concerning the programmatic mention of the signs of the times in *Gaudium et spes* 4, and perhaps there is an intrinsic link between the two passages that should be explored. Indeed, by decentering any ecclesiological limitation of God, the signs of the times are one of the most fundamental notions in the Christian way of dealing with history and reality, and thus in the Christian way of dealing with the manifold concreteness that results from and aims at God’s fullness. Of course, this notion leads to complex hermeneutical challenges. Instead of establishing a hermeneutical meta-theory, one can uncover the potential of Vatican II by understanding Catholicity as mutual de-limitation. Incidentally, this understanding of Catholicity is also implied when Pope Francis states that the connection between dogma and the pastoral in Vatican II “has revolutionized to some extent the status of theology”⁴⁸.

The Pastoral Constitution insists that “the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (*Gaudium et spes* 4). In accordance with the Catholicizing dynamic of mutual de-limitation, one can not only say that the Gospel helps us to understand the signs of the times, but also that the signs of the times help us to understand the Gospel. When theologians from all over the world deliberated 50 years after Vatican II, they expressed this relationship between the signs of the times and the light of the Gospel in terms of a dynamic that also characterizes the vision of Pope Francis mentioned above:

Interpreting the “signs of the times” in the light of the Gospel and vice versa exposes the reciprocal structure of faith, and, in this way, the dialogical character of faith, as it is already expressed through the relationships it

46. Quoted from K. SCHELKENS, *Lumen gentium’s ‘subsistit in’ Revisited: The Catholic Church and Christian Unity after Vatican II*, in *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 875-893, p. 893.

47. For the theological foundations and discussions of this topic, see P. HÜNERMANN (ed.), *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die Zeichen der Zeit heute: Anstöße zur weiteren Rezeption*, Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2006; for an actualization, see LAMBERIGTS – ROUTHIER – FERREIRA OLIVEIRA – THEOBALD – BOSSCHAERT (eds.), *50 Years* (n. 44), chapter 2; for the exploration of the topic’s pastoral-theological potential, see B. HILLEBRAND, *Schön und passend? Grundlagen einer Pastoral der Zeichen der Zeit* (zeitzeichen, 36), Ostfildern, Grünewald, 2015.

48. Pope FRANCIS, *Apostolic Constitution Veritatis Gaudium on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties* 2.

targets, i.e., the relationships between the Church and the world; Christ and people; and faith and historicity⁴⁹.

Indeed, the mutual de-limitation between the signs of the times and the light of the Gospel expresses and fills out a Christian vision of reality that we have characterized as a relationship between fullness and multitude, universality and concreteness, the Trinitarian key and the common tools of reason. In a dialogical understanding of the Church, the duty imposed by mutual de-limitation is in itself contingent and historical:

Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she [the Church] can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics (*Gaudium et spes* 4).

A quite natural contribution of the church historian to this duty is to understand how each generation has dealt with the “perennial questions” (*ibid.*). Fulfilling this duty can contribute to a mutual de-limitation of past and present, which helps us to better understand the present and to discern the potential of past developments from a perspective of fullness.

At the same time, this way of dealing with history and church history within reality as a whole goes beyond a conception of history as something that is past. For understanding the present is linked to questions about the future. If *Gaudium et spes* 4 asks for a mutual de-limitation of “this present life and the life to come”, the horizon of fullness becomes the ultimate horizon of the mutual de-limitation between the signs of the times and the light of the Gospel. The abovementioned mystical dimension of faith thereby concerns not only Christian thinking, but also Christian living and first and foremost their mutual de-limitation. Christian living and thinking are thus constructively engaged in a way of dealing with the future as history that is to come, both in an inner-worldly and in an eschatological sense.

Indeed, *Gaudium et spes* 4 points out that

today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective, and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man’s religious life as well.

49. LAMBERIGTS – ROUTHIER – FERREIRA OLIVEIRA – THEOBALD – BOSSCHAERT, *50 Years* (n. 44), p. 35.

More than ever since Vatican II, it is obvious that these sentences of the Council are prophetic⁵⁰. Of course, this recognition does not mean that a historian is *eo ipso* a prophet. But in view of the Church's duty to interpret the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, it would be as unfair to exclude historical knowledge while trying to understand the present and engage the future as it would be unfair to deny that historical understanding is always influenced by questions of the present and by the more-or-less accepted ideas of the future⁵¹. Thus, considering the mutual relationship between the signs of the times and the light of the Gospel according to the threefold conception of time, we have to valorize every human life between past, present and future.

