Critical Thinkers on the Threshold of Posthuman Philosophy

William Gladstone & George Tyrrell

(Revised and expanded edition)

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Comparatively few persons have a “turn” for anything. Our capacities are chiefly developed out of elements which before culture were not distinctly discernible.

W. E. Gladstone to his son W. H. Gladstone

Our task is one, not of argument, but of exposition; We have but to let Truth appear, and then bid men “Come and see!” And of these, some will go away according to the power of seeing they bring with them.

George Tyrrell

The phenomenological method is not the diametric opposite of the ontological; it is a more comprehensive one than the latter, whose merits it preserves and whose inadequacies it tries to remedy.

Leslie Dewart
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BACKGROUND

In this essay I contemplate the possibility of posthuman philosophy within the religious and theological schools of thought. In doing this, I do not focus on the traditional philosophical humanism which characterizes the scholastic and neo-scholastic approach within Western philosophy. Rather, I focus on a *dehellenized* philosophical way of thinking that, I hold, characterizes the thresholds of a new philosophical consciousness. That is to say, the Hellenistic philosophical principles that support Western humanism, are not used to support my understanding of a philosophy appropriate to posthumanity. My views have changed.

Having begun as an existential philosopher, with a view to evolving into a posthuman philosopher, I evaluate aspects of the philosophical consciousness of William Gladstone (1809-1898) politician and George Tyrrell (1861-1909) theologian in terms of both humanism and posthumanism from a phenomenological philosophical perspective. I realize that the phenomenological notion of humanity (in contrast to the classical idea of humanism) may not be adequately grasped by all philosophers. It seems to me that although many professionals appear to be somewhat conversant with general philosophical and theological notions that are pertinent to humanity, they nonetheless are struggling to clarify their understanding of an emerging posthuman philosophy. Yet, despite the growing popularity of research into posthumanism in academia, most academics, have but a general and somewhat sketchy knowledge of the significance of posthuman philosophy. Not all research into posthumanity is undertaken as philosophy. But rather most research is undertaken as a
dramatic exercise of human imagination or of fantastic reasoning. Thus, it is understandable that some researchers lack an adequate philosophical vocabulary to express their thoughts for a philosophy on the threshold of posthumanity.

My intention in this essay is to explore a new philosophical path, somewhat similar to Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) intention, but with an eye to posthumanity, that includes freeing philosophy from its traditional dependence on dogmatism. Kant wrote:

I am obliged to the learned public for the silence with which it has honoured my Critique for a considerable time; for this proves a postponement of judgement and thus some suspicion that in a work which leaves all accustomed paths and sets out on a new one in which one cannot at once find one’s way, something may perhaps lie through which an important but at present dead branch of human knowledge may receive new life and fruitfulness, and also a care not to break and destroy the delicate shoot by an overhasty judgement. ¹

This essay is intended to bring relief for the “seasoned” and tired analytic philosopher weary of enduring the process of moving from the known to the unknown. In light of pursuing a posthuman philosophy, I make no effort to further refine my efforts at philosophizing within the classical tradition, but take inspiration from Kant, and with

¹ Kant, Immanuel Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be able to present itself as a Science (Manchester University Press, 1953: 151).
an eye to posthuman philosophical interpretation, engage in philosophizing in a new way which may not at once be readily appreciated. My hope is that a philosophical continuity between the *human* being and the *posthuman* being will eventually be recognized by serious, non-trendy, contemporary thinkers. Contrary to popular trendy opinion, I hold that non-living entities do not qualify, or at least, do not merit human attributes (except for purposes of literary fiction) but not in formal philosophy. My invitation, therefore, is for the reader to consider the phenomenological philosophical method of interpretation of human experience as an alternative to the analytic approach in understanding posthumanity. Once grasped, the phenomenological approach avoids many of the epistemological pitfalls of analytic philosophy and heightens one’s consciousness to the point of providing a satisfactory interpretation of the posthuman experience.

In the posthuman context, the focus on the theological question of God will shift from a classical Hellenistic speculative perspective on the nature of God, to the existential question on the nature of the person in the presence of God. The former is an epistemological (objective) approach, whereas the latter is a phenomenological (subjective) approach. Many theologians have observed that talking about God in any traditional sense does not interest philosophers today. My emphasis, therefore, is not on the traditional Western approach to arguments for God’s existence, but on existential issues relevant to posthuman experience interpreted through a non-hellenized philosophy, i.e., phenomenology. It is precisely these existential issues that posthuman philosophy
needs to address in preparation for future theological discussion. I do not rely on the traditional epistemological systems of Western European philosophy and theology when envisioning the threshold of posthuman philosophy. Rather, I suggest that the notion of human consciousness be taken as the means of investigation. While some psychologists and social scientists may hesitate to claim knowledge about a *de facto* posthuman culture in the West, all critical thinkers have some knowledge of our present human culture, albeit interpreted through Hellenic principles. In Western culture we have experienced human and other organic life as naturally evolving. Humans soon became conscious that an evolving organism ends. To the contrary, however, most Christians believe that life, or the soul, is eternal and continues in some manner beyond our present organically embodied conscious state. For us to understand human life as evolving at the threshold of posthumanity is as natural as it was for our immediate human predecessors to understand life as evolving from brute animal to humanity.

In critically reflecting about the threshold of posthumanity, I have chosen a holistic, and person-centred, philosophical path to questions concerning human meaning (or consciousness). The person-centred and holistic approach to reflection on the posthuman philosophical threshold that I offer is an alternative to the traditional and theoretical humanistic perspective. I maintain that theology, holistically understood, will present an authentic

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2 By *holistic* I mean that the human entity is greater and other than the sum of its individual parts.
interpretation of the transcendental questions of the presence of God in posthuman life. My hope is that individuals, particularly seasoned and disaffected philosophers, will be able to graduate beyond classical epistemology and consider consciousness as a more appropriate means to philosophical understanding in the posthuman context.

In this essay, I do not present either a historical, nor a systematic examination of the notion of posthumanity. Rather, I undertake a phenomenological (de-hellenized) approach to understanding posthumanity. Following upon the section Theologizing Outside the Guild, I present some ways of reflecting on emerging posthuman philosophical issues. I consider five evolutionary turning-points in human consciousness. The first turning-point is to begin thinking diversely, which recognizes the evolutionary process in posthuman consciousness as furthering diversity, not focusing on identifying uniformity or oneness, as is traditionally done in humanism. The second turning-point is to begin conceiving philosophically, which marks an intellectual shift in understanding from popular folk-lore perspectives to formal reasoned philosophical perspectives. The third turning-point consists of understanding holistically, which acknowledges the acceptance of a transcendent factor, yet unknown, in the human being. In holistic understanding, the identity of the consciously thinking agent is greater than the sum of its parts. The fourth turning-point is reflecting theologically, that is, an intellectual stance that imports the humanist concept of God for re-consideration (re-location) within a posthuman experience. Alternatively expressed, where is “god” in the
posthuman world? The fifth turning-point is acting creatively, which inaugurates a new status of the human being as agent and as participant in creation, i.e., not only as an observer of creation. To my mind, these evolutionary turning-points are best understood, at this time at least, as preliminaries to philosophical reflections on the threshold of posthumanity. Research into a philosophy on the threshold of posthumanity may be done by any thinking human agent conscious of the evolutionary development of classical humanism to existential posthumanism.

My research addresses some aspects of the writing of two late 19th and early 20th century Western religious thinkers, George Tyrrell and William Gladstone. I understand them as precursors of posthumanism, and I reflect on some of their interpretations of Christian theology in light of foreshadowing a threshold of posthuman philosophy. While they are not contemporary with me, they are part of modern Western history and many of the issues they raised remain relevant for individuals contemplating the threshold of posthuman philosophy. Each author has offered differing, but complementary, points of view to his understanding of Christian theology within Victorian culture. The reason for choosing these two authors is that sufficient time has passed to allow me to view their thinking in relation to my thoughts on entering the threshold of posthumanity. To be conscious of the development of their philosophical and theological thought is helpful for philosophers today as they reflect on their past understanding and re-configure their knowledge in terms proper for a posthuman interpretation.
THEOLOGIZING OUTSIDE THE GUILD

Professional theology originated as a formal activity with the establishment of the universities. Professional theology was intended to serve the Church in clarifying and formalizing doctrine and dogma. At the time of the academic guilds, it was used by some pastors (Protestant and Catholic) in the spiritual direction of their better-educated parishioners. However, my current purpose is not spiritual direction, but to theologize outside any contemporary ecclesial guild. The contemporary term ecclesial refers to democratic relationships within the Christian faith-life. The classical term, ecclesiastical, refers to the hierarchical government of the Christian community. The former is subjective with emphasis on the agent, the latter is objective with emphasis on the object (i.e., the non-agent). The doctrinal and dogmatic statements extant in ecclesiastical institutions derive from theological controversies concerning the belief of the church as expressed philosophically on Hellenistic principles. As a consequence, over the centuries various rhetorical accretions have clouded reflection in theology preventing the development of an epistemology that would have kept pace with contemporary belief. This was so, since the philosophical language supporting theology which had developed in the medieval period, had become stagnant in the face of novel scientific discoveries. However, an existential theological reflection on novel scientific discoveries continued to take place in an ecclesial context that differed from the speculative theological reasoning that took place in an ecclesiastical context.
I undertake this theological reflection as preparation for future thinking at the threshold of posthumanity. Critical theological reflection is a unique human activity and an innate capacity of the human mind to interpret religious experience. In this critical reflection I choose human consciousness instead of classical epistemology as the means of theological interpretation. Further, conscious critical thinking reaches into the depths of the mind and discloses others, who are not me. Conscious critical thinking incorporates the believers’ best efforts at formulating an authentic Christian anthropology and an understanding of life and purpose in light of organic evolution. I conceive critical thinking, or critical consciousness in theology as undertaking three roles. The first is to relate the human being to its actual experience. The second is to understand truth as an authentic relationship between me and those others (organic and inorganic) who are not-me. The third is to appropriately advance the self-understanding of the ecclesial community in a posthuman context.

Critical consciousness reveals that the human mind can transcend the social, political and religious experience that was originally expressed within a traditional theological guild. 3 Critical consciousness discloses that philosophical and theological systems are not universal, but are contingent upon the culture that supports them. It further shows that our Western heritage reveals a movement from the monarchical government of an ecclesiastical hierarchy

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to the democratic governance of ecclesial authority. In short, critical consciousness discloses a threshold to a posthuman philosophical interpretation of life, at least in the Western world. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was among the first philosophers to recognize the beginning of a posthuman threshold in philosophy. He held that pre-theoretical humanity acted as a self-organizing whole whose activity was not based on the fixed laws of social and scientific mechanics. Pre-theoretical humanity acted according to the level of consciousness of its spirit. These levels of consciousness have been identified as holistic, as emergent evolution, and various other philosophies of evolutionary and historical development.  

Theoretical and metaphysical concepts do not create the vital urges with which humanity organizes itself, rather, existential (political) experience does. In posthuman philosophy the notion of agency (human cause and subsequent effect) takes on a new meaning in light of the created human being exercising a co-creative political role in life.

I reject the form of the earlier Medieval Christian theology, influenced as it is by outdated Hellenic principles. This rejection is necessary because Medieval theology does not resonate with a contemporary cosmology, as noted by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.  


guild, I avoid the baggage of the disputed ecclesiastical political and power-related issues that emerged at the Reformation/counter-Reformation period but which are no longer culturally relevant. Thus, the way is opened for posthuman investigations in Theological Philosophy. 7 In philosophically contemplating religious experience, I take seriously the contributions of the Enlightenment with its epistemological, historical, and evolutionary insights. The Enlightenment, which began in Europe, had introduced new and legitimate human interpretations of religious experience which, however, have become problematic today. North America, given its historical patrimony, continues to suffer from an inadequate philosophy in theological thinking as evidenced in the unsatisfied legacy traceable to the philosophical and theological issues once prevalent in pre-Victorian England. From a political philosophical perspective, George Grant (1918-1988) writes: “It is only possible to write here generally about the relation between Protestant theology and the new science. It sprang initially from one negative agreement: both the theologians and the scientists wished to free the minds of men from the formulations of mediaeval Aristotelianism, though for different reasons.” 8 During this time and, well into the reign of Victoria, England remained virtually isolated from Continental philosophical thought. However, critical examination of English philosophical and theological texts reveals some influence of German theological perspectives.

7 I use the term as coined by Leslie Dewart in The Foundations of Belief (Herder & Herder, 1969:11).
8 Grant, George Technology and Empire (Anansi 1969:20).
Selecting the philosopher-theologians William Gladstone and George Tyrrell, I assess their thinking in the culture of Victorian England as it was beginning to be influenced by Continental, and particularly German thought. In evaluating the work of William Gladstone and George Tyrrell, I do not necessarily endorse their respective conclusions. I present their thinking because they found themselves having to respond to a changing cultural landscape that affected the interpretation of their religious experience. I find myself in a similar situation of having to respond to the changing cultural landscape of an inherited Hellenistic philosophical tradition bringing about what I recognize as a threshold to posthuman philosophy. Both men were Christian and sought ways to relate their faith experience within the social order of their day. In Tyrrell’s case the Roman Catholic Church formed the context of his thought, and in Gladstone’s case it was the realm of Victorian politics. In their day, they criticized the mediaeval teleological doctrine with its substantial forms as preventing men from observing and understanding the world as it is. George Grant has noted: “The criticism by the theologians is less well known and less easily understandable in an age such as ours. They attacked the mediaeval teleological doctrine as the foundation of what they called “natural” theology, and that theology was attacked because it led men away from fundamental reliance on Christian revelation.” ⁹ Each found that the inherited structures of the ecclesiastical and the political order (both founded on Hellenic philosophical

⁹ Grant, George Technology and Empire (Anansi, 1969:20). See also Griffin, David; Beardslee, William; Holland, Joe Varieties of Postmodern Theology (State University of New York Press, 1989).
principles) were not adequately equipped to relate to the changing cultural and social environment of the time. As a result of the Continental philosophical influence, theology in Victorian England was challenged to revise its classical philosophical foundation. This revision contributed to the construction of the thresholds to posthuman philosophy.

At the beginning of the 19th Century, Rationalism was in vogue in England and on the Continent. Elliot-Binns has distinguished two attitudes of rational thought that were hostile to religious, and in particular Christian, consciousness. One attitude of thought was the open and complete rejection of the whole Christian system, typical of France; the other attitude, which typified Germany, tolerated Christianity, but gradually reduced it to a caricature of its former self. 10 The existential and less rationalistic Germanic thought, that later evolved into phenomenological philosophy under the influence of Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl, resonated with George Tyrrell. Although he died before any formal development of the phenomenological school of thought in England, his thinking was definitely headed in that direction.

My investigation of some preliminaries to the threshold of posthuman philosophy continues in that direction. Phenomenological reflection on the legacy of classical philosophy satisfies one’s subjectivist mood and, as well, consciously engages contemporary critical thinkers. And my critical consciousness of classical philosophy is a

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subjective awareness of the shift towards a posthuman philosophical threshold. I follow the phenomenological way of thinking suggested by W. K. C. Guthrie (1906-1981). He reminded us that philosophers do not think in a void. In fact, our thoughts are products of three interrelated factors: our temperaments, our experiences, and our reading of previous philosophers, all of which make up our particular life-worlds. 11 One of the pioneers of the phenomenological method was Edmund Husserl, who thought outside the theological guild. According to him, we can reflect on all experience, inasmuch as it presents itself to consciousness, within a clear, existential, methodological framework. All conscious knowledge, in contrast to Hellenistic epistemological knowledge, is embedded in a cultural context. Hellenistic epistemological knowledge transcends cultural contexts. In phenomenology the world of actual experience takes precedence over the abstracted and theoretical world of the sciences.

