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"SPOILS FROM EGYPT" : CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY AND NON-FOUNDATIONALIST THOUGHT

Thomas GUARINO

RÉSUMÉ : L'article procède en trois étapes. Il considère d'abord la notion traditionnelle des « dé-pouilles d'Égypte », une typologie répandue par Origène pour décrire la corrélation entre la théologie chrétienne et les autres formes de pensée. Il analyse ensuite l'approche contempo-raine des « dépouilles », telle qu'elle apparaît dans deux méthodes théologiques fortement in-fluencées par la philosophie non-fondationaliste de Heidegger, de Wittgenstein et de Gada-mer. Enfin, l'article propose une nouvelle façon de comprendre comment la théologie peut reprendre la typologie traditionnelle des « dépouilles » tout en incorporant les intuitions de la pensée non-fondationaliste.

SUMMARY : The article proceeds in three distinct steps. First, it examines the traditional notion of "spoils of Egypt," a typology popularized by Origen to describe the relationship and correla-tion between Christian theology and other forms of thought. Secondly, it analyses the contem-porary approach to "spoils" in two theological methods that are strongly influenced by the non-foundationalist philosophy of Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Gadamer. Finally, the article offers a new understanding of how theology can develop a reprise of the traditional spoils ty-pology whiles incorporating the insights of non-foundationalist thought.

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O ver the centuries, the task of "faith seeking understanding" has unremittingly presented itself to Christian thinkers. What is the nature of Christian belief ? Does this faith have a rational structure ? How are we to understand Christianity in light of other intellectual and religious movements which have their own claims to truth, finality and purpose ? These questions have long been the grist for theology's mill.

A new urgency, however, has been attached to the issue of Christianity's truth-claims. Defining characteristics of our own age include tolerance, pluralism, and respect for the "other" in all its forms. Any claim to final, ultimate and normative truth is looked upon with suspicion if not outright scorn. Metanarratives imperial-

istically asserting their own truth appear to be remnants of a discredited view, now definitively unmasked by postmodern thought.

Contemporary theology has no recourse but self-examination : How is Christianity to understand its truth-claims in the light of other *grands récits* of history ? More particularly, what kind of correlation exists between Christian faith and theology and the truth-claims of "secular" wisdom ? Further, how should this "correlationality," "reciprocity," or "intertextuality" be understood ?

In this article, I examine several ways in which Christianity has understood the "correlation" between the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the truth of "secular" or "philosophical" wisdom. The argument has three stages : in the first place, I examine some historical examples ; secondly, I outline some of the issues in the contemporary debate ; thirdly, I offer my own solution to the correlational question.

TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF CORRELATION

1. *Patristic Examples*

As Paul Tillich noted, some kind of correlation between faith and "secular" wisdom has existed from the beginning of Christianity.[1] Indeed, the struggle of the first Christians to find some accommodation between their faith in Jesus Christ and the philosophies permeating the Hellenistic culture in which they were educated has been well documented.[2] It is worth examining a few examples in order to illustrate how the "correlation" between philosophy and the gospel was first understood.

Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria have a good deal to say about this matter. Augustine, too, has a well-known passage concerning the proper reciprocity between Christianity and secular wisdom.[3] It is Origen, however, who is the correlational theologian par excellence, making repeated forays into the fundamental issue. It is he who widely popularized the classic Christian typology for correlation : "despoiling the Egyptians."[4]

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1. Paul TILLICH, *Systematic Theology*, I (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 60.
2. It is safe to say that the majority of early Christian thinkers did, indeed, favor a certain measure of accommodation. Henry Chadwick argues that even Tertullian's Athens/Jerusalem dichotomy (traditionally encapsulated in the *credo quia absurdum*) seeks only to preserve the distinctiveness of faith — to prevent the absorption of grace by nature. This seems to be case inasmuch as Tertullian did not hesitate to speak elsewhere of the *anima naturaliter christiana*. Henry CHADWICK, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 1-3.
3. AUGUSTINE, *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, 40. Other significant references may be found in Chadwick.
4. Citing Exodus 3, 21-23 and parallel passages. Origen's use of ancient philosophy in the task of *fides quaerens intellectum* has been well documented. Useful texts include : Henri DE LUBAC, *Histoire et Esprit : L'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* (Paris : Aubier, 1950) ; John C. SMITH, *The Ancient Wisdom of Origen* (London and Toronto : Associated Univ. Presses, 1992) ; and Henri CROUZEL, *Origen*, tr. A.S. Worrall (San Francisco : Harper and Row, 1989). Texts discussing the patristic notion of correlation include Endre von IVÁNKA, *Plato Christianus*, tr. E. Kessler (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1990) and L. FRIZZELL, "'Spoils from Egypt' in Early Christian Literature", in *Christianity and the Classics : The Early Centuries*, Wendy Helleman, ed. (forthcoming). I wish to thank Prof. Frizzell for making his typescript available to me.

