

## The Genesis of the Historiographical Notion of Second Scholasticism

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The historiographical notion of Second Scholasticism is used extensively today to indicate an indefinite group of thinkers whose common characteristics merely consist in the fact that they wrote their works between the second half of the fifteenth and the first decades of the eighteenth centuries and that they had a connection to some kind of institutional context. Interestingly, the vagueness of this notion is a key reason for its success. Moreover, although this notion is widely used, it does not seem that its genesis and the ideological presuppositions from which it stems are equally well-known. In this contribution, I focus on the latter subject: how, when and why this notion emerged.

Actually, the notion of Second Scholasticism is not very old: it was created by the Jesuit Carlo Giacon (1900-1984) in the first half of the 1940s as an adjustment of the Neo-Thomist historiographical paradigm. In order to understand the conceptual operation Giacon conducted, it is necessary to summarise the basic tenets of Neo-Thomist historiographical ideology.

From the second half of the eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth, Catholic philosophy developed in a variety of directions. One of these was the Thomist school of thought,

taken to mean a positive evaluation of Thomas Aquinas' works as a whole and the desire to use them as guidelines in the fields of philosophy and theology. For over a century, it was a minor, if not to say marginal, current. In 1879, however, its destiny, and with it the destiny of Catholic culture, radically changed: it was in that year that Pope Leo XIII (Giacchino Pecci, pope from 1878 to 1903) imposed the thought of Thomas Aquinas as the almost sole reference point for all Catholic intellectuals with the publication of the *Aeterni Patris* encyclical.

Leo XIII's act was of a political nature and was dictated by at least three factors. First, in the fifty years before the publication of that encyclical, Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846), Pius IX (1846-1878) and Leo XIII himself had condemned nearly all the cultural standpoints that had achieved some kind of fortune in Europe at the time, even among most Catholic thinkers. Second, a brother of Leo XIII, Giuseppe Pecci, a Jesuit, belonged to that very current of thought, i.e. Thomism. Finally, Leo XIII, in the second year of his pontificate, already had a precise political plan: to complete the subjection of the whole of the Catholic Church to the Pope, eliminating any plurality of opinions and all freedom of discussion in Catholic milieu. Thomism seemed to him to be highly suitable to his aims: supported in his decision by his brother Giuseppe, and surrounding himself with characters such as Ceferino González, Giovanni Maria Cornoldi and Tommaso Maria Zigliara, he chose Thomas Aquinas as a "safe" figure, to whose theological and philosophical thought Catholic intellectuals had to conform.

The transition from the positions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century erudite Catholics to those expressed in *Aeterni Patris* was at the same time both gradual and rapid. It was slow in so far as only a small number of Catholic intellectuals spontaneously abandoned the various way in which they had tried for over a century to reconcile science, learning and Catholicism; it was rapid in so far as *Aeterni Patris* imposed a certain model of theology and philosophy on members of the Catholic Church by political and disciplinary means.

Strictly speaking, what the *Aeterni Patris* encyclical established was not a dogma. Nevertheless, the proclamation of the dogma of the Pope's infallibility just nine years earlier in the First Vatican Council had made any *flatus vocis* on the part of the pope a dictate for the Curia. This was true above all for *Aeterni Patris*, and it was precisely in this way that Leo XIII and the Curia meant it to be taken. The words with which the encyclical opens are quite clear: in five sharp steps, the text moves from the manifestation of the wisdom of the Eternal Father to the supreme, unflinching, magisterial authority of the Pope, whose *ius et officium docendi et confirmandi fratres in fide* is explicitly recalled.

The only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, who came on earth to bring salvation and the light of divine wisdom to men, [...] commanded the Apostles *to go and teach all nations*, and left the Church which He had founded to be the common and supreme teacher of the peoples. For men whom the truth had set free were to be preserved by the truth; nor would the fruits of heavenly doctrines by which salvation comes to men have long remained had not the Lord Christ appointed an unfailing teaching authority to train the minds to faith. And the Church's [...] constant aim and chief wish was this: to instruct on religion and contend forever against errors. To this end assuredly have tended the incessant labors of individual bishops; to this end also the published laws and decrees of councils, and especially the constant watchfulness of the Roman Pontiffs, to whom, as successors of the Prince of the Apostles, St. Peter, in the primacy, belongs the right and office of teaching and confirming their brethren in the faith. Since, then, according to the warning of the apostle, the minds of Christ's faithful are apt to be deceived and the integrity of the faith to be corrupted among men *by philosophy and vain deceit*, the supreme pastors of the Church have always held that it was also their duty to advance, by every means in their power, science truly so called, and at the same time to provide with special care that all human disciplines were conveyed in accordance with Catholic faith, especially *philosophy*, on which a right interpretation of the other sciences in great part depends<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> «Aeterni Patris Unigenitus Filius qui in terris apparuit, ut humano generi salutem et divinae sapientiae lucem afferret, [...] Apostolis praecepit, ut