Langdon Gilkey (1919-2004) who also thought outside the theological guild, notes that the public task of the theologian is primarily the analysis of life with regard to its religious beliefs and aspects, and secondarily an analysis of life with regard to its economic, sociological or psychological dimensions, though each of these can have a religious basis and ground. 12 My contemplation on a posthuman philosophical threshold, though undertaken

personally, is not an isolated and private exercise. My interpretation, for which I am solely responsible, has been influenced by reading the works of various philosophers, such as Edmund Husserl, and theologians such as George Tyrrell, and politicians such as William Gladstone. The theological style of this essay falls within Jeff Astley’s understanding of doing “ordinary theology,” which focuses on personal insights arising out of experience and the theological consciousness that takes place outside the professional philosophical or theological guild. According to Astley, original theology is rarely done in our day. He maintains that theological thought is often undertaken as the study of other people’s ideas. It is rarely a self-critical reflection on one’s own religious experience and interpretation. 13

In other words, much contemporary theology retains the classical character of scholasticism and offers but new variations of old ideas. Although modern theology may have begun in the academy, it cannot remain a theoretical academic discipline, as John Apczynski noted. 14 Theology, of its perpetual purpose, must address the questions, problems, and data that arise from within all aspects of the human and the posthuman context. The critical consciousness of any theologian (this means anyone trying to understand ultimate meaning) addresses his or her *lebenswelt* (life-world) as an individual in community. A

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13 Astley, Jeff *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Ashgate, 2002).
theologian’s *lebenswelt* is constituted by the existential milieu of the cultural, social, and religious context of life.

Theologians on the thresholds of posthuman philosophy must continually search for new and meaningful ways to interpret religious experience outside the traditional theological guild of scholasticism. Today, one cannot understand the legacy of the past as fixed and dead and thus no longer relevant, any more than one can consider the lives of those former critical thinkers as merely historical fossils. From the phenomenological perspective, these thinkers may be physically dead, but their “living” legacy continues to shape the present, as it did the past. Their living legacy exists, not by virtue of its own historical right, but by virtue of its significance for the present moment in philosophical consciousness on the threshold of posthumanity. A critical phenomenology, in a Christian ecclesial context, must be in conscious dialogue with artists, musicians, novelists, poets, psychologists, and always with the Scriptures. Omitting the Christian aspect, is often characteristic of the Western scientific bias. A phenomenological contemplation on posthuman threshold incorporates, but does not literally reproduce, various aspects of the classical human temperament, experience, and understanding of both deceased and living philosophers. At this point, it should be easily comprehended that cultures, unaffected by Western globalization, which never experienced the humanism of scholasticism, or the Western Enlightenment, i.e., Asian cultures and some Arabic cultures, need not concern themselves with posthuman philosophical interpretation. Unless they have adopted Western values, their philosophy
will most likely focus on their cultural heritage vis à vis the West.
FIVE PERSPECTIVES ON A POSTHUMAN PHILOSOPHICAL THRESHOLD

In light of the above, I now offer a reflection on five issues arising within a phenomenological interpretation of posthuman philosophy. They are: (1) Thinking Diversely, (2) Conceiving Philosophically, (3) Understanding Holistically, (4) Reflecting Theologically, and (5) Acting Creatively.

Thinking Diversely

I have written this essay primarily for the critically consciousness Christian individual to increase the his or her awareness with respect to the emergence of a threshold of posthuman philosophy. The emphasis of this essay is on the active development and cultivation of a posthuman consciousness through which one may come to recognize his or her status as co-creator of one’s personal life-world. Posthuman philosophy of a theological kind will require consciousness of one’s culture. Consciousness of one’s culture includes contact with Eastern and non-Christian civilizations. The cultural traditions and expressions of faith outside the Western context adds diversity to one’s experience and interpretation of posthuman philosophy.

The art of developing a posthuman philosophy from the Christian perspective will necessarily incorporate an appreciation of the diverse scientific and techno-digital discoveries of the present day. Thinking diversely is a venerable tradition within the history of Christian theology and is to be retained in a posthuman context. Within his studies, George Tyrrell noted that Christians in the early
Church wandered intellectually among the Gentile nations to find vessels to hold treasures for which they found no receptacle in the house of their birth. Through engagement with diverse cultures, the primitive Christians discovered a variety of contexts in which they could articulate the development of their Christian life. 15 Posthuman Christians are at the threshold of accomplishing something similar in the 21st Century.

Christian theological philosophers, have followed two distinct, but related, phenomenological paths concerning human understanding; one by the individual and the other by a collectivity. The individual path of understanding is characterized by contemplating the recorded life of Jesus by his faithful followers who produced the written gospels. These texts suggested how the life of the Christ of faith was structured and understood, and dependent upon the evangelist’s memory. Each of the four gospels reflects a particular memory of the person of Jesus as the central focus which discloses a diverse picture of the Nazarene.

The second path of understanding is the shared consciousness within a collectivity of the significance of Jesus’s life. Accordingly, theologians within the church produced a variety of diverse theologies and these theologies altered the consciousness of other theological interpreters. Such diversity is not negative. It is, in fact, part of the evolutionary process. The theology of the early church developed among those members of the community who were most disposed to sharing their Christian

15 Tyrrell, George Lex Credendi: A Sequel to Lex Orandi (Longmans, 1906: 131).
experience. It is to be remembered, according to Robin Young, that an early church theologian “was a person like Hesiod or Orpheus, or any of the diviners and visionaries inspired by one of the members of the pantheon.” These early church theologians interpreted their particular experiences in light of their cultural understandings of the life of the Christ. Eventually, distinct questions arising from particular personal experiences presented problem for hermeneutic interpretation. St. Augustine provides one of the earliest recorded examples of theological diversity of the Christian experience. As Richard Woods has noted, Augustine's contribution in shaping our interiorly directed (and diverse) theological activity grew from his awareness of the presence of God at the deepest level of human consciousness. Augustine’s deep personal experience shone through his troubled spirit, often desirous of a total communion with God, but he was often left without a sense of God’s presence.

Eventually, the initial diverse conceptualizations of the faithful developed into a collective and uniform theological perspective that became normative for the Christian interior life and for some Catholic religious communities. For example, the two diverging and distinct schools of theology referred to as the “Alexandrian” and “Antiochene” schools which developed to address Christological questions were based on their geographical and intellectual differences. These schools were not homogenous groups and never

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existed as such in any concrete sense. While their diverse perspectives encompassed convergent themes and approaches, neither became a uniform system of theology. (This suggests to me that posthuman philosophy, deriving from various human themes, will not evolve into a uniform system of thought.) The presence of these schools indicated that diversity was an integral part of Christianity’s historical development for some time after the death of the apostles. However, Christianity could not continue to flourish exclusively upon the charismatic gifts that sustained the experience of the early Christians. Another model for a fulfilling life became necessary. As Christianity evolved, the community began to interpret its experience from within a philosophical consciousness. In time, between the Judaic and Hellenistic world views, a rapprochement prepared the way for a new articulation of the Christian experience. No longer was the imminent return of Jesus the driving force for sustaining charismatic Christian belief. An interpretation of the Christian experience, heavily dependent on the Hellenistic philosophical perspective, began to develop particularly in the Christian East which cast the Christian experience in a new and diverse light.

This development continued for centuries. As Brian Gaybba has pointed out, the various schools of theological reflection on the Christian experience were developing long before the Reformation of Christendom occurred. 18 These schools had developed to advance the priorities and

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18 Gaybba, Brian P Aspects of the Mediaeval History of Theology: 12th to 14th Centuries (University of South Africa Press, 1988).
perspectives of particularly important religious orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans. In the Middle Ages, a change in the structure of theological interpretation came about with the controversial introduction of Aristotle’s philosophy. The scholastic method of interpretation, influenced by Aristotelian and Platonic thought patterns, was the best tool for intellectual argument in that age, as evidenced by Thomas Aquinas’s synthesis of Aristotle’s cosmology and the Christian message. Eventually this theological synthesis became dominant in the Roman Church. It is significant that through the incorporation of Aristotle’s cosmology, Christian theology entered a human dynamic whose existential potential has only partially been realized by Western theologians to this day. Perhaps the philosophical human dynamic rooted in Aristotelianism, when re-articulated, will afford postmodernity a different outcome.

Schneiders points out that the medieval synthesis of philosophy and theology held together well into the middle of the 20th century, when the culture-shattering events of the two world wars, the technological revolution, liberation movements of all kinds, an explosion in knowledge, and rapid developments in philosophy, the humanities, psychology, and the other social sciences, brought the comprehensive hold of the medieval synthesis on the Christian mind and imagination to an end. Out of the new milieu, diverse theological ways of thinking have been

created and now shape the hermeneutic of Christian consciousness at various thresholds of posthumanity.

One can identify diverse theological perspectives in the consciousness of the Roman Catholic theologians during the so-called Modernist crisis of the early 20th century. This movement challenged scholasticism as the dominant theological method. During the early 20th century, the Magisterium of the Roman Church was increasingly vigilant over initiatives by theologians desiring to open its doors to the worlds of science, phenomenology, and democracy. Such vigilance caused some philosophers and theologians to shy away from the historical-critical method of interpretation. The Church in George Tyrrell’s time hesitantly embraced anything that supported existential subjectivity. With the publication by Pius X of Lamentabili in 1907, as well as the anti-modernist encyclical Pascendi, also published in 1907, the Roman Catholic Church self-consciously, and with full intention, withdrew from participation in the philosophical trends developing outside post-reformation medieval culture. (Posthuman thinking was not yet an option.) This withdrawal led to the continuing misperception that the Catholic Church was a monolithic fortress presenting a single public discourse for all peoples, at all times, and in the same way, thereby excluding diversity.

In spite of this, the Church’s tradition is instructive for us today as we reflect on the Christian experience individually and collectively. For example, as Christianity spread during the Patristic period, diverse views grew regarding both the manner and extent to which Hellenistic thinking should be
used to interpret the revelation of the Christ through Jesus of Nazareth. Some, such as Tertullian (160-225 CE) and Tatian (120-173 CE) were passionately opposed to Hellenistic philosophy and culture for fear that its influence would adulterate the gospel. Others, however, such as Justin Martyr (112-165 CE) and Clement of Alexandria (150-212 CE), endeavoured to express the message of the gospel using Hellenistic philosophical concepts.  

Notwithstanding Tertullian’s protestation, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem” Hellenistic philosophy entered into the service of the Church. Henceforth, Christian philosophy, the baptised pagan way of thinking of Aristotle and Plato, became an *ancillae theologiae*. The use of ideas boldly borrowed from traditions outside of one’s own, while not without controversy, has always been a living part of the Christian *traditio*. Indeed, S. C. Carpenter (1877-1959) has noted that borrowing from outside one’s tradition was a Catholic trait of the Modernist theologians. He wrote: “Tyrrell, and those who were with him were the original Modernists, were wholesale reconstructors, but they were enthusiasts for continuity. Their attempt broke down, or was driven underground, because the great Church which in the thirteenth century had been liberal enough to include the Aristotelianism of the Schoolmen, and the Troubadour methods of the Friars, was not able to entertain the sharp contrast between the historic faith and alleged historic fact which they put forward as a legitimate development. It broke down, but the Tyrrell

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school, and even Loisy for a long time, were profoundly Catholic in intention and desire.”  

Since the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65, the positive results of a critical scholarship, particularly within the study of scripture due to Modernist thinking, have been apparent. The modern trend in theology which is away from the singular scholastic approach and towards a diversified phenomenological approach, continues to develop and will likely significantly characterize the threshold of posthuman philosophy. The diverse ideas introduced through the Modernist theologians are, in fact, foundational for a phenomenological reflection on the Christian consciousness. Dare I say that through advancement of a critical phenomenological reflection diverse scholarship will further inaugurate the threshold of posthuman philosophy of the type that George Tyrrell had hoped for. As Maude Petre (1863-1942) quoted Tyrrell in her Introduction to his essays. “Hence I have not feared to put in fragments, in spite of their lack of finish, for the sake of some flash of insight which they convey; and they will serve their purpose if they do what their author was always satisfied to do, namely to give the lead to some other mind which can carry the search a little further.”

21 Carpenter, S C Supernatural Religion in its Relation to Democracy (Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1932:74).
23 Tyrrell, George, Essays on Faith and Immortality (Edward Arnold, 1914: xi).
Conceiving Philosophically

Conceiving philosophy is actually a way of “thinking after” about that which has arisen out of reflecting on one’s initial experience. In his article, “Faith as Existential Choice,” William Edie has noted that Tertullian, the Carthaginian theologian, considered the ‘natural man’ as simple, rude, uncultured and untaught, not yet ruined by Greek education. According to Tertullian, the “natural man” is *anima naturaliter Christiana.*” 24 Edie further notes that Tertullian invited his readers to return to their own religious experience, ignoring prior theory, to explore the Christian experience and find an authentic route to God. Thus, their conceptions of experience would be philosophically non-Hellenic. Similarly, the Athenian philosopher, Socrates (died 399 BCE), sought to clarify the thinking of poets, politicians, and whomever he met in the public forum. In doing so, Socrates did not follow the accepted folklore of the day. Rather, he undertook a responsible approach to thinking and conceived his ideas philosophically. 25 I recognize the “natural man,” the anima *naturaliter Christiana* in Tertullian’s sense, as the agent-philosopher interpreting experience at the threshold of posthuman philosophy. The posthuman philosopher conceives life differently than in the classical days when the system of theological guilds was in place. Developments in philosophy bring about developments in theology. And, as Heraclitus (approx. 535-475 BCE) once

noted, since everything appears to be perpetually in flux, no final philosophy or theology should be expected even in posthumanity.

The Western intellectual tradition rooted in the Greek milieu supports the philosophical conception of an abiding humanum, or what it means to be human in the cosmos. As Nicolas Berdyaev (1874-1948) noted, Greek philosophy does not conceive what a human being is in the particular, but conceives what human beings are in general. Such a conception arose out of Platonism. 26 For the Hellenes, an individual personality is a non-historical emendation, or perfection of the universal personality. Medieval scholastics, although influenced by Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy, found great difficulty in articulating the idea of the individual person as an abiding humanum. Nonetheless, Duns Scotus, the medieval Franciscan theologian, concluded that particular beings were the sole end of creation and the most important of things. 27 This view seems to be well established in the West. But, philosophical contemplation on the threshold of posthumanity challenges this view of the individual person as the most important of things with the intent of fabricating a “transitional” human being as a proper humanum for the future.

In existential thinking, the mechanical and technical languages of the 18th and 19th centuries are no longer

26 Berdyaev, Nicolas The Beginning and the End (Harper Brothers, 1957: 133).
27 Berdyaev, Nicolas The Beginning and the End (Harper Brothers, 1957: 118).
useful in interpreting Christian consciousness. Max Wildiers agrees with Teilhard de Chardin’s critique of the uselessness of outdated language in theological interpretation. 28 Along a similar vein, Kenneth Cauthen calls for a new Modernism within the North American philosophical community. 29 To my mind, existential phenomenology constitutes a useful philosophical alternative for the theologian entering upon the threshold of posthuman consciousness.

