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MEDIEVAL SCHOLASTICISM: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Introduction

As the reader will no doubt have noticed, the title listed above harbors a number of contradictions. Medieval scholasticism, as everybody will readily admit, has a past, indeed a most respectable one, one that goes back all the way to the schools of twelfth-century Europe, but can we truly say that medieval scholasticism has a present as well? And, what seems even more mind-boggling, can we say that it has a future? By stretching the ordinary limits of the mind in this way, my title jokingly plays on the very flexibility that is inherent in the term scholasticism. In line with some modern theorists,¹ I tend to see scholasticism as referring to what is essentially a 'school practice' rather than the embodiment of a well-defined doctrine. What I mean by this may at first sight seem rather obvious, as it merely reflects how the content of the doctrine conveyed by this method can vary. This is clear, for example, when we compare medieval scholasticism to Reformed scholasticism. As a consequence of the confessional traditions which they represent, different scholastic traditions present us with rather different interpretations of the meaning of the eucharist.² Yet instead of solving all problems, typecasting scholasticism as a school practice also presents us with new ones, to which attention should then be paid. Thus, if we agree that scholasticism is

¹ See A. McGrath, *Reformation Thought. An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1993), pp. 67-86. On p. 68 McGrath defines scholasticism not as a *specific system of beliefs*, but as a *particular way of organizing theology*. See further below n. 10.

² It is obvious that medieval scholastic authors would historically not have been aware of representing a confessional position. However, the later Reformation debates had the effect of forging a perception of medieval theology as distinctly Roman Catholic. Being a product of the Reformed tradition, Reformed scholasticism can thus be expected to put forward rather different theological viewpoints compared to medieval scholasticism, which in retrospect had become stereotyped as Roman Catholic. This is definitely true for interpretations of the eucharist. On the problem of confessional identity and ownership as affecting historical interpretation, see my article "Between Augustinian Sign and Carolingian Reality: the Presence of Ambrose and Augustine in the Eucharistic Debate Between Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus of Corbie," *Dutch Review of Church History* 80 (2000), pp. 137-56, esp. pp. 137-40.

before all a didactic method, there is a substantial risk that it can be used to demonstrate any and all propositions, as scholastic categories can be construed in such a way as to become an intellectual caricature.³ In the same way one can speculate about infinite possible worlds,⁴ in my title I was able to speculate about a future for medieval scholasticism.

On a more serious note, however, I want to argue that the very flexibility of this school practice, which has made it such a profitable tool for the academic study of philosophy and theology from the twelfth century onwards, has important drawbacks as well. This becomes clear if one compares scholasticism with mysticism: where the one has a surplus of intellectual control, the other may have a surplus of ardent surrender. While the latter point may go far to explain the appeal of mystical texts to postmodern readers, it is interesting that from the perspective of German Protestant theology, mysticism and scholasticism, while representing two theological extremes, were implicitly dismissed on the same grounds, namely as compromising true evangelical faith.⁵ Thus Adolf Harnack disqualified mysticism as “rationalism worked out in a fantastical way,” complementing this criticism by adding: “and rationalism is faded mysticism.”⁶ I shall come back to the connection between scholasticism and mysticism later on. Here it suffices to say that Harnack may have been right to the extent that they cannot be considered as methods which are mutually exclusive in clarifying the Christian faith.⁷

³ This problem should be distinguished from the former caricatures of medieval scholasticism in which the Reformed tradition tended to abound. On the heels of Erasmus' cunning wit and Luther's scathing dismissal of scholastic interpretations of the eucharist in his *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, scholasticism was often seen as a kind of philosophy/theology that focused on inane and futile problems, such as how many angels could dance on the tip of a pin. My problem here is that, while scholasticism represents a serious philosophical and theological approach, the very flexibility of its method has a negative side as well, to the extent that it may thus become seen as a method that can legitimate any and all intellectual positions.

⁴ I am obviously referring here to the important scholastic discussion about future contingents. See on this problem, W.L. Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leyden, 1988). For an analysis of this problem in the Dutch language, based on a reading of Johannes Duns Scotus, see A. Vos (ed.), *Johannes Duns Scotus. Contingentie en vrijheid, Lectura I 39* (Zoetermeer, 1992), pp. 27-43.