Guided by a particular curiosity for every concretion of life and faith, the church historian, perhaps more than anyone else, is aware "that we should humbly acknowledge that we cannot grasp the salvific will of God towards humanity in its fullness", but that "the interrelation between the 'signs of the times' and the 'Gospel' offers us the opportunity to enter ever more deeply into the mystery of divine love and mercy, revealed in Jesus Christ"⁵². In fact, church history is fundamentally the history of faith in Jesus Christ⁵³. As the *universale*

50. Those who accuse *Gaudium et spes* of being too optimistic should reread what follows, which sounds quite up-to-date: "As happens in any crisis of growth, this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake. Thus while man extends his power in every direction, he does not always succeed in subjecting it to his own welfare. Striving to probe more profoundly into the deeper recesses of his own mind, he frequently appears more unsure of himself. Gradually and more precisely he lays bare the laws of society, only to be paralyzed by uncertainty about the direction to give it. Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance. Although the world of today has a very vivid awareness of its unity and of how one man depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces. For political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, and with them the peril of a war which would reduce everything to ashes. True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems. Finally, man painstakingly searches for a better world, without a corresponding spiritual advancement" (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

51. That is why any reflection on present and future, especially when it occurs out of a pastoral motivation, should not neglect the insights offered by church historians; see, e.g., LAMBERIGTS, *The Dechristianisation of Europe* (n. 15).

52. LAMBERIGTS – ROUTHIER – FERREIRA OLIVEIRA – THEOBALD – BOSSCHAERT, *50 Years* (n. 44), pp. 34s.

53. Adapted from A. HOLZEM, *Praktische Theologie in der Vergangenheitsform: Die Geschichte des Christentums als Geschichte des "geglaubten Gottes"*, in D. NAUER

*concretum*⁵⁴, Jesus Christ is the incarnate interaction between universality and concretion which takes place throughout history; it is precisely this interaction which makes it possible to participate in a relationship that leads beyond history.

2. *Following Jesus the Evangelizer in History*

Indeed, within a Christian way of dealing with history and historicity the

Jesus-model is interpreted as God's vision of reality. In the story of Jesus, we see the ultimate expression of what God wants to be for human beings: a God of love, in other words, a God who wants to unleash, excite, stimulate and develop the best of what a human being can do. The God of Jesus is fortunately not a "neutral" final explanation of things, but someone who wanted to reveal himself in Jesus in concepts that are personal and accessible to people. Partly because of these two elements – person and love – this is not a God who closes off paths, or a God who for the sake of justice in his judging or condemnatory aspect has the last word, but a God who has included encouragement, understanding, and new opportunities in his program for humankind⁵⁵.

As to the future history of faith that we have just mentioned and that remains to be written, it is clear that Jesus Christ must be the center and the content of evangelization. Insofar as evangelization occurs nowadays in a pluralistic world, one must be aware that, among other things, today more than ever there can be tensions between the duty to preach the Gospel and the duty to respect others. For Christianity as the "religion

– R. BUCHER – F. WEBER (eds.), *Praktische Theologie: Bestandsaufnahmen und Zukunftsperspektiven. Ottmar Fuchs zum 60. Geburtstag* (Praktische Theologie heute, 74), Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2005, 388-397.

54. The christological impact is developed in W. LÖSER, "Universale concretum" als Grundgesetz der *oconomia revelationis*, in W. KERN – H.J. POTTMEYER – M. SECKLER (eds.), *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*. Vol. 2: *Traktat Offenbarung. Zweite, verbesserte und aktualisierte Auflage*, Tübingen, Francke, 2000, 83-93; E.-M. FABER, *Universale concretum: Zur Auslegung eines christologischen Motivs*, in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 122 (2000) 299-316.