*Aeterni Patris* was just the first of a long series of documents by means of which Leo XIII and the following three Popes, or some organs of the Roman Curia, determined what the contents of Aquinas' wisdom were, imposed the obligation to subscribe to them more and more forcefully and, in the course of time, bound Catholic intellectuals specifically to what were identified as the main principles of that philosophy. The reader can find the complete list of the documents issued to this effect from 1879 to 1916 in Cardinal Pietro Gasparri's note to canon 1366 of the Pio-Benedictine *Codex iuris canonici*<sup>2</sup>. These documents mark the continuity between the condemnation, expressed in Pius IX's *Syllabus complectens praecipuos nostrae aetatis errores* (1864), of any civil achievement and the anti-modernist struggle

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*euntes docerent omnes gentes; Ecclesiamque a se conditam communem et supremam populorum magistram reliquit. Homines enim, quos veritas liberaverat, veritate erant conservandi: neque diu permansissent caelestium doctrinarum fructus, per quos est homini parta salus, nisi Christus Dominus erudiendis ad fidem mentibus perenne magisterium constituisset. Ecclesia vero [...] hoc maxime voluerit, de religione praecipere et cum erroribus perpetuo dimicare. Huc sane pertinent singulorum Episcoporum vigilati labores; huc Conciliorum perlatae leges ac decreta, et maxime Romanorum Pontificum sollicitudo quotidiana, penes quos, beati Petri Apostolorum Principis in primatu successores, et ius et officium et docendi et confirmandi fratres in fide. Quoniam vero, Apostolo monente, per philosophiam et inanem fallaciam, Christifidelium mentes decipi solent, et fidei sinceritas in hominibus corrumpi, idcirco supremi Ecclesiae Pastores muneris sui perpetuo esse duxerunt etiam veri nominis scientiam totis viribus provehere, simulque singulari vigilantia providere, ut ad fidei catholicae normam ubique traderentur humanae disciplinae omnes, praesertim vero philosophia, a qua nimirum magna ex parte pendet ceterarum scientiarum recta ratio.»* LEO XIII, Epistola encyclica *Aeterni Patris*, in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, vol. 12, Typis polyglottae officinae S.C. De Propaganda Fide, Romae 1879, pp. 97-115: 97-98. As a rule, I follow the "official" Vatican English version of the encyclical (cf. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_04081879\\_aeterni-patris.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html)), however in some cases I prefer to render the Latin text into English in a more literal way.

<sup>2</sup> *Codex iuris canonici Pii X pontificis maximi iussu digestus, Benedicti papae XV auctoritate promulgatus*, (Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 9), Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, Romae 1917. The edition with Cardinal Pietro Gasparri's commentary was first published in the same year.

initiated by Leo XIII himself and taken to extremes by Pius X (1903-1914). To these documents one must also add canons 598 and 1336 of the Pio-Benedictine *Codex* itself, issued by Benedict XV (1914-1922) in 1917, the encyclical *Studiorum duce* (1923) of Pius XI (1922-1939) and the Apostolic Constitution *Deus scientiarum Dominus* (1931), issued by the same Pope.

This set of documents and the disciplinary actions that followed them had effects that were not only of a political nature, or within the field of Catholic or anti-Catholic theoretical or moral philosophy, but also on the field of philosophical historiography. That is to say, a neo-Thomist ideology existed and was of great historical importance even as a historiographical theory.

First of all, the very *Aeterni Patris* itself provides a kind of short compendium of the history of philosophy from the second century A.D. to the thirteenth. In the encyclical, one can read that it was the Apologists that were quick to combat the very first adversaries of Christianity (*insanientis doctrinae magistri*). The text explicitly mentions Justin, Quadratus, Aristides, Hermias, and Athenagoras. Then it recalls Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen (whose works, «licet erroribus, saltem ut nunc extant, omnino non vacent, magnam tamen complectuntur vim sententiarum, quibus naturales veritates et numero et firmitate augentur»), Tertullian, Arnobius, Lactantius, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and, emphasised in particular, Augustine. Then *per Orientem* follow John of Damascus and *per Occidentem* Boethius and Anselm<sup>3</sup>. The later authors recalled in this page of the encyclical are the *doctores scholastici*. The encyclical seems to accord them a fundamental role, i.e., that of having collected and ordered the fruits of the doctrine of the *sancti patres* (it is worthwhile noticing that here, too, as previously when speaking of the theories of the adversaries of Christianity, the noun “doctrine” is used in the singular: *segetes*

<sup>3</sup> LEO XIII, Epistola encyclica *Aeterni Patris*, pp. 104-107.