⁵ An interesting exception forms Paul Tillich who sees scholasticism, mysticism and biblicism as the three major trends in the Middle Ages. See C. Braaten (ed.), *Paul Tillich. A History of Christian Thought* (London, 1968), pp. 134-37.

⁶ Quoted in B. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism. Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York, 1992) [The Presence of God. A History of Western Christian Mysticism, vol. I], p. 268. Cf. A. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* II, 4th ed. (Tübingen, 1909), p. 145. See McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, pp. 265-343 for an extensive introduction by the author into the theoretical foundations of the modern study of mysticism.

⁷ As was rightly noted by Grabmann (see below, n. 15), Harnack's evaluation of

As a church historian, however, I have chosen as my primary task to analyze medieval scholasticism by taking stock of its modern study. This, then, is how the paradox of my title should ultimately be understood: what are the past, the present and the future insofar as the modern study of medieval scholasticism is concerned? Yet I will also try, by this same circuitous route, to develop a deeper insight in what it was that held theologians in the grip of this method for so long, as it dominated the theological scene for centuries. This latter goal naturally involves the presentation of a more in-depth view on the *ins* and *outs*, the *pros* and *cons* of that which we have come to label as the scholastic method.

When one sets out to study scholasticism, especially now that we have just defined it as a school practice, it may be tempting to organize one's analysis in the way of a scholastic query. This then is how one might proceed. One launches a thesis or a so-called *quaestio*, which is often divided into various articles, each representing specific aspects of the central question.⁸ To take an example from Thomas Aquinas' Commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate*: in this early work of Aquinas we find the first question entitled: On the knowledge of divine realities (*divina*). It is subdivided into various articles, the first being: Does the human mind need a new illumination by the divine light in order to know the truth? This article gives us first a set of arguments supporting the thesis that the human mind does need a new illumination (in this case: eight), which are immediately followed by various arguments denying this same statement (*sed contra*, with Thomas giving four counterarguments). Next the tension is resolved in a reply (*responsio*), a kind of synthesis which follows the general drift of the arguments rubricated under the heading *sed contra*. As if to underline the validity of the synthesis, finally, the article ends with a set of detailed answers corresponding both in number and in content to the opening set of arguments.⁹ Why is it that I do not proceed in this way? Here it comes in that part of what I want to do is to try and voice an objection, however slight, against the kind of formal structure that

scholasticism is not entirely negative. It is interesting that his ultimate criticism of late scholasticism regards in the end not so much its rationalism as the fact that it elevates the authority of the church beyond critical analysis. See A. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* III, p. 504.

⁸ For a lucid exposition of the *quaestio*-technique, see J. Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy (1150-1350)* (London, 1987), pp. 27-34.

⁹ See A. Maurer (trans.), *St. Thomas Aquinas, Faith, Reason and Theology, Questions I-IV of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* (Toronto, 1987), pp. 13-19. The reason I have chosen this example is that I have found this text to be well-suited to explain scholasticism to the uninitiated student. This I have learned through my own 'school practice.'

scholasticism introduces as a way of organizing one's thought, which led McGrath to call scholasticism 'a particular way of organizing theology.'¹⁰ The little joke behind my title was in part directed against this same character of formality. As we will see in the end, it is unclear to me not only what this formality entails but, more deeply, what reality it ultimately represents?

As an alternative to structuring the present analysis as a scholastic query, let us borrow scholastic terminology for a moment by invoking the search for truth as involving the so-called *adaequatio rei et intellectus*.¹¹ What precisely is the *res* that the scholastic mind ultimately wants to capture? For reasons of comparison, let us briefly turn to Augustine, leaving Thomas Aquinas behind. As an orator steeped in the culture of late antiquity, Augustine was much more schooled in the use of metaphor than in the display of doctrine, yet he is remarkably clear about what he considers the substance (or: *res*) of his hermeneutics. As can be read in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, the only *res* he considers substantial enough truly to bear that name, as it alone can be enjoyed, is the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹² To him all other things simply pale in comparison, taking on the derivative status of *signa*, signs or signifiers. While these signs are indispensable, to the extent that they help to bring humanity closer to God, humans should not conclude from this that the reverse is also true. That is, they should not think that once an intellectual understanding of the signs is acquired, one is thereby entitled to the enjoyment of God. Contrary to the teaching of Augustine, in scholasticism the status and meaning of the *res* around which the intellect wraps itself seem far from clear.¹³ On the other hand, however, it appears that the certitude

¹⁰ See n. 1 above.

