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Vatican 2 Conference  
Sacred Heart University  
14 October, 2022

“To Expel or Embrace? The Challenge and Promise of Handing Down the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in Light of *Dei Verbum*” [1]

### *I. Introduction*

Let me begin by saying what an honor it is to be here, in the presence of so many good and wise Catholic educators, theologians, and scholars of Catholicism. I want to thank in particular the Catholic Studies Department at Sacred Heart University, the Lilly Fellows Program, and especially Michelle Loris for making this event happen. [1]

The conference description puts in remarkably succinct language what it takes most academics a long time to say. The description prompts participants “to explore how our reading and understanding of Vatican II documents, as well as the formative thinkers of Vatican II and the Catholic intellectual tradition, can deepen and expand our vision of Catholic higher education, addressing new and old challenges.” In accordance with this prompt, my paper will take up one challenge, an old one: handing on the Catholic intellectual tradition. Let me also venture that this challenge was named in a paragraph surely to be cited more than once this weekend, *Gravissimum Educationis*, §11:[2] “Theology faculties have the goal of ensuring that an ever growing understanding of sacred revelation be achieved, that the inheritance of Christian wisdom *traditioned* by former generations be more fully appreciated.”<sup>1</sup> On the plane of common sense, handing on of this sort requires two things: (1) knowing what is to be handed on; and (2) knowing how to hand it on. To hand on, say, my family’s tradition of cranberry sauce at Thanksgiving dinner, I must know how to make it, and I must know how to

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief genesis and *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text, see Roman Siebenrock, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Erklärung über die Christliche Erziehung,” in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Band 3, eds. Peter Hünemann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 551–90, at 561–63, 582–85.

teach my children how to make it. Notice that the written recipe is not required. Both elements, the knowing and the knowing how to hand on, present steep challenges in the best of times.

Upon initial consideration, this process of handing on seems in many instances to require hardly any effort at all. We reflexively inherit and hand down languages and liturgies, structures and syllabi, canons and curricula. Our natural laziness would almost seem to help us, for to teach what we were taught is inherently easier than starting from scratch, say, a course in Christology. Yet upon further deliberation, traditioning poses a number of questions. One difficulty is the *what* question. *What* is the Catholic intellectual tradition? Is it mainly or exclusively Western and Latin, European and North American, scholastic and Thomist? [3] Certainly many of the luminaries that acted as *periti* to the Council Fathers did not think so. But how, exactly, did they come to realize that their own training, the recipe they received, was insufficient? How did they realize the limitation of the answer to the what question handed down to them?

Take, for example, Marie Dominique Chenu, [4] one of the “formative thinkers of Vatican 2,” trained in no less a stronghold of Thomism than the Angelicum in Rome and under the tutelage of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. How did Chenu come to know that the Thomas handed down to him was not the Thomas of history? How, epistemologically, could Chenu come to the judgment that marginalized and forgotten figures in Catholic history from the twelfth and thirteenth century did more to shape tradition than he was led to believe? How, in other words, does one re-member a forgotten tradition? What led Chenu, de Lubac, Congar, and other *ressourcement* theologians influential at the Council to practice their particular acts of retrieval? Whatever led to these efforts, they were most certainly not reflexive actions, like making the sign of the cross or genuflecting at certain points in the liturgy. They were instead actions and decisions rooted in some mixture of conviction and hope.

The challenge of handing on the tradition does not so much involve a reflex as it does a paradox. Before meditating on this paradox, let me briefly defend reflexive traditions. My children

learn to genuflect before they know that before which they genuflect. Many universities hold the mass of the Holy Spirit at roughly the same time each year. These are authentic moments of traditioning that do not require much beyond reflex. The larger project of conveying the Catholic intellectual and theological tradition, however, involves a paradox—wanting to hand on something that we come to know is deeper and broader than our grasp of it.

