

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*This 3 article post comes from The Catholic Thing. I put Fr. Weinandy's contribution first simply because it is the clearest of the 3 to explain the ambiguities and argument fallacies of the latest papal motu proprio, an opinion of Pope Francis.*

*All popes are to confirm the bishops in the faith given by Jesus, and to guide the people in the teachings of Jesus.*

*When a pope speaks on his own, and if it is confusing, ambiguous, and logically fallacious, it does not require assent and reception of the faithful.*

*It may not have been written by him personally, but it still bears His approval.*

*Jesus Christ left us a church to draw us to faith in Him.*

*Sometimes senior clergy make their own church to draw us to faith in themselves.*

## **Pope's 'Paradigm' Shift in Theology**

### **The Doing of 'Catholic' Theology**

Thomas G. Weinandy OFM Cap.

Pope Francis's Apostolic Letter in the form of a *Motu Proprio* (that is, by his own authority), ***Ad theologiam promovendam (To Promote Theology)***, was written as the approved new statutes for the Pontifical Academy of Theology. It contains many beautiful, appealing, and lofty ideals. As with much of what Pope Francis says and writes, however, confusion and ambiguity abound.

For example, Francis makes the following statements (all quotations are from an unofficial copyrighted translation provided by Anthony Stine.)

- **Future theology “cannot be limited to abstractly re-proposing formulas and schemes from the past.”**

- It cannot be “desk theology.”
- Theology must be “synodal, missionary and ‘outgoing.’”
- Theologians must be aware of “a paradigm shift,” and therefore must be in “dialogue” with different “cultures”, “different denominations and different religions.”
- Theology is to be “transdisciplinary,” that is, it must “make use of new categories elaborated by other knowledges.”
- Moreover, “ecclesial synodality therefore commits theologians to do theology in a synodal form, promoting among themselves the capacity to listen, dialogue, discern and integrate the multiplicity and variety of stances and inputs.”
- Theology seeks the truth in love, and thus it must “not be abstract or ideological.” Rather, it is to be “spiritual, elaborated on its knees. . .and attentive to the voice of the people.”
- Theology is to be “inductive,” “bottom up,” in that it must consider “different contexts and concrete situations in which peoples are inserted.”
- Theologians are to know “people’s common sense.” People have “so many images of God, often not corresponding to the Christian face of God.” These divine images must, in love, “only and always be privileged first of all.”

Now, on one level, most of the above could be taken in a positive sense and acknowledged as true. Who would deny that theology must be life-giving to our present cultures, to be evangelistic, and to consider the concrete situations in which contemporary people find themselves? The problem is that Pope Francis both **sets up false straw-men that can easily be refuted**, and he equally characterizes theologians and their doing of theology in a manner that is both **misleading and false**.

**To read Francis, one would think that previous Catholic theology was abstract, formulistic, and non-**

**pastoral. And that only now, because of Francis's encouragement, will theologians and theology make a change for the better. This characterization of past Catholic theology, however, is absolutely erroneous.**

From the time of the apostolic father, Ignatius of Antioch, Catholic theology has been pastorally academic. Irenaeus, the Apologists, Cyril of Jerusalem, the Cappadocians, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria, Catholic theologians have addressed the theological issues of the day, and they have done so to further the spiritual and moral life of their flocks. The same is true of Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Aquinas, and the entire scholastic tradition. Numerous contemporary theologians have continued this tradition – such as Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Moreover, the theologies of all the above theologians were imbued with Sacred Scripture. Scripture itself gave rise to theology and was its life-source. Likewise, these theologians did not attempt to change the Church's perennial, apostolic, magisterial tradition and teaching. Rather, they desired to advance, develop, and foster it – to plumb the depths of what was revealed, and what the Church taught. Again, they did so that bishops, priests, and laity alike could glory in these marvelous realities – the living and life-giving mysteries of faith.

**Yes, over the centuries, Ecumenical Councils and theologians have employed technical language, but they have done so for pastoral reasons.** The Council of Nicaea declared that the Son of God was *homoousion*, that is, of the same substance, with the Father, but it did so to ensure that it was truly the Son of God incarnate, Jesus, who suffered and died for our sins and rose bodily from the dead for our salvation.