55. LAMBERIGTS, *Geloven in de richting van* (n. 5), p. 105. "Mij spreekt in het christelijk geloof ook sterk aan dat het Jezus-model in de geschiedenis tot vandaag wordt geïnterpreteerd als Gods visie op de werkelijkheid. In het verhaal van Jezus zien wij de uitdrukking bij uitstek van wat God voor mensen wil zijn: een God van liefde, met andere woorden, een God die het beste van wat de mens zou kunnen, wil losweken, prikkelen, stimuleren en ontwikkelen. De God van Jezus is gelukkig geen 'neutrale' laatste verklaring der dingen, maar iemand die zich in Jezus in persoonlijke en voor mensen vatbare begrippen heeft willen openbaren. Mede wegens deze twee elementen – persoon en liefde – is het geen God die wegen afsluit, geen God bij wie rechtvaardigheid in zijn (ver)oordeelende component het laatste woord heeft, maar een God die bemoediging, begrip en nieuwe kansen heeft ingeschreven in zijn programma voor de mens".

of the Gospel”⁵⁶, this fact is especially true with respect to other religions, and that is why Mathijs Lamberigts is right to remember the central insights of Vatican II:

It remains true that even in countries where all the conditions are present for a true dialogue in freedom, because of growing cultural relativism and pluralism and social fragmentation, religious disinterest is growing or, even worse, divisions within Christian communities are growing. In such a context there is a constant temptation to close the windows and look back to the past, an idealized past that never existed, for in that case it would still exist. But it also remains true that time and again people are searching for meaning, for truth, for religious truth, a truth which is, for Christians, not a doctrine but a person, the one who is the way, the truth and life, the one we are waiting for. That is what we confess, that is what inspires our daily life and actions, that is why we must preach the Gospel, but we must do it in all humility and with respect for other religions⁵⁷.

It goes without saying that this way of dealing with history includes the necessity of multifarious studies, personal encounters, and a real openness of the heart, as Pope Francis and Imam Ahmed Mohamed Al-Tayyeb pointed out in the declaration of Abu Dhabi in 2019⁵⁸.

In order to deal with these and other future challenges of Christian living and thinking, church history is particularly conscious that Christian living and thinking is a dynamic of *Nachfolge*⁵⁹. Of course it is right to say that being a Christian means entering into a relationship with Jesus Christ. One should nevertheless not neglect the simple fact that

56. C. GEFFRÉ, *Le christianisme comme religion de l'Évangile* (Théologies), Paris, Cerf, 2012.

57. M. LAMBERIGTS, *Vatican II, Non-Christian Religions and the Challenges for (New) Evangelization Programmes*, in P. GORGAN – K. KIM (eds.), *The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context and Practice*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016, 15-29, pp. 28-29. See also M.L. FITZGERALD – J. BORELLI, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 2006, pp. 38s.

58. Pope FRANCIS – AHMAD AL-TAYYEB, *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019* (http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html). On this groundbreaking document, see F. KÖRNER, *Die Geschwisterlichkeit aller Menschen: Theologisch-islamwissenschaftlicher Kommentar zum Dokument von Abu Dhabi*, in *Stimmen der Zeit* 8 (2019) 605-618.

59. I use this German word in the way that does C. THEOBALD, *Le christianisme comme style: Une manière de faire de la théologie en postmodernité* (Cogitatio fidei, 261), Paris, Cerf, 2007, vol. 2, p. 809: “...dans nos sociétés différenciées et pluralistes, l’identité chrétienne ne peut ... se décider qu’‘à la suite’ (Nachfolge) du Christ, par la proposition effective d’un style de vie messianique, lequel se manifeste dans des figures de vie réussie capables de se situer à la fois face à l’agnosticisme politique et au sein d’une multiplicité de manières de concevoir l’existence humaine”.

Jesus lived 2000 years ago⁶⁰. *Nachfolge* expresses quite well this historical relation between Jesus on the one hand and his past, present, and future followers on the other. Throughout history, Christians follow Jesus as the one who evangelizes both the countless relations between God and humanity and the relationships between human beings. Jesus' words and deeds, his death and resurrection provide content and meaning for the relationality at the center of any Christian vision of reality and any Catholic way of life. In this sense, within the very differentiation and plurality, the Incarnation (including Cross and Resurrection) becomes an interpretation of history and is itself interpreted by history⁶¹. In history every perception and understanding of Jesus Christ that is entertained by Christians is itself humanly concrete⁶². Following Jesus is ever concrete but implies a universal horizon. Both the concreteness and the universal horizon stimulate curiosity, and both de-limit each other. This mutual de-limitation is also true for the way of dealing with "God's vision of reality" that is revealed in Jesus Christ and which human beings are invited to make their own (in a human way).