Although Origen uses this image in several places, perhaps the best known is his "Letter to Gregory." Illustrating how Christians utilize secular thought, Origen writes to the Thaumaturgus :

> [...] I wish to ask you to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity, and from geometry and astronomy what will serve to explain the sacred Scriptures [...].[5]

Origen explains metaphorically why this use of Greek learning may be sanctioned :

> Perhaps something of this kind is shadowed forth in what is written in Exodus from the mouth of God, that the children of Israel were commanded to ask from their neighbours and those who dwelt with them, vessels of silver and gold, and raiment, in order that, by spoiling the Egyptians, they might have material for the preparation of the things which pertained to the service of God. [6]

Origen's point is clear enough. Just as the Israelites took gold and silver from Egypt for the sake of the divine cult, so too, Christians may adopt and utilize secular wisdom in order to explain Scripture. In so doing, they build up the house of God.[7] On the other hand, Origen's appropriation of Greek wisdom is not uncritical. Even in the midst of appropriating Hellenistic philosophy, he urges caution, aware that a lack of care may lead to abuses. He reminds Gregory :

> And I may tell you from my experience, that not many take from Egypt only the useful, and go away and use it for the service of God. [...] From their Greek studies, [they] produce heretical notions, and set them up, like the golden calf, in Bethel [...].[8]

A recent interpreter says of Origen's "Letter to Gregory" : "The main principle arising from this document is that, though Origen allows for the use of nonscriptural and non-Christian learning, he firmly places it in the service of Scripture and particularly what is best for the service of God."[9] Origen's correlation of the Christian message with Greek learning is also noted by Henri de Lubac. While appreciative of secular wisdom, the Alexandrian believes that "[...]one can never utilize the doctrines of the time without having purified them, without having abolished in them all that is sterile and dead."[10] The reciprocity between secular wisdom and the gospel is symbolized by Origen in the relationship between Abimelech and Isaac (Genesis 26). They are sometimes at peace, sometimes at war : "For philosophy is neither opposed

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5. Translations taken from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. IV (Grand Rapids : Eerdmans, 1956), p. 393-394. Greek text may be found in « Sources Chrétiennes », 148.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Other important statements by Origen on the "spoils" issue may be found in his Homilies on Exodus, XI, 6 ; Homilies on Leviticus, VII, 6 ; and throughout the *Contra Celsum*. Exact citations and analyses may be found in the works cited in note 4.

8. *Ibid.*

9. John SMITH, *The Ancient Wisdom*, p. 143. Similarly : "[...] all nonscriptural material and doctrines outside the Church would have to be tested in service to Scripture and the Church before they could be useful to the one who wishes to know, and conduct himself in a way pleasing to God" (p. 144).

10. *Histoire et Esprit*, p. 79.

to everything in the Law of God nor in harmony with everything."[11] Ultimately, it is the Christian faith which must verify all that is received from philosophy.

Passages such as these cause de Lubac, among others, to reject the occasional suggestion that Origen was primarily interested in philosophical wisdom, that he ultimately sought a Platonic gnosis, abandoning the cross of Christ to recent initiates. The claim that early Christian thinkers forced the message of the gospel into the Procrustean bed of Hellenism is a serious charge that is difficult to sustain.[12] It is beyond the scope of this study to examine a host of patristic thinkers or to analyze the claim that several of them buried the gospel under alien ideas. The judgment, however, of both Chadwick and de Lubac appears sound : early Christian thinkers used, necessarily, the philosophy available to them. At the same time, they were cognizant of proper and improper uses of human wisdom vis-à-vis the gospel message.

As a prolegomenon to the contemporary debate on the issue of correlation, the reprise of the patristic tradition in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will be discussed.[13]

2. *The Reprise of the Patristic Tradition*

John Henry Newman and Henri de Lubac were representative Christian thinkers with lively interests in both patristic theology and the issue of correlation. Each was dissatisfied with the staid (particularly Roman Catholic scholastic) formulations which were equated with the Christian tradition and each sought to re-express and re-conceptualize the gospel message for the educated audiences of his time. In service to this goal, both men hoped to recover and vivify the patristic paradigm of "spoils," of correlation and reciprocity. Christianity could only speak to the moment if it mastered and utilized the main intellectual currents of the day.

As an historian and patrologist, Newman was familiar with the early church's irrefragable adoption of Hellenistic (and particularly Platonist) philosophy in the explanation of the Christian faith. He was familiar as well with the charge that the growth of the doctrinal tradition was corrosive to the simple message of the gospel.

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11. Homily, XIV, 3. *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, tr. R. Heine (Washington, D.C. : Catholic University of America Press, 1982), p. 199. See « Sources Chrétiennes », 7.

12. Of course, A. von Harnack is the classic representative of the view that the emergence of Christian doctrine represented an unwarranted hybrid of *gnōsis* and *pistis*. Harnack took Christianity's shift from its Palestinian matrix to the Mediterranean basin as a fateful and degenerative step resulting in a dogmatism that inexorably destroyed the spirit of the Gospel. The dogmatic tradition is "in its conception and development a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel." Cited by Jaroslav PELIKAN, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago : Univ. of Chicago, 1971), p. 55. Elsewhere Harnack says : "[...] every dogmatic formula is suspicious because it is fitted to wound the spirit of religion [...]", in *History of Dogma*, I, tr. N. Buchanan (Boston : Roberts Bros., 1895), p. 71.

Fine analyses of the *Hellenisierungthese* of Harnack may be found in H.-J. SCHMITZ, *Frühkatholizismus bei A. von Harnack, R. Sohm, und E. Käsemann* (Düsseldorf : Patmos, 1977), p. 50-93 ; and in E.P. MEIJERING, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums in Urteil A. von Harnacks* (Amsterdam : North Holland Publishing Company, 1985).