Yes, theologians and the Council of Trent employed the term transubstantiation, but did so to express correctly that the Eucharistic bread and wine was truly changed into the risen body and risen blood of Jesus. What could be more life-giving than

these mysteries of faith? They are not dead, lifeless, abstract doctrines.

**The irony is that Francis's promotion of a new way of doing theology contains no actual theological, doctrinal, or moral content. His support for a "new way" of doing theology is vacuous.**

A further ambiguity needs to be addressed. Pope Francis is keen on consulting the faithful in the doing of theology. "The faithful," however, appears to entail all people – even those who have false images of God. The *sensus fidelium* is composed, by its very nature, of those lay people who are faithful to what the Church teaches. Because they believe what the Church teaches, they are authentic guides and witnesses to the faith and its future authentic development.

**Those who do not believe, or hold erroneous positions, or desire to change the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church are, *ipso facto*, not part of the *sensus fidelium*.** Francis appears to refuse to make this crucial distinction – everyone is to have a voice in the synodal Church regardless of whether they have authentic faith.

Lastly, Pope Francis proposes the need for a "paradigm shift" in theology. This is, again, an ambiguous and confusing proposal. **There can be no authentic paradigm shift without being faithful to upholding and promoting what the Church has authentically taught through the centuries.** What has been previously taught and believed cannot now be said to be erroneous, and what is newly offered cannot be considered a legitimate development. In the end, a "paradigm shift" is a false notion, for, by its very nature, it demands a radical and destructive change of what went before.

**Hidden in Francis's ambiguous and confusing proposal for a new way of doing theology, though in a**

sense not hidden at all, is his desire to foster his own theological ideology – the changing of the Church’s doctrinal and moral teaching. Although Francis cannot make these changes himself, for the Spirit will not allow him to do so, yet he provides the opportunity and incentive for others to attempt to do so – those theologians who are of the same mind as he is.

**Sadly, this endeavor will cause great confusion among the faithful – the very sheep that Francis was appointed to protect and guide.**

### **Where is the New Theology Headed?**

Eduardo Echeverria

Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter, *Ad theologiam promovendam*, raises the question, “What is the new theology, and where is it headed?” I say “new” because Francis claims that theology is at a turning point, requiring a “paradigm shift” because the “signs of the time” are such that the epistemological and methodological foundations of theology must be rethought.

Perhaps we can get a sense of the “new” paradigm by contrasting it with the “old” paradigm.

The practice of Christian theology in the “old” paradigm, according to John Paul II, presupposes the twofold methodological principle: the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. With the former, theology holds to be true the content of revelation “as this has been gradually expounded in Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church’s living Magisterium. With the second, theology seeks to respond through speculative inquiry to the specific demands of disciplined thought.”

Faith seeks a disciplined understanding (*intellectus fidei*) of the truths of revelation, and this principle of *intellectus fidei* is expressive of the dynamism of faith seeking understanding (*fides*

*quarens intellectum*) that is found in a correlation of faith and objective revelation. Inherent, then, within the very nature of Christian revelation is this principle, said then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “theological science responds to the invitation of truth as it seeks to understand the faith.”

The corollary of this theological quest for insight is the *auditus fidei*: “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” (Rom 10:17) This, too, belongs to the “old” paradigm. Theology, then, is the disciplined exploration of the content of revelation, with an intellectual discipline that involves human reason, illuminated by faith attaining a certain understanding of the mysteries of faith.

In the “new” paradigm, there is a new “*way*” to do theology, according to Francis, namely, theology is contextual, relational, dialogical, and sapiential. The last three aspects are presupposed by the “old” paradigm. Francis’s call, however, for a “fundamentally contextual theology” is problematic, evoking a relativist view of truth.

Francis doesn’t actually say what the “new” paradigm is, but we get a hint in the opening sentence: “To promote theology in the future, one cannot limit oneself to abstractly re-proposing formulas and schemes from the past.” What does Francis mean? He doesn’t say. Elsewhere he says, “For truth is not an abstract idea, but is Jesus himself.”

