

Dr. Strangelove, Coal and Steel, and Vatican II: The Last Time the World Came to an End

By Michael Loriaux

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The world is coming to an end. A viral pandemic has struck the financial core of the capitalist world, bringing everyday commerce to a halt and gouging whole percentage points out of gross domestic products. We rich westerners have lost our presumption of immunity. Our expectations of eternal growth have been destabilized. Because we have seen and lived the swiftness with which a virus moves and strikes, because we have seen the disorientation and confusion of the scientific community as it avows "there is so much about this virus that we don't know," and because of the gnawing, irrepressible awareness that other existential threats, like climate change, are lined up to follow, our rich western presumption that "we'll be ready next time" begins to ring hollow. We look for a way "forward," sensing – this may be the pandemic's most dramatic legacy – that the word forward needs quotation marks.

But it's not the first time the world has come to an end. The last time it came to an end, if I recall correctly, was in October 1962, when American war vessels barred the delivery of Soviet nuclear missiles to bases in Cuba. It was a tense two weeks. Schools didn't close, but students and teachers did spend the day milling about in

corridors, unable to teach, read, or think productively. The crisis was the culmination of a decade's worth of anxieties about the world coming to an end, as brilliantly captured by such films as Stanley Kubrick's "Dr. Strangelove" and Kevin Rafferty's (et al.) "The Atomic Café." The first hydrogen bomb was tested on November 1, 1952. The Soviets detonated their own bomb on August 12 1953. In 1954 the Castle Bravo test irradiated the fishing vessel "Lucky Dragon," which then proceeded to sell its toxic catch on the Japanese market. In 1957 the Soviets launched Sputnik, demonstrating the feasibility of placing a nuclear warhead in the nose of a space vehicle. Meanwhile, school kids practiced "ducking and covering" monthly in preparation for the multi-megaton blast.

But the world didn't end. It survived. Not only did it survive, it played host to highly innovative and transformative initiatives, two of which I examine here: the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, and the reforms of Vatican II, whose deliberations began during the missile crisis. Both events demonstrated the possibility of defining a way "forward" in a world that is coming to an end. The ECSC laid the ground for the creation of the European Union, which is without contest (despite our jaded academic cynicism) the most ambitious and successful exercise in postwar peace-making in history. Vatican II's importance is arguably more circumscribed, but, setting aside the observation that there are twice as many Roman Catholics in the world as there are Europeans, it embraced with enthusiasm the cause of reconciliation and tolerance in a beleaguered world. Both events responded to the times by waging combat against the souverainisme or "sovereignism" that was fueling the nuclear arms race. Both achievements were facilitated by a discursive environment that enjoined skepticism, not only regarding the sovereignist pretensions of nation-states, but regarding the credibility of the myth that undergirds those pretensions, the myth of the reasoning, morally autonomous subject of the European Enlightenment, a subject whose claims to exercise sovereign power had been shattered by war, totalitarianism, genocide, and the abuse of science to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Sovereignism.

We begin the analysis of this riposte to frightening times by placing it in historical context, which means going back to a time when the world also appeared to be coming to an end. Troops loyal to Victor Emmanuel II, king of Italy since 1860, entered Rome on September 20, 1870 against the opposition of Pope Pius IX, occupied the city, and declared Rome to be the capital of a new unified Italian kingdom. We can trace both Vatican II and the ECSC back to roots in this devastating event (if you're a pope). The pope's reaction was to refuse to accommodate the government of the new nation-state and to fancy himself the "prisoner of the Vatican." His successors fancied themselves in like manner until 1929, when the Lateran Treaty recognized the sovereign autonomy of Vatican City. But the devastation wrought on the Church by the ideal of nationhood and national unification was not limited to Rome. North of the Alps, in 1871, Bismarck proclaimed the constitution of a unified German Empire – Catholic Austria was excluded – and placed it under the suzerainty of Protestant Prussia. In 1872 the Prussian parliament passed the School Supervision Act, which prohibited Catholic clerics from teaching. The imperial government subsequently expelled the Jesuits and other teaching orders from Germany. In 1873 the Prussian government passed laws subordinating Roman Catholic clerics to the authority of Prussian courts, and, beginning in 1875, it began registering births, marriages, and deaths in state rather than in parish registries. All religious orders were dissolved, and Catholic dioceses were refused state subsidies unless their bishops formally complied with the law and submitted to the authority of the Emperor. In France, the end of the world was coterminous with the end of the Second Empire in 1870 and the establishment of the Third Republic. The Jules Ferry laws of 1881-82 created a centralized system of compulsory, state-funded education in which priests and religious were not allowed to teach, and which condemned to misery the vast network of Catholic schools that already existed. The French Republic required that marriages not only be registered by the state, but be celebrated in a State (capitalized in French) edifice in a civil

ceremony. It also legalized work on Sundays, subjected seminarians to military conscription, abolished all ecclesiastical references and symbols in its public self-presentation, closed thousands of Catholic schools, and expelled or encouraged the departure of Catholic orders. In 1904, the National Assembly voted to sever diplomatic relations with the Vatican – those relations would not be restored till 1921 – and in 1905, the Republic put an end to public funding of religion and declared Church real estate to be State property, to which the Church had access only if represented by lay associations recognized by the State. On the plus side, the Republic ceased the longstanding French practice of interfering in the nomination of Catholic bishops. Similar secularizing laws and initiatives were imposed in Belgium, Austria, and Italy, all of which had the effect of rejecting, in the heart of Catholic Europe, the Constantinian ideal of complicity between the Church as the government of souls, and the Empire (which had formally ceased to exist in 1806) as the government of secular society. The Reformation had already fractured that complicity, but the Church was able to cobble something back together with various post-Westphalian states and principalities. It is this cobbled-something that was wrecked by the liberal and nationalist politics of the late nineteenth century.

The Catholic Church's reaction to the crisis was to imitate the national states and adopt a posture of *souverainisme*, or sovereignism (the term is commonly used in French; I adopt it here despite its barbarism). It was sovereignist in a novel way, since the Church as sovereign entity had now generally become non-territorial. The term nevertheless captures several features of the Vatican's reaction to the new, hostile Europe of nation-states, of utopian (nationalist, liberal, socialist) ideologies, and of new secular philosophies, especially transcendental idealism, the Church's principal philosophical irritant. The word sovereignty in and of itself juggles several connotations, one of which is that of a secession from an existing territorial order. The right of national self-determination as a sovereign people is a concept that began to gain currency in the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875-78, where it was used to contest the right of the Ottoman Empire to rule "national peoples" in Europe.

Secessionism in the case of the Papacy was manifested not only by its self-imposed territorial incarceration, but by the prohibition imposed on Italians not to hold office or participate in elections organized by the Italian state. Italians, in other words, were ordered to secede politically and civically from the life of the new national entity. One could not be both Catholic and Italian. Secessionism also captures the Papacy's spiritual and intellectual secession from a world subjected to forceful and rapid secularization. Pius IX's 1864 encyclical, *Quanta Cura*, denounced, as an Enlightenment fiction, the claim that the human subject possessed moral autonomy. It went on to detail seventy-nine other errors of European modernity, among which: "Human reason... is the sole arbiter of truth and falsehood and of good and evil;" "Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which... he shall consider true;" "The State... is endowed with a certain right not circumscribed by any limits," etc. Whereas the political enemy was the new nation-state, the spiritual and philosophical enemy was liberalism: its indifference toward religion, its preference for positive law over divine morality, and, as the century wore on, its *laissez faire* economics. The Church was critical of socialism, but it discerned in liberalism the rebellious cry of Lucifer, "I shall not serve."

The second manifestation of the Church's sovereignism was its location of power in the person of the Pope. The term sovereignty connotes the existence of somebody "at the top" to whom we can point and call "sovereign." Vatican I, the first ecumenical assembly since the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century, was called in 1868 to clarify the Church's opposition to the new world and suit it for combat. The Council, the sole organ of the Church empowered to define dogma, confirmed the Pope's rejection of rationalism, liberalism, and materialism, and then proceeded to confirm, as dogma, the hitherto informal norm of papal infallibility. The Pope, when speaking as bishop, *ex cathedra*, speaks doctrine. More than that, he has "full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church." The doctrine gave birth to the modern papacy. This is not to say that the Pope was not influential before 1868. But the monarchism of the post-Vatican I pope exceeded historical

precedent. The earliest popes – up through the Muslim conquest – had to negotiate and compromise with influential metropolitan sees at Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria. The popes of the Middle Ages had to accommodate the Emperor and powerful bishops. The popes of post-Westphalian Europe had to accommodate national churches like the Gallican Church in France, articulated around dynastic courts and defended by them. But the power of the eastern Metropolitans was smothered in the seventh, and again in the sixteenth century (the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople), and the Constantinian empire crumbled in the west in fact if not in law in the thirteenth century (with the rise of the indifferent Habsburgs), and was legally terminated by Napoleon in 1806. And now the rise of the nation-state and liberal ideology was undermining the powers of local bishops. Sovereignist Rome became the center of an Ultramontanist Catholic resistance. Its doctrines remained largely unchanged but its sociological organization was markedly concentrated. In 1903 Pope Pius X launched the project of composing a Code of Canon Law that would systematize ecclesiastical ordinances and end the tradition of Church customary law. The Code, published in 1917, invariably interpreted Church legislation in ways that comforted or reinforced papal authority. The Papal Curia became the religious tribunal of last resort. Its Holy Office (the successor of the Inquisition) ruled in matters of dogma.

The purpose of the new sovereignist and Ultramontanist papacy was to engage agonistically, conceptually, and philosophically with the liberal nation-states. The papal encyclical became the principal conveyance of that resistance, focusing as it did on social, moral, and even on political questions that were the purview of state governments. The number of encyclicals and other pronouncements grew vertiginously. Pius VI (1775-99) had authored only two. His successors, Pius IX (1846-1878) and Leo XIII (1878-1903), authored thirty-eight and seventy-five respectively. The mood of the encyclicals was not simply one of condemnation. The Papacy wrestled philosophically with the liberal world that was emerging so powerfully around it so as to formulate its own positions on issues such as liberty,

authority, laws, legitimacy, obedience, and social values. Thus armed it sought to enter into negotiation with other, statist, nationalist sovereign governments in view of establishing national concordats. The church used its sovereign resources to fight for an accommodation that would enable what the French called a ralliement, that is, the Church's consent to allow Catholics to participate in state politics. It looked with disapproval on the social upheaval that was industrialization and denounced the liberal thought, values, and policies that accompanied it. Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, for example, asserted that private property had limits. It should not deny the worker a just wage or impose unhealthy working conditions. Leo balanced property rights with the right of workers to defend their legitimate interests. "A small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself."

The third manifestation of Church sovereignism, examined in depth below, was its effort to forge a coherent, monolithic, and totalizing orthodoxy with which to arm the Church for its agonistic sorties. Leo XIII launched an ambitious program of getting back to fundamentals, at the center of which was the exhortation, in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, to privilege the writings of Thomas Aquinas in seminaries and schools and thereby provide them with a syllabus that is "firm, stable, and robust." The turn to Aquinas, it was thought, would enable the Church to purge its philosophical eclecticism and develop strong, coherent arguments with which to spar with liberal ideology.