13. The question of "spoils" will not be traced through the Middle Ages and the Reformation. Useful essays on this issue during those periods may be found in *Christianity and the Classics : The Acceptance of a Heritage*, Wendy Helleman, ed. (Lanham, Md. : University Press of America, 1990).

Against the claim that Christianity had gorged itself on the philosophical fruits of the ancient world with baneful and syncretistic results, Newman responded eloquently :

> They [Catholicism's opponents] cast off all that they also find in Pharisee or heathen ; we conceive that the Church, like Aaron's rod, devours the serpents of the magicians. They are ever hunting for a fabulous primitive simplicity ; we repose in Catholic fullness. [...] They are driven to maintain, on their part, that the Church's doctrine was never pure ; we say that it can never be corrupt.[14]

Newman's reference is to Exodus 7,9ff, where Aaron's rod swallows the serpents of Pharoah's sorcerers. Like Origen's "Egyptian spoils," Newman's "Aaronic rod" is a suggestive metaphor for the ecclesiastical use of secular learning. Christianity does not simply jettison or reject the systems of thought or ideas with which it has contact ; rather, it refines, purifies and deepens truth wherever it is found. For Newman, the reciprocity between the gospel and philosophy is such that the church casts human wisdom into the refiner's fire, always stamping it with "a deeper impress of her Master's image".[15]

Henri de Lubac, too, the twentieth-century patrologist who was instrumental in the supersession of the scholasticism hegemonic in Roman Catholicism until Vatican II, shares the early Christian and Newmanian concern for the ecclesial absorption and employment of all wisdom and truth.[16] In his programmatic work of 1938, *Catholicisme*, de Lubac assumes the mantle of Origen and Newman, arguing for both the truth found elsewhere, and the necessity of its refinement in Christ. He applauds, for example, the spiritual experiences which animate the religions of the world, asking rhetorically : "Must everything be jettisoned to give place to the Gospel ?"[17] Answering with a resounding "No," de Lubac states that there is a real truth to be found in the "beliefs and consciences" of non-Christians (116). At the same time, it remains "[...] the Church's mission to purify and give fresh life to each of them [the varieties of spiritual experience] to deepen them and bring them to a successful issue [...]" (152).

De Lubac argues that Christianity transforms the world not by rejecting it, but by *absorbing* it : "[...] there is nothing good which Catholicism cannot claim for its own" and again : "Nothing authentically human, whatever its origin, can be alien to her [the church]" (153). Cyril was on the right track with his use of Plato, similarly Ambrose with Seneca and Matteo Ricci with Confucius. Precisely because God is the author of nature, truth may be found in other religions and philosophical systems and

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14. *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, ninth edition (London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1894), p. 382.

15. *Ibid.*

16. According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, one sees in de Lubac's theology a fundamental decision "[...] for fullness, totality and the widest possible horizon — it is precisely the power of inclusion which becomes the chief criterion of truth — so that, negatively, it becomes a major concern of his to point out where the entire tradition, and in particular the ecclesial and theological tradition, has become narrow or rigid, often with immensely destructive consequences." "The Achievement of Henri de Lubac," *Thought*, 51 (1976), p. 10.

17. *Catholicism*, tr. L. Sheppard (New York : Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), p. 144. Page numbers are parenthetically noted in the text.

be fruitfully utilized and perfected by Christianity. Even thinkers who, at first blush, appear unalterably opposed to the gospel, Nietzsche, Marx and Comte, have much to offer :

> Many ideas of a more or less Marxist, Nietzschean, or Positivist stamp may even find a place in some blueprint for a new synthesis, and neither its orthodoxy nor its value will be called into question on that account. *In the Church, the work of assimilation never ceases and it is never too soon to undertake it !*[18]

The entire theological corpus of de Lubac bears witness to his retrieval of the patristic notion of reciprocity. Truth is indeed everywhere and the church's process of appropriation and analogy extends to every realm of thought. The only boundary for the assimilative and analogical imagination is Christ ; all truth is subject to further refinement in him.

Given de Lubac's drive for totality and mutual correlation, it is not surprising that he was a strong opponent of attempts, in various Roman Catholic circles, to revive the theological style of Aquinas and the thirteenth century. If the salt of Christianity were to maintain its tang, then the church could never become wedded to one theological style. The dynamism of the gospel demanded an unending process of creative imagination and bold appropriation :

> Just to imitate primitive Christianity or the Middle Ages will not be enough. We can revive the Fathers' all-embracing humanism and recover [their] spirit [...] only by an assimilation which is at the same time a transformation. For although the Church rests on eternal foundations, it is in a continual state of rebuilding, and since the Fathers' time it has undergone many changes in style [...].[19]

Arguing for a new, twentieth-century correlation between the gospel and contemporary thought, de Lubac states the obvious : we live in a world different from that of St. Paul, Origen, Aquinas and Bossuet. The present theological mission is to develop styles and approaches suited for our times just as they did for theirs. De Lubac is careful to add, however, that this correlation with an appropriation of new ideas involves a preservation as well as a transformation. Echoing Vincent of Lerins and the First Vatican Council, he says that any new development of Christian thought must be *in eadem doctrina eademque sententia* with the earliest church teaching.[20]

De Lubac's work, along with Newman's, bore good fruit in Roman Catholicism at Vatican II with the conciliar endorsement of true theological pluralism and with its emphasis on interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. The council initiated in Roman Catholic theology the kind of dialogue with contemporary philosophy and other disciplines which had long been characteristic of Protestant thought. The present dialogue, in several sectors of Christian theology, has marked differences with the no-

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18. *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, tr. E. Riley (London : Sheed and Ward, 1949), p. VI (emphasis added).