Beyond the innumerable personal stories of followers of Jesus as the Christ, the fundamental paradox of the Christian faith that results from following Jesus Christ – namely, the interrelationship between universality and concretion – leads to a double challenge. On the one hand, it is impossible to think in large enough terms about the relational dynamic of evangelization. Thus, within a Christian vision of reality, evangelization is a Christ-inspired relationship with the other⁶³ and a Jesus-inspired relationship with the other is evangelization. This understanding of

60. M. QUINSKY, *Aggiornamento vor Ort – christliches Leben und Denken in der Welt von heute und morgen*, in M. WIJLENS (ed.), *Die wechselseitige Rezeption zwischen Ortskirche und Universalkirche: Das Zweite Vatikanum und die Kirche im Osten Deutschlands* (Erfurter Theologische Schriften, 46), Würzburg, Echter, 2014, 125-149.

61. M. QUINSKY, *Inkarnation: Jesus Christus – Ermöglichung und Herausforderung christlichen Lebens und Denkens*, in ID., *Katholizität der Inkarnation* (n. 25), 189-236; ID., *Die Inkarnation – "nur ein Faktum" ?! Christlicher Realismus jenseits des Faktischen und Postfaktischen*, in K. RUHSTORFER (ed.), *Zwischen Progression und Regression: Streit um den Weg der katholischen Kirche*, Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2019, 184-205. See also K. RUHSTORFER, *Von der Geschichte der Christologie zur Christologie der Geschichte*, in ID. (ed.), *Christologie* (utb, 4942), Paderborn, Schöningh, 2018, 215-377, pp. 369s.; ID., *"...und der Logos wurde Fleisch" (Joh 1,14): Zur Tiefenstruktur der europäischen Geistesgeschichte*, in M. KIRSCHNER – K. RUHSTORFER (eds.), *Die gegenwärtige Krise Europas: Theologische Antwortversuche* (Quaestiones disputatae, 291), Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2018, 138-160.

62. T. MERRIGAN – J. HAERS (eds.), *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology* (BETL, 152), Leuven, Peeters, 2000.

63. LAMBERIGTS – ROUTHIER – FERREIRA OLIVEIRA – THEOBALD – BOSSCHAERT, *50 Years* (n. 44), p. 36.

evangelization leads to discerning how exactly the universality we seek becomes concrete and how it opens up a new perspective on the history of humankind:

In fact, if the “relationality” installed by the Gospel as a dimension of salvation is at the centre of Christian life and thought, Christianity has to be questioned on the reality of salvation itself in human history, beyond the encounter with the Gospel message as such. It has to do with an understanding of humanity’s whole history as a history of God and human beings⁶⁴.

On the other hand, it must be clear that this evangelization-relationalisation is not about blindsiding the other. On the contrary, such an approach accords the other a unique value that has to be discovered, respected, and even promoted. As noticed in the promising reflections on the *pastorale d’engendrement* as a Christian *habitus*, Jesus Christ himself by no means made disciples of all the people he evangelized, and many of them never appear in the New Testament again⁶⁵. And as Lieven Boeve shows in a far-reaching line of argument, the New Testament finds it noteworthy that Jesus Christ, God’s “interrupter”⁶⁶, was himself interrupted by the Canaanite or Syro-Phoenician woman (Mt 15,21-28; Mc 7,24-30)⁶⁷. This de-limitation challenges fundamental theology, church history, and the relationship between them.

III. A CATHOLIC HISTORIOGRAPHY?

1. *The Gospel in History – the History of the Gospel*

Since it is quite obvious that there is no such thing as Catholic physics or Catholic mathematics, one can legitimately ask if there is a specifically Catholic way to deal with the humanities and thus with history and historicity. The mutual de-limitation between the signs of the times and the light of the Gospel leads to a mutual de-limitation of the Gospel and history. On the one hand, one cannot reduce the history of the world and even the history of Christianity to a history of the Gospel. On the contrary, in light of the Gospel, the unevangelical aspects of the world’s

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 37s.