For Bernard Lonergan [5] this meant, in his own words, the nearly decade-long quest to “reach up to the mind of Aquinas.” Doing so revealed a dynamic account of the process of understanding different from the Aquinas handed on in the manuals. For Chenu, it meant discovering an Aquinas of history distinguished from the Thomas of faith. For Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac [6], it meant starting a series, *Sources Chrétiennes*, that edited texts, mostly from early Greek theology, that made it more feasible to encounter the breadth of a tradition whose handing on, rather than being a neat and tidy affair, was a messy matter. And for Cyprian Davis [7], it meant trying to imagine a history of Black Catholic life in America that had been willfully forgotten.<sup>2</sup> For all of these figures, ingredients had been omitted for centuries, or had trickled through but in a way that left only a thin trace, hard to discern on account of difference in language, and often lost in translation.

The paradox, then, is not only working with a revelation handed on in “earthen vessels,” but, even more dire, a history of handing on that includes both a remembering and a forgetting, and an attempt to remember what has not just been forgotten, but dis-membered. As Joseph Mueller reminds us, “Forgetting becomes a constant aspect of the tradition in a church that reforms itself.”<sup>3</sup> Handing down means both making an effort to “reach up to” the minds of the different authors we teach, or to present a coherent account of the history of doctrine and the lived practices of the Church, and

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<sup>2</sup> See Joseph S. Flipper, “The Ressourcement of Black Catholicism in Cyprian Davis, OSB,” in *Modern Theology* 36/4 (2020): 826–42.

<sup>3</sup> See Joseph G. Mueller, “Forgetting as a Principle of Continuity in Tradition,” in *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 751–81, at 763.

also a formal element: the tradition of enquiry borne of humility, aware that one's training had gaps despite the brilliance of one's teachers, and that one is handing on a fragmented, broken account, not the whole thing.

## *II. The Present Moment*

At no point in my own lifetime, and perhaps in many generation before it, has there been such a widespread reckoning with inauthentic forms of Christian learning and practice. [8] I speak of "inauthenticity" as a metonym to describe a partial and flawed transmission. This inauthenticity results in customs, habits, beliefs, and even sources that no longer share the faintest resemblance to the essential form. A few examples: when the Radical Reformers mandated adultery and polygamy in Münster during the 1520s; when German churches flew swastikas and repeated Third Reich propaganda about Jews; when members of the Jonesboro Baptist Church picket military funerals. Whatever handing down had been happening, these manifestations disfigured the tradition to the point that one can aptly speak of an inauthentic or rotten tradition. The sensible Christian will categorize these manifestations as fringe, extreme interpretations of Christianity, versions of which sprout up in all major religions, and which seem like bugs in a system, or unfortunate byproducts of any gravitational, worldview-shaping force.

More recent critiques, however, have sought not just to call into question the phenomenon of aberrant, fringe Christian manifestations, but instead have called into question entire eras of theology. On account of the praise heaped on his work, I want to offer Willie James Jennings [9] as an example of what I mean, although I could have just as easily located this critique within an array of similarly-

minded authors. Jennings's two most recent books—*The Christian Social Imagination* and *After Whiteness*—display a resounding critique of tradition.<sup>4</sup>

According to Jennings, much of our theology is bound up in racial logics. In describing what he labels “white masculinist self-sufficiency,” Jennings explains the depths of the problem:

It has taken me a long time to name this problem because it hides itself so well inside of Christianity. [...] It grew beautifully and powerfully inside of colonialism and colonial Christianity, took hold inside the educational foundations of the modern West, and now constantly flashes across the cognitive landscape of the educated imagination.<sup>5</sup>

In his earlier book, he describes the crisis as one of a “diseased social imagination.”<sup>6</sup> One can imagine one form of plant life strangling another when reading Jennings's account of this social imagination. Such concerns are not new in Christianity, as, for example in the repeated late medieval concerns about the problem of unchecked Aristotelianism expressed by such prominent theologians as Saint Bonaventure, not to mention sixteenth-century Reformers. What Jennings calls “plantation logic,” however, entails a logic that results in death and destruction for non-white bodies. To dismantle colonialist theology, and everything tainted by it, would seem to require wholesale upheaval of theological education.