19. *Catholicism*, p. 172.

20. *Ibid*. Like Origen, de Lubac also warns of an uncritical assimilation of human learning or culture. "The wisdom of Christ will always be madness in the eyes of the world. [...] It would be reprehensible — and futile — to wish to 'adapt' dogma to accommodate the whims and caprices of intellectual fashion [...]." "Apologétique et théologie," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 57 (1930), p. 361-378. The English translation is from *Theological Fragments*, tr. R.H. Balinski (San Francisco : Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 96.

tion of correlation discussed in Origen, Newman and de Lubac. It is to an examination of certain influential contemporary approaches that we turn.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND CORRELATIONAL THEOLOGY

How has the traditional notion of the correlation between Christianity and "secular" wisdom, expressed in the typology of "despoiling the Egyptians," changed in light of the widespread theological turn to non-foundationalist philosophy ?

While a full-blown study of non-foundationalism is impossible here, some distinguishing features of this movement should be noted before proceeding to its use in contemporary theology. Essentially, non-foundationalism accepts the criticisms of the Western philosophical tradition levelled preeminently by Heidegger and Wittgenstein. The former claimed that Western thought, in both its classical metaphysical and modern transcendental versions, had fallen victim to the ontotheological tradition with its twin foundationalist shoals of substance and subject. In a similar vein, the later Wittgenstein argued that philosophy, as encapsulated in the Augustinian-Cartesian tradition of ostensive definition, moved ineluctably toward a calculating and manipulative understanding of reality that ignored the swarming and irreducible forms of life and linguistic communities constituting the *Lebenswelt*.[21] In opposing foundationalism, both thinkers resist traditional attempts at "stopping the show" by finding some Archimedean point, irreducible *prima philosophia* or *Ursprungsphilosophie* from which to begin the search for rigourous and universal knowledge.[22] They seek to unmask the overarching horizons of radical historicity and temporality that totally saturate and envelop human thinking and being. All attempts at universalist understandings of truth and rationality are properly subject to deconstruction because they fail to account for the newly-presenced life-world and are, therefore, ontologically inappropriate.

For non-foundationalism, then, any attempt to advance a particular metanarrative or *grand récit* as *the* truth represents a colossal example of untenable ontological hubris. Such endeavors indicate a complete misunderstanding of the cultural-linguistic determinacy of forms of life, the absolute priority of the flux, and the all-encompassing horizons of finitude. Claims to truth are not *a priori* disallowed ;

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21. Recent works dealing with Heidegger's non-foundationalism include Jacques TAMINIAUX, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, M. Gendre, tr. and ed. (Albany : SUNY, 1991) and Fred DALLMAYR, *Between Freiburg and Frankfort : Toward a Critical Ontology* (Amherst : The University of Massachusetts Press, 1991). Similar recent analyses of Wittgenstein may be found in *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, A. Phillips Griffiths, ed. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991) ; Cyril BARRETT, *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Beliefs* (Oxford : Blackwell, 1991) ; and Gertrude CONWAY, *Wittgenstein on Foundations* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J. : Humanities Press, 1989).

22. Of course, non-foundationalist philosophy has contemporary defenders in thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard and Richard Rorty. Useful examinations of contemporary non-foundationalist trends may be found in John CAPUTO, *Radical Hermeneutics : Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987) ; James MARSH, John CAPUTO and Merold WESTPHAL, *Modernity and Its Discontents* (New York : Fordham University Press, 1992) ; and Richard BERNSTEIN, *The New Constellation : The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Mass. : The MIT Press, 1992).

however, such claims must take full cognizance of our postontological, posttranscendental, postmodern situation. An ontologically *appropriate* notion of truth must acknowledge the fissiparous and fragmented nature of human existence, the newly-unmasked decentered subject, and the enveloping presence of *lēthē* and *différe(a)nce*. Such acknowledgement explains the move of non-foundationalist philosophy away from notions of truth as correspondence and reference and towards more supple theories such as *phronēsis* and various pragmatic and praxis-oriented understandings.[23]

Even with this brief synopsis, it is not difficult to see that accepting the fundamental tenets of the non-foundationalist position offers unique challenges for Christian theology. Christianity has staked itself firmly to the notion that Jesus of Nazareth is the alpha and omega of human history, God's final, climactic and definitive word to humanity. It has traditionally presented itself to the world not simply as one local truth, but as an unsurpassable metanarrative, as the *grand récit* par excellence, as the *norma normans* for all other narratives, whether religious or secular in nature. As such, it understands itself as refining, purifying, deepening as well as norming other truth-claims. In Newman's words, Christianity's charge is to stamp all of reality with a "deeper impress of her Master's image." How does the theological adoption of non-foundationalist principles transform the traditional "Egyptian spoils" typology ? An examination of two methodologies will help answer this question.