¹¹ This definition of truth (*veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*) is cited by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* Ia q. 16 art. 1 resp. See also Scott MacDonald, "Theory of Knowledge," in: N. Kretzmann and E. Stump (eds.), *The Cambridge Compendium to Aquinas* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 160-96. On adequation, see p. 163. Cf. J. Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 125-28.

¹² In *On Christian Doctrine* I.II.2 Augustine declares that all doctrine is divided into things (*res*) and signs (*signa*), with the latter requiring further interpretation. He next subdivides *res* into things to be used and things to be enjoyed. The only thing truly to be enjoyed rather than used, is the Trinity. Basking in the light of divine plenitude, it requires no further interpretation, as one can take delight in its understanding. See *De Doctrina Christiana* I.V.5: "Res igitur quibus fruendum est, pater et filius et spiritus sanctus, eademque trinitas, una quaedam summa res communisque omnibus fruendibus ea, si tamen res et non rerum omnium causa, si tamen et causa."

¹³ One reason for this may be that, whereas Augustine highlights that there is a difference between *res* (reality) and *signa*, which corresponds with the distinction between *frui* and *uti*, Aquinas tends to focus on the conformity (*conformitas*) of intellect and reality

proffered by this method is far greater than any certitude of which the sinner Augustine would have ever felt capable. It is this potential lack of balance between method and goal which I hold to be problematic in my own analysis of medieval scholasticism.

Hence I shall forego the attempt to structure my analysis as a scholastic question, with the humble confession added that I would also not be capable of doing so. For whatever my criticism of medieval scholasticism may be, I certainly do not lack respect for the intellectual accomplishment contained in the treatises of the scholastic period. Instead of building my own analysis upon the tenets and principles found in them, however, I have opted more conventionally to adhere to a description of how the study of medieval scholasticism has developed over the course of the last century. At the end I want to come back to the theme of *adaequatio rei et intellectus* or, to put it more pointedly, to that of truth as *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*, in an effort to come to some kind of assessment of medieval scholasticism as we have highlighted its various modern approaches. As a church historian who is herself committed to studying the intellectual tradition of western Christianity, I am convinced that a critical discussion of scholasticism is much needed, not least because it may help to bring about a better focus on the contribution of medieval theology as a whole. For I do not want to hide that it is through scholasticism that medieval theology soared to unknown heights. Still, despite the formal character of this method the reach of scholasticism remains in my opinion a limited one, in contradistinction to the possibilities of negative theology.¹⁴ What the art of its limitations is will be the subject of some concluding remarks.

Medieval Scholasticism: the Past

The classic text which has done more perhaps than any other to further research into medieval scholasticism is Martin Grabmann's *Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, first published in 1909.¹⁵ This two-volume work

(ST Ia.16, 2 resp.). It should be pointed out, however, that through Peter Lombard, this Augustinian distinction was to have a long scholastic afterlife. See M.L. Colish, "Peter Lombard," in G.R. Evans (ed.), *The Medieval Theologians* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 168-69.

¹⁴ Without passing judgment, it is fair to say that in contemporary theology the impact of negative theology is more tangible than that of scholasticism. As can be seen e.g. from Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995), this impact has direct links to the present interest in mysticism.

¹⁵ See Martin Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode nach den gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen dargestellt* (1909; repr. Basel/Stuttgart, 1961; Berlin, 1988).

takes us through the history of scholasticism from early antiquity through the Church Fathers and the early Middle Ages until the beginning of the thirteenth century. It does so with the help of a definition that Grabmann gives at the beginning of his work:

Die scholastische Methode will durch Anwendung der Vernunft, der Philosophie auf die Offenbarungswahrheiten möglichste Einsicht in den Glaubensinhalt gewinnen, um so die übernatürliche Wahrheit dem denkenden Menschengenossen inhaltlich näher zu bringen, eine systematische, organisch zusammenfassende Gesamtdarstellung der Heilswahrheit zu ermöglichen und die gegen den Offenbarungsinhalt vom Vernunftstandpunkte aus erhobenen Einwände lösen zu können. In allmählicher Entwicklung hat die scholastische Methode sich eine bestimmte äussere Technik, eine äussere Form geschaffen, sich gleichsam versinnlicht und verleiblicht.¹⁶

Although Grabmann presents his book as a history of the scholastic method, yet from his description this method seems clearly content-driven. As he sees it, the goal of scholastic thought is to gain insight into the content of faith in order to bring supernatural truth closer to the rational human mind. The Thomistic *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, understood in a conventional sense as *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*, is here replaced by what we might well call an *appropriatio mentis ad veritatem supernaturalem*: a supernatural truth, one which is dogmatically enclosed.