*doctrinae*). Despite this, the encyclical mentions only three scholastic authors: Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and Albert the Great. None of the authors that followed them are mentioned<sup>4</sup>.

However, in the encyclical one can read three things worthy of note about what came after Thomas Aquinas. First, the religious orders that took Aquinas as their reference point are mentioned: first of all the Dominicans, and then the Benedictines, Carmelites, Augustinians, the Society of Jesus, *aliosque sacros Ordines complures*. Second, the encyclical states that, at the universities of Paris, Salamanca, Alcalá, Douai, Toulouse, Leuven, Padua, Bologna, Naples, Coimbra, *aliasque permultas*, there was a time when, «in those great homes of human wisdom, Thomas reigned supreme, and that the minds of all, of teachers as well as of taught, rested in wonderful harmony under the teaching and authority of the sole Angelic Doctor»<sup>5</sup>. Third, it claims that the ecumenical councils constantly desired to pay special honour to Thomas Aquinas and that this was particularly true of the Second Council of Lyon, the Council of Vienne, the Council of Ferrara-Florence, the Council of Trent, and the Vatican Council (i.e., the First Vatican Council)<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore, the *Aeterni Patris* contains three precise theories of an historical-philosophical nature.

The first is very clear, albeit implicit: Thomas Aquinas' thought is taken to be complete and systematic; any question of an evolution in his thought is totally ignored.

The second theory consists in a clarification of the relationship between the *sancti patres* and the *doctores scholastici*. I have already mentioned that, according to the encyclical, the Scholastics collected and ordered the fruits of the doctrine of the *sancti patres*. Actually, the encyclical also adds that precisely

<sup>4</sup> Ibi, pp. 107-108 e 114.

<sup>5</sup> «[...] tamquam in suo regno, Thomam consedissee principem; atque omnium vel doctorum vel auditorum animos miro consensu in unius angelici Doctoris magisterio et auctoritate conquevisse». Ibi, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> Ibi, pp. 109-110.

Thomas Aquinas stands first and foremost among the *doctores scholastici*, since he collected, combined, ordered and increased the doctrines of the *veteres doctores sacros* in such a way and so well as to be rightly considered a bulwark and glory of the Catholic Church<sup>7</sup>.

The third theory concerns the evolution of thought after Thomas Aquinas. In one passage in the encyclical, it says that «into the reasons and principles of things the Angelic Doctor scrutinised philosophical judgments that are the most comprehensive and contain in their bosom the seeds of almost infinite truths, which were to be unfolded in good time by later masters and with a goodly yield». A few lines below, the encyclical adds that «most learned men, in former ages especially, of the highest repute in theology and philosophy, after investigating the immortal works of Thomas with extraordinary commitment, gave themselves over to his angelic wisdom not so much to be instructed as to be essentially nourished upon it»<sup>8</sup>. Shortly after that in the text, however, it is stated that philosophers and theologians, even Catholic ones, have rashly moved away from scholastic philosophy, disdaining both the wisdom of the greatest men «et, quod caput est, Ecclesiae suffragium», which has led to disastrous outcomes<sup>9</sup>. The history of philosophy (and theology) from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century is therefore summed as follows.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibi, p. 108. The encyclical does not precisely identify these *veteres doctores sacros*. One is led to think that it refers to all the authors, whether Fathers of the Church or scholastic philosophers, that preceded Aquinas.

<sup>8</sup> «[...] philosophicas conclusiones angelicus Doctor speculatus est in rerum rationibus et principiis, quae quam latissime patent, et infinitarum fere veritatum semina suo velut gremio concludunt, a posterioribus magistris opportuno tempore et uberrimo cum fructu aperienda». «[...] doctissimi homines, superioribus praesertim aetatibus, theologiae et philosophiae laude praestantissimi, conquisitis incredibili studio Thomae voluminibus immortalibus, angelicae sapientiae eius sese non tam excolendos, quam penitus innutriendos tradiderunt». Ibi, pp. 108-109.

<sup>9</sup> Ibi, p. 111.

[...] to the old teaching a certain new manner of philosophy has succeeded here and there [...]. For it pleased the struggling innovators of the sixteenth century to philosophise without any respect for faith, they having asked and granted each other the power of inventing anything in accordance with their own pleasure and bent. Hence, it was natural that types of philosophy multiplied beyond measure, and judgments differing and clashing one with another also arose about those matters which are the most important in human knowledge. From a mass of opinions men often come to wavering and doubt; and who knows not how easily human minds slip from doubt to error? But, as men follow the lead given them, this pursuit of novelty seems to have caught even the souls of some Catholic philosophers, who, throwing aside the patrimony of ancient wisdom, chose rather to build something new than to strengthen and complete the old by aid of the new – ill-advisedly, in truth, and not without detriment to the sciences<sup>10</sup>.