We might think that Francis is rightly insisting that truth itself must be authenticated existentially – that is, lived out, practiced, carried out – and hence cannot be reduced to propositional truth, to being merely believed, asserted, and claimed. St. John Paul II once said, “No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: *I am with you!*” But Francis leaves unanswered – and does so consistently – the question of how both asserted truth and lived truth, the *fides quae creditur*, the faith *which* one believes, the propositional content, the beliefs which one holds to be true,

affirms, and asserts, and the *fides qua creditur*, the faith *with which* one believes, belong to the nature of faith as a whole.

Indeed, Francis' opening statement on truth vs. abstract ideas, and his statement that the practice of theology should not be about "abstractly re-proposing formulas and schemes," reminds me of Aquinas' consideration of the question whether the object of faith is a proposition or God. Francis seems implicitly to be putting a similar choice before us. Aquinas, however, argues that this choice is a specious one. Our faith is in both propositions and in the reality of the divine Word, Jesus Christ.

What is, then, an abstract idea? Francis does not say, but I think we must say that abstract ideas are propositions that we assert to be true, and the *context* does not determine the truth-status of the proposition. For example, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), or "Christ is risen from the dead." (1 Cor 15:20)

What about the truth-status of dogmatic formulations? Are the truths of faith expressed in the creedal statements of Nicaea and Chalcedon, or more particularly, orthodoxy, just "ideas," mere theory, mere thoughts or mere sets of words, abstract formulas and schemes, altogether separate from God, or do they convey or grasp divine reality itself, the truth about that reality, fulfilling the truth-attaining capacity of the human mind to lay hold of divine reality?

On the "old" paradigm, the truth-status of these propositions are, if true, such that they will be true always and everywhere. It is not the *context* that determines the truth-status of their propositional content; rather, reality itself determines the truth or falsity of a proposition. A doctrinal proposition is true, if and only if, what that proposition asserts is in fact the case about objective reality; otherwise, the proposition is false.

In a 1946 article, "Where is the New Theology Headed?," Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, put before the *nouveaux théologiens*, e.g., Henri Bouillard, Maurice Blondel, *et al*, the

choice between different accounts of truth: “[D]oes truth depend on its conformity with the measure of human knowledge in a given day” or “on its conformity to the reality of things as they are.” The former is contextual and hence entails a relativist view of truth; the latter is a realist view of truth, also known as a correspondence view. (see *Fides et Ratio*, no. 82)

In my view, Garrigou-Lagrange was mistaken about the *nouvelle théologie*, but he did raise an important question, which I now raise about Francis’s “new” paradigm. His emphasis on contextual theology, encourages a relativist view of truth, which is supported by his skepticism about “absolute” truth (see his “Letter to a Non-Believer” and a “Message of Pope Francis for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day”). His depreciation of both propositional truth and realism are problematic aspects of the “new” paradigm.

So, which is it? Does the “new” paradigm substitute the traditional definition of truth: *adaequatio rei et intellectus* [the adequation of intellect and reality], for the subjective definition: *adaequatio realis mentis et vitae* [the adequation of intellect and life]?” Only the former will enable us to promote the future of theology.

## **What’s It Really About?**

Larry Chapp

Pope Francis has released a new “*Motu Proprio*” about how to do theology in the modern context, *Ad theologiam promovendam* <sup>[1]</sup>, which makes the case that theology must no longer be from a “desk” and must no longer be merely “abstractly re-proposing formulas and schemes of the past.” Theology must



now be inductive and take into account the lived experience of believers and non-believers alike. Theology must not be “abstract” and deal in such lifeless constructions; instead, it needs to ground itself more explicitly “in the conditions in which men and women daily live.”

Who could possibly object to this vision? Nobody really, which is strange since *Motu proprio* rarely get written, if ever, in order simply to reiterate what has already been said many times and to reinforce the status quo of well-established practices. Therefore, we are justified in asking what this new document from the pope is really all about and what, specifically, it is criticizing, and what it is promoting.

Indeed, it is instructive to note the pope himself states quite explicitly that with this new *Motu proprio*, aimed at the reform of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, that he desires to initiate a new “paradigm shift” in theology which takes account of the massive cultural revolution we are undergoing. So he is, at least in his own mind, proposing that there is something deficient in the status quo of theology and that things need to change.