Contrary to Duns Scotus, phenomenological consciousness posits the primacy of the person as an agent, over things and recognizes the value of personality as the existential centre of the posthuman subject. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was one of the fathers of existential consciousness who figures prominently in adapting religious insights from personal interior reflection. However, it is necessary in our time to philosophically question such interior reflections in light of the growing threshold of posthumanity. Reflection on experience presupposes a human relationship within the community, characteristic of the “I-Thou” philosophical thought of Martin Buber (1878-1965). It is through living in community that an individual develops as a person. The Zulu and Xhosa languages have a useful word for this notion of community: ubuntu. Ubuntu has been translated as, “I am what I am because of who we all are.” The Zulu

29 Cauthen, Kenneth Toward a New Modernism (University Press of America, 1997).
and Xhosa African languages emphasize allegiances and relations within the community. To extend the meaning somewhat, another understanding would be: The belief in a universal bond of sharing that which connects all humanity, that is the humanum Thus, it would be reasonable in a posthuman community to re-conceive philosophically the Christian consciousness.

In light of a posthuman culture I suggest the abandonment of a universal (classical) individualism and its replacement with the notion of an abiding humanum that encapsulates the qualities of each unique human being. Given that individuals are unique, Gaudium et Spes, the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, conceives the inherent value and meaning of each individual person philosophically. According to the Pastoral Constitution, one’s individuality does not confer sovereignty but rather reflects human dignity. This notion of dignity is conceived philosophically in a posthuman perspective by James Watson in his thesis, “A Universal Human Dignity: Its Nature, Ground and Limits.” 30 Within this Christian philosophical perspective an abiding humanum (human dignity) accrues through a right relationship with God. Christian humanism (and by extension Christian posthumanism) rests on human dignity that is ultimately grounded in the understanding of God’s revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. Within the posthuman Christian community, the imitatio Christi becomes the embodiment of an abiding humanum that secular

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philosophers are likely to grasp only vaguely. The challenge for philosophers as they contemplate the thresholds of a postmodern world will be to find a place for the *humanum*. In short, to find a place for the presence of God.

In posthuman consciousness the *humanum* reflects the variations and similarities of William James’s five characteristics of all religious life. 31 He affirms that: first, the visible world is part of a spiritual universe; second, union with that higher universe is our true end; third, inner communion (prayer) with the spirituality of such a higher universe is a process where work is truly done and produces effects in the physical world; fourth, thereby, a new zest is added to life; and last, we achieve an assurance of safety and peace in the process. It seems to me that many of the present-day philosophers of posthumanity fail to address these philosophical conceptions in their contemplation. Rather, they are greatly occupied with the techno-digital and scientific aspects of transhumanism (i.e., transitional humanism) and the altered human organism.

*Understanding Holistically*

As Christians mature, we ought to re-think our faith experiences. This re-thinking, if undertaken, takes place in varying degrees and from various perspectives. For Catholics, and Christians in general, Vatican II has symbolized the end of a conventional understanding of the faith and introduced a new consciousness to understanding

the faith. This consciousness is rooted in phenomenology and critical reflection. I suggest that this consciousness constitutes a posthuman threshold of holistic philosophical understanding. Vatican II was not merely an exercise in updating doctrine and dogma, an aggiornamento. Rather, the Council itself was a phenomenological interpretation of Catholic theological consciousness, a ressourcement of a particular type. Generally, three features appear in the notion of ressourcement, but only one receives my attention here. The first feature is a return to patristic and medieval sources, and a second feature is a return to the works of St Thomas Aquinas. The third feature, which is the one that concerns me here, is a dialogue with the new philosophical movements and thinkers of the 20th century, as sources of renewal with particular attention to the Enlightenment, modernity, and liberalism from a holistic understanding in light of a posthuman philosophy.

Some post-Vatican II philosophers, in particular Catholics, contemplate the secular status of humanity, as well as its religious status. This has raised complex problems for Catholic philosophers re-defining their work within the public forum. In the public forum, Catholic philosophers co-exist alongside many other Christian and non-Christian religious philosophers, but not necessarily as equals. Since the late 19th century, some Catholic philosophers have partially abandoned their classical self-understanding and have entered upon a re-evaluated self-understanding, often from an historical perspective. To my mind, this change

began within the Modernist movement that sought to bring theological consciousness up to date with modern scientific discoveries. Individual Catholic philosophers who entered upon such a self-understanding abandoned the idea of any single cultural expression supplying the required philosophy of a believing community. Instead, they accepted a holistic understanding of various cultures in its place.

In posthuman consciousness the human and social sciences must not be understood solely in rational and mechanistic terms. Rather, the holistic perspective, as expounded by J. C. Smuts, recognized that the hole is other, and greater than the sum of its parts. 33 That is, any living organism has significant meaning beyond its limitations. This understanding discloses a philosophical consciousness superior to the rational and mechanistic perspective dominant since the Enlightenment.

The sciences alone cannot furnish us with a sufficient knowledge of our life-worlds, nor act as a substitute for a holistic interpretation of our experiences. The idea that it is required of science and techno-digital advancement to replace ethics and religion seems to be a major preoccupation of many posthuman academics. Science and techno-digital advancement provide various methods through which humanity may study itself, but they do not provide the human being with consciousness. In other words, science and techno-digital advancement are systems

33 Holon (in Greek) is the neuter case of holos meaning “whole,” but I use it with the philosophical qualification noted by Jan C Smuts. Cf. Holism and Evolution (Macmillan, 1926).
of knowledge with defined and set boundaries. To the contrary, the purpose of a holistic posthuman philosophy is to conceive the person as an open-ended question. In short, what does it mean to be human in a posthuman world? And where do we place God? From a holistic perspective, no satisfactory explanation of the person can be given within a system of defined and set boundaries. Holistic understanding always remains free from constraint and open to evolutionary development. Applying this insight to psychopathology, Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) believed that it is a mistake to try to set up any principle of the whole, or totem, or set up a scientific universal schema as a point of orientation for research on the human person. Instead, inquiries ought to be made within an attitude of faith to understand the infinite extent of who we are and what we know. 34 Such a task, I suggest, is becoming increasingly significant as philosophers contemplate what it means to be human as we enter upon the threshold of posthumanity.

We live in an age of an excess of mechanical and technodigital analysis. Earlier generations have experienced the ascendancy of a mechanical technology and digital technology triumph over the philosophical wisdom required to make proper use of techne. In order to reverse this situation, posthumans need to construct an appropriate philosophy, not only of right action, but of responsible agency. A holistic philosophy and theology do not eclipse modern science as knowledge, but, rather, seek to disclose the wisdom inherent in the human agent who is more than

the sum of its parts. The desire for an abundant life, that is, for more than is concretely available in life, is a motivating factor for inquiry into human existence. For the philosopher, an abundant life may be sought through a holistic consciousness that is aware of a relationship to the presence of God as the source and the end of truth and value in the world. 35

Literature, philosophy, religion, psychology, and modern science disclose a life that one may interpret holistically. Whoever reflects upon life holistically must do so from a personal perspective and make particular existential choices. Further, philosophers must decide to what degree humans are conscious of transcendent reality. They must decide if the transcendent reality that humans have experienced, or think they have experienced, is a psychological fiction or not. If philosophers do accept that transcendent reality is part of existence, it would appear to the traditionally-minded philosopher as a classic religious view. On the other hand, if philosophers accept that transcendent reality is not part of existence, it would appear to the holistic thinker as a human generated philosophical view. Such is a philosophical challenge facing the thinker at the threshold of posthumanity.

For those who do choose a holistically interpreted religious path, philosophy offers an almost infinite opportunity to reflect on the presence of the divine in human experience. Thus, the next issue is to consider what it possibly means to reflect theologically in a posthuman context.

35 It is not required that this “presence of God” be a substantive entity in itself. It may be a value generated by human consciousness.
Reflecting Theologically

Theological contemplation on religious experiences discloses a qualitative evolution of the person in contrast to an organic evolution. That is, in organic evolution “I” am differentiated from my environment, the “not-me,” physically. In qualitative evolution “I” am differentiated metaphysically, that is, self-consciously within my environment. In the chronological order of experience, theology is an “after thought” when reflecting on experience. I understand theology, as undertaken today, to be a comprehensive term to include a philosophical consciousness that assigns meaning to the Christian life. Thus, at the posthuman threshold of experience a comprehensive theological philosophy includes: folklore, common sense, reasoned or academic thinking, and the imaginative speculation that humans undertake about themselves. However, this is not to say that they are all of equal value to the posthuman thinker.

One intention in this essay is to introduce to the inquirer an approach to Western philosophy that does not rely on Hellenic principles to interpret experience, but one that is appropriate for the posthuman theological context. My approach does not aim to produce a final theology that will be the same for all people in all situations and in all cultures at all times. My intention is not classically Catholic. Rather, my intention is a contemporary Catholic one that encourages a critical examination of the stages of
cultural evolution in which persons act as agents creating their own theological philosophy in the public forum.  

For the religiously minded, theological philosophy discloses a universal milieu that is common to that which is human and to that which is divine and pervades all cultural experience. This milieu enables relationships to be identified between that which is divine (godly) and that which is human. In a philosophical contemplation of the theological type (i.e., Dewart’s Theological Philosophy) Western philosophers are served well by a mental schema based on experiential phenomenological interpretations of life. Such a mental schema does not ignore modern scientific knowledge, and thus does not end in uncritical belief, or fideism. A critical phenomenological perspective rejects a dichotomy between modern science and religion. Allerd Stikker has noted “that before interdisciplinary integration can be successfully evolving in many different sections of society, it is necessary to solve a fundamental dualism which lies at the root of present society. This dualism lies in the misconception, which has been in existence for hundreds of years, that religion and science are two different worlds. It is the synthesis between these two “disciplines” which forms a starting point for further integration and progress in the world.”  

36 As Gaudium et Spes (para. 59) notes: “Culture, since it flows from humanity’s rational and social nature, has continual need of proper freedom of development and a legitimate possibility of autonomy according to its own principles.” Flannery, Austin Vatican Council II (Costello & Dominican Publications, 1995).

37 Stikker, Allerd “Interdisciplinary Integration and Dualism in Society” in The Desire to be human: A Global Reconnaissance of Human
to Flannery’s translation; “All this demands that, provided they represent the moral order and the common interest, people should be entitled to seek after truth, to express and make known their opinions, to engage in whatever art they please; and, finally, that they should be accurately informed about matters of public interest.” 38 Within its own synthesis, I suggest that posthuman theological philosophy is approaching a threshold capable of solving such an antithetical dualism.

Theological philosophy is a descriptive, rather than a deductive discipline. The starting point for existential theological reflection is the human condition. Theological reflection interprets experience as a dynamic activity, that is to say, in relational terms and not in pre-determined fixed categorical terms. Reflecting theologically does not create or formulate new categories of values and virtues. Rather, reflecting theologically constructively criticizes the stifling ideological, sociological, and psychological aspects of classical religious experience thus enabling the religious thinker to assign new creative meaning to life. In my experience it has become clear that a theology based on modern scientific or mechanical concepts of the Enlightenment is no longer sufficient to meet contemporary human needs satisfactorily. Without significant qualification the historical-critical method, characteristic of modern theology, will not adequately serve posthuman reflection on the religious life. In my experience, a personal

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existential reflection upon the religious life transcends the boundaries of denominational communities. Further, the primary intent of a personal reflection on the religious life is not a private affair, but is a reflection by the person-in-community. Because personal reflection is able to transcend denominational limitations, it is less likely to become subject to an institutional and political ideology.

Reflecting on the religious life is a way of thinking by which theologians, acting as spiritual directors, attempt to understand the religious experience of the faithful and help them toward spiritual maturation. The experience of the presence of that which is divine, or the presence of God, coupled with the growth in personal faith, is foundational to Christian holistic theological consciousness.

Holistic theological consciousness is not tantamount to Religious Studies. Religious Studies undertaken as an academic discipline is not Theology. Religious Studies leads to knowledge about religions as social phenomena. It is of the order of convictional language. Nor is holistic theology, which is of the order of confessional language, a religious study in a sociological sense. Theology is reflection on a personal experience of faith that is a reflection on the existential issues arising in the religious life. In contemporary Western theological understanding, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are replacing ideological objectivism as the primary way of interpreting one’s theological consciousness. A subjective, inter-subjective, and ecumenical theology is requisite for Christians in the posthuman context and must be based on a knowledge of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Metaphysical quests that focus
on doctrine and dogma claiming to prove that God exists are futile. The existential theologian, reflecting on the religious life, does not look for a polemical opportunity to win a theological argument. Rather, the existential theologian’s primary concern is to express and clarify the experience of faith within a given culture.

Religious experience provides the opportunity for philosophical reflection of a theological kind. A theological philosophy discloses a spiritual world capable of being known within a human cultural context and within a variety of cosmologies. I accept that no cosmology exhausts the entirety of religious understanding, just as no theology exhausts all religious interpretation. To my mind, in trying to understand the religious life totally through a theological philosophy is not possible. But religious life is not beyond our experience of participating in mystery which is most fruitfully interpreted holistically.

Acting Creatively

We are born into a physical world not of our making. The world continues to evolve in a complex way that humans cannot stop or curtail, yet are personally involved in the transformations occurring within it. This means that Western Christians are living with anxiety and tensions that accompany the end of conventional religion. The West is often philosophically understood as a materialized and secularized culture that denies the transcendent. In the minds of some philosophers, this material secularity causes anxiety and tension that prevents the proper recognition of a transcendent dimension to life. I contend, however, that
this material secularity ironically affords an opportunity for us to become consciously and creatively involved in life’s evolution.

The vocation of the Church, its great commission, is the care of souls, the *cure animarum*. The *cure animarum* pertains to the redemption of both the individual and the community. Traditional reflection on the Christian life, as an exercise of the *cure animarum*, is carried on within, not without, a community of faith that is itself the custodian of the Christian message. The community is the locus of faith for the individual believer and, as well, acts as the mediator of the faith for future generations of believers. Thus, the community of faith is the primary milieu for acting creatively in light of a posthuman religious threshold.

In spite of the emphasis on an ecumenical dialogue in the contemporary world, Reformation and counter-Reformation polemics continue to surface. This is evidenced in the rise of a theological fundamentalism that has eclipsed the *cure animarum*. Because of this eclipse, many of us who participate in the life of the traditional church experience alienation from the Church. Many traditional institutions have ceased to be communities of faith that support the *cure animarum* because of a secular techno-digital influence, as Gabriel Moran has shown. 39 Thus, many of us are estranged from the religion we inherited and we are left with “spirit-less” churches. Western culture continues to become increasingly secular, which accounts for the fact that Christian churches have

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become social institutions with minimal spiritual creativity. As a consequence, we must create an alternative theological philosophy to understand religious life in a posthuman context. Traditional Christian anthropology presents God as transcendent and outside of creation, whereas, a posthuman Christian anthropology presents the presence of God as immanent in, yet transcendent to, creation. The traditional forms of Christian anthropology, their expressions, conceptions, and customs, have evolved from the world of Greco-Roman-Germanic civilisation and to some degree this civilisation remains part of our present-day experience. As Van de Pol states, these Greco-Roman-Germanic conventions are so interwoven with Western civilization that profound changes in this pattern of culture necessarily bring about changes in conventional Christianity. 40 In other words, changing the civilization changes Christianity. Hence the need to proactively and creatively shape our future posthuman culture.