Sovereignism's Trials.

Drawing a border to separate an inside and from an outside has never been proven to guarantee the inside of coherence, cohesion, and power. The border itself becomes a site of agonism. Combat at the site of definition, for and against the definition in principle, or for the principle but against the definition, has had the odd effect of simultaneously reinforcing the border, by keeping it uppermost in public debate, but undermining it by keeping the question of its legitimacy or definition at the core of

that debate. The origin of Rome's sovereignism was its desire to enter into sovereign-to-sovereign negotiations with state governments. But parties and action groups that arose throughout Europe to defend Church sovereignty became entangled in local, opportunistic logics that the Vatican found unruly and frequently discouraged. The condemnation of Action Française in 1926 is an example. Although seen as sympathetic to the Catholic Church, Action Française's support for monarchical restoration obstructed the Vatican's efforts to negotiate directly with the French Republic. Rome eventually placed the group's newspaper on the syllabus of banned publications, and refused sacraments to its members. Similarly, efforts to create a Catholic political movement in Austria met with episcopal opposition, as did the German Catholic Zentrum party because of its efforts to create an interconfessional trade union.

More directly relevant to our story was the agonistic encounter that sovereignty engendered along the scholarly frontiers of orthodox Thomism. The turn to Aquinas started out as a conservative movement, "a club to beat modern philosophers beginning with Descartes," writes John O'Malley. But it soon took on a life of its own and began to produce outstanding scholarship. Inversely, it also churned out sovereignist seminary manuals that "stood apart in almost determined isolation not only from other forms of contemporary scholarship but to a large extent even from Neo-Scholasticism itself," thereby engendering tensions and conflicts "at" the Catholic Church's dogmatic frontier.

The encounter between Thomist scholarship and secessionist Thomist sovereignism engendered frictions that were methodological, archival, and philosophical. Historiography as a profession emerged with and for the nation-state that it was charged with memorializing and celebrating. But it also emerged alongside "scientific," diplomatic, and hermeneutic methods of treating the archives. Marie-Joseph Lagrange, a French Dominican, is representative of the outburst of Catholic critical scholarship that occurred "along the frontier" during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Lagrange was concerned that Vatican sovereignism was

making Catholicism less rather than more relevant to intellectual life in liberal, Republican France. Therefore he founded the École Biblique in Jerusalem in 1890 with the goal of applying scientific hermeneutic and diplomatic methodologies to the study of scripture. Leo XIII in 1893 warned against methodological “modernism” and established the rival Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1902 to police the research. That Commission, however, was soon employing the same scholarly methods. In 1907, the Holy Office reacted to the new methodologies with the decree *Lamentabili*, in which it formulated and rejected the sixty-five errors of what it called, pejoratively, “modernist” scholarship. Pius X’s encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* further castigated the “modernists” as “partisans of error” who were introducing the Church’s enemies inside its sovereign borders, into “her very bosom and heart.” Scholars and teachers who espoused such falacies were dismissed from their teaching positions and their publications censored. Dioceses were ordered to establish “Vigilance Councils” to inform the bishops of the heretics in their midst, and clerics were required to take a vow to uphold the stipulations of *Lamentabili* and *Pascendi*. “*Pascendi*,” writes O’Malley, “had few, if any precedents in documents emanating from the Papacy. A veritable purge followed.” The sovereignist Church had turned totalitarian.

A similar story unfolds in an area of research that would seem, at first sight, to be far removed from the dogmatically sensitive practice of textual criticism. Concerns regarding the aesthetic and spiritual efficacy of Catholic liturgy in post-revolutionary and liberal France spurred efforts by the Benedictines of Solesmes to explore liturgical history for sources of new energy. The enterprise was highly successful and influential. It was also decidedly orthodox, inspired by Ultramontanism, and fueled by mid-nineteenth century enthusiasm for all things medieval. But as research worked its way through the Middle Ages and made its way to the early Church fathers, scholars began to discover discrepancies between what they were reading and officially sanctioned Scholastic theology. The project urged a more reflexive and self-conscious hermeneutics. The historical distance between reader

and writer had to be theorized and integrated into their work. But the new hermeneutic sensibilities destabilized dogma, inspired new thought, and began to prompt calls for a *ressourcement* – a return to the sources – of Catholic thought and practice. The term *ressourcement* would become one of the mantras, along with *aggiornamento*, of Vatican II. Meanwhile, however, the Curia reacted by twisting the term “*nouvelle théologie*” into an insult, like “modernism,” and punishing key figures of this scholarly turn: Marie-Dominique Chenu, Jean Daniélou, and Henri de Lubac, among others, all of whom would go on to assume important roles at the Vatican II Council.

Phenomenology and Thomism.

The skirmishes that occurred along the frontiers of the sovereignist Church were not only provoked by questions methodological and archival, but also by questions philosophical. The most productive encounter occurred between sovereignist, Thomist orthodoxy and the new philosophical movement called phenomenology. The encounter is difficult to imagine in our day, given the disciplinary (sovereignist?) jealousies that characterize the American university, and, even more, given the republican, secular prejudices that characterize the French university. Dominique Janicaud, in *Le Tournant Théologique de la Phénoménologie Française*, argued strenuously against any appropriation of phenomenological thought by religiously inclined scholars. And yet the historian Edward Baring maintains that “the single most important explanation for the international success of phenomenology in the twentieth century” was its engagement with Catholic scholarship. Phenomenology emerged at a time when neo-scholasticism was “the largest and most influential philosophical movement in the world,” and calculates that forty percent of all articles published on Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger during the interwar years, in a language other than German, were written by self-professed Catholic philosophers. The first conference on phenomenology outside Germany was hosted in France by the *Société Thomiste*. The existentialist Simone de Beauvoir encountered the work of Husserl for the first time as a student at the *Institut Catholique* in Paris. Sartre

read Heidegger for the first time in the company of the Catholic priest Marius Perrin. Both de Beauvoir and Sartre frequented the philosophical salon organized by the Catholic existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel.

The Thomist-phenomenological encounter was facilitated by an institutional infrastructure. An important feature of this infrastructure were the university chairs in “Catholic Philosophy” established at universities such as Munich, Bonn, and Freiburg-im-Breisgau in accordance with the concordats signed between the Vatican and the German states of Bavaria, Prussia, Baden, and others. Students could work simultaneously in the fields of neo-Thomism, neo-Kantianism, and phenomenology in a way that was inconceivable in republican France or even Catholic Italy. Another feature of this infrastructure was the Church’s international and polyglot network of seminaries, universities, and publications, which facilitated the dissemination of phenomenological thought internationally. That network was informally anchored by two centers: Rome, whose Papal Academy and Gregorian University hosted faculty, researchers, and students from around the world, and the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, and, within that university, the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie directed by Désiré Mercier, one of the leading figures of the endeavor to bring modern philosophical sensibilities and methods to the study of Thomism. These institutions and the network they anchored freed German phenomenology from the national-political (in an age of heightened nationalism) and especially linguistic barriers that might otherwise have restricted its audience.

The encounter between Thomism and phenomenology proceeded in three steps, of which the third would prove to be of crucial importance for the reforms of Vatican II. First came the great wave of Thomist enthusiasm for Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* (1900). The goal of Rome’s sovereignist strategy was not to withdraw from the secularizing world, but to engage agonistically with it from a firm sovereignist base. Placing Aquinas at the center of its doctrinal and political thought was supposed to serve that strategy. But it meant training a thirteenth century monk to debate with contemporary university philosophers. One of the debates in which

Aquinas's backers hoped he would perform well was that which opposed philosophical realism (the world as we experience it and describe it corresponds pretty well to the world as it actually is) to modern skepticism (there is no way to prove this last proposition because we can't get outside of our discursively constructed ideas of the world so as to test them) and the idealism that skepticism inspired (we construct an image of the world that we can share with confidence, perhaps not as it actually is, but as enabled by our shared – but arguably limited – sensory faculties). The debate had theological consequences. The world is, for theologians, God's gift to humanity to cultivate and enjoy. Skepticism is not only unwarranted but ungrateful. Idealism is worse. It claims that the world is a construction of the human mind, and therefore replaces admiration for God with admiration for humanity. Aquinas, needless to say, never participated in this debate. He has no epistemology on offer. When Husserl therefore claimed that consciousness is always consciousness of something, that through intentionality we are conscious of something that transcends the mind, that we must mark a distinction between acts of thought and intentional objects, Thomists thought they had discovered a brother in arms who was laying out a sophisticated path to the mind-independent world that idealism impugned. Husserl's philosophy, moreover, bore a close resemblance to that of Leuven's own Désiré Mercier. The infatuation was precipitous, however. Husserl, a former mathematician, was interested specifically in a priori logical laws, untroubled by empirical contingencies. He characterized perceptual experience as one of *Abschattungen*, of adumbrations, a cut below the unproblematic objects of Aquinas. Moreover, the realist-idealist binary is, from the perspective of phenomenology, one of the legacies of a sedimented philosophical lexicon that the return to the things themselves was designed to transcend.

The second step was marked by the horror that greeted Husserl's publication of *Ideas* in 1913, which was "experienced by neo-scholastics as a betrayal." In 1906, five years after the publication of *Logical Investigations*, Husserl began to adopt the

term epochê, borrowed from the Greek skeptics who used it to describe an attitude of non-commitment regarding philosophical disputes. For the skeptics, the epochê begat inner tranquility, ataraxia. Two millenia later Husserl was using it to describe how the observer might rise above and neutralize whatever naïve, inherited presuppositions she brought to her work so as to examine objects in their pure immanence, as purely given. The epochê enabled the “eidetic” (from eidos, Plato’s “form” – related to the latin video) reduction, which distilled that which is essential in the phenomenon from that which is accidental (there are one-floor houses and two-floor houses, but both display an essential house-ness). Essences are not given to the observer as self-evident. We have to work to reveal them. Identifying is a labor of the mind. Husserl therefore appeared to be moving away from the realm of objectivity to one of transcendental consciousness. Indeed, he labeled his phenomenology “transcendental idealism.” The evocation of Kant was the horror of horrors. Again, however, there was misunderstanding. The transcendental sphere does not preclude existence claims, and the Husserlian subject is not solipsistic. There is corporeality and intersubjectivity. When Edith Stein, who had studied with the Catholic phenomenologist Max Scheler and would become a translator of Aquinas, arrived in Freiburg in 1916 to work as Husserl’s assistant, she brought with her some well-developed doubts and misgivings, and wrote privately in 1917 that “an absolutely existing physical nature on the one hand, and a distinctly structured subjectivity on the other, seem to me to be prerequisites before an intuiting nature can constitute itself.” It’s not clear that Husserl would have disagreed. But she arrived in Freiburg anticipating that he would. The misinterpretation expresses a fundamental divide: reason for Aquinas and the Thomists is divine, and through reason we participate in divinity. For Husserl reason is human and immanent, and the challenge is to determine how to use it so as to eliminate the barriers that reasoning, in the past, erected between the human subject and the world. Note that criticism of Husserl’s idealist turn was not the monopoly of Thomists. Husserl’s own students hesitated to endorse it, and many of them, after the war, would reorganize

their thought around the question of existence in time with the help of Martin Heidegger.