Jennings phrases the problem of tradition and its taint in the form of a question: “We who teach and learn in theological education settings, should we envision ourselves as teaching in and toward a tradition?” Jennings regards the attempt to do so as mostly failed: “Unfortunately, the use of tradition in theological education has most often been to promote white self-sufficient masculinity in search of a coherence that would make us safe from seeing our fragment work and conceal what the fragment aims toward: communion.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); and *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 44.

Jennings provides a specific context for this critique when he draws on Alasdair MacIntyre's understanding of tradition while discussing the legacy of José de Acosta, one of the best-trained theologians among the first wave of European encounter with the Americas. The example of de Acosta shows how modern theology *traditioned* colonialism, that is, wove colonialist discourse within the theological tradition. Jennings writes, "José de Acosta marks the theological beginning of imperialist modernity. This form of modernity was articulated within and is born of an Aristotelian-Thomist tradition."<sup>8</sup> What should have initiated a crisis in European theological imagination—a crisis borne from the realization that the purported Christian governments in Europe were mistreating the peoples encountered in the Americas—failed to do so. For Jennings, the failure was structural and taints almost the entirety of European theology. This theology is risible because of its failure to prophetically confront a sinful colonialist logic. Jennings explains,

The difficulty [...] is reckoning with the fact that this crisis of theological tradition was not discerned by Acosta, and for the most part has not been discerned, as a crisis of Christian tradition. From the moment Acosta (and all those like him) placed their feet on the ground in Lima, the Christian tradition and its theologians conjured a form of practical rationality that locked theology in discourses of displacement from which it has never escaped.<sup>9</sup>

Jennings narrates both an inevitability and a call for radical change due to the ingrained nature of the problem. It seems clear, however, that if one follows Jennings' prescription for the future of theological education, there will be very little effort to understand with greater depth the Catholic theological tradition; if, for instance, all of Thomistic theology presupposes racial logics that made possible subsequent abuses of native peoples, then why would one find it beneficial to delve more deeply into a tradition that helped perpetuate the European colonialist logic that frames it. The tragedy of the colonialist encounter with non-Europeans "meets us in the now, precisely in an assimilation that defines serious, rigorous, scholarly—not with a broad beautiful vision of paying attention, but

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<sup>8</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 71.

through a strangled, suffocating vision that defines these ideas by a relentless Eurocentrism.”<sup>10</sup> While Jennings holds out hope that the plant of Christianity can be pruned from the ivy of colonialist, white, plantation logic, what needs to be pruned back is so encompassing and fundamental that one could be mistaken for confusing the ivy with what it strangles.<sup>11</sup> The critique articulated by Jennings brings into relief a serious question already implied: how can one ethically justify belonging to and retrieving a tradition so fundamentally entangled with something rotten?<sup>12</sup>

The import of this question for the project of handing on the Catholic intellectual tradition at a place like Sacred Heart University should be clear to all of us. I will sidestep the task of tracing colonialism in different realms of the Catholic theological tradition or of attempting a colonialist audit on the Church. Suffice to say, the fragile work of handing down the saving gospel is never more than one generation from total collapse. One could also pause here to recall all of the ways a sinful church can disappoint and has in fact fallen short. What I would like to do instead, however, is to meditate not only on the task of traditioning and the specifically Catholic ways of imagining this task, but also to ponder what kind of difference the Catholic understanding of time makes for carrying out this task.

### III. *Redeeming the Time: Johann Drey's Theology of Tradition* [10]

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<sup>10</sup> Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 52. This critique also resonates in the most recent work of Kelly Brown Douglas, who asks, “One of the most disconcerting aspects in this part of my journey was discovering the ways in which this anti-Blackness is embedded in the very theological fabric of Christianity. What, I wonder, is to become of the moral imaginary if even Christianity itself is beholden to a theological framework that fosters death for Black bodies?” (Douglas, *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter* [Orbis Books, 2021], p. xiii).