The effects of the Pope's directives on the field of historiography are already known. They undoubtedly boosted the study of Thomas Aquinas' thought and thus, indirectly, of medieval philosophy. In point of fact, if the works of Aquinas sum up everything that Catholic thinkers had really said before his time, and if the latter are to be included in a context that is considered to be "scholastic", studying the thought of both the *sancti patres* and the *doctores scholastici* is legitimate and jus-

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<sup>10</sup> «[...] in veteris doctrinae locum nova quaedam philosophiae ratio hac illae successit [...]. Adnitentibus enim Novatoribus saeculi XVI, placuit philosophari citra quempiam ad fidem respectum, petita dataque vicissim potestate quaelibet pro lubitu ingenioque excogitandi. Qua ex re pronum fuit, genera philosophiae plus aequo multiplicari, sententiasque diversas atque inter se pugnantes oriri etiam de iis rebus, quae sunt in humanis cognitionibus praecipuae. A multitudine sententiarum ad haesitationes dubitationesque persaepe ventum est: a dubitationibus vero in errorem quam facile mentes hominum delabantur, nemo est qui non videat. Hoc autem novitatis studium, cum homines imitatione trahantur, catholicorum quoque philosophorum animos visum est alicubi pervasisse; qui patrimonio antiquae sapientiae posthabito, nova moliri, quam vetera novis augere et perficere maluerunt, certe minus sapienti consilio, et non sine scientiarum detrimento.» Ibidem.

tified in order to understand Aquinas himself. On the other hand, however, these directives generated unfounded, misleading historical-philosophical representations. In the decrees of both the Pope and the Curia, Thomas Aquinas is presented as an author endowed with a coherent thought in line with that of the Fathers of the Church: a notoriously untenable theory. Furthermore, the thought of the medieval Dominican was thus, so to speak, stripped to its bare bones, selecting from it fundamental principles and additional consequences. A list of these claimed principles was even drawn up under the patronage of the least cultured of the protagonists of this affair, Pope Pius X: it is the infamous list of the twenty four Thomistic theses, which was published under the title *Theses quaedam, in doctrina sancti Thomae Aquinatis contentae, et a philosophiae magistris propositae, adprobantur*<sup>11</sup>.

On the whole, therefore, in the century that ran from the 1870s to the 1980s, the impositions of the Roman Curia and the consequent Neo-Thomist historiography played a deleterious role. Almost as if it were an article of faith, Catholic intellectuals found themselves obliged to profess not only a precise set of philosophical doctrines but also a precise representation of the history of philosophy and theology. This latter point should not be overlooked, since that representation not only caused the historiographical errors that were made and supported by many Catholic historians of philosophy but also affected the conception that non-Catholic historians of philosophy had of the history of medieval philosophy.

One of the historiographical theories that Catholic historians of philosophy found themselves having to defend was that of the “decadence” of thought in works written after Thomas Aquinas. Étienne Gilson undoubtedly had in mind the page from *Aeterni Patris* quoted above when, in 1937, also assuming

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<sup>11</sup> SACRA STUDIORUM CONGREGATIONE, *Theses quaedam, in doctrina sancti Thomae Aquinatis contentae, et a philosophiae magistris propositae, adprobantur*, (Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 6), Typis poliglottis Vaticanis, Romae 1914, pp. 383-386.

and adapting ideas of an idealist and Cousinian origin to his own aims, he maintained in a few conferences that there was a very precise recurrent process in the history of philosophy, which is the expression of laws internal to thought itself. There are four phases to the process that he theorizes: formulation of the system, crisis in the system, scepticism, moralism/mysticism. Needless to say, according to Gilson, Thomas Aquinas represents the “system” and anything after this until the eighteenth century – above all William of Ockham – represents the phase of the corruption of the system, of scepticism, and finally of the reaction, in the form of moralism and mysticism, to scepticism itself<sup>12</sup>. Four years later, in 1941, the Jesuit Carlo Giacon published his monograph *Guglielmo di Occam. Saggio storico-critico sulla formazione e sulla decadenza della Scolastica*<sup>13</sup>.

The title of Giacon’s work well expresses the historiographical convictions of its author at the time when he was teaching “Exposition of Catholic Doctrine and Ethics” at the Catholic University in Milan. Scotus, Giacon maintains, misunderstood and criticised Thomas Aquinas; in his turn, Ockham, in this case quite rightly, criticised Scotus. In so doing, however, Ockham moved even further away from Thomas and, remotely, founded modern philosophy. It is, therefore, the case to know Ockham’s thought, Giacon writes, in order to find «an explanation, and justification, for the abandonment and rejection of scholastic philosophy on the part of the philosophers of Humanism, the Renaissance and from Descartes onwards [...]»<sup>14</sup>.