Acting creatively implies grasping the meaning of one’s life and purpose and living out of that reality in cooperation with that which is “other and greater” than oneself. According to Arthur Fabel, the destiny of matter (including human matter) in the universe may well be controlled by the life that arose from within it. 41 We have a greater destiny than that which resides merely in our

biological life because we can think and love. Humans distinguish between destiny and fate. Humans are capable of creating careers for themselves. Human destiny, individually and collectively, is to endure through time, whereas human careers are within time and transient and terminal. Destiny is a personal and communal vision for the future, whereas fate reflects a non-cooperative end for the future of organic life. In a holistic theological philosophy destiny trumps fate.

We may not be able to alter certain circumstances in which we find ourselves but we can prevent these circumstances from altering us and diverting us from our destiny. The Christian life is the *called* life and it is somehow our destiny to live it as a co-operative venture. It is possible to stifle the call of our destiny, but not to destroy it. Some philosophers undertake reflection on the Christian life more seriously as they grow older. Through this process, we compare our Christian life with our secular life. Within Christian consciousness, God’s eternal presence renders all creation intelligible in its light.

The light of God is not a blinding light such as the artificial lights that humanity employs. In its light all other lights burn brighter, and time takes on the meaning of eternity.42 Individuals, conscious of the Christian life, act creatively in this light and for deeper reasons than those who are not conscious of this light. It is the religious experience, not a philosophical understanding of metaphysics that affects an individual’s philosophy, both in the human and posthuman

context. The Christian religious life is an organic incarnated life, not a spiritually disembodied life. Humanity is not a disembodied reality like God, subject to no creed, but contemplating them all without the necessity of bodily experience. Rather, the incarnated life is a co-creative life within bodily experience.

The drawback to acting creatively, on the part of some philosophers, is that they emphasize what is unique to them while underrating what is common to all humanity. In reflecting on common experience, it becomes clear that Christian religious experience has remained substantially the same under all its successive embodiments. 43 This is probably so since reflecting on the Christian life is a creative, reasoned activity in concert with the logos made flesh. Creative activity in concert with the logos is not constrained by doctrinal systems or social or cultural constructs of human fabrication. It is an experiential fact that reflecting on the Christian life is a poetical, philosophical, theological, ethical, and scientific activity. Such reflection is, at root, nothing less than the consciousness of the presence of God, both immanent and transcendent, which leads to the awareness of a fulfilled human being.

The experiences of William Gladstone and George Tyrrell help us here to contrast a human and posthuman philosophical understanding. A humanistic, that is, Hellenistic Christian anthropology was at the root of the theological thinking of both Gladstone and Tyrrell.

43 Lilley, Leslie The Programme of Modernism (Putnam’s Sons, 1908:77).
According to them, we need God’s help to be ourselves. However, the presence of God does not undertake to do for us whatever we can do for ourselves. Were this so, God would thereby dis-empower us. Only in so far as we cannot help ourselves is help from the presence of God a real kindness and authentic help, they both maintain. All inauthentic help weakens us and retards our human growth and spiritual development. In short, it prevents us from acting creatively. God’s help, or empowerment, leads to an active creativity on our part, whereas all dis-empowerment leads to the spiritual death of the religious life. Yet, as each philosopher develops an understanding of a Christian anthropology each will not arrive at identical conclusions. Their respective conclusions, however, it seems to me, lay foundations for a new threshold of a posthuman future.

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44 Tyrrell, George *Oil and Wine* (Longmans Green, 1907:139).
THE ORDINARY THEOLOGY OF WILLIAM GLADSTONE AND GEORGE TYRRELL.

In this section, I approach critical reflections of William Gladstone and George Tyrrell as *ordinary theology*. Ordinary theology, as self-critical theological reflection on one’s religious experience, involves taking into account insights from innovative thinkers. As mentioned earlier William Gladstone and George Tyrrell are helpful in that their thinking is sufficiently contemporary to be pertinent to a contemporary philosophical perspective; yet adequate time has lapsed to allow their ideas to have been tested in the public forum.

*William Gladstone*

In 1832, when Gladstone (1809-1898) entered politics, the Conservative Party was in disarray. His political thinking and his understanding of the Conservative Party led to his involvement in politics influenced by his religious convictions and insights. He had entered politics, following his father’s preference, even though a religious career would have been his first choice. In his youth, Gladstone desired to be a clergyman in the Evangelical tradition. Even at a young age he recognised a role for himself characteristic of a Christian gentleman of the time. Like many Victorians, Gladstone accepted duty as taking precedence over personal comfort. It was the duty of a

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Foot concludes that Gladstone’s “main interests and his main objects remained religious rather than political; this, combined with his shattering ability, helped to make him so extraordinary a phenomenon, and made his career so fascinating a study.” Foot, M. R. D. (ed) *The Gladstone Diaries*. 2 vols., (Clarendon Press, 1968: xxxi).
Christian gentleman, he believed, to lead a Christian public and social life, influenced by an interior experience of the guiding spirit of Christ.

Although his religious thinking governed his entire political life William Gladstone, the British statesman, was not primarily a theologian. He wrote at a time when an evangelical religious revival was underway throughout the nation. In his first book, *The State in its Relations with the Church*, he concerned himself with the interior spirit motivating the Church of England, as well as with the social aspect of the Church as a manifestation of that spirit. Additionally, the *Tracts for the Times* movement was influencing the context of public theological thinking in England. These theological currents affected Gladstone’s stance as a British statesman. Gladstone understood that this religious evangelical revival had its roots in the experience of the individual in need of redemption from sin. This theological dynamic appears in his personal diaries.

In contrast, George Tyrrell (1861-1909), although not a politician, struggled with religion as a social way of life. He viewed theology as a partial interpretation of that life. Tyrrell entered the Roman Catholic Church in 1879 and a year later he joined the Jesuits, the Society of Jesus. He was sympathetic to the difficulties experienced by Catholics in trying to reconcile scientific knowledge and thought with the traditional elements of Roman Catholicism. Some critics have described his writings as having an apologetic intention, being meditative in approach and, somewhat, mystical in content.
Gladstone’s “Year-end” Musings on the Interior Life

Gladstone’s musings on the Christian life are a product of the Western religious culture of Victorian England. His texts, more than his context, disclose insights that may assist us in our reflection on the interior life. Gladstone believed in disconnecting theology from religious professionalism. Theology has a greater purpose than mere religious instruction. It must incorporate insights from personal experience and not be confined to, and dependent on, doctrinal statements. He conceived of theology as a type of knowledge that evolves with experience, rather than catechetical material for examination for a clerical credential or licence. To this end he founded St Deiniol’s Library in Hawarden, Wales as a sanctuary for divine leaning and in order that clergy and lay individuals may deepen their faith. Accounts of Gladstone’s life show clearly that from an early age his religious beliefs influenced his actions. His religious opinions shaped his spiritual character and his spiritual character shaped his civil politics. From his “year-end” entries in his diary we get an insight into Gladstone’s theological thinking. These reviews began in 1827, when he was eighteen years old, and terminated in 1839 at the age of thirty. In these entries, as recorded by M. R. D. Foot, Gladstone reveals a particular understanding of the interior life.

His diaries served the conscious purpose of clearing his own mind on spiritual and religious matters as they

pertained to the individual and the nation. 47 They form a point of departure for a critical reflection on the interior life as a public religiously minded thinker understood it. Gladstone’s powers of religious observation were as acute as his powers of political observation. He involved himself in religious controversies as much as he involved himself in political controversies. In his diary of 1841, he wrote that his political involvement moved him to test his theological opinions and bring them into some sort of shape. To fulfil that purpose in the following year he wrote a paper entitled, “Twenty-seven propositions relating to current questions in theology.” 48

Gladstone based his understanding of the role of the institutional church, and a religious life in society on Palmer’s work Civitas Dei. 49 He would eventually have his

48 The paper is printed as Appendix 6 of The Prime Minister’s Papers with the notation: “The following fragment, which is bound with autobiographica, appears to be from another statement of Gladstone’s early religious beliefs, the remainder of which has been lost.” John Brooke and Mary Sorensen, eds., The Prime Minister’s Papers 1: Autobiographia, (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1971: 236).
49 “What I want to have, on the basis of Palmer’s work, is a setting forth, according to the methods which theological science provides, of the Civitas Dei, the city on a hill, the pillar and ground of truth, the Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Fortsetzung der Fleischwirkung, exhibited, not as against Nonconformists, nor even principally as against the Jesuit, aggressive Church of Rome, but as a positive dispensation, a form divinely given to the religious idea, which challenges with authority, but agreeably to reason, the assent of the rational and right-minded man, in competition with all the other claimants on that assent. I want some solid scientific work which shall
personal experience of religious life set out in an instructional book based on reasoned faith for use in the national church. Yet, he would later reject the notion of an Erastian church. In fact, he would come to reverse his beliefs regarding the relationship between Church and State. In *The Orb and the Cross*, Alec Vidler presents a detailed account of Gladstone’s thinking concerning the

set up historical or institutional Christianity to takes (sic) its chance in that melee of systems dogmatic and undogmatic, revealed and unrevealed, particularist, secular, antitheistic, or other, which marks the age.” Lathbury, D. C. *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, vol. 2, (Macmillan, 1910: 318).

Gladstone corrects what he calls “mistakes” in his earlier writings. Concerning his book, on the Church and State in 1896, he wrote: “Why is it that I do not set down the book among my gross and palpable errors? Now for my answer. Down to the time of my entrance into public life the prevailing creed of public men as to the Church was the Erastian system. I think that Lord Aberdeen, and in a degree Mr Stanley (Lord Derby) were on better lines, but generally the assertion holds. To get rid of this debasing system I even then felt an unconquerable desire, and one of the chief satisfactions of my political life has been to witness its progressive decay, which has now I trust nearly reached the stage of the last gasp. Now I make bold to say that my book on Church and State was the first manifestation from a political quarter of what was eventually to be a revolution in opinion. It was anti-Erastian from beginning to the end. The work was one most necessary to be done, and through my effort may in itself have been insignificant it helped to set thought in motion and was the small starting point of a process really great. Viewed from without it was mistake: but I think it subserved high and necessary purposes, so that I have never been disposed to give it any utter condemnation.” Brooke, John and Mary Sorensen, eds. *The Prime Minister’s Papers: W. E. Gladstone 1: Autobiographica*. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971:253).
relationship between church and state.  Further, Lathbury notes that the devotion to the principle of a state establishment of religion, which Gladstone supported until 1840, eventually yielded to a sense of the impossibility of applying this principle under contemporary conditions. From 1845 onwards, his chief ecclesiastical purpose was to prepare the Church for the shock of disestablishment that would one day come, although not in his own lifetime.

The critical reflection on the interior life often leads one to ask: Is church membership a prerequisite for doing theology? Can one do theology outside of the revelation in Christ? Concerning church membership, it has been noted that some Christians saw and continue to see the Invisible Church within the Visible Church and somehow connected with it. Yet, the Invisible Church certainly is not identical or co-extensive with the Visible Church. That “there are many souls within the Visible Church that do not belong to the Invisible Church; and there are many souls not within the Visible Church that belong to the Invisible Church is still a thoroughly orthodox and common saying,” so notes Baron von Hügel. Nevertheless, in understanding such ordinary theology through a critical reflection on the Christian interior life both theologians and religious philosophers need to somehow “enchurch” their thinking. That is, to think and reflect within a historically called

51 Alec Vidler, *The Orb and the Cross: A Normative Study in the Relations of the Church and State with Reference to Gladstone’s Early Writings* (SPCK, 1945).
52 Lathbury, D. C. *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, vol. 1, (Macmillan, 1910: xi).
community. This “enchurchment” in many ways vexed Gladstone. Through his experience of faith, he understood public service as a dimension of the called life. The experience of faith, for him was simultaneously a deeply personal and individual one. In an almost Augustinian styled personal confession, Gladstone’s critical reflections on his life, while clearly reflecting a Victorian pathos, still provide a lesson for us in analysing the effect of an evangelical revival on the psyche of an accomplished statesman.

In the year-end reflection on his birthday (29 December) in 1827, Gladstone writes on a pessimistic note: “time misapplied or lost, advantages neglected.” In that year, at age 18, he was not conscious of an improvement in his disposition or in the conduct of his life. He came to a similar conclusion again in 1828. However, despite this negativity Gladstone’s understanding and experience were that although he was a sinner, God had remained faithful to him. His sins had not cost him God’s blessings. In 1828, he writes:

This day by God’s mercy I close my 19th year. Would that in looking back I could discern any decided features of improvement. Would that I did not on the other hand see many grievous crimes, many unlawful fears and defections. Should I most blame myself for these, or bless God for his infinite mercies?

By the end of 1829, he notes that, as “the chief of sinners,” he must look to God for salvation. However, as to being the chief of sinners, he remarks “this certainly is not a
pervading nor a living belief.” Reflecting on his interior life, Gladstone remains conscious that his own sinfulness, more than God’s love, is the motivating factor in his religious life. This is evident, to varying degrees, throughout his writing. In 1830 he writes:

My birthday. Surely to me a day of pain in as far as it was a day of reflection: to others perhaps (God bless them) of joy. ... But as to real progress in religion: that is in the practical part of religion – the subjugation of the will and affections – I see no progress: though I may have clearer notions perhaps: which if so increase guilt.

Likewise, the following year does not appear to have brought him much joy, if any, as a Christian.

Looking back over the past year, I could indeed tell, amidst the recounting of numberless mercies, many of a very marked character, a melancholy tale of my own inward life: yet by the pain which such a retrospect ought to bring, my heart ought to be more stimulated more powerfully towards the penitence and the faith which the Gospel requires. In moral conduct, I would I could flatter myself there had there been any improvement: there has been much matter for deep shame and humiliation – may it cut to the quick, and do its appointed and fruitful work.

In 1832, he seeks spiritual blessings in spite of his perceived weak moral character.
I wish that I could hope my frame of mind had been in any degree removed from earth and brought nearer to heaven, that the *habit* of my mind had imbibed something of that spirit which is not of this world.

In an Evangelical vein, he continues: “no life of mine that is not severe can be godly,” and concludes the year’s entry with:

May my aim be, to cut off *every* merely selfish appetite and indulgence, and to live with my best energies uniformly and permanently bent towards the great objects for which even I, mean as I am, am appointed to live – the promotion, O Holy Father, of thy glory, and the establishment of thy Kingdom upon earth.

In 1833, at twenty-four, Gladstone begins to perceive a development in his interior life that gave him meaning and purpose. Overall, he records a positive attitude towards growth and envisions a hopeful future, not only for himself but also for all those numbered within the Church and, subsequently, within the nation.

Yet unless I altogether delude myself I still continue to read in the habitual occurrences of my life the sure marks of Providential care and love: I see all things great and small fitted into a discipline: I therefore believe that God is still my Father, Christ still my Saviour, the Spirit still a Spirit warning, striving, pleading, within me: and not to me only,
but to all those who are embraced within the body of the Church, by right if not in act.