<sup>11</sup> Jennings offers his own viral metaphor: “The problem we face is a diseased centeredness, one sickened with something akin to a virus that begins to work in a body, moving from parts to the whole outlook of a person” (*After Whiteness*, 140).

<sup>12</sup> Other recent efforts address the ethics of tradition in different ways. See, for instance, Simeon Zahl, “Tradition and its ‘use’: the ethics of theological retrieval,” in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71/3 (2018): 308–23; Anne Michelle Carpenter, *Nothing Gained is Eternal: A Theology of Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), especially ch. 3; downstream from Jennings, see Brian Bantum, “‘You Can’t Go Home Again’: Retrieval and Mulattic Theological Method,” in *Theologies of Retrieval: An Exploration and Appraisal*, ed. Darren Sarisky (London: T&T Clark, 2017). 261–77.

In terms of church councils, there are two great conciliar statements on tradition. The first, from the first session of the Council of Trent, declared that, alongside the written tradition of scripture, there were unwritten traditions that came from the apostolic period and thus validly preserved the saving truths of the gospel. The point was largely polemical and epistemological—we know what has been revealed not through scripture alone, as the Reformers taught, but also through unwritten traditions. The second great conciliar statement came at the Second Vatican Council, in the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum*. At this point it suffices to say that *Dei Verbum* emphasizes not just what is handed down, but the activity and process of handing down. If the faith is not just a set of facts contained in a collection of texts, but instead a living reality, like a language, then the reality handed down has a way of bridging or collapsing time. To learn a dead language, say, classical Greek, means to encounter it through textbooks or manuscripts or inscriptions. But to know a living language is to participate in its preservation, it is to make it present. If my family were the last family, say, to speak Cajun in Louisiana, and I did not pass it down to my children, it would cease to be a living language. In a similar way, the faith is a living faith and the gospel is a “living gospel” (*Dei Verbum*, §7). There are of course languages that have died and been revived, like Hebrew. And so too with belief systems. Yet for Catholics, this cannot be the case on account of the words Jesus spoke to the apostles in the Gospel of John: “The Father will give you another Advocate, and he will be with you forever” (14:16). Whatever corruptions and deviations occur, a truly Catholic attitude about history must insist that the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church, does not appear episodically in this history, like a guest star in a sitcom. The Spirit, like the Coen Brother’s dude, most surely abides.

*In between* these Councils there took place a lively discussion in the theology of tradition, linked with efforts to give an account of dogmatic development and to reckon with the impact of modern historical scholarship on Catholic theology’s dogmatic and normative claims. One of the most important, especially for Vatican 2, articulations of the way forward comes from Johann Sebastian



Drey (1777–1853) in a series of writings published in 1819. [11] These articulations helped the members of the Catholic Tübingen School, a school founded for all practical purposes by Drey. The School's theological impact reached far and wide, all the way to *Dei Verbum's* understanding of living tradition.

1819 was a big year for Drey. Two years after the faculty's forced relocation from Catholic Ellwangen to the intensely Protestant university town of Tübingen, Drey started a journal, published a groundbreaking work of theological encyclopedia—the *Brief Introduction to the Study of Theology* (a book that John Thiel calls “perhaps the most underappreciated book in the history of modern Catholic theology”)<sup>13</sup>—and published a four-part article for this new journal on the “Spirit and Essence of Catholicism.”<sup>14</sup> [12] In this article he also made a brief but substantial claim that identified the essence of Catholicism with a certain attitude towards tradition and time.