Upon reading Grabmann's definition, I became puzzled by what appears to be an odd internal inconsistency. On the one hand it is indeed true that this definition strikes a general Thomistic tone. This seems in accordance with Grabmann's attempt to salvage the method's suitability for apologetic purposes notwithstanding his criticism of neoscholasticism. But his definition appears at the same time permeated by a tension between revelation and reason which is more typical of Enlightenment apologetics than of the atmosphere of medieval thought.

Without delving further into the details of Grabmann's analysis, I would like to draw a few tentative conclusions from his volumes. These may well be of assistance in shedding more light on the apparent inconsistency which I just noted. Standing in the Catholic tradition, Grabmann seems before all to have been eager to defend the intellectual integrity of the scholastic method. In his eyes it was important to make room for the view that scholasticism arose as a genuine Christian development. Second, as a German academic Grabmann wanted to defend not just scholasticism itself but also its modern study as a respectable and relevant academic enterprise, with a serious intellectual message that went beyond echoing the anti-modernist teaching of the Catholic Church of his day. The first

¹⁶ See Grabmann, *Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, pp. 36-37.

point may help to explain why Grabmann is so eager to claim that biblical literature included speculative, even argumentative viewpoints, against the dominant voice of protestant 'Dogmenhistoriker' like Von Harnack.¹⁷ He comments on Paul, on the prologue to the Gospel of John and the Epistle of Peter (1 Pet. 3:15), as he attempts to demonstrate how the *ratio fidei* was indeed a matter of prime importance even in the days of the earliest Christian authors. Thus it is merely logical that scholastic authors would build on that. It is of obvious importance to Grabmann that the scholastic method was not a construct which became imposed upon an uncontaminated biblical Christianity, but that it was part and parcel of the gospel in a wider sense from the very beginning. The second point of being a qualified German academic helps to explain why Grabmann set out to study both printed and unprinted sources: by highlighting his own intellectual rigor, he may have hoped to add luster to the material he studied as well.

As for the inconsistency I noted in his definition: in my view it revolves specifically around the use of the categories *ratio* and *auctoritas*. Whereas Grabmann's use of the concept of authority appears decidedly medieval, meaning the teaching of the Bible, the Fathers and the Church, his definition leaves open the possibility that *auctoritas*, when it becomes solidified as the *res* around which the intellect wants to wrap itself, suddenly takes on the nature of supernatural truth.¹⁸ The transition from a flexible interplay of reason and authority to a virtual stalemate between human reason and a more dogmatically defined notion of supernatural truth is precisely what separates early medieval theology, whether located in monasteries or cathedral schools, from scholastic theology. While this may in itself be just the result of methodological specialization, as theology became a respected school discipline in the thirteenth century,

¹⁷ See Grabmann, *Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, pp. 55-61. On p. 58 Grabmann clarifies that he is opposed to those scholars... "welche einen Gegensatz zwischen dem Christentum des Evangeliums und zwischen Spekulation und Intellektualismus lehren und damit die scholastische Methode schon in ihren Anfangsformen mit einer Umwertung und wesentlichen Umgestaltung des Christentums in Zusammenhang bringen..." As Grabmann rightly points out, Von Harnack's explicit judgment about scholasticism and its method is actually not very negative, see pp. 9-11.

¹⁸ I do not want to claim that *auctoritas* is the *res* of scholasticism. Obviously the scholastics wanted to speak about reality itself, especially about God. But they nevertheless proceeded mostly by comparing and contrasting selected statements, which were derived either from authoritative sources or from colleagues or peers. Since God, as the reality *par excellence*, was hidden behind the authoritative statements of the masters, in a way then it does indeed seem to be true that *auctoritas* could pose as the *res* of scholasticism.

as a side-effect of this successful development it appeared one could only analyze scholasticism by agreeing to its terms. When trying to explain the notion of 'supernatural truth',¹⁹ one is often forced to use other scholastic terms to clarify what is meant, without ever being able to step back. If we apply this criterium to Grabmann's own analysis of scholasticism, it seems indeed that that which needs to be explained has contaminated the tools and method of the very scholar (Grabmann) who set out to try and explain it. Thus, despite the great work that this German scholar has left behind, in the way that he has tackled the study of scholasticism, there seems to be a kind of *petitio principii* ('begging the question') at work. This may give us the eerie sense that, having reached the end of his analysis of scholasticism, we are perhaps not all that much further than when we first started.