The Historicized Subject

Heidegger's *Being and Time* inaugurates step three in the history of Thomism's encounter with phenomenology. Heidegger began his career as a Thomist and wrote his Habilitation dissertation on Duns Scotus. He was denied the chair in Catholic Philosophy at Freiburg, however, because he was judged to have been immoderately influenced by Husserl's idealism. The judgment was unfair. His dissertation was not Husserlian, but argued rather for a richer and more concrete understanding of subjectivity, as bounded within and by history. But the disappointment contributed to Heidegger's estrangement from Thomism (though he would never reject its anti-modernism). Ironically, his work was generally well received by Catholic philosophers who were testing or resisting the Church's sovereigntist posture and who, inspired by the ideal of *ressourcement*, were working to develop a more critically and historically oriented Thomism. Important among these was Erich Przywara, discussed below, the influential editor of the Jesuit journal *Stimmen der Zeit* – "voices of the times" – who treated "Heidegger and his emerging school" as carving "a path from the transcendental subject to the transcendent object, that is, real reality."

Heidegger borrowed elements of his historical grounding of subjectivity from the Christian mystics – Meister Eckhart, Bernard of Clairvaux, Teresa of Avila, and especially Augustine. It was Augustine that moved him to rethink intentionality, not as it relates to knowledge but as it relates to a more fundamental, worldly, and pressing "care," *cura*, or *Sorge*. From Augustine he moved on naturally to Luther and Kierkegaard, and then fortified his understanding of historicism, already apparent in his thesis on Duns Scotus, by reading Schleiermacher and Dilthey. That project took him to Marburg and friendship with the influential Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann who introduced Heidegger to the "hermeneutics of facticity." Protestant

and Catholic thought came together in Heidegger's atheistic masterpiece, *Being and Time*, in which, writes Baring, "we can see the fraught development of the two confessional strands...: an ontological project, continuous with his early Catholic studies, and an analysis of *Dasein*, continuous with his investigations into Protestant religious experience in the period after 1916, which would explain how being disclosed itself to us."

For Catholic philosophers and theologians, *Being and Time* located a new site at which to test the sovereignist frontier. The debate would not oppose "dogmatic" Thomists to the more philosophically and critically oriented Thomists, however, but would bring the latter into productive dialogue with their Protestant colleagues, engaged in their own contest with the liberal theologies of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and von Harnack. New thinking, in other words, blurred the frontier that separated the two expressions of western Christianity and engendered dialogues of enduring importance, notably between Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar (discussed below). The new scholarly dialogue both foreshadowed and contributed to Vatican II's commitment to ecumenism.

New thought was fueled in no small part by the rediscovery of Søren Kierkegaard's writings, which resonated with the sense of crisis that penetrated cultural and scholarly life during the interwar period. Peter Gordon writes: "The language of crisis serves as a helpful introductory framework for understanding the cultural context of interwar German philosophy. ...Much of what makes the encounter [with Heidegger] so compelling in philosophical memory today is the sense of urgency that struck so many participants at the time." That sense of urgency was widespread and found expression in multiple styles: Tristan Tzara's Dadaism, Simone Weil's denunciation of the "machine" (anticipating Kubrick's "doomsday machine"), George Grosz's portrayals of a noblesse-sans-obligations ruling class, Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*, and on and on.... Peter Gordon recalls an obsessive and widespread interest in educational reform: "the Germans were ...consumed with worry at the apparent disconnect between scholarship and 'worldview': their conversation

turned with great frequency to the ‘crisis’ of cultural formation and the ‘alienation of Spirit from life.’ That concern was felt well beyond Germany’s frontiers. Recall that in faraway Chicago, Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, fearing that positivism and the technological style were endangering the university’s mission, instituted the famous “Great Books” curriculum of Aristotelian inspiration – an unintended, mimetic tribute to the Thomist revival.

Kierkegaard inspired the Protestant theologian Karl Barth’s “dialectical theology,” grounded in God’s “critical negation” of humanity’s efforts to comprehend and embrace him. God, Barth argued, is totally other, even in revelation. Faith for Barth is a *Wagnis*, a “gamble,” fraught with risk. Bultmann sought to shore up Barth’s dialectical theology by providing it with an anthropology of Heideggerian inspiration. Dialectical theologians resisted that anthropology, however, because it was not compatible with the more foundational doctrine of God’s radical alterity. Catholic Thomists, by contrast, were attracted to that anthropology for precisely the same reason that the Protestants resisted it. They discovered in Heidegger’s ontology a meditation on divine creation that, theologically, could culminate in belief. Their complaints about Heidegger were the polar opposite of Protestant complaints. Erich Przywara criticized Heidegger for restricting without justification the ontological given of human consciousness. Urs von Balthasar, discussed below, contended that Heidegger’s portrayal of human finitude cut humanity off unnecessarily from any sense of the transcendent. We find in the contrasting but oddly complementary appropriations of Heidegger by Catholic and Protestant theologians the almost stereotypical contrast between a Catholic religious sensibility that focuses on the mediation of God by the world – the sacraments, human reason, truth, charity, and beauty – and Protestant insistence on God’s inconceivable otherness, Kierkegaard’s unassailable mountain and either/or.

A similar encounter was taking place in Paris between Catholic thought and existentialism, represented not (yet) by Heidegger but by the Christian philosopher Gabriel Marcel. Marcel was first attracted to Thomist thought as a platform from

which to explore how an incarnated, historicized human conscience makes sense of existence. Thomism's realism and its rejection of the disembodied Cartesian mind were crucial for Marcel. He participated regularly in Jacques Maritain's weekly salons at the latter's home in Meudon. Maritain was France's most influential representative of a historically, intellectually, and politically engaged Thomism. But Marcel ended his visits to Meudon in order to organize a rival salon that was less preoccupied by the hair-splitting subtleties of Thomist thought. Existence, Marcel argued, exposes us to mystery, that is, to experiences of the world that cannot be objectified. Relationships, for instance – friendship, loyalty, and love – not only challenge the subject's capacity to define and encapsulate experience conceptually, but disarm our powers of objectification. The self in love is vulnerable, not in control, and exposed to humiliation. Being in the world in this mode of relationality is mystery, not sovereign mastery.

Marcel developed his ideas in dialogue with Karl Jaspers. If we feel compelled to grapple with being, Jaspers contends, it is because we are bounded by it – we walk in it and are moved by it. Our subordination to being, our inability to step out of it, explains why we can't grasp it. The irreducibility of our historical singularity – our location in time, in a place, in a society, in a tangle of intersubjective commitments that are mine and mine alone – prevent us as Dasein from transcending the empirical analysis of our ontic world and grasping the ontological world as anything other than the private Da of our private Sein, that is, the “here” of our “being” (or, more literally and expressively, the “here of our to be”). Empiricism may enliven the hope of mastery, but the question of the why and wherefore of our existence is disorienting and destabilizing. For the Christian Marcel, it is this last sentiment that should move us to wrestle with the metaphysics of religious faith.

Existentialism resonated with the mood of the age, particularly in Rhineland and Alpine Europe, where war and totalitarianism had, it would seem, imprisoned the subject in a history without meaning and without a credible utopian alternative. It spoke to the sentiment of “humiliation” that the sovereign, reasoning, morally

autonomous subject was forced to endure in a violent century, and the projection of that sentiment on a world – Dasein’s world – that it portrayed as absurd. Camus’ Dr. Rieux is "sick and tired of the world he lives in." Emmanuel Levinas, writing in a German Stalag, explores the parallel between Heideggerian being and insomnia – a mode of being from which the subject can only yearn to escape. Following the war, Michel Foucault would present Kant disconcertingly as a philosopher consumed by the effort to find an “an Ausgang, an ‘exit,’ a ‘way out’” from the clutch of time. Sartre, suffering vertigo while studying a tangle of tree roots, laments: “To exist is simply to be there; those who exist let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them.” The influence of existentialism in Rhineland Europe became such that Jacques Maritain felt compelled to proclaim that Thomism is itself an existential philosophy. Its starting place, like existentialism’s, is concrete existence. It differs only in its loyalty to the lived experience of identity and the lived recognizability of order beneath Sartre’s “frenzied excess” of being. For Maritain, new experiences enrich our account of the world; for Marcel they destabilize it. For Maritain, our intellect presides over our hermeneutic interpretation of the world; for Marcel, the mind is simultaneously assisted and obstructed by the affects.

Although the “sense of urgency” to which Peter Gordon refers helps explain the appeal of existential thought before and after World War II, it also explains the appeal of Fascism, Communism, and of course Catholic anti-modernism. But the latter respond to the sense of urgency in the sovereign style. They define the exceptional state (decadence, nihilism, injustice, apostasy) and enjoin a decision (revolution, ethnic cleansing, Catholic resistance to modernizing ideologies). Existentialism, by contrast, elicits a riposte to absurdity that is informed not by sovereign pretensions to assert mastery, but by embracing the humiliation of the subject at the hands of history. That embrace assumes the form, for example, of Heideggerian or Sartrean authenticity, or Sisyphus’s laugh. It is personal, even solipsistic. It is not political. Solipsism is not an option for the theologian, however, for whom God gathers the self who confesses its humiliation at the hands of history

into the new Jerusalem. The theologians who pave the way to Vatican II try to imagine a being-in-the-world that proposes a riposte to the decadence and nihilism of the times, but one that is ecclesial rather than solipsistic.

Ek-stasis.

The existential riposte to absurdity is one of ek-stasis, of “stepping out” – existêmi – from history, so as to explore a way “forward,” to “project” forward, in a manner that does not pretend, ideologically, to alter history’s course, but that embraces – that assumes “ownership” in Heidegger’s imagery – of historicity as a structurally ineluctable feature of being-in-the-world. In this section I explore two efforts, by Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, to envisage ek-stasis theologically as an alternative to a futile Catholic sovereinism, secessionism, and authoritarianism.

Karl Rahner was born in Freiburg-im-Breisgau in 1904, studied with Heidegger from Fall 1934 to Summer 1936, and became friendly with him after the war. He played a decisive role at Vatican II and his work enjoys enduring prestige. Rahner’s point of departure was sufficiently “modernist” to earn him a monitus – a “watch yourself” – from the Roman Curia in the late 1950s. He was inspired initially by the critical historical engagement with scripture and the patristic literature that was being championed by scholars like Chenu, Daniélou, de Lubac, Schillebeeckx and others, most of whom had progressed well beyond “watch yourselves” and were formally prohibited by the Curia from teaching and publishing. In response to the disarray that critical historical scholarship was causing in theological circles, Rahner sought to develop an interpretive perspective from which to approach it, one that “assumed nothing,” but adopted the viewpoint of preconceptual, unthematized, “original” (his word – which sounds uncomfortably like Rawls) human existence. We recognize Heidegger’s Dasein in this ambition, as well as the Heideggerian effort to free interpretation from the sedimentation of centuries of scholarly – in this case Thomist – routine.