65. C. THEOBALD, *C’est aujourd’hui le “moment favorable” : Pour un diagnostic théologique du temps présent*, in P. BACQ – C. THEOBALD (eds.), *Une nouvelle chance pour l’Évangile: Pour une pastorale d’engendrement*, Bruxelles, Lumen Vitae, 2004, 47-72, p. 67.

66. BOEVE, *Interrupting Tradition* (n. 23), p. 145.

67. BOEVE, *God Interrupts History* (n. 25), p. 206.

living and thinking and of the living and thinking of individual Christians and the Church as a whole are even more prominent. In this sense, the Gospel is the most radical critic of Christianity and Christendom imaginable, and any rereading of the history of faith, which is also a history of sin, becomes a call to redemption and conversion. On the other hand, we cannot reduce the history of the world and of the Church to a process in which the Gospel is purely exterior. On the contrary, it might be part of a specifically Christian way of dealing with history to discern whether and in which way the Gospel has influenced history in general as well as particular histories. The Gospel opens our eyes to an existential dimension of history and of particular histories that goes beyond any human historical limitations.

In this paradoxical dynamic of mutual de-limitations of the Gospel and history lies the key for a specifically Christian way of dealing with history both as past and as future. While it is true that a certain kind of master narrative is no longer possible in historiography, and hence in understanding the world in which we live⁶⁸, it is also true that we need to reflect on the difficult topic of salvation history or the economy of salvation⁶⁹. The Christian master narrative, resulting from the dynamic of a paradoxical mutual de-limitation of the universal and the concrete, consists in according value to all the countless histories of humans. In other words, one has to conceive of salvation history or the economy of salvation by recognizing that “tout homme est une histoire sacrée”⁷⁰. Humanly speaking, this requirement is as necessary as it is impossible. But the requirement shows that when Catholic curiosity is first and foremost an encompassing interest in the neighbor, this very interest opens

68. On the one hand, one could add here that the important book first published in 1992, F. FUKUYAMA, *The End of History and the Last Man: With a New Afterword*, London, Penguin, 2006, already belongs itself to history. On the other hand, one should not neglect the theological questions arising from such essays as Y.N. HARARI, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, London, Harvill Secker, 2014.

69. See above n. 42; see also M. QUINSKY, *Tradition and Normativity of History within an “Economy of Salvation”*, in ID., *Katholizität der Inkarnation* (n. 25), 327-344. It would be interesting to compare Claude Geffré’s intuition of a “histoire du salut différenciée” (C. GEFFRÉ, *De Babel à Pentecôte: Essais de théologie interreligieuse* [Cognitio fidei, 247], Paris, Cerf, 2006, p. 64) with the intuitions developed in F. KÖRNER, *Religionstheologie als Geschichtstheologie: Dogmatischer Vorschlag*, in G. DE CANDIA – P. NOUZILLE (eds.), *Sancta morum elegantia stile e motivi di un pensare teologico: Miscellanea offerta a Elmar Salmann*, St. Ottilien, EOS, 2018, 535-541.

70. On this famous phrase of Patrice La Tour du Pin (1911-1975), known in the French liturgy as the refrain of a chant written by Jo Akepsimas, see M.-J. LE HAN, *La structure liturgique dans Une somme de poésie de Patrice La Tour du Pin*, in M. BERCOT – C. MAYAUX (eds.), *Poésie et liturgie: XIX^e-XX^e siècles* (Littérature et langue françaises, 1), Bern, Peter Lang, 2006, 153-166, p. 154.

up the horizon of fullness in which a Catholic way of dealing with history becomes possible. This way of dealing with history is an intrinsic part of theology. In this sense, one can subscribe to Marie-Dominique Chenu's judgement: "Une histoire parfaite de la théologie aboutirait, s'il en existait une, à une théologie de l'histoire"⁷¹. And therefore, beyond its character as a historical science, historiography becomes in a very precise sense theology, even if theology is more than historiography.