These are historiographical theories that were very widespread in Catholic circles in those years, and it is superfluous to say anything further about them here. Nevertheless, this head-

<sup>12</sup> É. GILSON, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1937.

<sup>13</sup> C. GIACON, *Guglielmo di Occam. Saggio storico-critico sulla formazione e sulla decadenza della Scolastica*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1941. The work is divided into two volumes with the page numbers continuing from one volume into the next.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibi*, pp. IX-X: X.

strong Jesuit also had a striking idea in store. A first hint of it can already be found in the conclusion to the above-mentioned monograph.

After the first decadence of Scholasticism, which occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it flourished again in the sixteenth and seventeenth, thanks both to the intrinsic need to rediscover a highly rich speculation, in the face of the poverty of the new philosophical and theological researches, and to the need to polemicise with Protestantism. Particular merit in this first rebirth of Scholasticism is deserved by the great Dominican theologians who wrote commentaries on St. Thomas: Tommaso de Vio, Francesco Silvestri, Vitoria, Soto, Cano and Báñez. An equally important recognition is owed to the theologians of the new-born Society of Jesus: Toledo, Fonseca, Molina, Vázquez, Leys, Valencia, and St. Roberto Bellarmino. Francisco Suárez requires a particular place of his own. He did not wish to be merely a commentator on others' doctrines but to master scholastic speculation in order to expound it in his own way, according to the needs of the new times<sup>15</sup>.

As we can see, in 1941 Giacon had already formulated the idea according to which there had been a "golden age of Scholasticism", followed by a period of decadence, which in its turn had been followed by a "reflowering of Scholasticism". It is as well to bear in mind that at this point in time of his intellec-

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<sup>15</sup> «Dopo la prima decadenza della Scolastica, avvenuta nei secoli XIV e XV, vi fu un rifiorire di essa nei secoli XVI e XVII, sia per la necessità intrinseca della rivalutazione di una speculazione ricchissima, dinanzi alla povertà delle nuove ricerche filosofiche e teologiche, sia per la necessità della polemica contro il Protestantismo. Un merito particolare in questa prima rinascita della Scolastica ebbero i grandi teologi domenicani commentatori di s. Tommaso: il card. Gaetano, Silvestro da Ferrara, il Vitoria, il Soto, il Cano, il Báñez; un merito non meno importante ebbero i teologi della nascente Compagnia di Gesù: il Toletto, il Fonseca, il Molina, il Vázquez, il Lessio, Gregorio di Valenza, e s. Roberto Bellarmino. Un posto del tutto singolare lo rivendica a sé Francesco Suárez. Egli non volle essere un semplice commentatore di dottrine altrui. Volle impadronirsi della speculazione scolastica per esporla in modo proprio e secondo le necessità dei nuovi tempi.» Ibi, p. 679.

tual evolution, Giacon presents the authors he mentions as theologians. In no way does he deny that philosophical doctrines may also be found in their works, but in Giacon's way of thinking there is some reason for attributing that title to them. The reason emerges in something Giacon wrote shortly afterwards: the essay published in 1942 and entitled *Galileo e la scolastica della decadenza. Conferenza tenuta sotto gli auspici della Reale accademia d'Italia all'Università cattolica del S. Cuore il giorno 12 maggio 1942 – XX*<sup>16</sup>.

The theories formulated by Giacon in this text are rather complex and reveal his effort to follow the scheme of “golden age / decadence / reflowering” when facing the complexity of the late medieval and Renaissance historical scene and, above all, the scandal aroused by the Galileo case. This, very briefly, is Giacon's theory. The decadence that characterised decadent Scholasticism concerned not only metaphysics but also philosophy of science. To be more specific, not only the comprehension of the first principles of metaphysics but also the distinction between philosophical physics and physical science were lost<sup>17</sup>. In the course of the sixteenth century, there was indeed a reflowering of scholastic philosophy, yet the “eminent men” who were the protagonists in this were mainly interested in theology; the rebirth, therefore, concerned not philosophy *tout court* but philosophy considered to be propaedeutic to theology<sup>18</sup>. The Renaissance Aristotelians who dealt with physics were not scholastic authors, but thinkers, partly Averroists, partly Alexandrists, who had lost all understanding of true Aristotelian thought in the fields of both metaphysics and physics<sup>19</sup>. Galilei had never been taught true Aristotelian

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<sup>16</sup> C. GIACON, *Galileo e la scolastica della decadenza. Conferenza tenuta sotto gli auspici della Reale accademia d'Italia all'Università cattolica del S. Cuore il giorno 12 maggio 1942 – XX*, Istituto filosofico Aloisianum, Gallarate 1942. “XX” obviously stands to indicate the twentieth year of the Fascist era.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibi*, pp. 17-25.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibi*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibi*, p. 8.

metaphysics, was not concerned with it and did not dispute with the current of scholastic philosophy that was interested in theological questions; his enemies were rather non-scholastic Aristotelians<sup>20</sup>. Galilei was right to criticise the physics professed by those Aristotelians but was not understood by scholastic theologians simply because of their incompetence<sup>21</sup>.