Dasein, for Heidegger, is the being that comports itself understandingly toward being. It is being that interprets the world in which it is, and in which it can only remain. Through its understanding, Dasein steps out – existêmi – from the present and, in and through ek-stasis, projects itself in time beyond the present, into an imagined future present that remains bound in being, in historical time. Dasein has the interpretive capacity to assume ownership of its time within the finite limits of its being, as being-toward-death. Similarly, for Rahner, our concrete human experience of the world is not immersed in, or entirely absorbed by, the concrete “here,” or “da” of human existence. We are self-aware, we experience ourselves experiencing, and can assume responsibility for that experience. Rahner characterizes the self’s experience of itself experiencing as a kind of transcendence, what I’m calling ek-stasis, a transcendence of the imagination that questions the da of dasein, projects that da forward in time, but does not exist apart from or independently of Dasein’s singular being-in-the-world. Our power to question the present and project ourselves into the future is not something that is external to our existence that we can be said to “possess.” It is what we are. It reflects and expresses our human essence. As the questioning human subject advances, as being, in a world that invites interrogation, the subject steps outside that world and opens itself infinitely to the unknown through the unfolding of what Rahner describes in Aristotelian/Thomist terms as an entelechy. Ek-stasis for Rahner the theologian, in contrast to Heidegger, is not obstructed by death’s door. On the contrary, the encounter with that horizon exposes Dasein to the thought of being-most-irreducible, being sans “da,” extricated from the accidents of time and history.

Rahner draws on Heidegger to humble the Cartesian-Kantian subject by placing it ineluctably in history, time, and place. But he turns to Husserl to help describe ek-stasis, or “transcendence.” It is true that humanity, for Rahner, transcends the “here” of its existence, its being-in-the-world, in its engagement with the particularities of its historically concrete and singular world. But he attributes Dasein’s desire to transcend its here-and-now to what he calls the “drive of the

mind,” an inexhaustible and infinite dynamic. He borrows the concept from the theologian Joseph Maréchal, who taught at the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de Louvain (Leuven), the most “transgressive” of Catholic theological institutes as regards the Church’s sovereignist project. Maréchal drew explicitly on Kant (the dogmatic Thomist’s arch-foe) for his portrayal of a subject that actively and dynamically structures what it knows. Rahner recasts Maréchal’s idealism with Husserl’s help so as to elaborate his thinking coherently within the linguistic framework of phenomenology. It is, for Rahner, through a kind of Kantian or Husserlian labor to structure the world that Dasein accedes to knowledge of absolute being, to being in its essence.

This dynamic empties Rahner’s theology, however much grounded in the singular experience of a world indissociable from history, of any meaningful reference to existential absurdity. For this reason Rahner is not generally associated with the existential theologians (Lonergan, among Catholics, and Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich among Protestants). Absurdity for Rahner is the absence of meaning. That absence is not possible in a world that promises meaning and provides what it promises. The absence of meaning can only be experienced in relation to its lived presence. Although the experience of the world can elicit questions that defy answer, and impose on us the awareness of our finitude, constraints, and limitations, we still experience the world as intelligible, and we still anticipate intelligibility and coherence even, and especially when, it is not (yet) present. We cannot help but anticipate that an answer is forthcoming. It is this very anticipation that situates the transcendence of our finitude in the form of what Rahner calls (not without controversy) the *Vorgriff*, the pre-conceptualization, pre-apprehension, or, to give the term a well-deserved Kantian rendition, the a priori capacity to conceptualize, as the condition of possibility of our intellectual insistence on an answer.

The *Vorgriff* situates the encounter between Rahner’s philosophizing and his theologizing. The word “God,” as word, enters his existential narrative at this point. It enters, as word, as a fact that inhabits the historically located world into which

Rahner and us have both been thrown, and which elicits questions that Rahner and his historically local co-inhabitants, in their drive, seek to answer. The word provokes and galvanizes the “drive of the mind.” Even if the word elicits only a haunting question, it spurs Dasein to wonder. And, in the company of other words – beauty, truth, eternity, infinity – it moves Dasein to awe and to poetry. The drive of the mind, the will to make sense, pursues the a priori pre-apprehension, the *Vorgriff*. The *Vorgriff* conditions the anticipatory experience of God. Dasein, being-in-the-world, driven by the will to make sense, experiences the world as pointing beyond itself. Words that normally refer to the things of the world, “father,” for example, are introduced by analogy into contexts that direct their signifying power toward the incomprehensible source and origin of the concrete things they name. Language, analogy, and transcendence together structure a discursive universe in which each of these three structural elements supports and nourishes the other. Each signifies a fundamental human experience and, simultaneously, interrogates the mystery of that experience. Within that discursive space the mind is born by human essence away from being-in-time-and-place toward being-most-irreducible, to which the word “God” is applied analogically. Rahner introduces the term “supernatural existential” to express, as profession of faith, God’s two-fold gift: the gift of the world and the gift of the drive that lifts Dasein, from and through its being-in-the-world, to the encounter with God as being-most-irreducible. Rahner is laboring to provide theology with a more robust and sophisticated reading of Aquinas – a “transcendental Thomism.” *Esse*, the Thomist translation of being-most-irreducible, becomes the “worauf,” that is, the whither-to of the *Vorgriff* (the -auf of *worauf* echoes the ana- of analogy). Dasein’s dynamic orientation toward the mystery of God is the obverse of God’s self-communication to Dasein through this gift that is the the world and the gift of the drive of the mind that seeks to understand – Heidegger’s *verstehen* – the world. Human nature in its essence is transcendence to God in the freedom of inquiry. Despite Rahner’s debt to idealism, “transcendence” remains grounded in Dasein’s singular experience of the world, and it confers dignity on that experience. Dasein in the world cannot shake the world loose. Between the

mind's drive and the discernment of a "way out," an infinite number of questions intercede in and through an infinite number of singular historical encounters. Rahner's theology acknowledges that singularity and therefore the diversity of a multitude of ek-staseis. Rahner's theology, with its bold synthesis of somewhat incompatible philosophies, will be on display at Vatican II

The existentialist style, as discussed earlier, reflects the age that gave birth to it. For this reason it is interesting to compare Rahner's thought with that of Erich Przywara, his immediate predecessor and inspiration, in which the existentialist style is not yet apparent. In comparing the two we witness the emergence of the thought of ekstasis. Przywara, Heidegger's contemporary and Rahner's senior by only a decade, was, as the editor of *Stimmen der Zeit*, steeped in contemporary philosophical debate. The Jesuit journal's (unstated) mission was to test the frontiers of Catholic sovereignism. Przywara's editorial assignment took him to Munich and a cultural scene animated by the likes of Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, Thomas Mann, and Franz Marc and the Blauer Reiter group. Historical situatedness was not the abstract, philosophical concept for Przywara that it was for the Freiburg native Karl Rahner. Przywara wrote on Husserl and Heidegger (whose concept of Being he critiqued for being "a lot of nothing"), as well as on Simmel, Scheler, Buber, Kant, Hölderlin, Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth. His goal was to think past "Kulturkampf-katholizismus" and to bring Church teaching to bear on a post-World War I central Europe that had been dramatically destabilized by civilizational decline and crisis. The times called for a style of thought that was less complacent and self-assured than Thomism. Przywara grounded his theological thought in subjectivity, if only because that was where the philosophical world surrounding him was grounding it. Subjectivity was, for Przywara, a *terre de mission*. Przywara's response to the times was to revive and revitalize the medieval theology of the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being. As the moniker suggests, it centers on being in time and in history. The concept, though venerable, proved particularly relevant to Przywara's efforts to grapple with the humbling of the modern subject. He uses the term

“analogy” not only in the sense of metaphor, but in the original Greek sense of “reckoning.” “Analogy” evokes the active appraisal of similarity and dissimilarity between the profane and the divine. The analogical experience of the world mediates between the subject and God, but in a rhythmic, dialectic oscillation (sans *Aufhebung*) between similarity and dissimilarity, or what Przywara calls a *Schweben* or swinging. The *analogia entis* elaborates a metaphysics of active interplay between the human, conceived as singularity, and the divine. The interplay, the *Schweben*, however, is as contemplative as Thomist dialectics. It enables advancement in the knowledge of God, but it does not evoke the dramatic decisionism of seeking and electing a “way out,” an *ek-stasis*, from confinement in the absurdity of the present. The imagery of *ek-stasis* is completely absent from Przywara’s thought.

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), Rahner’s contemporary, was, like Rahner, much influenced by Przywara, with whom he worked for several years at *Stimmen der Zeit*. *Ek-stasis* will appear in Balthasar’s theology, but, in comparison with Rahner, in a more assertively existentialist form. Balthasar also drew liberally on the work of Heidegger, though he never studied with him. Following his doctorate he studied at the Jesuit College of Fourvière, in Lyon, where Jean Daniélou, Gaston Fessard, and Henri de Lubac were championing critical historical interpretation. As in the case of Przywara, Balthasar’s eclectic interests, as exemplified by his writings on Kant, Schelling, Nietzsche, Rosenzweig, Scheler, Jaspers, Hegel, Heidegger, and the Dada figure Johannes Baader, made him something of an expert on “modernity.” Balthasar would also garner fame for his authoritative studies of the theological works of the Protestant Karl Barth, with whom he would become personally close.

Balthasar wrote his doctoral thesis in Literary Studies rather than Philosophy. His first book, *The Apocalypse of the German Soul*, explored works by Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Mann, and Rilke. As a student of literature, Balthasar was at ease with the historical situatedness of authors and their readers, and was not disturbed by the claim that the encounter with God is always singular (as Augustine had already claimed in the fourth century – it’s not a new idea). But he found the site of that

encounter not in abstract, theoretical inquiry, as did Aquinas and Rahner, but in affect, in aesthetics. He advocated a “theological aesthetics” through which to better appreciate the “theological dramatics” of scripture. He was critical of Rahner on two counts. First, he faulted Rahner’s reluctance to make greater use of the findings of critically oriented scriptural scholarship, despite the importance he accorded to it. Second, he wasn’t fond of Rahner’s *Vorgriff*, our supposed transcendental attentiveness to the supernatural. Balthasar argues that the encounter with God is not cognitive but aesthetic. It demands narration rather than explication. Christian faith specifically is rooted in the singularity’s aesthetic reaction to (the tale of) God’s abandonment of his only begotten son, Jesus, to be crucified and condemned to infinite separation in the nether world. It was a poor reward for the consummate obedience that Christ had always shown the Father he loves. But our affective reaction – mourning, confusion, indignation, anger, sadness – sets us up for Easter, the Resurrection, and the Ascension, the experience of which Balthasar encapsulates in the term *glory*, which again connotes an aesthetic response. Balthasar insists, moreover, that the crucifixion and resurrection, if they are to be affectively and effectively lived, must be placed within the full literary context of God’s relationship with his servant Israel, as consigned to the Torah and the writings of the Prophets. The emotional roller coaster of our literary encounter with scripture is itself a stepping out of the present, an *ek-stasis* from history, into a narrative, aesthetic space in which the *kenosis*, the non-sovereign self-giving self-sacrifice of the Son of God, as person or hypostasis of the Trinity, prevails over godlessness, abandonment, and death. It is an *ek-stasis* that can only be experienced singularly because it can only be experienced aesthetically. That *ek-stasis*, singularly lived, nevertheless orients the subject toward new worlds of possibility, a “transcendence” of sorts, but one deprived of *entelechy* and a *priori* drive. And, as with Rahner, that world is discerned obscurely, precisely because it is unencumbered by dogmatic argument and ostentation. It is apprehended by the affects as a world in which, according to the psalmist, justice and peace shall kiss.