The document does not give us many details about what all of this means, and so perhaps it does not mean much at all and we should just all move along since there is “nothing to see here.” But I think it is actually not very hard at all to discern what the pope is asking for when one reads the document in the light of the history of modern Catholic theology, the overall pastoral decisions of this papacy, and the recently completed Synod on Synodality.

The first thing to note is that as it stands the text sets up a ridiculous straw-man caricature of the current state of Catholic academic theology. Ever since the eclipse of neo-scholastic approaches to theology in the post-conciliar era, there have been almost no mainstream theologians, of any theological persuasion, who have done theology in a rationalistic and deductive manner. So thorough has this eclipse been that there are now strident traditionalist voices in the Church calling for its return and

lamenting its demise in the first place. Nor have they been merely “repeating” the formulas of the past in rote fashion, devoid of creative development.

So when the pope criticizes the theological guild for being insufficiently oriented to Mystery, overly wedded to rationalist deduction, and too prone to merely repeating the past, one has to wonder what he is talking about.

The sad and simple fact of the matter is that this is a false straw-man caricature and that very, very few theologians fall under its negative judgment. This is where embedding the *Motu proprio* in the broad arc of modern Catholic thought is instructive. Because the ideas for the “paradigm shift” in theology to which he is alluding are not pure inventions of this papacy and have a well-established pedigree in the Church over the past 60 years.

Two approaches to the categories of contextualized enculturation and subjective appropriation of the faith emerged in the post-conciliar era. One side, which we can loosely designate as “*Communio*” theologians (to which Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI belonged) argued that culture and subjective experience must be paid attention to and used as templates for doing theology. But both needed to be “sifted” and “tested” by the truths of Revelation as interpreted by the perennial teaching of the Church in order to adjudicate between elements that are true manifestations of genuine faith and elements that are distortions of that faith.

In other words, the truth of Christ leads the way and comes first and must be the only metric for judging the viability of modern “experience” as a vehicle for an ongoing development of doctrine.

The other approach can be loosely designated as “*Concilium*” theology, which was characterized by an opposite rendering of the interplay between faith, culture, and experience. Self-described as “contextual” and “correlational,” it began with modern culture

and experience and granted to it a normativity hitherto unheard of in Catholic theology.

These approaches were often animated by a runaway Rahnerian theology of grace where all worldly structures and all persons are always already imbued with the salvific presence of God even without acceptance of the Gospel. Therefore, theology was to begin with the assumption that the Holy Spirit is present without qualification in culture and experience and that God's Revelation in Christ must now be interpreted in their light.

In other words, the experiential tail is going to wag the Christological dog.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that this new *Motu proprio* was issued right after the end of the Synod on Synodality. Because these very same superficial approaches to the normative status of unproblematized experience were being invoked by the progressives at the Synod in order to justify the ordination of women and the full moral legitimation of the alphabet soup of the "rainbow community."

The "development of doctrine" being invoked, therefore, had little to do with Vincent of Lérins and his categories, and everything to do with blessing the modern *Zeitgeist* – and changing Church teachings accordingly.

It is impossible to reach hard conclusions from such a short and ambiguous *Motu proprio*. But such texts are written for a reason. And I do not think it is difficult to see, especially in light of the Synod, which of the two main theological approaches the text is recommending and privileging.

And I also think that it is rather clear that what the document means by "repeating the formulas" of the past are those theologies, like John Paul's and Benedict's, that posit ecclesial doctrines as normative for the judging of experience, rather than the other way around.

Time will tell how all of this plays out. Pope Francis is a mercurial man and hard to pin down. But he radically altered the

Pontifical John Paul II Institute in Rome and the Pontifical Academy for Life in a manner that involved firing JP II/Benedict-type Communion theologians and replacing them with progressive contextual theologians and proportionalist moral theologians.

One is most certainly justified in viewing this latest *Motu proprio* as more likely than not, cut from the same cloth.

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[1] *Ad theologiam promovendam*: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu\\_proprio/documents/20231101-motu-proprio-ad-theologiam-promovendam.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu_proprio/documents/20231101-motu-proprio-ad-theologiam-promovendam.html)