Medieval Scholasticism: the Present

While Grabmann lived in an age which tried to recover from Kant's frontal attack on the legitimacy of traditional metaphysics, and his study of scholasticism may indeed have been meant as a kind of belated Catholic *apologia*, the modern author who is his counterpart is Richard W. Southern. At the end of the twentieth century this English historian has given a new push to the study of scholasticism. Southern was well-known as the author of the definitive biography of Anselm of Canterbury, the Benedictine monk who is known traditionally as the 'father of scholasticism.'²⁰ But his interest in Anselm as a scholastic thinker, and hence in scholasticism itself, is rather different from what someone familiar with Grabmann's approach might expect. This is clear from a famous study which he published in 1970, entitled *Medieval Humanism*. Notwithstanding the fact that Anselm is most famous for his so-called ontological proof for the existence of God, itself based on the Augustinian premise *credo ut intelligam*,²¹ what Southern appears to admire most in Anselm is his

¹⁹ The term *supernaturalis* is not a scholastic term *per se*; it can e.g. be found in John the Scot Eriugena. Yet his use of the term puts him in the tradition of Dionysian negative theology, as it literally means to transcend the boundaries of created nature, while leaving the Augustinian idea of grace substituting for nature intact. With Thomas' famous sense that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, on the other hand, his use of *supernaturalis* does seem to represent a break in the Augustinian tradition. See Thomas, *Commentary on De trinitate* q. 2 art. 3 resp. in: A. Maurer (trans.), *St. Thomas Aquinas, Faith, Reason and Theology, Questions I-IV of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius* (Toronto, 1987), p. 48.

²⁰ See R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm. A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 441.

²¹ The difficulty with the definition of medieval scholasticism can be nicely illustrated

stature as a humanist. Rather than seeing humanism as a renaissance category, however, when the fresh study of classical and biblical sources replaced the medieval train of authorities, Southern defined humanism as: "...that outlook which ensues when the elements of dignity, order, reason and intelligibility are prominent in human experience...."²² Against Renaissance critics of the Middle Ages, and obviously working with a definition of humanism which differs from most standard interpretations by *including* rather than *excluding* scholasticism, Southern argues that the period between 1100 and 1320 was one of the great ages of humanism in Europe, if not the greatest of all.

In redefining humanism in this way, Southern seemed to have found a way to reappraise the later Middle Ages without falling into a Grabmann-styled, old-fashioned apologetics. But how to deal with the conventional definitions of scholasticism and the *ratio fidei*? It would take another thirty years before his new approach would come to fruition. In 1995 Southern published his *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, volume I: *Foundations*. From the first this book was meant to be the first of a three-part series. Although volume II: *The Heroic Age* was published just earlier this year (2001),²³ due to Southern's recent death it is as yet unclear whether and/or when the foreseen third volume will appear. From the first two volumes, however, it may be concluded that Southern has left his earlier definition of humanism virtually unchanged. But where *Medieval Humanism* was about formulating an insight, the two volumes of *Scholastic Humanism* are about fleshing it out. "Fleshing out" is precisely what Southern regards to have been the great contribution of scholasticism as the intellectual development which followed on the heels of early medieval humanist authors like Anselm. Expanding the outlook of medieval humanism through the development of a single program, that is what Southern sees as the great intellectual and educational achievement of the scholastic system. In this respect it is significant that he extends the reign of this schoolsystem as an important bearer of western culture far

from precisely this motto. Although the Augustinian and the scholastic tradition are often seen as being at odds, at the same time this Augustinian motto is seen as the point of departure for the scholastic approach. Anselm is a key figure in the transition from the prescholastic to the scholastic interaction of *ratio* and *auctoritas*. See Grabmann, *Geschichte der scholastischen Methode* I, 265-339. In an interesting remark Harnack draws attention to the fact that *ratio* and *auctoritas* become in fact telescoped in medieval scholasticism, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* III, pp. 494-95.