Balthasar's rendering of the existentialist sensibility bears a closer likeness to the secular literature than does Rahner's. We find the same humiliation of the subject, historically bounded, and exposed to a story that belongs to the facticity of being-in-the-world. In contrast to Rahner, however, Balthasar's subject doesn't think its way toward faith. The ek-stasis nevertheless situates the subject's power to discern new possibilities "through a glass darkly." Ek-stasis according to both Balthasar and Rahner, however, differs from that of the secular existentialists because, though lived singularly, it culminates in an ek-klesia, a calling out to assembly, in contrast to the solipsistic experience of authenticity described by Heidegger and Sartre.

Vatican II: The Surprise

We cannot fully understand Vatican II without discerning in its deliberations and resolutions the reflection of a broadly existentialist, non-sovereignist riposte to absurdity and nihilism. The council was a rebellion against sovereignism and the conceptual, supra-historical subject that undergirds it. It reversed the sovereignist project not through institutional change, however, but through the reconceptualization of what one could most appropriately call the Church's being-in-the-world. The Church abandoned sovereignty discourse and replaced it with, to use the official term, pastoral discourse. Pastoral discourse dismantled the sovereign frontier between Catholic and non-Catholic and turned the site of separation by difference into a site of encounter, curiosity, and sharing.

Vatican II was a complete and utter surprise. No rationalized historical reconstruction of the event can do it justice. The Council was surprising in several ways: first, because it was called, second, because of the bishop's unanticipated resistance to authority, and third, because of the bishops' unforeseen receptivity to non-sovereignist thinking. As regards the first point, the idea of calling a council to finish the work begun by Vatican I (cut short by the occupation of Rome by Italian troops) had been casually evoked through the years but regularly postponed. No one expected that Angelo Roncalli, elected Pope John XXIII in October 1958, would be the

man to call it. Roncalli was both a company man and an outsider, a diplomat who represented the Vatican abroad, but who, for this reason, was perpetually far from Rome. He was also seventy-six years old at the time of his election, and was named pope only because he was a provisionally acceptable second-choice candidate for all. But three months into his tenure he startled the world by announcing his intention to convene a council to “promote the enlightenment, edification, and joy of the entire Christian people,” and to extend “a renewed cordial invitation to the faithful of the separated communities [Protestant and Orthodox] to participate with us in [a] quest for unity and grace.” He passed over the putative need to complete the work of the sovereignist Vatican I council in silence (hence the numbers, one and two). Moreover, the “cordial invitation” rather than the more habitual “exhortation” constituted already, at the time of the announcement, an initial transgression of the sovereign style. One could argue that the call was not a surprise, and that it made historical sense. Roncalli’s diplomatic assignments took him to Orthodox Bulgaria, Muslim Turkey, and heterodox and secularist Paris, and so gave him an experience of life beyond the Church’s sovereign borders. But there is no documentation that actually supports this claim, and the observation itself doesn’t amount to a prediction.

The second surprise was the bishops’ show of independence and openness to non-sovereignist discourse from day one of the council. In order to prepare for the conference, nearly three thousand bishops around the world were asked to forward to Rome what one might call by analogy their cahiers de doléances. The doléances themselves were few and unoriginal: tightening up doctrine and denouncing communism headed the list. Few bishops raised questions regarding the use of Latin in the liturgy or the desire for Christian unity. The bishops’ replies were then handed over to the Curia whose task it was to group them by topic and come up with an agenda. About 2500 bishops arrived for the first session of the Council in Fall, 1962, with the expectation that they would be presented with resolutions by the Curia which they would then be asked to approve with all the enthusiasm and fidelity

of a Communist Party Central Committee, and then go home. But the Pope reserved yet another surprise. His welcome address, though it confirmed his attachment to “authentic doctrine,” added that doctrine should nevertheless “be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through literary forms of modern thought.” He drove the point home by appointing renegades De Lubac, Congar, Chenu, Schillebeeckx, and Rahner among the *periti*, the scholarly experts who would help guide the bishops in their deliberations. His words apparently mobilized the bishops to think and act more independently than was their custom. When, at the first session, the Curia invited the bishops to elect its pre-vetted list of candidates to sit on the redaction committees, the bishop of Lille politely asked that they be given time to discuss the list. The bishop of Cologne seconded the motion. The assembly supported the move by an unusually large margin and reacted by giving itself a round of applause.

The third surprise was the bishops’ openness to non-sovereignist thinking. Nearly all the bishops had been named by popes Pius XII and Pius XI. They had all regarded sovereignism as doctrine. But John XXIII largely withdrew during the council, depriving it of sovereign impetus and allowing it to become a highly political event. All the wrangling, back-channeling, *fait-accomplis*, and procedural conspiring that we would expect in the most profane of parliamentary assemblies occurred under the vaults of St Peter’s. Bishops organized themselves into factions, most of which reflected regional sensibilities, but which nevertheless displayed political proclivities. The bishops of Latin America were increasingly reluctant to bow to European hegemony, and those of Africa were anxious to show independence at this culminating moment (the early 1960s) of European decolonization. The most active and influential of these geographically centered groups, the Transalpine group, was the best prepared for doctrinal debate and, more specifically, came armed with elements of a vision of a post-sovereignist Church. The group was composed of bishops from Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Austria, and included many of the most energetic participants in the council: Josef Frings of

Cologne, Achille Liénart of Lille, Julius Döpfner of Munich, Bernhard Alfrink of Utrecht, Léon-Joseph Suenens of Mechelen-Bruxelles, Augustin Bea, a native of Baden but formally attached to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and the North American Bishop of Montreal, Paul-Émile Léger. During the months when the Council was not in session the German bishops would organize meetings to examine questions and debate texts. Bishops from neighboring countries frequently joined them. Karl Rahner was the principal theological adviser to this group, and he helped compose a number of texts that the group submitted for debate to the Council. When the Council was in session, the group continued to meet regularly at the Belgian College of Rome, prompting wisecracks that the Council should be renamed Leuven I.

One of the great surprises of the Council was an unanticipated hunger for non-sovereignist reform. It surprised the bishops themselves, who, as noted above, arrived in Rome prepared to vote yes. The texts presented to the Council were energetically debated, however, and revised, re-debated and re-revised. One of the effects of the multiplication of informal, geographic blocs was to demonstrate to bishops who sympathized with reform that they were not alone, nor even a minority. The resistance to sovereignist discourse was predictably strongest among the transalpine bishops, for whom the experience of nihilism and devastation was the most traumatic, the integration of Catholics into post-war democratic life the most advanced, and interest in developing a transgressive, reformist discourse the most sustained. But one of the great surprises of the Council was the degree to which non-sovereignist discourse resonated with non-European bishops. In order to counter non-sovereignist discourse, a non-geographical, doctrinal grouping was formed, the International Group of Fathers. The media characterized the group as “conservative,” but the transalpines contested that characterization. For them, sovereignist discourse was not conservative, but was as new and as disruptive as that of the liberal, nation-state discourse that it proposed to combat by imitation. Reformist advocacy of a return to patristic sources (“ressourcement”) was, by their

assessment, more truly “conservative,” in the literal sense of the term. It soon became evident how isolated the International Group was. Controversial and hotly debated motions and texts were approved by typical majorities of about 2200 to about 200. Support for reform was, moreover, spontaneous. It did not reflect deference to the Pope. Though canon law (recently rationalized) placed councils unambiguously under the oversight of the Pope, John XXIII rarely intervened. During the first session, in 1962, he was more involved in helping resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis than he was in running the Council. His successor, Paul VI, allowed himself to be lobbied and intervened more often in Council deliberations, but did so typically to spare the International Group from marginalization and embarrassment.

The surprise that was Vatican II was consigned to the documents it produced, especially the three that were most hotly debated: *Dignitatis humanae*, *Nostra aetate*, and *Gaudium et Spes*. The first was the Council’s declaration on freedom of religion, a novel concept for a church that had cultivated a working relationship with political power since the fourth century, and whose experiment in sovereignism sought specifically to reformulate that relationship in an age of liberalism and national self-determination. *Dignitatis* was grounded in an existentially inspired anthropology that drew on the affect-based phenomenology of Max Scheler, the Neothomist synthesis of Jacques Maritain, and the more radically Sartrean Personalism promoted by Emmanuel Mounier and his colleagues at *Esprit*. It acknowledged *Dasein*’s singularity and the accession to faith through personal, historically grounded experience and inquiry, and went so far as not to exclude the unbaptized from salvation.

Nostra Aetate began as an effort to reconceptualize Christian-Jewish relations after the Holocaust. That effort proved to be politically fraught for the Syriac churches of the Middle East in a period wedged between the Suez Crisis and the Six-Day War. The Council therefore decided to address Catholic relations with non-Christian religions generally and include a long passage on Judaism in this context. That passage concludes: “mindful of the patrimony [the Church] shares with the Jews

and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone." In perhaps the most significant transgression of Church sovereignism, the Council declared more generally that the Church "rejects nothing that is true and holy in [non-Christian, even non-Abrahamic] religions. It regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings, which though different in many aspects from the ones it holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men."

Gaudium et Spes is a constitutional text that outlines the Church's place in the world. It reprises language on the dignity of the singular human being, created in the image of God and called, in and through history, to communion with God. Because the Church's purpose is to promote that dignity and to prepare that communion, it is obliged to participate in policy debates as they affect that purpose. *Gaudium et Spes* re-affirmed Church teaching on labor relations, first introduced by Leo XIII and confirmed by several encyclicals since then. But it innovated by lauding the achievements of science and technology, which it treated as a kind of *Przywran* analogy, oscillating between likeness and negation of the divine. Karl Rahner was much implicated in the redaction of this text, as were Marie-Dominique Chenu and future pope Joseph Ratzinger. The document was unprecedented in its appeal to historicist thinking and its concern for the "world" beyond Europe and outside the Church.