Giacon ended his 1942 conference by quoting a statement by Giovanni Gentile, according to whom, «The Aristotelians that were Galileo's adversaries belonged to the period of decadence»<sup>22</sup>. The collocation and periodisation of the "heights" and "depths" Giacon proposed were, in actual fact, very different from those recalled by Gentile, but in the twentieth year of the Fascist era, in a lasting honeymoon between the Fascist regime and papal Catholicism, such subtleties could be overlooked.

The full application of the theory of the rebirth of Scholasticism to the field of philosophy occurs in the bibliographical guidebook published by Giacon in 1943 entitled *Il pensiero cristiano con particolare riguardo alla scolastica medievale*<sup>23</sup>. It is here that the expression "Second Scholasticism" appears, in this way giving a name to the reflowering of Scholasticism of which Giacon had spoken in his earlier writings. Giacon thus presents, in the brief preface to the volume, his own historiographical proposal.

[...] the present *Guida* concerns the history of Christian philosophy from Patristics to Neo-Scholasticism; since, however, the constitution and elaboration of a Christian philosophy strictly speaking occurred above all in the Middle Ages, while prior to that period there was only a remote preparation and after it merely successions, echoes and developments, most of this *Guida* is dedicated to medieval Christian philosophy. The speculation

<sup>20</sup> Ibi, pp. 11-13, 16-17 e 47-49.

<sup>21</sup> Ibi, pp. 50-52.

<sup>22</sup> «Gli aristotelici avversari di Galilei appartenevano al periodo della decadenza». Ibi, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> C. GIACON, *Il pensiero cristiano con particolare riguardo alla scolastica medievale*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1943.

during this part of the history of philosophy is commonly known by the name of Scholasticism. The period of the development of Christian scholastic thought runs basically from the ninth to the fifteenth century, that is to say, from the Carolingian Renaissance to the end of the Middle Ages, from the first Dialecticians to the end of Nominalism. This first period, which ends with the decadence of Scholasticism, is followed by another period, that of the reflowering of the same, at times called Spanish Scholasticism, before and after the Council of Trent, up to and throughout the whole of the eighteenth century, when a new decadence of it took place. Finally, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is a second reflowering: Neo-Scholasticism and, above all, Neo-Thomism. For ease of expression, in recollection of the three Platonic Academies, we have settled on calling the three periods of Christian Scholasticism First, Second and Third Scholasticism: medieval, Spanish and Neo-scholastic. Together with a general introduction and Patristics, they hence constitute the five sections of this *Guida*<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> «[...] la presente *Guida* riguarda la storia della filosofia cristiana dalla patristica alla neoscolastica; siccome però soprattutto nel Medio Evo si ebbe la costituzione e l'elaborazione di una filosofia cristiana in senso rigoroso, mentre prima si trattò soltanto di una preparazione remota, e dopo, di vicende, di echi e di sviluppi, così la parte maggiore della *Guida* è stata riservata alla filosofia cristiana medievale. La speculazione di questa parte di storia della filosofia è comunemente chiamata con l'appellativo di Scolastica. Il periodo di svolgimento del pensiero cristiano scolastico va sostanzialmente dal secolo IX al secolo XV, cioè dalla Rinascita carolingia alla fine del Medio Evo, dai primi dialettici alla fine del nominalismo. A questo primo periodo, che termina con la decadenza della Scolastica, segue un altro periodo, quello del rifiorimento della medesima, chiamato talvolta col nome di Scolastica spagnola, prima e dopo il Concilio di Trento, fino a tutto il secolo XVIII, quando si verifica una sua nuova decadenza. In fine, nei secoli XIX e XX si ha un secondo rifiorimento: la Neoscolastica e soprattutto il Neotomismo. Per comodità di espressione, ricordando le tre accademie platoniche, si è convenuto di chiamare prima, seconda e terza Scolastica i tre periodi della filosofia cristiana: medievale, spagnolo e neoscolastico. Essi, insieme a un'introduzione generale e alla Patristica, costituiscono pertanto le cinque sezioni della presente *Guida*.» Ibi, pp. XIII-XIV.