²² See R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), p. 31.

²³ See R.W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*. Volume I: *Foundations* (Oxford, 1995). Volume II: *The Heroic Age* (Oxford, 2001).

beyond the boundaries of the medieval period, relativizing these very boundaries in the process,²⁴ namely until the crumbling of its base in the eighteenth century.

By describing and analyzing scholastic humanism in this way, Southern's book is an improvement on Grabmann's pioneering work in two ways. First of all, it is much clearer than in Grabmann that scholasticism for Southern implies the priority of method over content. His volumes amply illustrate this by focusing on the schools themselves: their masters, their organization, their societal impact. As a historian Southern is eminently equipped to see these medieval schools not just as a product of their age, but with a strongly shaping effect on them as well. Scholasticism for him encompasses such details as the laws of private property or rules for fair trade alongside the fine points of theology and philosophy. As in Grabmann, however, here we also find at times a certain overlap, or contamination if you will, of method and content. Thus Southern likewise tends to work from the tacit presupposition that as a system scholasticism was intellectually superior to the systems it replaced, such as the monastic quest or the education found earlier in cathedral schools.

Here Southern is both more subtle and more elaborate in defining what he considers the nature of scholasticism. As he states on p. 40:

To return to the schools: their programme was based on two convictions: first, that the human intellect was created capable of understanding both the purpose of God in the Creation and the structure of the whole created order; and, second, that — even after the Fall — by the special revelation of God and by the efforts of inspired and able scholars, the main outlines of the structure and development of the universe has become accessible to human minds. By a further extension of this general intelligibility, it was also believed that the means that God had used to redeem mankind by the Incarnation and sacrifice of Christ on the Cross were also capable of being understood.

In its careful layering of the schools' programme, Southern avoids Grabmann's leap by which the latter jumped straight into the notion of 'supernatural truth.' Instead, his focus is much more on the human(istic) side of the schools. As the above quotation shows, he has in fact adopted the scholastic viewpoint 'that mankind was created as the link between the natural and the supernatural orders.' His entire project can be seen as an elaboration of precisely this idea.

²⁴ This is one of the great advantages of Southern's approach to scholasticism. Moreover, by allowing a more fluid transition from medieval to later forms of scholasticism, he also allows a more ecumenical approach to scholasticism. This ecumenical approach is also advocated in W.J. van Asselt and E. Dekker (eds.), *Reformation and Scholasticism. An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids, 2001), although the richness of this theoretical position is not fully explored.

By virtue of his broad historical approach, then, Southern is able to contextualize scholastic thought more adequately than Grabmann without falling into the trap of having to give an essentialist definition. If anything, one might perhaps accuse him of sometimes falling into the other extreme by giving such formal descriptions that they cease being functional, as it becomes hard to connect them with any specifics at all. Thus we find him making the following statements: 'The characteristic strength of medieval scholastic thought was its elaboration of the authoritative statements of the past'.....or: 'The beauty of scholastic thought lies entirely in the grandeur of the whole enterprise and in the careful elaboration of details to form a systematic body of doctrine'.²⁵ Although Southern's book itself can serve as an effective demonstration of the scholastic clarity to which it so eagerly wants to pay tribute, and although the author wisely avoids 'theologizing' attempts to extol scholasticism as the method ideally suited to convey supernatural truth, we still lack a deeper insight into why this clarity is so commendable in the first place.

Medieval Scholasticism: the Future

If one compares Grabmann's portrait of medieval masters with Southern's, it may be obvious that Southern has a much better feel for the historical setting of the scholastic method. And yet, even in the case of Southern's exemplary contextualization, the method analyzed does not fail to leave its imprint on the scholar analyzing it. This is not a criticism of the two modern authors discussed here as much as it signals how hard it is to get a grip of what medieval scholasticism in the end is all about. In the final segment of this article on 'the future of medieval scholasticism', I want to concentrate precisely on this aspect. But before doing so I shall insert a short excursion to show how besides Southern's concentration on scholasticism as it developed between 1100 and 1320 in the schools of Western Europe, there are other interesting ways of analyzing scholasticism as well.

