

## REASON AND FAITH

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF ANTONIO ROSMINI

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The purpose of this article (1) is to provide readers of the web-site *rosmini-in-english* with an introduction to Rosmini's life and thought which will be appropriate in the context of the recent Papal Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. Pope John Paul II opened the way towards the beatification of Antonio Rosmini in 1994. Subsequently in 1998 by mentioning him with approval in the encyclical, the Pope reinforced the process of the restoration of Rosmini's reputation as philosopher, theologian and saintly founder of a religious congregation, the Institute of Charity.

When presenting a succinct account of the life and works of Antonio Rosmini in the light of *Fides et Ratio*, there are two main problems. The first is the complexity of the philosophical, political and religious context of Rosmini's life and times. But without some grasp of this background it is impossible to understand either the content of his books or his political and religious fall from grace in the turbulent times of the unification of Italy and afterwards under Pope Leo XIII. Nor is it possible to appreciate correctly the slow process of the restoration of Rosmini's reputation in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Secondly, there is the problem of Rosmini's vast written output, consisting of nearly 100 volumes, which was an almost miraculous response to the cultural, religious, political and human events of his time. By the end of his life in 1855, all the major ideologies of modern Western civilisation had been established and he was therefore able to react to them in a way which accepted their positive contributions, but rejected their elevation of partial insights into all-pervasive structures. His enormous contribution to the intellectual and spiritual life of Europe can now be seen as the last great synthesis of reason and faith in the history of the continent and of the Christian Church. But despite the immense prestige in which he was held during his lifetime and the depth and scope of his

philosophical output, Rosmini was largely lost to the mainstream of European cultural, academic and religious life.

In Part 1 of my article I try to explain how this happened as his life and work inevitably drew him into the controversies which surrounded the Papacy of Pius IX and the bitter struggle for the unification of the State of Italy. I indicate the essential features of Rosmini's critical survey of Western epistemology up to the time of Kant and his response. Part 1 also summarises the events which followed the posthumous publication of his major theological books and led up to the 'condemnation' by the Holy Office of the famous forty propositions, *Post Obitum*, extracted mainly from these posthumous works. (2)

In Part 2 of the article I describe the gradual restoration of Rosmini's reputation after the centenary of his death in 1955 and in particular during the succession of Popes from John XXIII to John Paul II. I outline the fundamentals of his philosophical thought, which provides foundations without fundamentalism, and endeavour to show that because of its openness to *all* human experience it is still relevant to today's urgent questions. I also indicate how this philosophy underpins the aims, objectives and content of the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.

## **PART 1. Rosmini. The history from 1797 to 1888**

### **Birthright.**

Antonio Rosmini-Serbati was born on 24 March 1797 in Rovereto, a valley town on an important route north-eastwards out of Italy. The year before, Napoleon Bonaparte had entered this town during his victorious campaign against the Austrians, but by the time the young Antonio was only a few months old, political authority was restored to Austria. As a result, the political atmosphere which was to dominate the whole of Rosmini's life was largely determined by the internal and foreign policies of Austria. The Italians call this part of Italy the 'Trentino', and in fact Rovereto was always overshadowed by its

larger neighbour to the North, the town of Trent, which gave its name to the counter-reformation Council.

The upheavals of the French Revolution and conquest of the rest of Italy by Napoleon hardly affected this northern corner of Austrian Italy. So Rosmini was brought up in a prosperous and well-regulated household undisturbed by war and he attended the local schools during a peaceful and happy childhood. This mountainous region of great natural beauty gave him an environmental sensitivity to the world and its wonders.

It is an interesting insight into the spread of philosophies of the Enlightenment into Austria and Italy at this time that in Rosmini's teens his tutor was able to instruct him in the works of the English philosopher John Locke and other European philosophers up to the 'Critical Philosophy' of Kant. But even in this period Rosmini showed an independence of mind and began to form his own philosophical path, shaped by early readings of medieval Christian authors including Augustine and Aquinas. From 1816-19 he undertook theological studies at the University of Padua where he demonstrated a natural gift for friendship. When he finished at Padua he tried to enlist his many friends in a Society which would help him in the compilation of a Christian Encyclopaedia, as a counter to the corresponding work of the French Enlightenment.

Ordained subdeacon in November 1819 he began to use daily the collection of psalms, hymns, prayers and scriptural quotations which make up the Catholic breviary. While his thought was already deeply informed by his spiritual reading and that of the Bible in particular, a subsequent characteristic of all Rosmini's writings was the inspiration he found for them in the Christian scriptures. This provided one element of a seamless unity which he would always seek to bring to light between the human experience of religion and of reason.

Having formed his 'Society of Friends' at Rovereto, he joined a similar venture launched in Turin by the Marchese Cesare Tapparelli d'Azeglio. Rosmini also responded to the request of his fellow young clerics in and around Rovereto for a course of studies.