Living tradition, according to Drey, has less to do with life and more to do with time, with the relation of the present to the past. Christianity, according to Drey, is not a religion of the book, and its theology is decidedly not a form of philology. Instead it is the religion of a person, Jesus Christ, who was, is, and ever will be. One can bring into relief this Catholic understanding of time by recalling Lutheran objections to the sacrifice of the mass.<sup>15</sup> [13] From the Lutheran perspective, to call the mass

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<sup>13</sup> John E. Thiel, “Review” in *Theological Studies* 69/3 (2008): 696–97.

<sup>14</sup> Drey, *Kurze Einleitung in das Studium der Theologie*, ed. Max Seckler (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2005); ET: *Brief Introduction to the Study of Theology*, trans. Michael Himes (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); [Drey], “Vom Geist und Wesen des Katholizismus,” in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 1 (1819): 8–23, 193–210, 369–91, 559–74. For a modern, critical edition, see Drey, *Nachgelassene Schriften, Vierter Band*, ed. Max Seckler (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2015), 453–90.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, “Therefore, just as distributing a testament or accepting a promise differs diametrically from offering a sacrifice, so it is a contradiction in terms to call the mass a sacrifice, for the former is something that we receive and the latter is something that we give. The same thing cannot be received and offered at the same time, nor can it be both given and accepted by the same person, any more than our prayer can be the same thing as that which our prayer obtains, or the act of praying be the same thing as the act of receiving that for which we pray” (trans. Steinhäuser, p. 29)

a sacrifice contradicted the notion that Christ's death was the sacrifice to end sacrifice. For Catholics, the anamnesis of the mass makes present the past in such a way that bridges linear time.<sup>16</sup>

Along similar lines, Catholic Christianity, for Drey, cannot be a religion of the book, but instead must be a religion of the person of Christ. A tradition based on a text performs a much different kind of traditioning than is the case of a tradition based on a living person. For Catholics, the Church is Christ's mystical body, which stands in real relation to the resurrected, ascended body of Christ. An exclusively textual theology elides this difference. Drey's explains:

If scripture alone is accepted as the means of the tradition of the ideas of religious belief, then the whole of theology is exegesis. But if there exists a living objective reality which is generally recognized as the continuance of the originating event and therefore its most authentic tradition, then the historical witness is found in and through it. The Church is just such a manifestation.<sup>17</sup> [14]

Rather than imagining the Church as preserving a tradition laid down in a text, as if revealed tradition were a lifeless, even if incredibly important, thing, Drey posits the Church as a living, *historical* community that mediates Christ to believers.

To believe in Drey's account of a living tradition does not mean any of the following: (1) that the early church, however reconstructed, should be the ideal in all matters for today's church; (2) that church teaching, and the understanding of this teaching, has remained static or encrusted; (3) that development, per se, is laudatory; (4) that the Church need not reckon with and even make bold attempts to correct sin or to discard traditions that cloud rather than illuminate the light of the Gospel. Regarding the fourth point, Drey himself, especially in these years, argued loudly for reforms Catholic practice, especially around priestly celibacy.

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<sup>16</sup> Drey does not make this specific point, but Sailer does. See Geiselman, *Lebendiger Glaube aus geheiligter Überlieferung*, 140, which cites from Sailer's *Vollständiges Lese und Gebetbuch für katholische Christen* (Munich: Joseph Lenter, 1785) I, 180. For an attempt to highlight the liberative features of this anamnesis, see Shawn M. Copeland, "Turning Theology: A Proposal," in *Theological Studies* 80/4 (2019): 753–73.

<sup>17</sup> Drey, *Brief Introduction*, §47.

It does mean, however, that there is a particular way that the present relates to the past. Drey finds it helpful to contrast Catholicism to Platonism, for here one sees the difference between “a mere handing down [*einer bloßen Ueberlieferung*] and “the pure, uninterrupted continuation [*Fortbestand*] of an event [*Tatsache*].”<sup>18</sup> Catholicism insists on the necessity of that uninterrupted continuation. Platonism can be lost for centuries, only to be rediscovered through an encounter with its founding texts. But Catholicism, as demonstrated by its theology of ordination, enacts a handing on of a fleshier variety.