Let me mention two specific developments that I hold to be of special significance in this regard. First, not unlike what is currently happening in the study of mysticism, it appears that increasingly attention is being paid to the role of scholasticism in other religious traditions.²⁶ The

²⁵ See Southern, *Scholastic Humanism* I, pp. 54-55.

²⁶ See J.I. Cabezón (ed.), *Scholasticism. Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives* (Albany, N.Y., 1998) with articles on scholasticism in Christianity but also in Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. See also the useful analysis by Paul J. Griffiths in the same volume,

advantage of this way of studying scholasticism is that we can analyze it not just as a doctrine or a method, but as a certain stage of development which sooner or later takes place within every religious tradition. Just as religions develop their rituals in liturgy and codify their sacred texts through the process of canonization, so they also will experience the need to sort out the approved method for studying these texts. In that sense, the scholastic method as studied by Southern might never be understood exhaustively by trying to contextualize it, as there are always other factors at play as well which influence the scholastic process. On a different note, if scholasticism can indeed be seen as a kind of developmental stage inside a religion, it would be interesting to compare medieval and reformed scholasticism from precisely this perspective to see whether, on a larger scale, Catholicism and Protestantism in their interaction behave more as different religions than as subsequent stages of the same religion, i.e., western Christianity.²⁷

The second point I want to make follows from this. It seems increasingly plausible that the intellectual roots of the Reformation are to be found in late medieval nominalism.²⁸ If the Reformation had not met with political sympathies, thus yielding the founding of national Protestant churches, is it not possible that the medieval Roman Church might itself have become reformed in a way that was not so protestant after all? In this respect it is extremely interesting to see what different alternatives on such pivotal issues as predestination were being developed in the late Middle Ages. I am thinking here specifically of Peter Aureol's notion of general election (GE), in which God's election is separated from predestination and reprobation. As a recent study by James Halverson has shown, Gregory of Rimini developed his well-known idea of Double Particular Election (DPE), which we have come to know as 'double predestination' specifically against Aureol's teaching.²⁹ Rather than seeing the Reformation as having roots in the period of the late Middle Ages, a thesis made famous by the late H. Oberman,³⁰ one might instead have to argue that

"Scholasticism: The Possible Recovery of an Intellectual Practice," pp. 201-35.

²⁷ Consequently, this would lead to a different assessment of Protestant and Catholic scholasticism as well. Rather than seeing their parallel nature as pointing to an underlying basis for ecumenical discussion, it can point to their separateness as different religions undergoing a similar development. Although I might sympathize with the former approach, which is that of Van Asselt, I do not rule out the validity of the second approach which it could be worthwhile to explore.

²⁸ See A. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford, 1987).

²⁹ See J.L. Halverson, *Peter Aureol on Predestination. A Challenge to Late Medieval Thought* (Leyden, 1998).

³⁰ H.A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval*

the Reformation was a kind of late medieval scholastic experiment gone awry. Obviously, put in these terms this is too crude and simple an explanation. Here Southern's idea of contextualizing the scholastic method is helpful, as the fact that the movement of Reformation caught on may well have to be attributed to other societal factors aside from the intellectual dynamism kindled by certain developments within scholasticism. Yet if we want to be furnished with proper answers to these questions, it seems imperative that the period of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century be studied extensively. Moreover, as we carry out this project our focus should not just be on the schools with their teaching and their masters, but also on the mystics — men, but increasingly also women — whose theological ideas were forced to retain an 'unschooled' quality, as they were developed outside the banks of formal logic.

Conclusion

Just as the aftermath of medieval scholasticism appears to be of crucial importance if we want to assess the period of its bloom, so a study of its origins is equally needed. These lie in the late eleventh and early twelfth century. Since this is also my own field of study, at the end of my paper I want to draw some examples from my reflections on the twelfth century schools in order to come to some kind of concluding evaluation. As said, my aim has been to show not just where the analysis of Grabmann and Southern may be faulted, but more specifically what there is about the scholastic method — having to do with the absence of a solid *res* — that in the end makes it such a stimulating and misleading one at the same time.