2. *Historians and Theologians – and Philosophers?*

Christians not only believe that every human being is part of the history between God and humankind, Christians also take into account that they themselves are involved in the (past) history they investigate and in the (future) history they construct with their fellow human beings. Mathijs Lamberigts states: "I also believe because I can subscribe to an approachable and moving history: interest in the history of man(kind) presupposes the belief that this man(kind) in its many manifestations is fascinating for us today and can hold up before us a meaningful mirror"⁷². This recognition de-limits one's own situation and one's own living and thinking:

The thought of my enrolling in a history is very important to me personally. I find particularly inspiring and encouraging for my faith the way in which many men and women in our history have continued to give shape to the Christian faith in its purest form, often contrary to common practices⁷³.

It is not inconvenient that a church historian is personally involved in the subject of church history. Such involvement rather makes of necessity a virtue in that within the communion of believers from all times, church history operates as a "communal understanding of history"⁷⁴. In this

71. M.-D. CHENU, *Avant-propos*, in ID., *La théologie au douzième siècle. Préface d'Étienne Gilson, de l'Académie Française* (Études de philosophie médiévale, 45), Paris, Vrin, 1957, 11-15, p. 14.

72. LAMBERIGTS, *Geloven in de richting van* (n. 5), p. 106: "Geloven doe ik dus ook omdat ik me kan inschrijven in een aanspreekbare en aangrijpende geschiedenis: interesse voor de geschiedenis van de mens(heid) veronderstelt het geloof dat deze mens(heid) in haar vele verschijningsvormen voor ons vandaag boeiend is en ons een zinvolle spiegel kan voorhouden".

73. *Ibid.*, p. 105: "De gedachte dat ik me inschrijf in een geschiedenis vind ik persoonlijk erg belangrijk. Beklijvend en bemoedigend voor mijn geloof vind ik met name de wijze waarop in onze geschiedenis vele mannen en vrouwen het christelijke geloof in zijn puurste vorm – vaak tegen gangbare praktijken in – constant gestalte zijn blijven geven".

74. QUINSKY, *Geschichtlicher Glaube* (n. 11), pp. 62-67, 135-139, developing an intuition of CHENU, *Avant-propos* (n. 71), p. 14, who speaks of a "communion de la foi" as a dimension of the history of theology and of the "tradition vivante", which was, incidentally, one of Yves Congar's favorite topics.

sense, one can fully apply what Marie-Dominique Chenu stated in his programmatic essay *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*: “Une théologie digne de ce nom, c’est une spiritualité qui a trouvé des instruments rationnels adéquats à son expérience religieuse”⁷⁵.

As Christians, we believe that within this very history, the experiences of faith have their own dignity. And just as they are insightful for philosophy, as claimed by Jürgen Habermas⁷⁶, they can also be insightful for historiography. In this sense historiographical objectivity not only does not impede a Christian understanding of history, but can even stimulate insights into faith. Within a mutual de-limitation, both approaches have their rights and can question each other. In a historical dialogue between faith and the world, concreteness de-limits universality and universality de-limits concreteness.

This understanding of historiography leads us to a final point: the relationship between historiography and philosophy. As someone who became an outstanding church historian and fundamental theologian *sui generis*, Yves Congar (1904-1995) combined the curiosity described by his friend Chenu and the Catholicity which Congar himself helped to rediscover⁷⁷. Even so, while he may be an inspiring model for Catholic curiosity, he was also accused of ignoring philosophy⁷⁸. Of course, this kind of reproach can refer to real questions, but it can also be rather cheap. For the strength of Congar’s fundamental theology lies in its being a historical way of thinking whose Catholicity is not limited by any philosophy. That said, while the relationship between history, theology, and philosophy has itself a very complex history – as the example of Congar’s own theological (and spiritual) school at its best shows⁷⁹ – Catholic curiosity does not mean underestimating philosophical insights. Instead Catholic curiosity is open to the specific potential of every philosophy. A “dowser”⁸⁰ such as Congar showed the philosophical potential of

75. CHENU, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* (n. 12), pp. 148s.

76. J. HABERMAS – J. RATZINGER, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion. Überarbeitete Neuausgabe*, ed. F. SCHULLER, Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2018; see also T. RENNER, *Postsäkulare Gesellschaft und Religion: Zum Spätwerk von Jürgen Habermas* (Freiburger theologische Studien, 183), Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2017.

77. On this topic see, among others, J. FAMERÉE – G. ROUTHIER, *Yves Congar* (Initiation aux théologiens), Paris, Cerf, 2008, pp. 57-79.