1. *Postliberal Thought*

The term "postliberalism" has been widely associated with the work of George Lindbeck and, with nuances, several other thinkers.[24] What fundamental characteristics delineate this theological style ? Strongly influenced by the notions of incommensurability, historicity and socio-cultural particularity that pulsate through the work of Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars, Kuhn and Geertz, the postliberal theologians are united, at the very least, in their distaste for foundationalism. Having placed these "defenders of difference" in their collective pantheon, Lindbeck and other postliberal thinkers logically avoid speaking about "universals" of any kind, whether it is a matter of universal religious experience, universal truth, or universal standards of rationality. Speech about "universals" indicates a severe epistemic misunderstanding of the radical flux and difference penetrating all levels of thought and regulative forms of life. It is precisely the claim to universality that causes Lindbeck to reject both the

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23. Some pragmatic theories of truth are briefly discussed by Richard RORTY, in "Education, Socialization and Individuation," *Liberal Education*, 75 (1989), p. 2-9, and more fully in *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*, D.S. Browning and F. Schüssler-Fiorenza, ed. (New York : Crossroad, 1992). I have discussed *phronēsis* in "Between Foundationalism and Nihilism : Is *Phronēsis* the *Via Media* for Theology ?", *Theological Studies*, 54 (1993), p. 37-54.

24. William PLACHER identifies Ronald Thiemann and Hans Frei along with Lindbeck in *Unapologetic Theology* (Louisville : Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p. 22, note 24. Similar lists of theologians may be found in Carl BRAATEN, *No Other Gospel !* (Minneapolis : Augsburg Fortress, 1992), p. 19 ; and in Mark CLADIS, "Mild-Mannered Pragmatism and Religious Truth," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 60 (1992), p. 24, note 5. As all authors admit, such lists involve painting with a wide brush and ignoring many specific differences. THIEMANN, for example, points out his disagreements with Lindbeck and postliberalism in *Constructing a Public Theology* (Louisville : Westminster/John Knox, 1991), p. 18-25.

cognitive-propositionalist and experiential-expressive models that dominate some theological quarters.[25]

Postliberal thinkers argue, rather, that if one gives proper ontological weight to the finite, the particular and the local, then one speaks not of universal experiences and standards, but of encompassing cultural-linguistic systems, of enveloping networks and webs of belief, of the incommensurability informing various frameworks. Human thinking, acting and judging are deeply rooted in the forms of life from which they emerge. Christianity is not exempt from this determinacy. It, too, has its own forms of rationality and justification ; its truth-warrants and criteria are to be found in the Christian community itself, not in universal standards imported or imposed from elsewhere.[26] Truth-claims should not be measured, therefore, against external, universally accessible norms. Such an approach is ontologically inappropriate, resurrecting classical and Enlightenment modes of thought which the newly-presenced horizons of non-foundationalism have discredited and superseded. Truth is to be found, rather, in the standards, warrants and modes of verification proper to the uniquely Christian form of life.

Of course, the question immediately arises : Does this avoidance of universal and public standards of truth and rationality allow the truth-claims of Christianity to refer beyond a limited cultural-linguistic circle ? While postliberalism vigorously defends the intra-systemic consistency of doctrinal language, one wonders if the language itself truly refers to actual states of affairs. It certainly appears that on any "strong" version of the postliberal model, the issue of reference simply disappears.[27] As Wainwright has said : "His [Lindbeck's] theory of truth appears inadequate, at least to the claims Christians have traditionally thought they were making for their message and teaching."[28]

Is there room for a rapprochement between postliberal theology and the traditional "spoils" typology ? An attempt to answer this question will be made after a review of a second major contemporary methodology, revisionist thought.

2. Revisionist Thought

Revisionist theology, unlike the postliberalism discussed above, is concerned with defending and adjudicating theological truth-claims by means of publicly warrantable

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25. *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 1984).

26. This element in postliberal thought is aptly described by David BRYANT, in "Christian Identity and Historical Change : Postliberals and Historicity," *Journal of Religion*, 73 (1993), p. 31-41. Of course, it is precisely the claim that norms for truth are inextricably linked to the standards within a particular community that gave rise to Kai Nielsen's dyslogistic description : Wittgensteinian Fideism.

27. William PLACHER, "Paul Ricœur and Postliberal Theology : A Conflict of Interpretations ?", *Modern Theology*, 4 (1987), p. 35-52. Placher notes, however, that it is not completely clear if Lindbeck adopts a strong version of the cultural-linguistic model. Similar comments regarding Lindbeck's palpable hesitancy on the question of reference are made by Alister MCGRATH, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Oxford : Blackwell, 1990), p. 26-32.

28. Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT, "Ecumenical Dimensions of George Lindbeck's 'Nature of Doctrine,'" *Modern Theology*, 4 (1988), p. 121-132.

criteria.[29] Its fear is that postliberal thought, with its emphasis on the cultural-linguistic uniqueness of the Christian form of life, is inordinately pre-occupied with mere internal coherency, thereby courting the possibility that theology will become locked in a closed-circle, excluded from the larger world of scholarly and humane discourse.[30] The revisionist quest to establish public criteria for the redemption of Christian truth-claims has led to the postliberal counter-charge that this position reverts to untenable universalist and Enlightenment standards of rationality. On closer inspection however, the revisionist stance, despite its emphasis on publicly redeemable warrants, is, in many ways, quite close to postliberalism. Both methodologies are deeply indebted to Heidegger, Wittgenstein and contemporary non-foundationalist philosophy in general. As such, one may argue that, on fundamental principles, postliberalism and revisionism are much closer than is sometimes admitted.