From comparing Grabmann and Southern we have already learned that what is at stake in the scholastic project is the finding of a delicate balance between reason (*ratio*) and authority (*auctoritas*). Scholasticism, to use the title of Abelard's well-known course manual, is the method of *Sic et Non*. Yet whereas Abelard wrote his work for didactic reasons, namely to bring order to the undigested accumulation of patristic and biblical *auctoritates*, over the course of the following centuries this didactic method increasingly gained a normative status. Both Grabmann and Southern, each in their own way, seem to be affected by this, as they easily slip in scholastic terms such as 'supernatural' truth. Perhaps they would defend themselves by arguing that this was indeed the medieval outlook. But that is where my real contention comes in. For in my view this

Nominalism (1963; Durham, 1983).

separation between the natural and the supernatural is a construct which was without antecedents in early medieval or patristic culture, as it came into being only with the rise of scholasticism itself. In fact, the scholastic method has been so successful in allowing for a total makeover of the ways in which theological and philosophical knowledge has become organized that we tend to bypass the problem that, by doing so, it shaded and ultimately changed the kind of knowledge — and perhaps the nature of knowledge *per se* — as it had become standardized in the early Middle Ages.

Thus scholastic knowledge is ultimately a knowledge without a past.³¹ To focus on the theological aspect of matters, what scholasticism did by introducing and propagating a formal course of study, was in fact to sever the ties that had existed for centuries between the study of letters (and nature) on the one hand, and the higher learning of theology on the other. One could argue, and rightly so, that this is a mere consequence of going down the path of intellectual specialization. True as this may be, in the case of finding the right balance between *ratio* and *auctoritas*, it seems particularly detrimental to embark on this road to specialization. In order for the concept of authority to be operative, there needs to be constant recourse to the past in which it was validated. Prior to the scholastic age, when the notion of authority was invoked, it referred mostly to the living testimony of a noted Christian predecessor with whom the author saw himself linked in a continuous tradition. When transplanted to a scholastic context, however, *auctoritas* soon came to point to a bracketed text, one to be *used* rather than confirmed or denied. Moreover, the use of ‘an authority’ was no longer primarily conditioned by the weight of the quoted position but rather by the context of the overarching argument.

My second criticism of the scholastic method focuses precisely on the way in which surrounding arguments can become adrift. This brings us to the claims of reason. While the notion of *auctoritas* may have been at risk of eroding to such a point as to become a text without an author, the meaning of *ratio* seemed to soar to disproportionate heights. What’s more, with the claim of ever greater scientific certitude, reason seemed to take on a kind of divine sanction, thereby increasingly overshadowing the

³¹ In his article on the recovery of scholasticism (n. 26), Paul Griffiths speaks about the ‘intratextuality’ of scholastic texts: “...every element of a given body of texts becomes part of the interpretive context within which every other element is read and understood, so that scholastic readers read, recall and teach what is functionally a single text, even if one that is internally differentiated, composed of works that may have come from the minds of different authors at different times.” See Cabezon (ed.), *Scholasticism. Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives*, p. 216.

traditional role of faith. Now it is true that in the old arts curriculum dialectic or logic, besides being one of the arts, served at the same time also as arbiter of all the arts. Within scholasticism, however, the role of reason seemed to be more and more one of architect rather than arbiter, as scholasticism became a game to be continuously perfected rather than to be played. With reason itself so caught up in crafting and finetuning the entire system, so as to make it work better, there seemed to be less room afterwards for admiring how it actually worked, for enjoying the game as somehow itself endowed with divine grace.³²

It is not my task to pass judgment on medieval scholasticism, especially not as it has brought so much progress and sophistication to theological argument. Yet what I want to suggest is that, despite the optimism of Grabmann and Southern, the *ratio fidei* found in scholasticism is very different from that familiar to either Augustine or Anselm. While in terms of content it may be much the same, in terms of tradition it is not continuous with earlier practice. In an odd way, it seems as if the notion of *ratio fidei* is gradually replaced by a kind of *fides rationis*. As a final comment, let me end by saying that as a historian of Christian thought I am too committed to this earlier tradition ever to fully share in this kind of a progressive faith, even though at times I too may be swayed by the cogency of its rational arguments.

³² One of the differences between the prescholastic rationalism and the rationalism of scholasticism has to do with the kind of literary sensitivity that dominated the former, as it has generally been typical of the Platonic tradition. In his article Griffiths borrows the term 'lecturature' to indicate how reading and composition are symbiotically related in scholasticism (p. 218). As he states on p. 220: "Scholastic compositional practice ... requires techniques both for composition and for storage. But it does not require writing (in the ordinary sense) for either ..."