78. M.-J. LE GUILLOU, *Yves Congar*, in R. VANDER GUCHT – H. VORGRIMLER (eds.), *Bilanz der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert*. Vol. 4: *Bahnbrechende Theologen*, Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 1970, 181-199, p. 198.

79. M. QUISINSKY, *Philosophie et théologie: Quelques intuitions du père Chenu revisitées par ses héritiers*, in Id., *Katholizität der Inkarnation* (n. 25), 150-170.

80. For the characterization of Congar as “dowser” (“Wünschelrutengänger”), see H. LEGRAND, *Yves Congar. Leidenschaft für die Einheit: Einige Anmerkungen zu seinen*

Catholic curiosity at its best. Moreover, now that modern and postmodern philosophy seem more and more exhausted by their own success⁸¹, it is more and more plausible that the Christian faith not only has to be considered in line with philosopher x or y but also that fundamentally, Christian faith can be strengthened by a variety of even postmodern philosophical insights and can itself strengthen them. In other words, by being open to philosophy, theology as an expression of faith also has something to say to philosophy. In a certain way, a “Catholic realism”⁸² shows that the philosophical question of reality and realism transcends philosophy. In dialogue with the philosophy of all ages and times, but also in touch with the concrete life of people throughout ages and times, a historian is therefore someone whose curiosity is and can be particularly Catholic.

EPILOGUE –

CATHOLIC CURIOSITY AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN CHURCH HISTORY AND FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

Catholic curiosity opens up to all humanly possible insights. Mutual de-limitation as a definition of the term “Catholic” means that theology can serve as the science that deals with all these insights in a radical openness to God (and to the question of God), as well as to the fullness of life that God supplies (and to belief in that fullness). Within such a theology, which can after all be conceived of as a “life science”⁸³, church history not only values every single moment in human history, but in so doing, theology also fosters openness to fullness throughout human history. Church history can lead to Catholic curiosity, and Catholic curiosity can lead to church history. As a part and an expression of Catholic curiosity, church history can be a kind of fundamental theology⁸⁴.

Einsichten und zu seiner Hermeneutik, in *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 113 (2004) 223-246, p. 229 and p. 240.

81. RUHSTORFER, *Befreiung des “Katholischen”* (n. 22).

82. M. QUINSINSKY, *L’intellectus fidei à l’heure du “Nouveau réalisme” : Une perspective œcuménique sur le dialogue entre théologie et philosophie?*, in *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 92 (2018) 201-219; ID., *Die Inkarnation – “nur ein Faktum” ?* (n. 61).

83. M. QUINSINSKY, *“Lebensfülle” – Ermöglichung und Herausforderung einer Theologie als “Lebenswissenschaft”* (forthcoming).

84. See *pars pro toto* M. DELGADO, *Auf dem Weg zu einer fundamentaltheologischen Kirchengeschichte*, in A.R. BATLOGG – M. DELGADO – R.A. SIEBENROCK (eds.), *Was den Glauben in Bewegung bringt: Fundamentaltheologie in der Spur Jesu Christi. Festschrift für Karl H. Neufeld SJ*, Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2004, 338-350.

Indeed, when it brings to our conscious awareness that every “recontextualization”⁸⁵ in history is contingent, thus clarifying the recontextualization itself and its conceptualization, church history is fundamental theology. When it opens and holds open our conception of the mutual de-limitation of universality and concreteness, church history is fundamental theology. When it advocates for Catholicity, church history is fundamental theology. Finally, church history as fundamental theology helps us to explore the mystical depth that Catholic curiosity, with its dynamic of ongoing mutual de-limitations, can generate and nourish. In this sense, too, the history of the faith belongs to the faith itself⁸⁶.