Drey employs a variety of synonyms in his “Spirit and Essence of Catholicism” to convey the continuity of Catholic tradition, the continuance of an event. Tradition works like a spoken language. It changes and develops; some words come and go. What is transmitted in Catholicism, furthermore, is not foremost a set of teachings; it is instead a life. Just as in a language, what is transmitted is not just a knowledge of the language, but the language itself. Likewise, the Church transmits a living Christianity that it both recalls and embodies. In these ideas one finds the seeds of the claim of Drey’s most famous student, Johann Adam Möhler, that the Church is an “ongoing Incarnation.” [15]

Several times in his essay, Drey contrasts the living Catholic reality to a dead tradition. Here we can recall the famous line from Jaroslav Pelikan: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”<sup>19</sup> Drey rejects any theology that would remove God from the present workings of history. He writes of “the living faith in the God who is present” (477). No form of Christianity based primarily on a relationship to a text can produce a living tradition. He explains, “Catholicism does not regard the event of Christianity as momentary, as something that is only ushered forth through a dead medium of tradition [*todte Ueberlieferungsmittel...*] but instead as a manifestation that, to be sure, arose in a particular time but from that point on was perpetually abiding and handed on through its own living existence” (483). What makes Christianity different from the

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<sup>18</sup> Drey, “Geist und Wesen,” 455.

<sup>19</sup> Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

Platonic tradition? Both traditions are rooted in texts—the Bible and the Platonic corpus—and both traditions have current-day devotees. But the content of Christianity is not a knowledge, or even a faith, but rather a life. Earlier in his essay Drey contrasts a tendency toward originalism with the Catholic system: “There does not exist an actual continuation of the historical fact, only a handing down by means of a dead and mute vehicle—the letter” (460). Even if one does reconstruct something of original Christianity, it happens “under the auspices of the dead handing down” of this original form and thus fails the test of a living tradition (483). Underlying Drey’s contrast between dead and living tradition is an epistemology, according to which the means of acquiring happens one way for a textual tradition, and another way for a living language.

Drey’s declaration, however, does not entirely explain *how* one retrieves or has access to the living source of this tradition. He provides this explanation when he writes, in *The Spirit and Essence of Catholicism*, of the “*Grundanschauung* [fundamental intuition] of Catholicism, whereby Catholicism regards itself as part of an “unbroken continuation” (463). [16] He also describes how two planes of experience are connected through a “living, interior intuition.” It is through this intuition that one discerns a connection, or disjunction, between the living faith of the present and the past, or how one discerns the authentic from the inauthentic. Drey explains, “This approach is the most actual and authentic principle whereby the Catholic constructs and judges Christian ecclesiality [*Kirchentum*] as her own” (483). One’s participation in a life and one’s historical retrieval of past eras of Christianity gives an evaluative power that we all surely believe in if we accept that there can be authentic and inauthentic Christian traditions. This happens through a participation that, Drey insists, is more like an unbroken chain of sacerdotal ministry than an exegetical encounter with a text, especially if that encounter happens outside of what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls a *Wirkungsgeschichte*. [17] Here we can stick with Gadamer for a minute: one enters into a whole-part hermeneutical circle, in which one’s increasing knowledge of the parts of the tradition give one a sense of the whole. This sense of the whole then

circles back to the capacity to evaluate and, when necessary, re-evaluate parts of the tradition. I want to emphasize that this is something we already do. When we read the sermons and tracts of those defending slavery in North America, and compare them to the spirituals and slave narratives, we know—I certainly hope, and I certainly wouldn’t want to believe in any theory saying we couldn’t—the difference between authentic and inauthentic traditions. Elsewhere Drey appeals to the sacramental life of the Church as an activity that makes the past present (473).