The greatest innovation in the Council's documents, however, may have been stylistic. The innovation is obvious when we contrast the quotes in the preceding paragraph with the denunciation of the eighty errors of modernity evoked earlier in this essay. Rome prior to Vatican II was a kind of court of appeals. It said the law and talked like a judge. Vatican II, writes John O'Malley, moves, by contrast, "from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from definition to mystery, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue. It did not 'define' the teaching but taught it on almost every page through the form and

vocabulary it adopted.” Vatican II, O’Malley continues, was a “language event.” Its texts were suffused by an unconventional vocabulary: “brothers/sisters, friendship, cooperation, collaboration, partnership, freedom, dialogue, pilgrim, servant, development, evolution, charism, dignity, holiness, conscience, collegiality, people of God, priesthood of all believers.”

Style and vocabulary alone set Vatican II apart from every council that preceded it. More importantly, they enabled the Church to embrace a new way of being in the world. The Council gave voice to the humbled, historicized subject of twentieth century Europe and its ek-stasis from that historical dead-end. From the humiliation of nihilism it projected toward a possible future more meaningful and more promising than the present. Humiliation and ek-stasis help us understand why the Council had to be a surprise. The subject’s sovereign claim to make something happen “according to plan” was out of bounds from the outset. It was rejected by the very sovereign who called the meeting.

The Schuman Declaration.

Nine years before John XXIII called for an ecumenical council, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed a plan to bring the production of steel and coal in France and West Germany under the control of a single, supra-national authority. The Schuman Declaration, like John XXIII’s call to convene an ecumenical council, must be interpreted against the backdrop of twentieth century nihilism and the philosophically informed riposte to that nihilism. The humbling of the European subject by war, in both instances, conditioned a stepping out from Europe’s historical predicament so as to imagine new ways of being-in-the-world. The reform of European political space, like the Vatican II reforms, rejected sovereigntist discourse. The historically specific, “immanent” origins of the ECSC become apparent when we note that neither the ECSC nor the EU more generally has been replicated outside of Europe. Both are historically and geographically singular. And,

like Vatican II, it was a surprise. It didn't have to happen and it didn't have to succeed.

Diplomatically, the Declaration unraveled the Gordian knot that was confounding the western allies in 1949-1950. The United States had been pushing hard and successfully to unite the three western occupation zones of Germany into a sovereign, economically functional republic that would eventually join NATO and defend the front lines of America's anti-Soviet cordon sanitaire. The French, however, were appalled and dismayed by America's efforts. They could not help but recall America's solicitude for Germany after World War I, its sudden withdrawal from Europe after having secured German unity, and the twenty-year crisis that ensued. The French therefore responded to US initiatives by vetoing whatever they had the power to veto: easing production limits on Ruhr industry, settling the question of the Saarland (which France had annexed to its economic space), Germany's admission to the Council of Europe, and Germany's membership in the Atlantic alliance. France's resistance threatened the viability of America's containment policy by giving encouragement to political forces in Germany that favored anti-capitalist reforms and were fighting for a full reunification of Germany, including the Soviet occupation zone, which would, like Austria, participate in neither the American nor the Soviet military alliance. The struggle split not only public opinion but the political parties, the CDU and the SPD, that were still being cobbled together following years of Nazi dictatorship. The Americans feared that such dissension, geopolitically unrealistic, would only have the effect of undermining the authority of their chief ally in Germany, the leader of the CDU and Chancellor of the Federal Republic, Konrad Adenauer. Adenauer, himself, feared the specter of a neutral Germany. The Soviet Union had exited the war with enormous prestige, and Communist parties in Italy, France, and Belgium were attracting strong electoral support. Adenauer also feared American isolationism. Nevertheless he did not support German participation in the western alliance at any price. He was insisting that limits on Ruhr industrial output be lifted, that the fate of the Saarland

be negotiated, and that the Federal Republic be admitted as a fully sovereign member to the Council of Europe, the OEEC, the International Authority of the Ruhr, and NATO.

The United States tried to win French support for its vision by placing German reunification within the constraining framework of some kind of European organization. The idea of such a community was not new. It had exercised the European political imagination, as a realistic enterprise, since 1919. Many of Europe's most celebrated cultural personalities supported the project – Thomas Mann, Alfred Einstein, Sigmund Freud, José Ortega y Gasset, Jules Romain, Paul Valéry – as did, more importantly, Gustav Stresemann and Aristide Briand, German and French foreign ministers in the 1920s. The non-Communist Resistance movements had inscribed European federalism in their manifestos. The United States therefore took advantage of widespread federalist sentiment to create an Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) in 1948, to which it assigned the task of distributing Marshall Plan financial aid. That same year, western European governments, responding to an appeal by Winston Churchill, created a Council for Europe, which, with its representative assembly and Court of Human Rights, was supposed to lay the institutional foundation for a European federation. The US also sought to placate the French by accompanying the reunion of the three western occupation zones into a Federal Republic by establishing the International Authority of the Ruhr in 1949, which set limits on coal and steel production. France supported all these initiatives but consistently vetoed German participation, opposed German sovereignty, and made clear that it would continue to do so until its security fears, justified by history, were addressed. Germany, we should recall, had been unified only seventy-five years before. German nationhood lacked historical legitimation and, in French eyes, only brought instability and imbalance to European relations. France needed the resources of the Saarland to rebuild its economy, moreover, and it needed limitations on Ruhr output in order to remain competitive with what had been, prior to the war, the world's number two

industrial power. France's opposition fomented an abiding diplomatic crisis. The NATO treaty was signed in April, 1949, the German Federal constitution was approved in May, 1949, and the Soviets detonated their first atom bomb in September 1949. The Americans now turned to the French in desperation. They asked to French to find a way to make German participation in western international institutions, as a nation equal in sovereign rights, acceptable to them. The item was placed on the agenda of the May 10, 1950 meeting of the International Authority of the Ruhr.

The French response was set out in the Schuman Declaration. Its proposal to create a European Coal and Steel Community squared the circle. It placed German heavy industry under a transnational authority from which the United States was notably absent. Such a transnational institution would help to address France's security concerns (military power at that time was still forged in steel), allay its suspicions regarding US motivations and diplomatic competence, and its trepidations about competing with Germany in European and world markets. The ECSC made France and Germany equal participants in a supranational economic space governed by a supranational organization, and acknowledged the Federal Republic's standing as an equal partner and sovereign nation. It also styled itself as a significant step toward further European integration, as represented symbolically by its parliamentary assembly and its Court of Justice. Italy and the Benelux countries responded positively to France's invitation to join. Diplomatically, the reference to European federalism had the merit of also addressing American fears that the Germans and French would create an unbeatable coal and steel trust, on the traditional European, monopolist model. Extending membership to Italy and the Benelux muddied those waters.

The ECSC proposal was a surprise, one that becomes apparent when we review the various, contending interpretations that seek to reveal its "historical logic." I will treat the first of these in greater detail because it relates back to our discussion of Vatican II. According to this interpretation, popular at the time in Socialist and

Communist circles, the ECSC was a Catholic conspiracy. The claim is based, first, on the fact that the two principal figures behind the proposal – Robert Schuman of France and Konrad Adenauer of Germany – were both practicing Catholics and leaders of their respective Christian Democratic parties (MRP – Mouvement Républicain Populaire – in France). The Christian Democrats were also in power in the other participating countries, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Over the next four decades, Christian Democrats showed great commitment to European unification. The claim is based, second, on Robert Schuman's 1954 book *Pour l'Europe* and other public statements in which he cites Jacques Maritain and Pius XII as his inspiration. He reprises Maritain's claim that "democracy is linked to Christianity doctrinally and chronologically." Christian Europe has a democratic vocation, which European unification advances by combatting nationalist totalitarianism. Maritain, however, was a lukewarm advocate of European unification, so Schuman turned to Pius XII who declared in 1944 that "the absolute order of beings and purposes ...comprises, as a moral necessity... the unity of mankind and of the family of peoples." Europe doesn't figure in that statement per se, but Pius XII would subsequently evoke the possibility of a federal Europe based on the model of the Swiss Confederation.

This account, like conspiracy theories generally, squeezes lots of conviction out of a thin archive. It is true that the protagonists were devoutly Catholic, and it is conceivable that this fact fostered some degree of trust and complicity between them. More interesting in my view, however, is the fact that they shared, not the same religion, but a similar experience as "frontiersmen" living on the edges of national space, Schuman in German Lorraine and Adenauer on the Catholic, urbanized, and internationalist fringe of Protestant, agrarian, and provincial Prussia. The Italian premier, Alcide De Gasperi, leader of the Italian Christian Democratic party, also devoutly Catholic, grew up in Austrian Trentino (South Tyrol). All three attended German language universities, and when they met personally they talked business in German. But they did not meet often. Their biographies, moreover, do

not show them to have been deeply or even casually literate in the debates unfolding within Catholic social and philosophical circles regarding postwar political possibilities. Their biographies make them look rather like politicians, with all the qualities and limitations that characterize that profession: the foreshortened time horizon, the pressure to address incompatible demands and pressures, the temptation to “go Machiavelli” when circumstances permit. (Schuman, for example, feared his own government would reject the ECSC proposal, so he placed it last on the agenda, presented it rapidly as a mind-numbingly technical initiative, availing himself of all the stultifying rhetorical power of the nerdy technocrat – and it worked). Moreover, each knew that the other had to address myriad pressures coming from various directions, and for that reason, however great their religious sympathies (or not), they deeply distrusted one another as politicians, up through and beyond the Treaty of Paris. As for their alleged religiosity, their biographies do not dismiss it, nor do any of them dedicate a chapter to it. Schuman’s references to Maritain and Pius XII, it should be noted, are after the fact (1954). They may represent nothing more than a back-projected celebration cum glorification of his Declaration. Finally, we should not forget that Charles de Gaulle was also a devout Catholic and a native of Lorraine who spoke fluent German, but was hostile toward European integration because of his almost mystical attachment to the concept of nationhood. Paul van Zeeland, former Prime Minister of Belgium, was also a devout Catholic and a “frontiersman” by dint of his Belgian nationality, but also showed no enthusiasm regarding the ECSC. His proclivities were pro-Atlantic, and better expressed in NATO and the Bilderberg Group.