A year later he writes:

Twenty-five years have passed over my poor head: the body they say is now compact and firm: but my mind at least remains incoherent and disjointed: void of the power to realise its desires and thoughts, and of the courage to seize upon occasion in its flight: though I think its mechanical aptitude for labour may have grown. I am still one of that Body to whom the promises are assured: to whom God is a Father, and Jesus Christ an elder brother.

The conviction of being numbered among Christ’s faithful, regardless of external effort or action, remained with Gladstone all his life. Gladstone was motivated in his adult life, primarily interiorly, not exteriorly, to deepen the understanding of his Christian life. Lathbury writes: “Mr Gladstone’s faith stood in no need of help from outward forms. He had come to his convictions without any such aid.” 54

Gladstone views 1835 as an important year and he questions his own growth in the religious life. For him, the Christian life overrides even the significance of his birthday. He writes:

But the question for these anniversaries – special to them, but fit for every day – is, has the soul gained

any growth into the Father’s image? Is the mind which was in Christ more seen and known and transferred? I can only answer this much: the heart condemns, but God is greater than the heart, and the evidences of His love in warnings and monitions and Providential combinations, remain abundant to sustain the soul. Onward then upon another year.

In 1836, his entry reads: “Every year the mercies of God seem to, and do accumulate: but the mixture of baseness and nothingness within is brought out more clearly and convincingly as their sad counterpart: have mercy, O God, have mercy.” Gladstone acknowledged in 1837 the blessings for that year, but still found that the sinful human condition affected him. However, with the conviction of deep Christian piety, he continues to desire a greater union with God.

Therefore I see my years pass away with dread: because their work is unfulfilled. O for a sense of the Divine will, an earnest and continual design to read accept and follow it and be incorporated and identified with it. O that the blessings of the Redeemer’s covenant may with their power purge me to Himself and establish me in His love and service for ever.

In 1838, he is in Rome, the year before his diary ends and he enters a serious reflection: “My twentyninth [sic] birthday: how solemnly this clock strikes.”

1839 ends his 30th year. He acknowledges God’s help in living a Christian life but notes that he has made little
practical progress with respect to duties. For this he blames himself and writes that:

nothing to affect myself except what tends thoroughly to abase, is suggested by the retrospect. His mercy however has vouchsafed to me that which I contemplated as a help towards heaven and I am indeed still persuaded that it is my own fault if it do not prove so.

In 1844, Gladstone wrote to his wife, “The final state which we are to contemplate with hope, and to seek by discipline, is that in which our will shall be one with the will of God.”

Earlier in 1833, he had set out to follow an examen based upon his philosophical understanding of “the good” as it serves the interests of national, social, and political activity. After noting that good acts or actions are not universal to humans, but that “a man acts on appearances not on essences” he proffers four questions that constitute his personal standards for moral progress: (1) What effort have I made this day to advance any of my fellow creatures in the knowledge of the truths of salvation? (2) What acts have I done this day, which would scandalise a brother and cause the way of God to be evil spoken of? (3) What distinct struggle with my impulse or propensity have I gone through this day, and with what success? (4) What proof has my mind given this day of having an eye unceasingly fixed on God, and of its readily reverting with concentrated attention to him, escaped from out of the midst of the cares

of this world? 56 These questions were not theoretical in his life, but provided a concrete framework for making daily decisions.

_Gladstone’s Evangelical Background_

Gladstone was familiar with the works of Aristotle and St. Augustine but was primarily attracted to Bishop Butler’s theological understanding. 57 He found a kindred spirit in Butler, whose mind Gladstone found in accord with Augustine’s thought. Gladstone subsequently embraced Butler’s approach in theological thinking to strengthen his own religious opinions. Further, the Bishop’s approach to the Christian life influenced him so highly that he wrote a commentary on the two works of Bishop Butler. According to Gladstone, taken together, Butler’s _Analogy_ and _Sermons_ supply inquirers with the main substance of religion and the conduct of Christian life. 58 He noted that the student will find in Butler’s work an opportunity to grapple personally with a teacher and come to master the teacher’s thought. He sees in Butler’s understanding of morality an inductive, philosophical approach to both natural and Christian ethics.

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57 Joseph Butler, a Bishop of the Church of England, had written the _Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature_. Butler’s book was written to answer a religious philosophy known as Deism which argued that God had made the world but had never used prophets, visions, angels or revelations to teach mankind. Butler died in 1752.

During his life, Gladstone continued to hold Evangelical opinions, although in time he came to favour the High Church establishment, no doubt due to influence by Butler. While on a trip to Italy in 1838, Gladstone met two gentlemen, one of whom encouraged him to become a Catholic. After a general and broad discussion on religion, Gladstone wrote in his diary, “It is impossible to open the whole subject with these persons but when they seem really set upon the essence of religion, I suppose the right way is to dwell upon what connects us both with the Redeemer.”

The comment reveals his allegiance to the Evangelical tradition, in that a personal relationship to the word of the Lord takes precedence over an institutional set of doctrines and dogmas.

Gladstone moved from the Evangelical Christian position to that of a High Churchman in various stages. He gives an account of this transition in which he even questions his own sincerity in the process. It is clear that his conversion process was an intellectual enterprise as opposed to “a conversion of the heart.” He agreed with H. E. Manning’s remark prior to his conversion to Catholicism: “The Church is going back into the condition in which it stood before the days of Constantine,” and Gladstone

61 Henry Edward Manning was born of a Low Church family and was educated at Harrow and at Balliol College, Oxford. He was ordained (1832) in the Anglican Church. In 1835 he had become an adherent of
appropriately observed: “Of course this will not hold water as a formula: but it is widely, profoundly and multifariously true.”

Gladstone admits to having been brought up with no notion of the Church as the corporate or sacramental body of Christ. Nor did he have any notion of a corporate visibility of the Church of Christ as an outward religion and form of religious observance, that is, a set form of liturgy and sacraments. However, when in 1841 or 1842, Gladstone embraced a historical understanding of the Church he accepted that the visible and established High Church received from its Saviour a commission to continue His saving works upon earth.

Gladstone’s Interior Christian Life and Public Christian Life

I have considered the religious aspects Gladstone's thought as it developed, or did not develop, in respect to institutional and political ideology, as well as individual

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63 The acceptability of High Church establishment came to him while on a trip to Naples. On this trip he had opportunities to examine the Church of England’s Prayer Book in which he discovered a notion of the Church previously unknown to him. The High Church notion he discovered with its historical continuity, hierarchical ministry and sacraments was in clear contrast to his Evangelical background. However, by degrees, he was led towards accepting that an historical and hierarchical understanding constituted a true form of the Church.
experience. I think that Gladstone would have most likely concluded that should critical reflection on the Christian interior life fail in transcending institutional interests, it would degenerate to a mere component for the enactment of religious policy of the Church the result of which would be tantamount to a living death. In short, critical reflection on the Christian interior life cannot terminate in a kingdom of this world; but it does disclose a transcendent kingdom begun in this world.

As noted earlier, St. Augustine and the early Fathers of the Church, particularly St. Bernard, influenced Gladstone’s early theological formation. However, he also read the less orthodox Christian thinkers such as John Locke (1632-1704) and Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and he was familiar with Strauss’s (1808-1874) Leben Jesu. Of Strauss’s book, he understood it as a sort of apparatus criticus for his thinking. Nevertheless, his Anglicanism was ordered and systematized almost entirely by Palmer’s book, even though he did not altogether follow the severe judgements it passed upon those who were in schism from the English Church.

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64 Strauss, David Friedrich, 1808-1874, German theologian and philosopher. In Berlin he studied Hegelian philosophy. As tutor at Tübingen he lectured on Hegel, modern philosophy, and Plato. His Das Leben Jesu (2 vols., 1835-1836) aroused much interest because it applied the “myth theory” to the life of Jesus, treated the Gospel narrative like any other historical work, and denied all supernatural elements in the Gospels. It was translated into English in 1846 by George Eliot. Strauss’s writings mark a turning point in the critical study of the life of Jesus.

65 See John Brooke and Mary Sorensen, eds., The Prime Minister’s Papers 1: Autobiographia, (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office,
As well, Gladstone was somewhat influenced by Dr. Dollinger’s ideas before Dollinger left the Roman Communion. 66 Gladstone’s reading of Dollinger’s historical and theological account of the Arian controversy of the 4th century strengthened his allegiance to the Church of England and stimulated a desire to maintain the doctrine and dogma of the High Anglican Church. In 1845, Gladstone wrote of Dr. Dollinger that, although a Roman Catholic, Dollinger said nothing to disturb his beliefs or to attack his religious opinions. He sought only to assist Gladstone in his convictions concerning reflection on the interior life as well as public life. 67

George Tyrrell

George Tyrrell was 37 years old when William Gladstone died at the age of 89. No record shows that they ever met,
but they were ideological contemporaries. Their writings, arising within a common culture, show that both men grappled with the same religious and spiritual issues, Gladstone primarily from a political perspective and Tyrrell primarily from a theological perspective. Both addressed their respective forms of church establishment in their writings. Were the two to have corresponded, I suggest that Gladstone would readily have assented to much in Tyrrell’s understanding.

As evidenced in *The Faith of the Millions*, Tyrrell had an appreciation of the role of the Church of England in the life of the nation. First, he noted that a weakened Anglicanism is a calamity for the Catholic Church since Anglicans, in good faith, make a beneficial contribution to the unfolding of the Christian life within the nation. Second, and similar to Gladstone’s initial perspective, Tyrrell believed that the Anglican Church is a direct work of God for the good of the Church in England. The Anglican Church is a manifestation of God’s providence for English believers. However, he sees secularising threats to the Church of England in the future that may cause it to lose its influence in the land. In fact, Tyrrell suggested that the Catholic Church might stand alone when it comes to the development of Christian dogma in England.

On his part, Gladstone, saw conversions to Rome, which resulted from the Oxford Movement, as harmful to the Church of England. To his way of thinking, no accord with Rome would arise if Rome acts aggressively to the actual
Church of England and solicits converts from her. From an international perspective, Tyrrell believed that were Europe to reject Christianity and embrace the secular state it would do so at its own peril. Europe was founded on Christian principles constitutive of its social policies. In this sense, the State has assisted the Church in fulfilling its purpose as a school for the interior life. The nation undertakes this task comparatively easily since its citizen, the human being, is *naturaliter Christiana*, that is, by nature Christian, as Tertullian taught. However, the distinction between church and state remains and facilitates the diversity necessary for a sensitive *cure animum* along multi-cultural lines.

That the Christian life is *naturaliter Christiana*, Gladstone agreed and noted that this understanding even influenced pagan philosophers. Life as *naturaliter Christiana* had exercised anonymous influence on the religious frame of mind of many philosophers. He long believed that Seneca, Aurelius, and Epictetus were largely influenced in their work by Christian notions to which they did not know that they were indebted. Life as *naturaliter Christiana*, however, is not specifically tied to any cultural or political expression.

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Motivation for Holistic Theology

Tyrrell did not write for the uncritical thinker, but rather wrote as one who was in communion with his readers and their sensibilities. He was a cautious writer and did not write for the sake of novelty or popularity. He notes that to depart from established conventions for merely selfish motives is licence, not liberty. 70

That Greek thought might have saved the Christian message for the world is not part of Tyrrell's understanding. Rather, he suggests that human intention, schooled in the Christian life, has preserved the Christian message. He writes that he sees intention guiding the process of preservation from first to last as leaven in the loaf. 71

Scholasticism, as a way of thinking that accommodated revelation to secular form, came to have little relevance in Tyrrell’s mind. The issue was how to recognise theology among the forms of order that serve a faith seeking understanding. As a form of order, theology serves an institutional Christianity. To this end, Tyrrell's understanding of the vox populi, as a source for theology, does not equate to the voice of the populace, that is, to public opinion. Rather, the vox populi consists of the best results of the thinking of the collective mind of the faithful. It reflects the sensus fidelium, as a collective school for the reflection on the interior life.

70 Tyrrell, George Oil and Wine (Longmans Green, 1907: xi).
71 Tyrrell, George The Faith of the Millions (Longmans Green, 1904: xiii).
Love for God, seeking schooling in the interior life, provides motivation for studying theology. Coming to understand the things of God out of love is the beginning and root of all theology. Brian Gaybba reminds us that the contemporary phenomenon of Liberation Theology is rooted in love.  

Truth is the result of God’s love for us and of one’s practical learning within the school of the interior life. One may experience God’s love outside of one’s inherited religion. As noted earlier, we are more likely to feel our relationship with God than to understand it. The Spirit of Christ helps Christians feel the truth and then formulate it. Once formulated, the Spirit of Christ helps Christians feel their way deeper into this truth.

It is worth noting that non-rational life feels but does not formulate its feelings. I suggest that the existential unfolding of the interior life takes place within two sets of relationships. One set consists of agreement and attraction, and the other set consists of dislike and revolt. Agreement and attraction, as well as dislike and revolt, occur in all communities. The *Lex Orandi*, the rule of prayer, is a product of the community, not the individual. The *Lex Orandi* constitutes the unfolding of the community’s unfolding of the interior life, not the individual’s isolated experience. Public authority sets the criterion for religious truth, but it does not set the criterion for private judgement. For an individual’s life to be healthy and bear fruit it must unfold within a community and be connected to what is

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72 “With the sure instinct given by Love, liberation theology has – whether it realizes it or not – retrieved the classic Augustinian tradition that only love gives full understanding of the things of God.” Brian Gaybba *The Spirit of Love* (Geoffrey Chapman 1987: 266).
common to the community’s life. What constitutes the fruit of the community’s Christian life is recognised through the work of a spirit of holiness in each member that is manifested in the social aspect of religion, the school of the interior life.

The recognition of God as a moral force in the evolution of religious human practice indicates a movement from magical understanding to an existential understanding. This is an evolutionary development in theological understanding. Tyrrell accepts both a magical understanding and a true understanding of the interior life. A magical understanding of the interior life functions without the benefit of revelation and is the result of an effort to address the wholistic needs of the community; a true understanding of the Christian interior life functions with the benefit of revelation and constitutes a holistic understanding. That is, humans are capable of understanding their experience as greater and other than the sum of their parts.

Friedrich von Hügel does not use the term holism, yet he notes that religion reveals realities other and more than our mere reason and consciousness alone. Holism implies a certain psychological and social liberation. Jan Christian Smuts writes that in the context of personality, freedom is

73 He writes: “For religion, again, has too much taught and trained us to find the dignity of our nature in our reason and conscience indeed, but this because our reason and our conscience intimate and reveal realities other and more than themselves – the various infra-human and human worlds, and God within and beyond these various worlds.” Friedrich von Hügel, Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion, 2nd Series, (Dent & Sons, 1951: 120-21).
not merely a concept but becomes the full measure of life that motivates each human being to self-realisation. The holistic approach reflects a stance that is both theoretical and practical and, thus, empowering in the deepest sense of the word.

Jan Christian Smuts used the term holistic with reference to evolutionary understanding. Holism reveals a new cosmology with respect to scientific understanding and creativity that is the integral evolution of the universe. Although Smuts, who coined the term holism, did not include the notion of God in his work, he admitted that the critical reader might recognise the religious notion implied therein.