Giacon's historiographical proposal finally reaches maturity in the three volumes of *La seconda scolastica*. Published from 1944 to 1950, they embodied his proposal and sealed its success. In the prefaces to the volumes<sup>25</sup>, Giacon repeatedly and explicitly states his aim when carrying out his research: to contribute, he writes, to the Italian national reconstruction by advocating a philosophical system, the Neo-Thomist one, that is sound and able to provide a foundation both for experimental sciences and for whatever may be correct, albeit fragmentarily, in contemporary thought. To the same extent, Giacon explicitly states that he has not meant to write an erudite work, but intended, he clarifies in several places, to contribute to the progress of contemporary thought, which is why, he proceeds to say, he has chosen to tackle only those authors and those themes which, to his mind, served his purpose, consigning the rest to oblivion.

Equally explicitly, Giacon expresses, from the very first page of the first volume of the work, his view of history and of the history of philosophy from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century.

It is well-known that after the classical age [i.e., the thirteenth century], with the advent and triumph of Nominalism, while anti-scholastic currents of thought were acquiring strength, in turbulent times ill-suited to speculation, due to the lack of superior minds that might have stood comparison with the great masters of the thirteenth century, scholastic philosophy had entered a period of profound decadence. In particular, the papal captivity in Avignon, the struggles between the papacy and the empire, the western schism, the Councils of Constance and Basel, the heretical movements of Wycliffe and Huss, had placed and were placing the supreme ecclesiastic authority in a position in which it could not further studies profitably, as it had done in the previous centuries. [...] Religious orders [...], considerably relaxed as far as the rigours of discipline are concerned, were no longer

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<sup>25</sup> C. GIACON, *La seconda scolastica*, 3 voll., Fratelli Bocca, Milano 1944-1950, vol. 1, pp. 5-12, vol. 2, pp. 1-9 e vol. 3, pp. 5-9.

the cenacles of the purest activity of thought. However, once the Roman See had been strengthened in the second half of the fifteenth century, [...] it was possible to bring back to life that philosophy that [...] had made the best century in the Middle Ages one of splendour<sup>26</sup>.

The modern reader cannot but find such a text risible. If, however, one reads on, one can sense Giacon's intellectual effort. We thus discover that Giacon denies that what followed Thomas Aquinas was always merely decadence, or simply a passive repetition of the latter's thought; he admits that Humanism did contribute to a certain extent to what he considers the sixteenth-century rebirth of Scholasticism; he also acknowledges the presence, in the centuries with which he deals, of non-Thomist university traditions (only, however, to credit them with the sole task of challenging Thomism); he sees, and points out, the composite nature of the thought of the authors he speaks of (although he blames this fact); he does not refrain from having a dig at the "orthodox" Dominican Domingo Báñez, likening him to Cornelius Jansen.

In all three introductions to the volumes of *La seconda scolastica* Giacon presents the complete outline of the work. This is what he writes in the Introduction to the second volume.

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<sup>26</sup> «È noto che, dopo l'età classica, con l'avvento e il trionfo del nominalismo, mentre prendevano vigore correnti di pensiero antiscolastiche, in tempi turbolenti e poco propizi alla speculazione, per la mancanza di menti elette, che potessero reggere al confronto con i grandi maestri del secolo XIII, la filosofia scolastica era entrata in un periodo di profonda decadenza. In particolare la cattività avignonese, le lotte tra papato e impero, lo scisma d'Occidente, i Concili di Costanza e di Basilea, i movimenti ereticali di Wicliff e di Huss avevano messo e mettevano la suprema autorità ecclesiastica nell'impossibilità di promuovere efficacemente gli studi, come aveva fatto nei secoli precedenti. [...] Gli ordini religiosi [...], rilassandosi alquanto nel rigore della disciplina, non erano più i cenacoli della più pura attività di pensiero. Rassodata però, nella seconda metà del '400, la Sede romana, [...] fu possibile una rinascita di quella filosofia che [...] aveva reso splendido il miglior secolo del medio evo.» Ibi, vol. 1, p. 5.

[...] I called the sixteenth-century period before the Council of Trent: *I grandi Commentatori di s. Tommaso: il Gaetano, il Ferrarese, il Vitoria*; and I wanted to call the periods after the Council: *I nuovi problemi etico-giuridici*; the seventeenth century: *Le sistemazioni generali*; the eighteenth century: *La nuova decadenza*<sup>27</sup>.

The first three volumes published by Giacon contain only the first two of the four themes, or titles, mentioned here; the work is, therefore, in point of fact unfinished. I have not carried out any research to establish the reasons why Giacon did not complete his initial project. One can, in any case, observe that Giacon's historiographical theory constitutes an adjustment of the Neo-Thomist historiographical paradigm. Thanks to this theory, the doctrinal tradition inspired by Thomas Aquinas is no longer dragged into the whirlpool of modern philosophy set off by William of Ockham; on the contrary, after a latent period, it represents itself in the limelight of history, albeit in imperfect forms, and preserves the aspirations and materials that make what Giacon considers the most recent and authentic reflowering of medieval Scholasticism possible, that is to say, Neo-Scholasticism and Neo-Thomism.