As for the Christian Democratic parties, they were mere conglomerations of politicians who were all just like Schuman and Adenauer – ambitious, competitive, and barely capable of repressing their inner Machiavellis. The parties were all more or less factionalized and the differences between the factions were serious. As for the party militants, they were more inclined than Adenauer and Schuman, if only because they had the time, to argue and debate within a framework of ideas that

was heavily marked by Thomist and existentialist inspiration. Recovering the terms of these debates would require a separate essay on the modern Catholic concept of the “person.” It would require working our way back to the “person’s” origins in the works of Romano Guardini, the phenomenology of Max Scheler, and the thriving German Catholic youth movement of the interwar period, which Baring describes as Nietzschean in spirit if not inspiration. Paul-Louis Landsberg, a student of Scheler, Husserl, and Heidegger, would introduce German existentialist-style “personalism” into France, notably via Mounier and the journal *Esprit*. Catholic activists like Mounier used the concept of personhood to wage combat with both liberalism and socialism. The person – singular, historically situated, called to faith – is both other than and more than the capitalist consumer or the exploited proletarian. But the idea did not generate an ideology. It was amenable to varying political elaborations. For Mounier and the journal *Esprit*, the imminent collapse of capitalism enabled the flourishing of the person, freed from exploitation. Their position was anti-capitalist, anti-American, and even naïvely pro-Soviet. *Esprit* vigorously opposed German reunification and the Atlantic alliance. (We should recall in this context that the period 1930-1950 witnessed the rise and suppression by the Curia of the worker-priest movement, in which the Vatican II peritus Marie-Dominique Chenu played a significant role. Karol Wojtila [future John-Paul II] introduced the movement into Poland, which after the war, would provide *Esprit* with its staunchest readership. During my university days in Paris, student hawkers of *Témoignage Chrétien* were still selling their wares on the Sunday marketplace side by side with those of the Communist Party weekly, *l’Humanité Dimanche*). An influential but more elitist alternative to socialist personalism, however, was articulated around the concepts of subsidiarity and federalism. The language was legalistic and constitutional, not existentialist and revolutionary. The key concern here was to confer on the person the greatest possible political freedom. Promoting human flourishing by this reading was not incompatible with a well-regulated capitalist economy. The most prominent representative of this version of personalism was Alexandre Marc, a close collaborator of Mounier in his early days and co-founder of *Esprit*. After the war,

however, Marc and Mounier parted ways. Marc became Secretary General of the Union of European Federalists and the leader of the European Federalist Movement. Both constructions of personalism informed debates regarding the direction of Christian Democratic politics in the countries of Rhineland Europe after the war, and therefore pushed and pulled Adenauer and Schuman in a variety of directions. To these two Christian Democratic sensibilities, which both issue from phenomenology, we should, to complete the picture, add the uncomplicated and unadorned anti-Communism of someone like Georges Bidault, Schuman's colleague and rival in the MRP. Regionalism also remained a powerful component of party politics. Adenauer and Schuman were acutely attentive to the affairs of the Rhineland and Lorraine, respectively, as was De Gasperi to the Trentino and Gaston Eyskens to the intense regionalism of Belgian politics. None of these sensibilities should therefore be conceived as homogeneous or even coherent. But they moved party politics, and thus moved Schuman and Adenauer more than the pope did.

Adenauer's CDU, to complicate things further, innovated by appealing to Catholics and Protestants alike to form a strong center right party whose politics would be informed by a Christian Weltanschauung – Adenauer's own term – and compete with the Social Democrats in what Adenauer hoped would evolve into a two-party system. But the CDU had to assert its vision against those who were fighting to resurrect the confessionalist-sovereignist, left-oriented Zentrum, as well as those in Bavaria for whom extending a hand to Protestants was not a particularly urgent task. Adenauer, in his dealings with Schuman, had to respect and juggle all these currents. The French MRP, meanwhile, struggled in similar fashion to attract Catholic voters who had developed the habit of voting for conservative, anti-liberal, anti-socialist candidates, while working with Socialists and Communists to restore the Republic and solidify it with welfare programs. In sum, the conspiracy myth confers on the world of European Catholicism a unity of political purpose and vision that it did not come close to displaying.

In light of these considerations, we should not be surprised that the ECSC never came up for discussion in diplomatic circles prior to the outline of the project that Schuman sent to Adenauer on May 7, two days before his declaration of May 9, and three days before the May 10 meeting with the Americans. None of the ECSC's conceptual sources was recognizably Catholic. Jean Monnet, a liberal technocrat, outlined a proposal that sought to satisfy the Americans and Germans while assuring France access to German resources to help speed French economic reconstruction. Adenauer had discussed bringing France and Germany closer together by creating a grander version of the nineteenth-century German tariff union. Schuman, Monnet, and especially Adenauer were all conversant with the 1923 proposal by German steel magnates to use equity in coal and steel plants to pay reparations, as mandated by the Versailles treaty. That proposal would have addressed French security concerns and ended the occupation of the Ruhr, but was blocked by the United States for commercial reasons. The ideas were all there, but none of them was recognizably Catholic. On the contrary, the thinking and the Declaration itself focused on geopolitics. We read in the Declaration: "The pooling of coal and steel production... will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war... The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible." And it evokes:

...a first step in the federation of Europe... [which will not be achieved] all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany. Any action taken must in the first place concern these two countries.

Other stories have tried to crack the code. These include Alan Milward's influential study of the arduous negotiations that made the ECSC a practical possibility. Milward focuses on the dogged efforts of governments to defend national interests

and portrays the initial experiments in European unification as, ironically, an effort to save the European nation-state. Milward stumbles on the surprise outcome, however, which is the surrender of parcels of state sovereignty to a transnational organization. That surrender would, within a generation, expand from steel and coal to some of the most regal of state powers: control of the money supply, trade policy, border police, industrial policy, agricultural policy, etc. The EU is the only international organization that makes policy for its members. The WTO doesn't make trade policy, nor does the IMF make monetary policy (unless asked to do so). A second interpretation tries to reveal the liberal logic behind the surrender of sovereignty, presented as a "pooling of sovereignty," the goal of which is to make cheating impossible. But the theory trips on the fact that liberal institutional thought was not influential in Europe at that time, and on the fact that the less constraining safeguards that one finds in the WTO or the IMF seem to work well enough. Then there is the story of American hegemony and its efforts to develop international organizations that would provide the institutional infrastructure for an American sphere of influence. It is true that European unification provided Americans with something they badly wanted: European recognition of a sovereign, re-militarized West German republic. But the United States was not involved in developing the initiative, and the price it had to pay was high. European unification discriminates against American exports and it rivals American influence in international organizations.

In summary, we do have an uncomplicated story of conflicting interests that takes us up to the point of Schuman's declaration, but which can't account logically for that declaration. The ECSC proposal was a *deus ex machina*. Like the pope at Vatican II, the American suzerain "decided on the exception," called a meeting, then left the room, abandoning those left behind to their imaginations. Efforts to imagine a solution were informed by broad gauged debate about the possibility of a post- or non-sovereign Europe. The solution to the clash of sovereign interests was to retire the assumption of sovereignty. Neither Germany nor France nor the United States

would exercise sovereign control over the resources of the Rhineland regional economy. Whether Adenauer and Schuman mastered the terms of that debate doesn't matter. The debate was conducted daily by scholars, journalists, activists, and editors who were heatedly trying to figure out what the concept of a Catholic or Christian politics might mean in an age of nihilism and reconstruction, and who, in so doing, were generating hopes and energies with which the likes of Schuman and Adenauer were forced to contend. The idea of "personhood" was at the center of that debate. The "person" is unlike the subject of Marxist, liberal, or nationalist ideology. Utopia awaits the latter, but not the former. The "person" has been humbled by history, whereas the ideological subject engages in heroic combat to clear the path to utopia of its enemies. The "person," cloaked in history, neither embodies nor reveres sovereignty whereas the ideological subject, even the liberal subject, lines up behind the sovereign flag (recall the national liberal Settembrini of Mann's *The Magic Mountain*). The "person" may long for European peace and unity, but the vision is blurry. The ECSC proposal could not mobilize that vision in the customary way, as something for sovereigns to fight for. Humiliation and ek-stasis "worked" by creating a space in which a surprise might (or might not) happen. The words "facilitate, encourage, might/might not" do not advocate for a general theory according to which humiliation causes ek-stasis causes radical reform. We can't turn a narrative that concedes that things didn't have to happen into that kind of theory. Inversely, we do discern features that are arguably essential to the two historical events being described, and which are, perhaps, relevant to our age (or not).

From the Rhine to the Yangtze.

We might still be tempted to question the competence of the Enlightenment subject in our own time. The modern subject seems to be wandering aimlessly through the pandemic and remains blissfully heedless of the peril of irreversible climate change. But we cannot simply lift ideas from another age and apply them to today's world. The last time the world came to an end, humiliation and ek-stasis engendered

surprises because they emerged from and were meaningful within the singular history of twentieth century nihilism. They didn't do work as abstract ideas. They resonated, from "birth," with the concrete historical conditions that produced them. The question of their relevance in our time must therefore take the form of a historical rather than an abstractly conceptual investigation.

One of the principal eyewitness accounts of Vatican II was written by an American priest-journalist named Ralph Wiltgen (an Evanston native). Appalled by the Vatican's inability to provide reporters with information they could use or even understand, Wiltgen set up his own highly successful news service to mediate between the Council and the media. He subsequently wrote a history of the Council based on his reporting, entitled *The Rhine Flows Into the Tiber: A History of Vatican II*. The title pays tribute to Rhineland Europe's bishops and theologians, whose contributions to the Council's deliberations were so decisive. Vatican II and, it goes without saying, the Schuman Declaration, were Rhineland events. The humiliation of the politically and metaphysically sovereign subject that conditioned those events was principally a Rhineland phenomenon. The harshest complaints of decadence and the most alarmist expressions of nihilism were heard in the triangle demarcated by Paris, Vienna, and Berlin. That triangle also located the existentialist counter-offensive against nihilism.

The concept of "sovereignty" is itself a Rhineland concept. The ideas of "national sovereignty" and "national self-determination" were forged in battles named Fleurus, Austerlitz, and Sedan. They were made the foundation of territorial organization at the 1878 Congress of Berlin and the 1919 Conference of Versailles. If we trace the roots of the concept back further we encounter the formulation of the sovereign right to non-interference in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, and we find the famous proclamation *cuius regio eius religio*, which spelled the end of the Constantinian imperial ideal, in the 1555 Peace of Augsburg. The word itself, *soveran*, is French bastardized Latin for *super regnum*, over-and-above-the-kingdom. Both the word and the concept emerged in legal battles launched in the

eleventh and twelfth centuries by the Capetian heirs of Charles the Bald against the imperial pretensions of the Hohenstaufen heirs of Louis the Pious. (Lothar's heirs, who ruled the Rhineland, the wealthiest part of the Carolingian legacy, lost the succession battle early on. Their realm decomposed into the provinces of Lorraine, Alsace, Luxembourg, and Brabant.) Louis VI (1108-37) styled himself Imperator Franciae, the emperor of France (the first historical occurrence of this last term). Philip II Augustus (the epithet says it all) warned his trans-Rhenish rivals in 1202 that *Rex ipse superiorem non recognoscat* – the king recognizes no higher power. Later in the century the French monarch would claim that the Emperor dominates all *princes praeter regem Franciae* – except the King of France – and that the French *Rex in regno suo est imperator*, is emperor in his kingdom. Sovereignty's two inseparable connotations, supremacy and secession, are in evidence from the concept's first elaboration.

Eight centuries down the line, the texts of Vatican II and the Schuman Declaration attack secessionism and make a blur of hierarchy. And yet both the word and the concept of sovereignty survived, and in our day seem to prevail as the basic, common sense assumption of how peoples should be organized. That survival can be traced back to an important bifurcation that occurred the last time the world came to an end. While Europe doubted sovereignty's suitability as a remedy for its own tribulations and so went about inventing non-sovereign forms of territorial governance, Europe was also exporting this same concept of sovereignty around the world as it retrenched from the colonial empires that it could no longer dominate. The number of states recognized as sovereign multiplied greatly over the next half century. For the former colonies, sovereignty was not an option. Sovereignty alone provided the legal standing they needed to work with other sovereign entities and with international organizations so as to acquire legitimacy and assistance. (The word's dissemination raises interesting questions about its reception in a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts that, to my knowledge, have not been thoroughly examined.)