With postliberalism, the revisionist trajectory admits the priority of the historical flux as well as the illusory search for Archimedean points, immutable first principles, and transcendental ontologies. Any attempt to revert to these notions would be to ignore the deconstruction of foundationalist philosophical spines by Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Gadamer. On the other hand, revisionist theology does seek some universal justification for its truth-claims. These public and universal truth-warrants, however, must be redeemed on decidedly non-foundationalist grounds. Like Habermas, revisionist theologians think that something of Enlightenment universality is retrievable ; nonetheless, this retrieval must be in accordance with the enveloping horizons of temporality and radical finitude.

The revisionist concern, then, for universality and publicness should not be confused with notions of truth or rationality interested in enforcing transcultural absolutes.[31] Revisionism holds, in fact, that one must avoid the univocal Enlightenment notion of rationality which led to manipulable domination, and, in a backlash, to the contemporary rage against reason.[32] David Tracy's emphasis on "otherness," "difference" and "pluralism," on the analogical rather than the univocal imagination, should be understood as a revisionist safeguard against the deadening monism toward which attempts at universality frequently tend.

In order to successfully complete its project of marrying philosophical non-foundationalism with universal and public criteria, the revisionist model needs notions of truth and rationality which are neither tied to the foundationalist *episteme* nor locked into a non-communicative cultural system. Revisionist theologians here explore the ideas of truth emerging from Pierce's community of inquirers, James' co-

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29. A brief summary of revisionist theology may be found in PLACHER, *Unapologetic Theology*, 18, p. 154.

30. An astringent critique of the "ghettoizing" tendencies of Wittgensteinian philosophy may be found in the Popperian-influenced analysis of Peter MUNZ, *Our Knowledge of the Growth of Knowledge* (London : Routledge, 1985).

31. As David Tracy wrote recently : "[...] the Enlightenment notion of rationality is in danger of becoming part of the problem, not the solution." *Dialogue with the Other* (Louvain : Peeters Press, 1990), p. 1. Tracy's further comments on Husserl's *Crisis* illuminate his understanding of the project of modernity (p. 3).

32. This contemporary backlash is analyzed by BERNSTEIN, in "The Rage Against Reason," *The New Constellation*, p. 31-56.

herent, ethical pragmatism, Habermas's ideal-speech situation and Gadamer's reha-
bilitation of *phronesis*. Revisionist thinkers like Tracy continue to grope for appro-
priate notions of truth which do not require the foundationalist ontological grounds
associated with more traditional referential theories.[33]

In light of these brief analyses of postliberalism and revisionism, one may ask : Is
any rapprochement possible with these methodologies and the traditional "spoils from
Egypt" typology ?

3. *Reflections on the "Spoils" Typology in Postliberal and Revisionist Thought*

Although one must admire the new attempts at *fides quaerens intellectum* embod-
ied in postliberalism and revisionism, once the Heidegger-Wittgenstein axis has been
accepted, one speaks of the "spoils from Egypt" typology only with difficulty. Ac-
ceding to either the ontological priority of the historical flux or to the relative isola-
tion of cultural-linguistic spheres makes it difficult, if not impossible, to assert the
universal normativity of Christianity.

If the non-foundationalist move is made, then there is no *ontological* basis for an
epistemological or hermeneutical framework allowing for the separation of a norma-
tive Christian content from an historically, culturally and linguistically conditioned
form. Postliberal and revisionist thinkers alike, precisely as a corollary to their rejec-
tion of foundationalist ontology, emphasize that truth is inextricably linked to its
historical and epiphanic form. One cannot legitimately speak of grasping a transcul-
tural or translinguistic truth which is both separable from, and capsulable in, a variety
of forms and contexts.[34] But once the ontological grounds allowing for the herme-
neutical form/content distinction are expunged, then one has no basis for arguing for
the fundamental identity of meaning of Christianity throughout history. An identity of
content within a variety of forms is now philosophically unsustainable.[35] By logical
necessity, non-foundationalist theologians turn toward non-referential notions of truth
now deemed ontologically consistent. Theological truth cannot be knowledge about
states of affairs ; the overarching horizons of historicity and cultural-linguistic de-

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33. One comment may be taken as illustrative of Tracy's epiphanic notion of truth : "The truth of religion is,
like the truth of its nearest cousin, art, primordially the truth of manifestation." *Dialogue with the Other*,
p. 43. Compare this with Stanley Rosen's dismay (in a non-theological context) at the demise of referential
notions of truth : "[...] there can be no doubt that the thesis that art is worth more than the truth is the domi-
nant principle of our time." *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New York : Oxford, 1987), p. 138.

34. To say transcultural and translinguistic is not to speak of disembodied contents, but to acknowledge the
distinction between a universal truth-claim and the cultural and linguistic milieu in which this claim is
born.
    I have argued elsewhere that Gadamer's hermeneutics, relying on Heidegger's deconstruction of ontology,
seeks to overthrow the form/content interpretative trajectory. Such an approach rests, Gadamer claims, on
ontologically truncated grounds. "Revelation and Foundationalism : Toward Hermeneutical and Ontologi-
cal Appropriateness," *Modern Theology*, 6 (1990), p. 221-235.

35. David Bryant points out an anomalous element in some strains of postliberal theology. While affirming the
cultural, historical and linguistic determinacy of all thought and experience, some postliberals seek to "[...]
isolate an enduring and unchanging structure within the Christian tradition that can anchor Christian iden-
tity." Bryant correctly argues that it is inconsistent to affirm both non-foundationalism and unchanging,
identical structures. BRYANT, "Christian Identity," p. 35.

terminacy demand something like consensus, communicative praxis or practical reason.