_Tyrrell’s Critical Reflections on the Interior Life_

Most discussions of Tyrrell’s theology occur within the historical context of the so-called Modernist Crisis in the Catholic Church. However, David Schultenover considers a variant approach to Tyrrell’s theology. He claims that Tyrrell’s genre is intellectual history, rather than institutional history; his study does not aim to describe the modernist movement, but the intellectual development of a major contributor to the movement by focusing on the man

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as the key to his thought. 76 Tyrrell lived at a time when religion seemed fated to be submerged and undermined by the vast torrent of secular knowledge that was sweeping over the intellectual world. 77 Such a torrent of secular knowledge threatened to discount the intellectual, meditative approach to religious experience and theological interpretation and constituted a threat to the intellectual life of the British Isles and the Continent. Mary Green suggests that in Tyrrell’s day, Catholic religious thought had not kept pace with English religious thought in general, nor with Catholic and general religious thought on the Continent. 78 David Wells notes that Tyrrell displayed in his writings an Irish heart but he possessed a German mind characterising him as straddling the affective Irish and the intellectual German worlds. 79

Concerning Germanic influence in English thought, Joseph Gostwick notes that German intellectual, meditative thinking could never be the result of knowledge founded on reason alone. Such thinking, characterised by intuition and immediate feeling, takes place in the interior life of the individual. Religious feeling was beginning to be taken seriously at this time and Gostwick observed that the “rights” of intuition and immediate feeling – rights long suppressed under the tyranny of logic – were now allowed

76 Schultenover, David George Tyrrell: In Search of Catholicism (Patmos, 1981: vii).
77 May, Lewis. Father Tyrrell and the Modernist Movement (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1932: 9).
78 Mary Green, George Tyrrell: The Modernist as Spiritual Director PhD thesis (Saint Louis University, UMI Dissertation Services, 1978: 28).
to be as valid as the conclusions of reasoning processes.  

Such intuitive and immediate feeling nourished Tyrrell’s intellectually meditative character and his theology.

Initially, scholasticism provided a context for Tyrrell’s thinking. However, Tyrrell soon realised that scholasticism no longer met the needs of a modern and scientific age. In Leslie Lilley’s words, Tyrrell could no longer accept a demonstration of God supported by those “idols of the tribe” – the Aristotelian conceptions of motion, causality, contingency, and finality.  

He probed into interior religious experience and desired to express intellectual meditative understanding with the aid of scientific thinking. Percy Gardner and Bernard Reardon both suggest that some knowledge of Hegel’s philosophy, which rejected Aristotelian understanding, would help in comprehending the pattern of Tyrrell’s thinking. With the Hegelian dialectic in mind, Gardner quotes Tyrrell’s remarks that the process through which he had reached his present position will appear as a wavering, rather than as a straight line, a result that should facilitate the critic’s task.

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80 Joseph Gostwick, German Culture and Christianity: Their Controversy in the Time 1770-1880 (Norgate, 1882: 397).
82 Gardner, Percy Modernism in the English Church. (Methuen, 1926).
84 Gardner, Percy Modernism in the English Church. (Methuen, 1926: 49).
A contemporary of Tyrrell, A. Boutwood, 85 writing under the pseudonym Hakluyt Egerton, alludes to the meditative aspect of Tyrrell’s thinking. When Tyrrell speaks of “Divine Immanence,” Egerton does not believe that Tyrrell means Pantheism, the doctrine that God is the substance of all finite particulars. Egerton held that, undoubtedly, Tyrrell believed that God is in man – although whether by way of mere indwelling, or as a part of man’s composite nature is not clear. 86 Egerton also noted that Tyrrell distinguishes between the general experience of religion and the particular experience of revelation. Tyrrell does not refer to the cause of the experience of revelation, as if it were the same as the cause of the experience of religion, but refers to it by a description of its subjective character, rather than as a psychological event. 87 This subjective insight or psychological happening is common to those reflecting upon the interior life through existential methods.

An Existential School for Reflecting on the Interior Life

In order to examine the unfolding of the interior life within the social context of the contemporary Western culture, we must recognize that contemporary Western culture does not readily recognise the interior life as a universal quality. Sarah Jane Boss makes such an observation in discussing

85 A. Boutwood (1864-1924) an Anglo-Catholic layman published a series of criticisms on the nouvelle theologie, the new theology.
the awareness of God’s presence in contemporary culture. She suggests that contemporary Western culture reflects the lack of a general spirituality, a void left by a failure to respect the holy and the sacred as constitutive elements within the social order. Reflecting on the Christian interior life is not merely an examination of vocational skills nor is it the development of a more comprehensive view of faith. Reflection on the Christian interior life reveals a new understanding of life that transforms our existential condition. This new understanding requires articulation in a contemporary philosophy.

Reflecting on the Christian interior life has roots in intertestamental times. “The endeavour to construct theology in the Gentile-Christian Church arose from the belief that the positive conception of God as the Father of Christ, and of Christ as the Son of God, must be demonstrated as a

88 Her argument draws upon the work of the thirteenth century Mallorcan theologian Ramon Llull. “The advantage of Llull’s work is that it is very, very different from anything that is being considered by modern theologians. Because we live in a society in which the possible holiness of a thing is not perceived to be of public importance, a society in which most people live B and are more or less forced to live B as though nothing is sacred, we cannot start to think properly about the question of God’s hiddenness or revelation in the creation if we start from the dominant assumptions of the culture that we inhabit. The culture has judged the issue in advance. So it is only if we are willing to take into account world-views that are radically different from the dominant ones of our own age that we can get any reasonable perspective on this question.” Sarah Jane Boss, “Does God’s Creation Hide or Disclose its Creator? A Conversation with Ramon Llull,” New Blackfriars 85, (March 2004:170-185).

universal truth of reason, in relation to the knowledge of the world which men had then attained.”

Contemporary existential theology queries the acceptance of universal truths of reason. Truth is not reserved to demonstration solely by reason, as our post-Cartesian world would have us believe. In our time, reflecting on the Christian interior life must take into account all phenomena. From an existential perspective, it matters little that Christianity has developed in Roman and Protestant forms. Indeed, this diversity has always been an aspect of the Christian Church. Nowhere is this more obvious than in existential theology. Existential theological issues are common to both Roman and Reformed Churches – in fact, common to all religious belief.

In reflecting on the Christian interior life, one needs to reconcile certain basic existential experiences. These experiences are fear, despair, love, hope, suffering, death, happiness, finiteness, and guilt. These *existentialia* reflect only one aspect of our existence, the human dimension or contribution (*a partis hominis*). They are not of God’s dimension or contribution (*a parte Dei*). For the existential theologian a question arises: What is the basis of hope for humanity in the midst of finiteness, guilt, and suffering? One asks this question with the hope of eschatological fulfilment. Utilising modern science and evolutionary theories, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin has made an excellent

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contribution in answering this question. Before his attempts, George Tyrrell addressed the same issues.

The existential issues that Tyrrell addresses in *Oil and Wine* are as acute today as they were when he put pen to paper. In *Oil and Wine*, he represents to us the church as an existential school for the interior life. Reflecting on the interior life occurs as a dialectic between the perceived difference between moral and civic values created by a separation of Church and State. In this dialectic, he notes that the Church has made an ethical contribution to the Western social order and civilisation. In turn, Western society has made its historical contribution to the evolution of the Church. Further, he claims that this dialectic has been tested and confirmed through the experience of individuals living in the world. The Church, as institution, Tyrrell notes, is leavened and softened by those kindlier manners and gentler laws that have been developed in the civilisation that she herself once nurtured with the milk of the Gospel. When these kindlier manners and gentler laws are re-introduced into the Church, they restore a fresh spirit and bear fruit once more. The individual’s response to these kindlier manners and gentler laws will always be unequal. The response depends on the many personal factors in the individual’s make-up that determine the receptivity of that of the spirit in everyone.

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91 See the collection of articles in Leo Zonneveld and Robert Muller, eds. *The Desire to be Human: A Global Reconnaissance of Human Perspectives in an Age of Transformation Written in Honour of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Miranda, 1983).

92 George Tyrrell, *Oil and Wine*, (Longmans Green, 1907: xiv).
Tyrrell speaks of the oil and wine metaphorically. He means not the oil and wine characteristic of joy and happiness, but rather of medicine. He cites the physician in the gospel story who bound the traveller’s wounds. Metaphorically, the oil and wine clear the eye of the soul so that it may see more clearly in reflecting on the interior life. In other words, the oil and wine enable one to see beyond the visible confines of the institutional church and perceive it as a school for the inner life. Having clearer eyes, we see the elements of Catholic Christianity that some other Christians, as well as non-Christians, cannot see.

Since Christians live in community, the questions arise: What type of religious community is available for the believer? What type of Church do believers constitute? To Tyrrell, it seemed that no public consensus existed regarding the constitution of a unified religious community or Church. He was convinced, like Gladstone, that without such consensus, individuals drift in their Christian life into angst. Living in the Victorian era, Tyrrell’s ideas reflected the idea of a nation and church unified within a common culture. Similarly, Gladstone presumed this to be the case. It is clear that Tyrrell had in view the existence of a community composed of the greater number of citizens who supposedly shared a common culture and belief system, but, in fact, there was no such community. Without the support of a common culture and religious belief system the faithful run the risk of harm, he believed. According to Tyrrell, for many, religion played no authentic part in their lives due to the lack of a common culture and belief. He has remarked that when, as here and now, no public unity of faith, profession, or practice is
professed, the great mass of those who depend on imitation and gregariousness for their belief are lost to religion. 93 Subsequently, they lose the institutional church as an existential school for the interior life. The institutional Church, as an existential school for the Christian interior life, cannot be merely a passive theoretical entity without any recognisable visible form. It is clear to Tyrrell that individuals require some active form of institutional religious expression.

In *External Religion*, Tyrrell attempted to sketch out his understanding of an organised religion and its relation to reflection on the Christian interior life. At a time in which the classical notion of natural law had not yet been dislodged from public influence, Tyrrell readily accepted its principles. Thus, he presumed that religion and civilisation are natural to humanity. However, humanity is capable of perverting these activities. John Ralston Saul provides an example of such misuse of reason in his extensive work, *Voltaire’s Bastards*. 94 Theology has served religion throughout its history. However, theology can be perverted and diverted from its proper purpose in order to serve particular polemical ends. Religion, as an expression of our inborn spiritual instincts and appetites, needs theology as an interpreter to help us reflect on a proper Christian interior life. For Tyrrell, the Christian life does not confine itself to experience in this world, but it experiences the transcendent. The Christian shares the life of God participating in the divine life as offered by God.

93 George Tyrrell, *Oil and Wine*, (Longmans Green, 1907: 151).
The unique example is Jesus of Nazareth. The life of Jesus, being an incarnated life, is the prototype of the intermingling of God’s spirit in the flesh. This intermingled spirit is such that whoever listens to God’s voice within (individually) will recognise God’s voice when it speaks from without (collectively).

How is it that the institutional Church is a school for the interior life? Tyrrell does not answer this question in the traditional manner. Unlike Gladstone, he sees beyond the question of baptism as the sacrament incorporating the believer into the Church and looks to a transcendent relationship between the believer and God. The individual’s response to an invitation from God discloses a transcendent relationship between the believer and God. Being schooled in the interior life is the product of two choices, or initiatives, on the parts of two distinct individuals. The first is on the part of God and the second, on the part of an individual. Tyrrell notes: “It is from beginning to end, a matter; first from His choice, then of ours.” 95 The inadequacy of classical philosophical formulation requires ever-newer forms of the existential school for reflecting on the interior life. Classically, the philosophical form of analysis reasons from cause to effect. In the context of an ontological understanding, God is posited as the first cause or the unmoved mover. A vague Deism precluding divine encounter with the world has been the inevitable result. In contrast to Deism, an existential phenomenological theology reflects on an awareness of God in his workings as well as on an awareness of God from his workings.

95 Tyrrell, George Oil and Wine, (Longmans Green, 1907: 188).
Henry King made a similar observation in his *The Reconstruction of Theology*, in that each age has its own favourite analogies and modes of conception. 96 From Tyrrell’s perspective, we may conclude that the existential school of the interior life originates from knowing God in his workings more than from his workings. Tyrrell notes in *Lex Credendi* that if we see Christ’s spirit in us, we become responsive to it. We know the spirit, not through metaphysical insight, but through thoughts, feelings, utterances, and affects the spirit has upon us. In short, we know the spirit existentially. Tyrrell notes that, notwithstanding objective truth, feelings are more accurate than metaphysical notions when it comes to understanding the truth. Tyrrell distinguishes between the objective truths of the intellect and the subjective truths of feelings. In short, he claims that what we feel is truer than what we know. After examining the thought of the ancient Greeks, he writes that the Greek-inspired philosopher was inclined to be more interested in Christology than in Christ; in the metaphysics of the Spirit than in the fruits of the Spirit; in the theory of life than in living. 97 It follows then, that one may give of oneself to God’s work, God’s will, God’s cause, yet not to God, and thus fail to participate fully in the existential school for reflecting on the interior life.

96 King, Henry Churchill *Reconstruction in Theology* (Macmillan, 1901:2).
97 Tyrrell, George *Lex Credendi: A Sequel to Lex Orandi* (Longmans Green, 1906: 35).
To Tyrrell’s mind, the Church is clearly an existential school for practical reflection on the interior life. The Church, as a school, constitutes the developmental context for the individual Christian’s interior growth. Christian theologians operate in media ecclesia. Tyrrell interprets the ecclesia in a personal and existential sense (phenomenologically) rather than in the prevailing institutional or bureaucratic sense (ideally). The Russian existentialist philosopher Berdyaev suggests that Tyrrell’s model of Church is strikingly similar to the Russian notion of sobornost. Berdyaev writes that Tyrrell does not set Protestant individualism against the Catholic doctrine of the Church, but sets forth a peculiar spiritual collectivism, known as sobornost or Russian Orthodox Catholicity. He explains that in this conception, the church is indeed an external objective reality. However, sobornost is not a collective reality that stands higher than the human person. Rather, it is the highest spiritual power in the human person that enters communion with the living and the dead in a particular historical and cultural context. In this sense, the Church is an adaptation of spirit to social conditions. The Church is not merely a social organization, although it manifests itself that form. The Church discloses a life of the spirit that is neither subject to, nor dependent on, social laws; it offers a life that consists of a community in Christ. The church is freedom and love, and no external authority constitutes it. Rather, it is freedom enlightened by a grace.