Precisely because this scheme does not respect the original Neo-Thomist historiographical dictate, not all adherents to that dictate have been willing to accept Giacon's theory: if one admits that not everything that follows Thomas is a deviation from his thought, it becomes difficult to delineate clear borders between true and false philosophy. One author who was hostile, at least practically, to Giacon's historiographical proposal was the Stigmatine Cornelio Fabro, who was of the opinion that none of Aquinas' followers had understood the authentic spirit of Thomism. His negative evaluation of Francisco Suárez went

<sup>27</sup> «[...] al periodo del secolo XVI precedente il Concilio di Trento, davo come titolo proprio: *I grandi Commentatori di s. Tommaso: il Gaetano, il Ferrarese, il Vitoria*; e avrei dato al periodo posteriore al medesimo Concilio, il titolo: *I nuovi problemi etico-giuridici*; al secolo XVII: *Le sistemazioni generali*; al secolo XVIII: *La nuova decadenza*.» Ibi, vol. 2, p. 1.

back at least to the article *Neotomismo e neosuarezismo: una battaglia di principi*, published in 1941. Yet not even those authors belonging to the Order of Preachers won his approval. In 1958 Fabro published the article *L'obscurcissement de l'“esse” dans l'école thomiste* and again in 1989 he began his article dedicated to João Poinso (Juan de santo Tomás) with the following aphorism: «The same thing as what happens to the traveller going to London frequently occurs when following the path of the Commentators: ‘Does this road lead to London? – Certainly. But if you want to arrive there, you have to turn around’». Faced with the question «What have Thomists said, done or taught, compared to the teachings of their Master St. Thomas, in these last seven centuries?» and having ascertained that «the disciples of the Angelic Doctor have been divided amongst themselves from the very outset and in various ways», Fabro wonders, not rhetorically: «Do we then have to say, that is admit, that the so-called Thomist school, from the very beginning, has revealed a deviationist tendency existing from the time of the speculative revolution acknowledged to be the Master's?»». Fabro's reply is that we do: from its very outset the Thomist school betrayed the mainstays of Aquinas' thought<sup>28</sup>.

Despite the fact that ideas such as Fabro's were widely accepted in Catholic circles, Giacom's historiographical viewpoint still had a far-reaching effect: it permitted authors that would otherwise be excluded from any historical narration, or badly

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<sup>28</sup> «Succede spesso, nel seguire la via dei Commentatori, come a quel viaggiatore diretto a Londra: ‘Conduce questa strada a Londra? – Certo. Ma se volete giungervi, bisogna che vi voltiate’» (This text is a translated quotation from Søren Kierkegaard's *Dagbøger*, I A 55). «Che hanno detto, fatto, insegnato... i tomisti – rispetto all'insegnamento del maestro s. Tommaso – in questi sette secoli?». «Tornando ai sette secoli di storia del Tomismo, e anche questa è un'osservazione critico-storica, è facile rilevare che anche i discepoli dell'Angelico fin da principio e in modi diversi si sono divisi fra loro [...]». «Dobbiamo allora dire cioè ammettere che la cosiddetta scuola tomistica, fin dal suo inizio, mostra una tendenza deviazionistica in atto dalla rivoluzione speculativa riconosciuta al Maestro?» C. FABRO, *Il posto di Giovanni di s. Tommaso nella scuola tomistica*, «Angelicum», 66 (1989), pp. 56-90: quotations from pp. 56 and 58.

included in the inadequate category of Spanish Scholasticism, to be awarded a place in history. This solution has found favour with historians of philosophy of all bents, both those caught up in the tangles of papal dispositions, and those blinded by age-old anticlerical disputes. It permitted the former to vaunt some kind of survival of true philosophy even during the centuries of the Reformation and early modern times; it allowed the latter to lump together and remove more easily, by a single act of the mind and the pen, all those who, in their opinion, had opposed the birth and growth of the authentic philosophy, i.e. modernity.

Indeed, it is the case to recall that both the general representation of the history of philosophy supported by Giacon and that symmetrically upheld by many twentieth-century “lay” authors were founded on the subordination of historical enquiry to a theoretical programme and have been significantly belied by subsequent research. Interestingly enough, during recent decades, several attempts have been carried out to make sense of the notions of Scholasticism and Second Scholasticism. I believe that none of them has been successful, nor yet could have been. These notions cannot stand without the support of the ideological assumptions from which they stem; however, one can no longer share those assumptions, and, therefore, the notions themselves have become intrinsically meaningless. In conclusion, leaving aside the notion of Scholasticism, whose genesis I have not discussed in this paper, I believe that the time has come for that of Second Scholasticism to be happily discarded.