If theology accepts the ontological ultimacy of non-foundationalism, then the discipline is hard pressed to protect the material continuity, identity and universal normativity of the revelatory narrative. Rather than defending the universality and fundamental meaning-invariance of the Christian message, theology is left to defend only the formal and historical continuity of reflection on the Christ-event. But this non-foundationalist turn to textual meaning-variance and "undecideability" appears to militate against the very notion of God's self-manifestation, of the truth which the church is able to grasp in faith, of the unity of the *depositum fidei* (*paratheke*, I Tim. 6. 20/II Tim. 1.14).

Must one conclude then that non-foundationalist theology allows of no rapprochement with the "spoils" typology ? Or does the typology simply take on a different configuration ? David Tracy, for example, has long defended the notion of mutually critical correlation, attempting a kind of creative retrieval of the "spoils" imagery.[36] And, in fact, Tracy's early move beyond Tillich's question/answer approach and his absolute insistence on true textual reciprocity has much to commend it. It must be admitted, however, that Tracy's rejection of foundationalism and the referential notion of truth, as well as his concomitant acceptance of the ontological priority of the flux and the more fluid notions of consensus and *phronēsis*, has theological ramifications for any understanding of correlation. On strictly non-foundationalist grounds, Tracy must now defend an intertextual equivalency, an interpenetrative mutuality harboring deep lethic and apophatic consequences for theology. Neither the revelatory narrative of Christianity, nor any other metanarrative, can now be taken *a priori* as normative. There is, rather, a mutually critical correlation between texts from which, on the basis of publicly warrantable and redeemable criteria, a consensus regarding their truth-claims emerges. One can argue that a notion of "spoils" is here operative, while, at the same time, acknowledging the extent to which non-foundationalist presuppositions move one in a direction quite different from Origen, Newman, de Lubac and the tradition at large.

HISTORICALLY CONSCIOUS FOUNDATIONALISM : TOWARD A NEW TYPOLOGY OF "SPOILS FROM EGYPT"

As an alternative to these recent forms of non-foundationalist thought, I offer an historically conscious foundationalism which is in a better position both to maintain the material continuity of Christian identity and to take account of contemporary philosophical currents. In accordance with the traditional typology, theology must be committed to absorbing and adopting the legitimate insights offered by non-foundationalism and postmodernism. At the same time, Christian *faith* requires that theology bear

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36. *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York : The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 43-47. Tracy clearly explains his own view of correlation vis-à-vis other approaches, in *The Analogical Imagination* (New York : Crossroad, 1981), p. 88, note 44.

witness to the integral identity and universal normativity of the Christian revelatory narrative. An historically and ideologically conscious foundationalism can satisfy both of these demands.

Why the need for foundationalism ? It must be stated unequivocally that Christianity is a foundationalist enterprise *not* because of some *a priori* philosophical commitment to a particular ontology, but because foundationalism appears to be demanded by the very notion of revelation.[37] This was suggested above when alluding to such concepts as the material continuity and integral identity of the Christian narrative. Vatican II, for example, speaks of the climactic and normative revelation in Jesus Christ which is integrally transmitted from age to age in perpetuity. Such a comment is hardly innovative. It simply sums up the long tradition of Christian belief that God has truly manifested himself and taken humanity into deep communion with his own inner life. In turn, Christianity has adopted some form of *prima philosophia* only insofar as it needs this to undergird logically the material continuity and integral transmission that appear essential to its self-understanding.

Within Roman Catholicism, the epistemological achievement of Vatican II was to demonstrate that the material identity of Christianity does not require a commitment to *one* particular philosophical system, viz., Christianized Aristotelianism. Besides Aquinas' vision of reality, a true pluralism of philosophies and theologies was endorsed and affirmed.[38] It must be added, however, that the council (and subsequent ecclesiastical documents) endorse only a pluralism which can sustain an understanding of revelation which includes Christianity's historical identity and universal normativity. "Spoils" may indeed be found everywhere ; however, this absorption, correlation and utilization of human wisdom is always normed by the gospel's own claims. As de Lubac phrases it : *Non in te me mutabis, sed tu mutaberis in me.*[39]

While the Christian notion of revelation may demand some form of foundationalism, this first philosophy must be historically and theologically nuanced. Even if nonfoundationalist thought is *ultimately* unacceptable as a theological option, many of its themes can and must be cultivated as useful "spoils" at the service of the gospel. Foundationalist theology, then, must continue to incorporate the insights that Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Habermas, Kuhn and Geertz have so brilliantly brought to light : the radical finitude of the subject, the encompassing horizons of temporality and historicity, the socio-cultural locatedness of all thought, the hidden

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37. This is the position that von Balthasar argued against Karl Barth when answering Barth's famous taunt about the *analogia entis* with its implication that Roman Catholicism simply transformed Christianity into neo-scholasticism. Von Balthasar claimed that Catholicism used various conceptual systems which sustained its notion of revelation without committing itself to the exhaustiveness of any particular ontology. On the other hand, prior to Vatican II, there was some justification to Barth's charge that, at least on the material if not formal level, scholasticism seemed normative. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, tr. J. Drury (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

38. This recovery of pluralism, within the framework of realism, remains an underappreciated achievement of those theologians associated with the *nouvelle théologie* : Henri de Lubac, Henri Bouillard, Y. Congar, et al. An extraordinary statement of this proper pluralism may be found in the 1946 essay of Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, "On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time," *Communio : International Catholic Review*, 20 (1993), p. 147-187.