Incidentally, the connection between church history and fundamental theology becomes obvious when one reads Pope Francis’ mystical way of dealing with history in *Laudato si*⁸⁷ and compares that approach to his foundations for theology, where historical and fundamental-theological thinking mingle in a mutual de-limitation⁸⁸. Of course, if the fullness is God’s fullness, then the human search for fullness has its limitations and its all-too human aspects. The same is true of curiosity. The word “Catholic” thus also requires being honest about the negative aspects of curiosity, as they were described by Augustine as well as by Thomas, and in more recent days by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)⁸⁹. The word “Catholic” also means being curious about unbelief and skepticism as part of human life and of faith: “Augustine or Theresa, for example, teach us a lot about the power of unbelief and skepticism, about the quest that can only lead to faith when it proceeds from a recognition of one’s own

85. BOEVE, *God Interrupts History* (n. 25), pp. 30-49.

86. I think one can extend the (theologically and spiritually) programmatic sentence in CHENU, *Avant-propos* (n. 71), p. 14: “Ainsi, en quelque manière, l’histoire de la théologie est intérieure à la théologie même”. On the notion of history used in this context, see also X. DEBILLY, *La théologie au creuset de l’histoire: Marie-Dominique Chenu et son travail avec la Mission de France* (Cogitatio fidei, 304), Paris, Cerf, 2018, pp. 135-220; on the notion of faith to which I here refer, see J.A. BERRY, *Yves Congar’s Vision of Faith* (Tesi Gregoriana. Serie Teologia, 242), Roma, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2019.

87. See above.

88. On his respective foundational statements, see M. QUINSKY, *Prolegomena einer Theologie als Lebenswissenschaft “auf der Grenze” : Papst Franziskus und die theologische Erkenntnistheorie*, in *Theologie und Glaube* 107 (2017) 137-156. Meanwhile, Francis’ concept of theology is also developed in *Veritatis Gaudium* (Pope FRANCIS, *Apostolic Constitution Veritatis Gaudium on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties*, among others nos. 2-4) and *Id.*, *Meeting on the Theme “Theology after Veritatis Gaudium in the Context of the Mediterranean”*, Promoted by the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy – San Luigi Section – of Naples. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, Naples, Friday, 21 June 2019 (http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco_20190621_tologia-napoli.html).

89. SCHRÖER, *Neugierde* (n. 14), col. 759.

limitations”⁹⁰. The word “Catholic” also means that doubts and questions are a part of faith. In a personal vein, Mathijs Lamberigts relates the following:

It goes without saying that the “yes” tendencies in my life do not place the “no” department out of the picture. The pain and suffering far and near remain hard nuts for me to crack. Of course, much of this pain and suffering can be explained by historical factuality... But the day when a baby dies of sudden infant death syndrome or when I learn that a friend is terminally ill – and there are more of such days than I would like – my faith inclines in the direction of “I can’t believe that” (with the ablative), because that, too, belongs to the experiences and duties of the *credo in* plus the accusative⁹¹.

This *credo* has many expressions. As to theology, one can conceive of it as applied faith⁹². When one has the joy of doing theology with the theologian Mathijs Lamberigts, one experiences his Catholic curiosity, which leads him to ask the right questions. In many discussions, the questions are more important than the answers for advancing the whole discussion and generating insights far beyond the answer to a specific question. This ability to ask the right questions makes of a church historian a fundamental theologian, one who helps fellow Christians and theologians become more curious and thus more Catholic – and vice versa.

Katholische Hochschule Freiburg
Karlstr. 63
DE-79104 Freiburg
Germany
michael.quisinsky@kh-freiburg.de

Michael QUISINSKY

90. LAMBERIGTS, *Geloven in de richting van* (n. 5), p. 106. “Augustinus of Theresia leren ons bijvoorbeeld veel over de macht van ongelooft en scepticisme, over de zoektocht die slechts vanuit die erkenning van de eigen beperktheid tot geloof kan leiden”.

91. *Ibid.*, pp. 107s. “Het hoeft geen betoog dat de ja-tendensen in mijn leven de neen-afdeling niet buitenspel zetten. De pijn en het lijden veraf en dichtbij blijven voor mij harde noten om te kraken. Natuurlijk is veel van deze pijn en dit lijden te verklaren vanuit de historische feitelijkheid ... Maar de dag dat een baby sterft aan wiegendood of dat ik verneem dat een vriend terminaal ziek is – en zulke dagen zijn er meer dan me lief is – neigt mijn geloof al eens in de richting van het ‘Ik kan niet geloven dat’ (met ablatief), want ook dat zit in het leef- en takenpakket van het *credo in* + accusatief”.

92. M. QUISINSKY, *Theologie als angewandter Glaube: Ökumenische Impulse zur gesellschaftlichen Verantwortung christlichen Lebens und Denkens*, in *Catholica* 72 (2018) 215-230.