At the end of the essay, Drey discusses the possibility of inauthentic tradition, especially in the realm of mission. Drey insists there can be no compulsion in Christianity, that missions can pass on a bad form of Christianity, and even that popes can err, recalling Paul’s correction of Peter (488–90). The intuition connecting past and present and the unbroken continuity between the apostolic period and Drey’s own do not eliminate the possibility of error, sin, and bad tradition. But these realities do not cancel the truth that the Catholic believer, in Drey’s mind, is part of an unbroken continuation from the apostolic period to the present; there is no fundamental fissure or definitive break, let alone a chasm, between contemporary and past Christianity.

#### *IV. Tradition at Vatican 2 [18]*

No search of the Council’s *acta* will turn up a discussion of these texts, and not even the diaries of Yves Congar mention Drey’s name. Yet as countless studies have shown, the ideas of nineteenth-century Tübingen made their way to the aforementioned twentieth-century *ressourcement* thinkers, who in turn brought them into conciliar discussions in their roles as *periti*. This is true of *Dei Verbum*, one of the Council’s greatest achievements. In Chapter 2, “On the Transmission of Divine Revelation,” the Council Fathers emphasize the integrity, the wholeness, of the saving gospel that was to be transmitted. They write, “The apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time.” As §8 continues, the Council Fathers seamlessly interweave the activity and the substance, using both noun and verb

compounds of *traditio/tradere*. [19] Free from the polemical urgencies that prompted the Council of Trent, the authors of *Dei Verbum* were not primarily motivated to defend the legitimacy of tradition as a source, and could thus emphasize its dynamism: “The Tradition from the Apostles makes progress in the Church with the help [*assistentia*] of the Holy Spirit. There is growth in insight into the realities and words handed down [*verborum traditorum*]” (*DV* §8.2). These are not the words of a community daring the world to wrest its precious tradition from its cold dead hands; instead, these words convey a transmission of a “living gospel” (*DV* §7), “entrusted to the living Magisterium of the Church” (*DV* §10.2), which makes the tradition itself a living one (*DV* §12). The understanding of revelation, manifested in tradition, grows and expands like a language; the Council Fathers write that the early Christian authors “witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church” (*DV*, §8.3). Even more striking, the same God who revealed the fullness of saving revelation through his Son “continues to converse with the spouse of his beloved Son” (*DV*, §8.3). Although the canon is closed, God is still actively present to the community of believers and even converses with them.

At this point the overlap between the theology of tradition explicated by Johann Sebastian Drey and that of the Council bear remarkable resemblance, specifically regarding the living quality of the tradition and its analogue in human language. A key mediator was Josef Rupert Geiselmann, who revived the Catholic Tübingen School in the 1930s and 40s, wrote a book on living tradition leading up to the Council, and, at the behest of Karl Rahner, composed a short treatise on tradition to compel the Council Fathers to go beyond the Tridentine framework. No less a scholar than Gerald O’Collins writes,

Members of the ‘Tübingen School’ [...] interpreted tradition as ‘living tradition.’ [...] The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on Divine Revelation paid tribute to those who had elaborated the notion of ‘living tradition’, by teaching that [...] readers [of Scripture] should take into account ‘the living Tradition of the whole Church’ (*DV*, §12). Sadly, the translation

of the Vatican II documents edited by Austin Flannery [...] omitted 'living' [...]. A courteous and grateful nod towards the Tübingen School was lost.<sup>20</sup> [20]

#### V. *The Upshot of Living Tradition for Catholic Higher Education*

To say that there is a crisis in Catholic education, and that we are at risk of losing the pearl of great price is to speak a banality. Not because we are not in a crisis, but because we are never not in a crisis. We are always at risk of taking an inauthentic counterfeit of the Catholic intellectual tradition and reproducing it, or taking an authentic version and rendering it inauthentic through bias, sloth, and *acedia*. Let me highlight three ways that the Council can inspire more authentic forms of handing on. [21]