98 Berdyaev, N. 1927. “Orthodoxy and Ecumenism.” http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/ /Sui-Generis/Berdvaev/> (17 October 2005) [This link is out-of-date at the time of this printing.]
that enables a critical reflection of the interior life by the faithful. 99

Similarly, eternal life for von Hügel does not require that religious practice conform to a specific institutional context. However, some form of institutional context is required to accommodate religious practice. Baron von Hügel, a contemporary of Tyrrell, wrote about the interior life in medio ecclesia. The conflation of the Christian interior life and institutionalism has led to much misunderstanding and to a frustrating problematic in the interpretation of religious experience in our time. For von Hügel, the interior life is eternal life. Through his studies, he discerned that the Christian life, which equates with eternal life, manifests itself in our earthly existential condition. In his book, Eternal Life, he addresses various existential issues that arise concerning the Christian life. He is aware of “embodied truth” and endeavours to remain conscious of the action of the body, of the senses, and the physical environment for the mental, spiritual and religious life. He had wished to avoid the acute problems and conflicts of his time concerning church authority and, thus, to keep himself and his readers undisturbed by such immediate and embittering controversies. However, he could not avoid or even minimise these questions for himself. 100 He had to engage the interior life as disclosed in its earthly existential condition. Von Hügel concluded, therefore, that Eternal Life, which begins with conscious reflection upon the Christian interior life, is not divorced

from human action, but is somehow incarnated in human action and religious practice. Like Tyrrell, von Hügel believes that spiritual beliefs have practical consequences. “Eternal Life,” he writes, “is no substitute for either God or man; but it is the activity, the effect, of God, or of man, or of both.” 101

Tyrrell observed that the development of the interior life has emerged more from individual example and schools of theology than from the formal doctrines of the institutional Church. Historical criticism shows us that all substantial advancement has been the work, not of officials, but of individuals almost in opposition to officials; not of a system, but of those who have, to some extent, corrected and modified the system. The modern understanding of ecclesial organization, as taught by Vatican II, reflects Tyrrell’s preferred understanding of in media ecclesia. However, Tyrrell expanded his understanding of the ecclesia to include the world as the place or school wherein one may ponder the Divine. This is a prophetic insight on his part. Critical reflection on our worldly experience is a powerful current in contemporary spirituality and anthropological theological thinking. Through our reflection on our experience, for the Christian the world discloses itself as reflective of the divine. Tyrrell notes that to believe in the Church as a Catholic is to believe in humanity. He says that to regard the world outside the Church as God-forsaken and to deny that God works and reveals himself in human history seems to modern

philosophers as the most subtle and dangerous form of atheism.

Anticipating some of the thinking of Vatican II, Tyrrell called upon the Church to deconstruct the very concepts of medievalism that were incapable of meeting the needs of the time. Tyrrell set about to analyse the experience of faith by using philosophical and scientific insights derived from the contemporary context. If Tyrrell did not directly influence, he certainly anticipated the *nouvelle theologie* of theologians like von Balthasar, and E. Congar who emerged after World War II to play a significant role at the Second Vatican Council. I suggest that Tyrrell anticipated the neo-Thomistic revival of Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson and the introduction of the transcendental Thomism of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan. Tyrrell anticipated these thinkers in the sense that each of these recast prevailing orthodox ideas to accommodate modern scientific developments. Tyrrell was among the Catholic theologians who first recognised that philosophy had moved beyond the reified scholasticism which had developed by the late 19th and early 20th century and which popularly framed theology. Theology, Tyrrell maintained, must engage deeply with the world in order to unfold the uniquely Christian experience as opposed to reminiscing about the historically romanticised visions of the past.

What we need for reflecting on the Christian interior life is a theology of action cognisant of current political, social and religious issues. Doubt, or a crisis in existential meaning, often seems to arise from the failure of outdated ideas to carry the meaning of one’s present experience.
When this happens, we may be disposed to question what we previously believed, as to context, but we do not doubt what we previously experienced. Questioning what we previously believed assists us to discard any outdated context of interpretation. When doubting, however, is rooted in a loss of faith in God and a subsequent replacement of faith in ourselves to the exclusion of God, this is an unhealthy, narcissistic decision.

In our acts of worship and adoration, it is an error on our part to remain with the creature and not recognise the affectiveness of the Creator. Our experience reveals that the need to adore and to worship constitutes our personality. Our experience further reveals that adoration or worship makes possible a participation in the Christian interior life. In worship and in adoration, the barriers around the self are burst and we participate in the interior eternal life of that which is Infinite while acknowledging that which is finite in our own life. According to Maude Petre, a personal and intimate friend of George Tyrrell’s, we can come to share in the revelation of God’s infinite interior life through knowledge of acts of adoration and worship.\textsuperscript{102}

\textit{The Necessity of a Christocentric Ecclesia}

The legacy of the Modernist climate enables us to undertake a new reflection on the Christian interior life and helps us to understand that Christianity without Christ is not a new Christianity but a new social ideal. It also helps

\textsuperscript{102} Erb, Peter \textit{A Week End Book of Thought and Prayer: Maude D. Petre} (Catholic Scholars Press, 1998: 30).
us to understand that Christianity with the mystical Christ, but not the historical Christ, is not a new Christianity but another religion. Further, it helps us to understand that Christianity with Christ as a moral ideal, but unworthy of worship, is not new Christianity, but an adaptation of Christian teaching in the light of secular religious or philosophical systems. Were one to have asked Maude Petre about these developments, she may have replied that in reflecting on the Christian interior life, certain changes are not proper changes at all. Rather, such changes are substitutions and Christianity has a better chance of survival in its older form than in any of its new forms. To my mind, theologians must renew the task of reflecting on the Christian interior life in each age – otherwise they have no reason for being theologians. Edward Schillebeeckx, in commenting on existential theologians such as Bultmann, observed that we may question whether the Christian faith is emerging intact from this existential reinterpretation, yet we certainly cannot deny that the whole intention of reinterpretation is to help the faith pass unscathed through its present-day crisis. Notwithstanding the challenges inherent in an existential theological interpretation, an existential interpretation is to be preferred over a return to older forms of classical theologising, since the “older” theology simply repeats itself and renders no assistance to the faith in this time of trial. Thus, the older theology is endangering orthodoxy because it remains so ill adapted to modern needs. 103

From an existential perspective, Tyrrell maintained that the Church needed to be enfleshed in the individual subject and subsequently manifested in the infinite variety of people in all places and times. This would result in a constant becoming or unfolding of the Christian interior life and of the Church. Life itself gives birth to the interior experience of faith. Studying in a detached way, the theology that clothes revelation will not bring us into the fullness of life promised by Christ. We must in some way come to share among others the spirit of Christ animating our own individuated life. Sydney Cave, citing Friedrich Schleiermacher, writes that total obedience to Christ avails for our advantage only in so far as through it our incorporation into vital fellowship with him is brought about, and in that fellowship, we are moved by Christ, that is, his motive principle becomes ours also.  

Revelation: Poetical and Philosophical

Revelation interpreted poetically belongs to the realm of popular piety. The religious poem, as an original experience, is an uncritical way of expressing the interior life and understanding religious experience. The critical thinker realises that the poetic view lacks precision. He or she also notes, however, that both religion and poetry bring us nearer to the meaning of the world than any formula of metaphysics.  

Tyrrell, as a critical thinker, realises that God is not extended in space; that is, God is not part of

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105 Tyrrell, George “The Relation of Theology to Devotion” *The Month* (November 1899: 425, n. 1.)
creation. However, the notion of God as creator immanent in creation is conceivable for its advantages to our understanding, according to Tyrrell. 106 The poet renders the notion of God conceivable. For Tyrrell, to preach the gospel does not equate to the teaching of theology. The gospel, the living of the Christian interior life, is the experience of the spirit of Christ. In Hard Sayings he makes the insightful observation that a poem is a fragment of the life of the poet. Further, he maintains that the poem is nothing less than a fragment of the personality of God.

The poet, Francis Thompson (1859-1907), penned these words: “Life is an Inkerman, fought in the mist. If men saw clearly, they would despair to fight. Wherefore the Almighty opens the eyes only of those whom He has led by special ways of gradual inurement and preparation.” 107 Thompson and Tyrrell shared similar ideas. According to Boardman, when Tyrrell described Catholicism in terms of “Christianised paganism” at once immanent and transcendent he came very close to the notion of the incarnation that Thompson had desired to express in his

poetry. Tyrrell was putting forward something of the aims Thompson had set himself as a poet. 108

A re-connection with the transcendent is what we seek within the poetic spiritualities of our age. The poet deals with a deeper level of being and experience than the conscious level of reason. Reason has a limit in its ability to achieve the possible within the philosophical approach to the mystery of God. John Ralston Saul has discussed how reason has reached the point of tyranny in Western social thinking. 109 Like any personal relationship, our personal encounter with God defies exhaustion. Reflecting on the interior life, affected by God, as an experience of being with the other utterly transcends the conventions of our creaturely existence, according to John Paul II. 110 We cannot really know others, including God, unless we understand them as persons and not merely as sterile conventions of our own making. Whoever takes the appreciation of what God has done in Jesus of Nazareth out of the human relationship further takes away what has the potential to be uniquely Christian within us.

While reflecting on the interior life, believers transcend the boundaries of their existence in such a way that they become authentically themselves freed from the impediments of existential constraint. Such an awareness of self does not rest only with mystics and those of similar

mind. This awareness is, in fact, the centre of life for all Christians. We come to know God as we come to know any other person, that is, through an encounter of mutual self-giving. Such an encounter often requires both a poetical and theological response to God’s conceived initiative.

Many individuals who reflect upon the interior life do not enjoy public notoriety. They live ordinary, uneventful lives. One can gain a valuable insight in reflecting on this ordinary Christian life. I note the closing sentence in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*: “For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.” 111 Those who have lived a hidden life faithfully have brought about change in the social order. Change does not only come from the teaching of the theologians, nor only through any of the official representatives of the system. Change comes from those who have, in practice, corrected or to some extent influenced the system outside the gaze of the public eye.

Within the believing community, psychologists envision a different role for religion to play than do theologians. Psychology pertains to wellness and theology pertains to redemption. Viktor Frankl seems to agree and notes that, although religion might have a very positive psychotherapeutic effect on a patient, its intention is not psychotherapeutic. Religion might promote such things as mental health and inner equilibrium, but its aim is not primarily a concern for psychological solutions. A fusion of

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the goals of religion and psychotherapy results in confusion. Whoever tries to make psychotherapy into an *ancilla theologiae*, a servant of theology, robs it of the dignity of an autonomous science and takes away the potential value it might have for religion. Psychotherapy can be useful to religion only in terms of its by-products or side effects. \(^{112}\)

In Tyrrell’s view, humans are more in need of redemption than psychological wellness. He asks such questions as: has philosophy’s role been taken over by psychology? Will psychology fail as a philosophy? \(^{113}\) Tyrrell anticipated, but rejected, the religious role in the life of the individual and of society as advocated by the psychologist Alfred Adler (1870-1937). For Adler, religion and belief were psychological and supportive fictions that one could use to compensate for human deficiencies. In contrast, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) believed that religious belief was an illusion one could dispel. Tyrrell also anticipated and rejected the critique of religion offered by Sigmund Freud.

In contrast to the meta-narrative of psychoanalysis, many of us experience that we create the world of our choice and give it relative reality. We also create ourselves and become to ourselves what we choose ourselves to be. In an insightful and highly contemporary passage, Tyrrell writes that in the eyes of others, whatever the status of our life choices, if we reckon ourselves dust in a world of dust, dust

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we are. Yet, our soul cannot cleave to dust; cannot eat dust and be satisfied. We are made to cling not to dust, but to God. 114 Viktor Frankl said it well when he wrote that no one believes that he or she is a sublimated animal once he or she has seen the repressed angel within. 115 The nature of the person, as naturally Christian, leads to a theistic approach and harmonising of opposites. Theism is but embryonic Christianity and Christianity is but developed Theism, according to Tyrrell. 116 Further, he notes that Catholicism is older than Christianity. In fact, Catholicism is as old as humanity itself. 117 Social co-operation influenced by Christian religious thought results from reflecting upon the inner life. Further, in this social co-operation we attain an enriched quality of life, not an intellectually idealised truth.

George Tyrrell has left no systematic account of his views. His short life was largely taken up in controversy.

114 Tyrrell, George Oil and Wine (Longmans Green, 1907: 23).
116 Tyrrell, George Lex Orandi or Prayer and Creed. (Longmans Green, 1904: xxxi). Further, Leslie Dewart makes this observation. “Underdevelopment or inadequate development of theism is the principal form of the unwarranted and expedient inadequacy of the Christian faith. And if the theism of Christianity, as has been suggested above, is relative and conditional, we can appreciate the reason why the underdevelopment of Christian theism automatically implies most likely a drift in the direction of absolute theism.” Leslie Dewart, The Future if Belief Theism in a World Come of Age (Herder & Herder, 1966: 131).
117 I dare suggest that the term Catholicity better expresses what Tyrrell meant when he used the term Catholicism. The -ism suffix refers to substantial characteristics, whereas the -ity suffix refers to qualities of a topic.
However, upon examination, two significant insights become evident. First, Tyrrell contrasted the deposit of unchanging, formalised truth with a living, dynamic experience of the faith. Second, he held that a belief is best tested through experience and subsequently evaluated by the fruit it bears in life. A belief, for Tyrrell, is not only a theoretical concept formulated with the aid of a metaphysical philosophy. A belief is more than that and results in practical consequences that affect the temporal life. Further, the consequences of belief are not limited to temporal life. Beliefs that prove fruitful re-present to us the realities of the eternal Christian life. It is in and through our practical (temporal) life or existential situation that we enter upon the eternal Christian life.
CONCLUSION

I have discussed the thought of William Gladstone and George Tyrrell as existential thinkers with a bias for the person. Neither claimed that his views were entirely new, but that they drew on thinkers that lived centuries earlier. Neither Gladstone nor Tyrrell represent a system of philosophy; instead, they share some common points of interest arising from their experience of the religious life. Neither is agnostic or atheist in understanding the spiritual life. Both share insights and philosophical perspectives similar to other Christian existential thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard (Danish Lutheran), Nicolas Berdyaev (Russian Orthodox), and Gabriel Marcel (Roman Catholic), all of whom are valuable to our current theological understanding in their opposition to the excessive objective and systematising tendencies that began with Descartes and culminated with Hegel. Gladstone and Tyrrell worked at replacing a concentration on the objective world with an emphasis on the person as centre of their religious thought.

Socrates, the Stoics, St. Augustine, and St. Bernard have expressed ideas similar to contemporary existential thinkers, but it was Søren Kierkegaard with whom the personal existential standpoint truly began.

Most classical philosophers have sought to show the connection between faith and reason. In an innovative move, existentialist philosophers turned away from the objective world to the being of the individual person. From Kierkegaard to the present day, many philosophers have emphasised the gulf between science and philosophical thought based on the dichotomy between subject and
object. They sought another path to knowledge of human nature and spiritual education. They agreed with Kierkegaard in his thinking that systems thrive at the expense of the individual.

The existential philosophers point out an error in any theory of knowledge that claims that science is able to account for everything. However, they are ready to accept whatever thinking of scientists that remains in its own proper sphere. Humans are always more than they know themselves to be. Among the first to suggest this was the philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). He claimed that the type of thought suitable for human studies differs greatly from that employed in the physical sciences. The physical sciences are concerned with the objective world and human studies deal with mental and spiritual life. Humans come to know physical objects from the outside, but to understand a person from the inside, humans must re-live another’s experience and project themselves into another’s being for true spiritual knowledge. Human knowledge of physical objects is through appearance, but in understanding a person an authentic meeting between an I and thou and Thou takes place. In such a meeting, humanity continues its attempts at forming right relations in the contemporary world as Gladstone and Tyrrell have shown.

The most important relationship is that which exists between persons. It is not merely a relationship of feeling, but one in which sympathy, mutual respect, and understanding play an important, but subordinate role. All personal existential thinkers call for a more comprehensive and deeper sense of living in which the notion of choice is
most important. Our choices occur when we opt for a life governed, not by universal principles, but a life that conforms to the expectations of morality and religion. The supreme choice is, in fact, the choice for or against God. We cannot evade choosing and William James (1842-1910) has noted that to delay choosing is really to make a choice. Humans must choose to be educated in the spiritual life.