39. *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, tr. R. Arnandez (San Francisco : Ignatius Press, 1984), p. 69.

presence of ideological interests, the linguistic embeddedness of reason, the theory-laden status of the inquirer, the incommensurability of frameworks, the epistemological determinacy of varying forms of life, and so the list continues. What is essential to sophisticated foundationalism is the constant interlacing of facticity and historicity with the foundationalist ontology, whether metaphysical or transcendental, that theology apparently needs. While the foundationalism proper to theology is here chastened by a variety of horizons, the maintenance of the historical identity of Christianity, its referential truth, as well as its integral transmission is not discarded as so much metaphysical baggage.

Sophisticated foundationalism must equally come to terms with those notions of truth which represent non-foundationalist attempts to plot a middle course between propositionalist *epistēmē* and sheer relativism. These attempts may be classified under two kinds : 1) The universalization by Gadamer of Aristotle's *phronēsis* from book six of the *Nichomachean Ethics* and 2) Some turn toward the pragmatic or communicative praxis theories of Dewey, Pierce, James or Habermas.[40] Taken together, these theories provide theology with significant clues about the nature of truth : the fundamental equality of the community of inquirers, the effect of socio-cultural location on the construal of truth, the linguistic determinacy of any formulation, the apophaticism and absence at the heart of presence, the conditions necessary for humane and respectful discourse, and so forth. As several thinkers have noted, many of these ideas possess an inner congruency with Christian views (e.g. the parity which should characterize the community of believers).[41] As such, they can serve to further shade and nuance Christian truth-claims. At the same time, the Christian understanding of revelation, with its unyielding incarnational and historical dimensions, must ultimately supersede the consensus, coherence and *phronēsis* notions of truth which characterize contemporary non-foundationalism.[42]

Several of the thinkers mentioned above have no commitment either to Christianity or to theism. Nonetheless, their contribution to the understanding of the truth proper to Christian theology and faith is enormous. The use of their thought by sophisticated foundationalism constitutes a reprise of the patristic methodology which fully recognized that Christianity has no monopoly on wisdom or truth. The *logos spermatikos* theme of Justin and the subsequent Alexandrian school as well as the *anima naturaliter christiana* of Tertullian emphasize the expanse of places where truth may be found. It seems entirely accurate to say then, as Tracy does, that "secular" wisdom offers not only questions to Christianity, but answers as well. The theologian should always be searching for the truth uncovered by other disciplines, always combing the fields of "secular" wisdom in order to appropriate insights that

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40. Wittgenstein's understanding of truth can here be subsumed under Gadamer's retrieval of *phronēsis*, i.e., since the only exercise of reason is that which is wholly temporally and historically embedded, the truth reached is completely subject to the delimiting character of these horizons.

41. The congruency of certain of these theories with Christianity has been explored recently by Paul LAKE-LAND, *Theology and Critical Theory : The Discourse of the Church* (Nashville : Abingdon Press, 1990).

42. This position is argued by E. ARENS, "Zur Struktur theologischer Wahrheit," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 112 (1990), p. 1-17 ; and, more forcefully, by Walter KASPER, "Das Wahrheitverständnis der Theologie", in *Wahrheit in Einheit und Vielheit*, E. Coreth, ed. (Düsseldorf : Patmos Verlag, 1987).

will expand and deepen Christian self-understanding. Christianity has no inner drive to monism, to the sublation of differences ; it seeks, rather, to learn from them.

A further point must be made regarding an historically conscious foundationalism desirous of renewing the "spoils" typology. The Christian employment of spoils is never a surgically precise manoeuver. It is true that theologians, in their reconceptualization and reformulation of the Christian tradition, have a preservative as well as a transformative task. A sophisticated and theologically nuanced foundationalism, however, recognizes that there is no algorithmic or positivistic method for defining and circumscribing the *depositum fidei*.[43] Even if one takes Christianity as necessarily normative for other metanarratives, the attempt to refine, adopt and incorporate new ideas and new insights will always, at least for a period of time, yield loose ends and anomalous formulations. The history of theology bears witness to the difficulties encountered when trying to determine exactly what belongs to the "substance" of Christianity and what is merely "accidental."[44] It will not always be clear, then, if a new attempt at incorporating "spoils" truly protects the "deposit of faith."

To answer our initial question : A reconciliation between contemporary theology and the traditional "spoils" typology is possible. Indeed, if Christianity is to maintain both its internal identity and its transformative dynamism, such a rapprochement is essential. The historically conscious foundationalism outlined here provides a possible pathway.

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43. Obviously, in determining the precise nature of Christian faith, theology relies of a variety of dimensions : the authority of Scripture, early credal statements, ecumenical councils, the multifaceted nature of Christian experience, etc.

44. Need one refer again to the condemnations at Paris in 1270 and 1277 regarding the introduction of Aristotelian terminology ? Karl Rahner has spoken with frequency on the difficulty of determining whether a new theological system has, in fact, performed its preservative as well as transformative task. He argues that theology will always generate a certain amount of healthy friction precisely because of this dual goal. Karl RAHNER, "Yesterday's History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow", in *Theological Investigations*, XVIII, tr. E. Quinn (New York : Crossroad, 1983).