First, the Council reminds us that **the Holy Spirit is present in the Church**, and has never not been present in the Church. This means, whatever the historical Church's shortcomings, one can encounter the tradition to find ways how and examples of Christians who took what was given them and attained a deeper understanding of revealed mysteries, or grew into a more authentic way of Christian living. One's comfort in this truth means that one can have the confidence to avoid both the triumphalism masking an insecurity that cannot stomach any historical shortcomings, and the problematic tendency to make tainted manifestations an excuse to ignore the tradition *en masse*. By living this confidence, Catholic educators engage in the part-whole hermeneutical circle, whereby Christian history reveals more deeply how Christ intended us to live, while the earliest apostolic witness serves as a means to test the authenticity of this history.

Second, the Council encourages **a courageous openness toward the contemporary world**. I do not want to confuse this openness with embrace. Here I can only reference Pope Benedict and others' rightful concern that *Gaudium et Spes*'s reference to the sign of the times had been

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<sup>20</sup> Gerald O'Collins, SJ, *Tradition: Understanding Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4-5. The Latin reads "vivae totius Ecclesiae Traditionis."

misunderstood. *Gaudium et Spes* itself calls for something like the part-whole hermeneutic just mentioned: “The Church carries the responsibility of reading [*perscrutandi*] the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (GS §4). With good judgment and with courage, then, Catholic scholars should encounter the findings of the natural and the social sciences, and “interpreting them in the light of the Gospel,” engage in continuous reflection on how these insights can help grow our understanding of revealed truths. The Church has a long history of integrating philosophical claims into theology and doctrine. We have models for doing this well. This is not the case for integrating the social sciences. There is much skittishness about the natural and social sciences, however, and even about theories. I suspect much of this comes from instances or exaggerations of embrace that have not always interpreted these theories and sciences “in the light of the Gospel.” Yet the answer is not to find false comfort in one fundamentalism or another, as if shutting oneself off from a body of knowledge or a discourse could be a real solution for protecting a tradition that is living. Just as nobody balks at the word *algebra* as an Arabic intrusion into what would otherwise be a purer English, so those entrusted to hand on the Catholic intellectual tradition should not refuse outright the valid insights from the realm of critical theory, the social sciences, and the natural sciences.

Third, Catholic institutions should **find comfort in the chaos**. There is no perfect core, no ideal composition of a department of theological or religious studies, no ideal ratio of mission-based vs. non-mission based faculty hires, no common text guaranteed to vouchsafe or preserve all that is right and good in our two-thousand year history of handing on the gospel’s saving truths. If anything, history proves the opposite. The attempt following *Aeterni Patris* (1879) to make Thomism equivalent to the Church’s philosophy and theology may have done more in hindsight to destabilize Thomism than to make it the Church’s perennial philosophy. A truly intellectually open and Spirit-attuned intellectual community will find comfort in asking, *Is it so?* Does my syllabus accurately and fairly cover the material it claims? Have I understood the Church’s social teaching when I present it in class? Do



I fairly present the Church's teaching on the body and sexuality. When I think of the Catholic intellectual tradition, I think not only of texts and movements, but teachers and mentors like Otto Hermann Pesch, Lisa Cahill, Michael Himes, Pheme Perkins, and Peter Hünermann. Likewise, our students experience this tradition not so much as explained but as embodied, embodied in us. And speaking from the reality of middle-age, let me say that our bodies, sadly, change. Our understandings of given figures can grow, but can also diminish. The intellectual virtues and habits that made us go into Catholic education can grow dull. To find comfort in the chaos means accept the responsibility that the Catholic intellectual tradition, for better or worse, lives in us. Thank you.

- **show why Christ promising the HS means that Catholic Church can't be corrupted >> need to see "traditioning" as a dynamic critique of the tradition (Kasper could be helpful here; also Espin & co)**
- **Gadamer on the capacity for the text of the past to schmelz the Horizon.**
- **at some point recap debate about Scripture and Tradition as strategy to justify confessional commitments and possibilities of development (not sure what I had in mind here; don't worry for now)**