The process of theological understanding in the spiritual life as I hope to have shown through reflecting on Gladstone and Tyrrell’s writings involves a dialogue among the I and thou and Thou as a genuine conversation. Theological understanding is a personal relation, not one of mere words. It is an existential relationship between one person and another. Reading the works of William Gladstone and George Tyrrell constitutes for the reader an existential relationship in the inner life of the Christian that can enhance one’s theological education in preparation for a posthuman future.
So, What’s “Post” in Posthumanity?

Posthumanity is a difficult and refractory subject for philosophical study. Posthuman philosophy amounts to a new ordering of our knowledge with its principles derived from sociology and classical philosophy. Many contemporary philosophers find difficulty in orienting themselves within this new phase of contemporary philosophy due to its complex intellectual background. Thus, some philosophers may deem it futile to inquire into that which seems to be a satisfactory philosophical system supporting formal academic disciplines. But for others, particularly contemporary avant-garde philosophers, to inquire into posthumanity is a necessary task as posthuman experience seems to require a new way of interpreting and re-ordering human thought. That being the case, the religious philosopher must always keep in mind the history of the role of faith in human life, the role of human desires, and the problems and hopes of human beings. That is to say that the philosopher must understand humanism (i.e., Western humanity) before understanding posthumanism (posthumanity) as a possible and more appropriate philosophical concept for the 21st century and beyond.

Through its dogmatic character the philosophy of humanism affirms that supernatural powers exist and that a relationship with such powers is possible and even necessary in some cases. Classically, this necessity of a relationship with supernatural powers is expressed in humanism’s sacred history of religious belief which is not intended to explain phenomena but rather to regulate human actions. Thus, at every stage of evolution, humans
have been philosophizing about the organization and the regulation of the powers of body and mind which are, in fact, limited. In order to guard against unintended error, the humanistic philosophers made an attempt at appropriately expressing the limitations of body and mind. The same is true for posthuman philosophers. They are required to make an appropriate attempt at understanding and expressing the limitations of body and mind. That is, the answers to humanity’s deeper problems have always been discovered through the social character of philosophy. So will the answers to posthumanity’s deeper problems be discovered through the social character of philosophy. That is to say (drawing from Malinowski) when seen within a posthuman perspective there is a conscious development in philosophical thinking. I suggest that those philosophers who ponder culture and believe in the value of philosophy, though perhaps not in the specific tenets of some traditions, probably realize that the present-day under-utilization of philosophy is not adequate for a proper development of the posthuman philosophical mind. I hope that our whole future society will not founder in this lack of philosophical interest but work for the maintenance of living philosophical truths which have guided humanity out of barbarism to culture, the loss of which will threaten us with barbarism again. ¹¹⁸

Philosophers who take an emanationist view tend to ignore personal interaction in favour of the inner logic of an ideological or isolated individual value system. The

philosophy characteristic of posthumanity abandons this inner logic and isolated value system of understanding and views itself as both actively defining and enriching the individual personality. Posthuman philosophy is essentially a set of notions shared among individuals. By way of contrast, in humanism the major themes of thought have tended to converge on a union of understanding, even if only potentially so. Posthuman philosophers, on the other hand, seem to be developing in the opposite direction and any such convergence on union is not readily apparent. However, there is a unity within posthuman philosophical consciousness where subject relates to object, but that is not to be equated with the union of the human philosophical understanding where subject apprehends object. It would not be accurate to view posthuman philosophy as a social fact because posthuman philosophy is understandable only within the minds of individuals as an attitude towards life. Posthuman philosophy is not sufficiently time-tested to have the status of an academic discipline like classical philosophy – as yet, at least. In posthuman philosophy it is the meaning the individual gives to life that acts upon the personality, as opposed to the inherited objective set of social norms that characterize humanistic philosophy. Posthuman philosophy is not a social fact like science whose secondary purpose is to prevent humanity from inventing false ideas about the powers which it experiences in life, and subsequently representing them under a guise that is really foreign to human nature and often erroneously transfigured by folklore. Rather, posthuman philosophers are conscious of a moral harmony (variously understood) yet characteristic
of all human thought which is felt to originate from an external source, the location of which cannot be perceived, but only conceived. We thus are tempted to conceive this moral harmony as immanent in us, yet it represents something within us that is not purely of ourselves, i.e., a moral consciousness. (Of this moral consciousness, often holistically understood, humanity has never made even a slightly distinct representation except by the aid of religious symbols.) 119

Within this moral consciousness, humanism as classically understood, accepts two distinct and separate mental states and thus gives the impression that we are conscious of two conceptions of reality. One impression is of the real world of profane things and the other impression is of the real world of sacred things. The philosophy of posthuman experience rejects this conceived dualism of reality in favour of a conceived duality of reality constituting a subject (me) and an object (not-me) in an existential relationship. Posthuman philosophers do not deny or assert that there is some fundamental set purpose, either intrinsic to nature or extrinsic to nature, that determines humanity’s goals. This has been the view characteristic of humanistic philosophy. Posthuman philosophers opt for an alternative stance in establishing goals through an indeterminant and perpetually evolving human consciousness. Even if it should finally turn out that there is, within posthuman philosophical contemplation, some cause of ultimate determinateness (presently unknown) to us, we need not

119 Cf. Emile Durkheim The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (George Allen & Unwin, 1915).
assume, or suppose, that it is of any metaphysical *other* that *butts in* to the course of humanity’s goals. 120 Rather, posthuman philosophers would likely consider the advantages of this metaphysical development in terms of mutual cooperation.

Posthuman philosophers adhere to the view that present situations are not to be interpreted exactly as past situations were interpreted. Present situations are to be defined only as similar to past situations, particularly if there is an attempt to apply a previous solution to the present situation. Posthuman philosophers do not interpret, in a classical or instinctive manner, the same existential conditions as humanistic philosophers are wont to do. They elect to reflectively re-interpret experience because existential conditions vary. 121 Posthuman philosophers suggest that there is a range of possibilities for further interpretation open to the individual even after the stabilization, or “fixity” of the principles of humanistic philosophy. Such a range of possibilities will often give birth to a creative personality that tries to consciously realize or enact these possibilities in daily life according to some definitely self-determined aim. As the individual consciously enacts these possibilities (of self-determined aims) the process of personal evolution will become increasingly evident and events will not be seen or understood as being determined in advance.

120 Cf. Tolman, E C *Purposive Behavior in Animals and Men* (Century Company, 1932).
While there is reservation by some humanist philosophers concerning the subjective (conscious) and objective (physical) aspects of the person evolving together, there is no such reservation in posthuman philosophy. Mind and matter evolve together. Therefore, the fundamental principles of posthuman philosophical interpretation must be sought as disclosed in an individual’s own nature as well as in the experiential social context, despite any lack of harmony between the individual and the environment. Posthuman interpretation of the person, then, is not the realization of a static essence as in classical humanism, but is the realization of a dynamic human consciousness that continually evolves. Thus, in posthuman society there is likely to be an increasing tendency to appreciate philosophical change, as compared with the appreciation of the philosophical stability of the ancient and medieval worlds. Such change, of course, will likely result in a personality type that differs from the classical type and is more at home in the posthuman context.

This change in personality leads to a change in consciousness which in turn leads to a change in the focus of philosophy, from a human organic philosophical focus to a posthuman organic/techno-digital focus. (The roots of the techno-digital focus are in contemporary science fiction.) In light of the evolutionary development of human consciousness the direction of posthuman philosophical consciousness can only be forward, that is, beyond the present humanism to a stage of post humanism. (Consciousness cannot develop backwards.) The purpose, philosophers might argue, of posthuman philosophy is to understand consciously and subsequently elucidate
personal experience, rather than accept the formative principles of philosophical theory as inherited from classical humanism.

When philosophers ask: “Is posthuman truth the same as human truth?” this inquiry begs the question concerning the post in posthumanity. The conception of an ideal philosophical truth in humanist philosophy questioned in posthumanism. Posthuman philosophy has no room for an idealism that postulates “a sphere of perfection which does not bear the scars of its origins and, measured by which, all events and processes are shown to be finite and incomplete.” 122 Posthuman philosophy is an existential philosophy that interprets life-situations and is not dependent upon ideological insight for eternal truth, as is the philosophy of humanism. Rather, posthuman philosophers recognize truth as that which the human being is correctly (non-pathologically) conscious of concerning its experience interpreted physically or metaphysically. That is to say, that posthuman philosophers will continue to be nourished by the philosophy of humanism that relies on classical dependability, but at the same time they will generate unexpected discoveries through their existential posthuman approach to philosophy. There is historical evidence for expecting the unexpected within posthuman philosophical evolutionary development. It was never possible, nor will it be, to universalize the original Platonism of Hellenic philosophy. The original Platonism of Hellenic thought has undergone numerous revisions and

formulations in the forms of Neo-Platonism, Renaissance Platonism, and German Idealism, each of which represented a new creation in the essence and ideology of philosophical inquiry.

Humanistic philosophy, one might argue from an historical perspective, is dependent upon Hellenistic philosophical principles which are more self-contained as abstract terms and are less in contact with particular and concrete experience. Posthuman philosophy is the opposite. Posthuman philosophy is an evolving continuance in the contemporary organic/techno-digital world of the classical efforts by the human mind to render an appropriate interpretation concerning humanity’s earthly experience. Posthuman philosophers aspire to go beyond the bounds of historical time which has no limiting boundaries of its own, but is “limited” only by the cultural context in which it is recognized. Thus, posthuman philosophy would be unfaithful to its task if it were to confine itself solely to the diagnosis of humanity’s temporal situation. Not subject to temporal boundaries the posthuman philosopher not “culture-bound” and not required to be the laudator temporis acti of classical philosophy.

Humanist philosophers have sought to speak to humanity and have succeeded to a great degree in the West. I speculate that their failure to speak globally to contemporary humanity is due more to a narrowness of knowledge, than to a narrowness of intention. Posthuman philosophers focus on a plurality of cultural contexts and the continuation of a permanent and necessary effort of humanity to understand itself and its relationship to other
species. They go beyond classical philosophy by enabling the human agent to consciously direct the evolution of its self-interpretation in an existential context. Thus, self-interpretation in an existential context is post human when compared to the earlier task of humanism’s encouragement of the individual’s passive acceptance of a pre-determined end. Posthuman philosophers address the collective self-interpretations of organic/techno-digital culture at the threshold of the future of humasnity. Posthuman philosophers accept that their philosophy is an unrestricted effort of the human mind to understand itself individually and as a collectivity. In short, posthuman philosophical understanding is an intentional re-envisioning of the classical philosophical traditions that were previously understood as essences and accidents in the intellectual life of the human species. Posthuman understanding illustrates an evolutionary philosophical development from classical Western philosophy (i.e., humanism) through to Renaissance humanism, to contemporary secular thinking and beyond. This evolutionary development, being post human, has received stimulus from the process of intellectual evolution and contemporary historical interpretation. It can expect further stimulus from technology, while understanding humanity constituted as organic agents with moral and rational propensities. As intellectual evolution and contemporary historical interpretation continue to develop, posthuman philosophers most likely will surpass the criteria of “rational animal nature” as defining humankind. The sociologist, Edward Shils, observed that the classical interpretation of humanity was conceived as a category within the human species, not
as a knot within in a network of human relationships as is the posthuman vision. Humanity is more adequately conceived as a product of the network of conscious organic relationships. Given that humanity is conceived as self-reflecting members of a collectivity, humanity is also conceived as benefiting from the advantages of that collectivity and as being victimized by the disadvantages of that collectivity. 123 Posthuman philosophers tend to be more self-consciously positive towards the regulation of that collectivity than classical humanist philosophers, it seems to me.

Posthuman philosophers acknowledge humanity’s need for a cognitive order in the cosmos that is more than reflective of biological adaptation. As the critical literature of posthuman philosophical thinking spreads over the social and mental network of humanity it enhances human intellectual consciousness in a way the literature of travel (concrete and imaginary), the literature of geography and the literature of anthropology and culture seldom can achieve. That is to say, posthuman philosophers are able to determine an appropriate place for that which in the philosophy of humanism is reflective of the divine in human experience, that is, religious consciousness. But it is not a methodology similar to that of classical religious humanism, but a methodology of human interpretive consciousness (as opposed to Hellenistic epistemology) in addressing the issues of sacred or charismatic experiences.

That is to say that posthuman philosophers view classical philosophers as being in a somewhat dated position. The classical approach ceases to be useful as a solution to philosophical problems once these problems cease to be relevant to contemporary experience. Or the classical approach ceases to be useful when the previous solution is replaced by a more satisfactory non-classical solution. The case is that throughout all academic disciplines, classics have remained classics because no better solution has been found. Thus, a better solution for religious interpretation in the future may be found through a kind of secular revelation, as it were. The notion of progress in posthuman philosophy consists in improving upon the classics by consciously comprehending more deeply the various historical and evolutionary experiences. What is \textit{post} about humanism, is that humanity must constantly renew what the classics commend to humanity. Philosophers in the posthuman age must preoccupy themselves with the classical legacy of the elementary human existential facts of [1] the fear of death (annihilation), [2] the need for polity, (managed sustainability), [3] creative authority (human goals), [4] the horror of chaos (purposeful life), and [5] the pressure of scarcity (environmental issues). All such elementary existential facts are subject to revised posthuman interpretations. No enhanced precision of thought, nor increased quantity of experience will be able solve these problems. Only a posthuman philosophy of heightened consciousness which has no boundaries of its own will solve these contemporary problems. That is to say, the lack of classical philosophical boundaries allows posthuman consciousness to enhance or deepen the
experience of the human being who then may provide appropriate solutions to contemporary existential problems.
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

angst: A German word meaning anxiety, or fear of some unknown.

aggiornamento: An Italian word meaning an “updating” or modernizing of thought.

culture: A context of customs, achievements, etc. of a particular civilization or group of people.

cure animarum: Literally, “cure of souls”, a Latin term roughly translated today as pastoral care.

ecclesial: Relating to the church as a called assembly.

ecclesiastical: Relating to the church as an established, or defined, institution.

elan: A vigorous spirit or enthusiasm.

epistemological: Pertaining to the theory and nature of knowledge, with reference to its limits and validity.

existential: Describes the philosophical movement of diverse doctrines on the analysis of individual existence of the person who must assume ultimate responsibility in life.

holism: The theory that conceives the universe as consisting of interacting wholes that are more than the sums of their elementary parts.

ideology: A systematic body of concepts about human life and culture.
interior life: Used in this work as a synonym for human spirituality.

lebenswelt: A German term meaning one’s life-world.

logos: An ancient Greek term referring to the controlling principle in the universe.

metaphysical: Relating to the transcendent or a reality beyond what is perceptible to the senses.

milieu: A French term meaning the physical or social setting in which something develops.

Modernism: A tendency in theology to accommodate traditional religious teaching to contemporary thought.

naturaliter Christiana: by nature, Christian.

phenomenological: Pertaining to the development of human consciousness and self-awareness as a preface to philosophy.

philosophy: All sciences and liberal arts, exclusive of medicine, law, theology and factual science.

theology: The study of religious faith, practice and experience and of God’s relation to the world.

ressoursement: A French term meaning a “return to the sources.”
About the author

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