The word and the concept were saved not only by decolonization, but by the hegemonic comportment of the postwar United States, a country that had suffered almost no material damage in the war, was endowed with colossal financial reserves, and that used its wealth to mobilize its scientific community to invent the most frightening instruments of war known to humanity. The National Defense Education Act of 1957 allied the universities with the national laboratories and poured prodigious amounts of federal money into university research. Hutchins, who in the 1930s reformed the university to address civilizational decay, passed the baton of educational reform to James Bryant Conant, President of Harvard, who, in 1940 and beyond, transformed the US university into a juggernaut of applied scientific research. American universities went quickly from being so-so to being the most prestigious in the world.

Thus armed, the United States shed its isolationism and involved itself powerfully both in world politics generally and in Rhineland geopolitics specifically. Conant became America's first ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany. The United States assumed a kind of suzerainty grounded in its informal ability to "decide on the exception." It used its suzerainty to forge a sphere of influence composed of the world's economically most advanced nations. Supporting that sphere were several dozen international organizations that served as sites of functionally targeted intergovernmental cooperation. International organization constrained the sovereign freedoms of the participating nations to the point that abiding by their rules became the precondition for being treated as sovereign (as opposed to being treated as a "rogue" or "failed state") by the international community. Inversely, international organization inflated the pre-eminence of the American hegemon, as the condition of possibility of its existence and authority. Neo-conservatives coined the term "American exceptionalism" in the 1990s to refer to the country's conceptual position as guarantor of the international legal order by virtue of the fact that it stood, alone, above and outside that order. The US did not hesitate to extract advantage from its super-sovereign standing. It scuttled the Bretton Woods monetary arrangement in

1973 when it deemed that arrangement to be contrary to its interests. It maligned and coerced the United Nations in 2003 to win approval of its invasion of Iraq. By 2003, however, America's commitment to leadership had already begun to flag. Its commitment to hegemonic internationalism was always menaced by the perennial lure of isolationism and unilateralism, particularly (since 1920) in the ranks of the Republican Party. Today, the madcap but feckless unilateralism of the current administration has thoroughly run American leadership into the ground, possibly forever.

Today the Rhine, the birthplace and purveyor of sovereignty and debates surrounding it, flows on, past the Tiber and, through war, decolonization, revolution, and financial globalization, and pours into the Yangtze at Wuhan. From the conjunction of these two historical torrents emerge phenomena that are both novel, like the novel corona virus, and familiar, because we have seen it all before. Among the most striking novelties, aside from the virus itself, is the computer and all that it has enabled: telecommuting, e-commerce, instant information, visual communication with colleagues, friends, family. Without computer technology the current pandemic would be more lethal, more destructive of the economy, and more burdensome psychologically. Inversely, there is nothing novel about our general comportment toward the pandemic, which shows no signs of having evolved since antiquity. Discounting or ignoring the severity of the emergency in order to keep shops open, leaving town to find refuge in the countryside, the privilege of the rich who are not indispensable and therefore able to seek shelter, and the poor who are indispensable and must work, both to keep society functioning and to assure their own survival – it all goes back centuries, as does the facility with which the plague is blamed on foreigners and conspirators. More germane to this essay is the familiar intrusion of sovereignty, both as secession and as authority. Over the past months secession has largely prevailed over cooperation. Movement across national frontiers was rapidly restricted and even prohibited, even within the bounds of the European Union. Controlling international travel might be construed as an act of

elementary prudence, but it is not difficult to imagine cooperative measures, regarding testing and confining, for example, that are equally prudent and less disruptive. Inversely there is nothing prudent about the refusal to collaborate internationally to develop a vaccine, to spy on foreign laboratories, and to treat the vaccine as a vehicle of legitimation of sovereign authority. More dysfunctional and pathetic were the calls in the United States to “liberate” states from CDC guidelines and strut one’s guns in a state capital. Even more disturbing, however, have been the many performances, not of sovereign secessionism but of sovereign authority. Some performances might have qualified as purely and laughably theatrical – Bolsonaro in Brazil and Trump in the United States – if they had not provoked dramatic increases in infections and deaths, foisted more work on exhausted doctors and nurses, and eroded democratic norms and institutions. Other performances of sovereign power went beyond theater and used the pandemic expressly to repress opposition and concentrate power in sovereign hands. India, the “world’s largest democracy,” has offered perhaps the most tragic instance of such an abuse of power.

The sovereign style, which survived the crisis of the last century, now prevails again as common sense. Discussion in the European Union today is characterized more typically by demands to turn the EU into a sovereign entity (a highly unrealistic proposal) than by efforts to use the EU’s history to think and experiment outside the sovereign box. And yet the common sense of sovereignty is less secure than it was at the beginning of the last century, when sovereign secessionism was an integral part of normal international politics – sovereigns seceded from other sovereigns and governments responded to the shock in sovereign disorder. Humanity today must contend with a different kind of shock. Today’s challenges, some of which imperil humanity’s survival as a species, are increasingly global in scope. The pandemic itself is pan-dêmos. It concerns all peoples. The sovereign-secessionist style is incapable by definition of mobilizing humanity to address it. Sovereignty, not as secession, but as the locus of authority, is equally ill-adapted to current

circumstances. Sovereign authority exists for one primary and over-arching purpose: to defend and preserve the secessionist entity against the enemies of secession. The concept was developed by, for, and through political combat.

The Enlightenment subject, as philosophical warrant of the sovereign's pretensions to dispatch emergencies, has also survived the great nihilistic crisis of the twentieth century. American hegemony and its scientific extravagance have put to sleep most suspicions regarding the common sense of the morally autonomous, reasoning, sovereign self – certainly in the United States itself and in the American academy. It is true that doubts persist in the latter, but the academy has both the virtue and the vice of developing and broadcasting thought, on the one hand, and of burying it deep in disciplinary erudition, on the other. Doubt regarding the sovereign self currently lies buried, and muted, just when the pandemic has begun to spark new suspicion in our very homes. A Brandeis colleague, Viva Hammer, writes from her bunker in Australia:

Into a world built on the certainty of a limitlessly increasing lifespan the new coronavirus imposes uncertainty. It whips through us and we are astonished: the moment before, we believed we were masters over nature. And now, doctors who have fought successfully to keep us alive are impotent; we are left to fight the disease alone, to prescribe our own medicine, that is, to keep away from one another. Who knows who hides the disease and breathes it to us?

The suspicion that Hammer is expressing is amply warranted. But such doubt lacks the ascendancy that it had in the middle of the last century, when it was voiced everywhere: Gregorian University, the Café de Flore, University of Freiburg, Woodstock. It informed cultural production broadly: philosophy, literature, and the arts. However much we might bemoan the powerlessness of our doctors today, we still assume as a matter of course that our mastery over nature is intact and that we shall find a cure. Science will eradicate the virus and sovereign governments will support and apply the science. This is our common sense assumption. We are all

waiting – waiting for the sovereign subject to do its work. Economic theory, the precious wunderkind of the American university, has also stifled such doubts, but in a different manner. It has bolstered the myth of the sovereign self by democratizing it, by conferring sovereignty on the modern consumer. The consumer is the highest authority as regards the satisfaction of his or her own wants – there is no higher court. The modern consumer sovereign appears to be undaunted by the perils that are gathering on the near horizon. He feels invited by his sense of sovereignty to treat talk of such perils as mere opinion – one “brand” of thought in competition with other “brands,” often propagated by the “enemies” of sovereign order. Nor does the sovereign consumer feel humiliated by history if he can secede from it (by moving to Idaho, by subscribing to QAnon, etc.). He is therefore immune to the urge to project and debate new worlds of possibility. We have seen shocking expressions of consumer sovereignty during the current pandemic, not only in the United States, but elsewhere in the western democracies.

We see signs of rebellion among younger adults (our students), for whom the end of the world casts a longer shadow. Francesca Musto writes of Naples’s wicker baskets, which shared the generosity of numerous unknown donors with an even greater number of unknown recipients. It is perhaps “the symbol of a new community, if not a new religion.” Felipe Alarcón enjoins a deeper engagement “with life, death, and labor” to construct a new way of being-with. Zona Zaric and Ivica Mladovic relate the incapacity of sovereign power to use the pandemic to repress academic freedoms and close frontiers. Nathalia Justo shows how a caudillo-wannabe’s melodrama reignited calls for agrarian reform. Marc Crépon, in his essay, formulates a more general complaint against sovereignty’s “infantilizing force,” and asks whether state power, “as wielded by public health and political authorities, shouldn’t also be recognized as a form of violence.” The question, doubtless generated by his experience of confinement in France, begs comparisons with other democracies – New Zealand comes to mind – in which the struggle against the pandemic might, hypothetically, have assumed a more “pastoral” rather than

“sovereignist” style. But Crépon’s complaint is nevertheless intriguing in its evocation of Kant’s recrimination of monarchical rule as similarly infantilizing, and in its advocacy of republican rule as the condition of possibility of human responsabilization and maturation. Our democracies remain suffused by the sovereign (perhaps monarchical) style. Democracy, as Crépon contends, will have to be reinvented. Ideas of federalism and subsidiarity, reprised from the heady debates about European unification, may have become appropriate again in our time of the pandemic.

Crépon concludes with an exhortation to step out: “To dream is to endow ourselves with the right to imagine.” But stepping out – ek-stasis – in any sense other than solipsistic, is not so easy in our day. Something of vital importance is missing in all our struggles against the sovereign style and against a culture suffused by the myth of the self-sufficient subject. “Leuven” is missing. By Leuven I refer to a crucial sociological feature of the debate that unfolded last time the world came to an end: the institutionalized, networked, international clearing house for thought, critique, and imagination that Leuven, as an institution of research and learning, helped to anchor, along with a dozen or more other research centers. That network animated debate about our mode of being in the world, shared it internationally, and made it available for purposes of cultural production and political disputation. Debate crossed “sovereign” disciplinary and political boundaries in a way that is, for so many reasons, inconceivable in our time – despite the fact that doubts about sovereignty and the Enlightenment self are percolating just below the surface of public debate in dozens of more or less isolated sites: new debate about the “anthropocene,” whose roots take us back to nuclear weapons and the last time the world came to an end; “school strikes for climate” and serious discussion of awarding the Nobel peace prize to the teenager Greta Thunberg; the papal encyclical *Laudato Si’* and its call to conceptualize the economy as something other than a compilation of stats... The focus of debate has not even shifted very much in its principal articulations since the last time. Humanity’s being-in-the-world is still the

central issue, and Heidegger is still incontournable. His discussion of enframing, technology as a setting-upon, the succession of worlds, all have their place in the development of a critical anthropology. Ek-stasis today already has lots of well-thought material to work with – but actually working with it may have to await the construction of a new Leuven.

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