Accordingly he set up a school in his house and used as texts the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, who was largely neglected at this time in the general abandonment of scholastic philosophy and theology. Rosmini even began a translation of the *Summa Theologica* into Italian. So it is significant to record here that Cesare d'Azeglio's younger son Luigi entered the Jesuit order and in the 1830's became rector of the Jesuit College in Rome. When Luigi was considering a reform of the curriculum of his students he knew of Rosmini's enthusiasm for Aquinas and his co-operation with his father in Turin a decade earlier. As a result, he had a long correspondence with Rosmini and was persuaded of the merits of Thomistic philosophy. In his audience of students at the Jesuit College was the young cleric Gioacchini Pecci who, as the future Pope Leo XIII, began the revival of scholastic philosophy with his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879). But as we will see, this association with Aquinas and Leo XIII did not protect Rosmini from eventual condemnation.

### **Priesthood**

Rosmini was ordained in 1821. He continued to live in Rovereto, look after family affairs after his father's death, and carry on his studies. But his clerical state brought him new responsibilities in serving the local parishes and working under the local bishops. This experience soon deepened his awareness of the baleful effects which the relationship between Church and State had produced on the religious life and practices of his time.

Rosmini found himself situated in a complex set of interactions between politics, religion and nationalism. The relationship between Church and State had worsened steadily in the latter part of the eighteenth century in both the principal areas of civil authority where Catholicism was the main religion, namely France and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The rise of Jansenism also divided the unity of the French church, where the growth of Enlightenment thought had weakened the intellectual influence of orthodox Christianity. In 1764 political pressure forced the suppression of the Jesuits in France. The following revolution in France also saw a sweeping away of much clerical privilege and authority.

Under Napoleon in 1798 Rome was occupied by the French and Pope Pius VI died in exile in 1799.

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Joseph II had been convinced of the philosophical justification of a modernised and liberalised Empire. And so for the Church 'Josepism' meant suppression of monastic orders and defiance of Papal authority over Church appointments. In 1815 Austria regained most of the control of the north of Italy, apart from Piedmont which obtained its independence. The whole of the Austro-Hungarian empire then felt the steely hand of foreign minister and chancellor Metternich, as he strove to counteract every sign of nationalism and liberalism in the dependent territories, which included much of Northern Italy.

This was the political and religious context of the life of the young priest and philosopher, Rosmini in 1823. In April that year he paid his first visit to Rome where, in a personal audience with Pope Pius VII, he was encouraged to carry on with his philosophical projects. So, he immersed himself anew in the history and questions of European philosophy from Plato to Kant and began a critical response to them in the formulation of his own ideas on the failures and successes of this philosophical history.

Only a few months later Pius VII died and Rosmini preached the sermon at the requiem mass in Rovereto in which he argued for greater independence from the State in Church affairs. It immediately rendered him a marked man in the eyes of the Austrian authorities and afterwards he could only move out of Austrian jurisdiction with difficulty. And at this time, though he wrote the first drafts of two books, the *Constitution for a Civil Society* which was a blueprint for a unified Italy, and *The Philosophy of Right*, he was unable to publish either of them. But they were both saved for the future and more urgent circumstances that led up to the revolution of 1848.

Rosmini was particularly concerned with the effects of the civil rule not only on the organisation of the Church as a whole, but also on the faith and religious life at the level of the people in the parishes. As a result he began what is probably his best known work, the *Five Wounds of the Church*, which was written 'to illustrate more clearly the sorrows

which now afflict the Church'. The five chapters of the book liken these sorrows to the five wounds of the crucified Christ. The sorrows were: the divide between people and their clergy in religious worship; the lack of education of priests; the disunity among bishops; the civil control over the appointment of bishops; and the restrictions placed by the state on the use of Church possessions. It was to be a prophetic book.

In 1823-25 he worked through the whole of Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* with the local clergy and enjoyed the lively discussions he had with his colleagues. During 1826-28 he visited Milan on a number of occasions. This city, although now a dependency of Austria, was still a centre of post-revolutionary literary freedom where classical and romantic movements argued out their respective merits. Here Rosmini was introduced to the leading writer among the Italian Romantics, Alessandro Manzoni and their friendship continued throughout Rosmini's life. Manzoni was then working on the second draft of his famous novel *I Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed) and was deeply conscious of the political significance of the story and the language in which it would appear. Rosmini, with his classical literary and religious background, was a great lover of Dante. He was convinced that Dante's Florentine tongue would alone form a fitting vehicle for national unity. So Manzoni published in the language of Florence, with the result we know today as the national language of Italy. But tracked as he was by the secret police of Metternich, this acquaintance with a writer still tainted with Jansenism was another indication to the Austrian authorities of Rosmini's unreliability.

## **The Foundation of his Religious Congregation, The Institute of Charity**

From as early as 1820 he began to consider founding a religious order for men who could be engaged in doing the work he thought needed in the Church. Looking for the guidance of Providence, he hesitated and consulted through the years of the 1820's until, when offered the use of a mountain-top retreat outside Domodossola, Rosmini felt it was right to begin. In the freezing Lent of 1828 Rosmini fasted and prayed while writing the constitutions for his new religious society. Although in correspondence to family and friends he denied it, these Spartan surroundings could hardly have improved his health. He was already afflicted by a stomach ailment which continued for the rest of his life. Probably a gastric ulcer, it was misdiagnosed and was the eventual cause of his death.

May 1829 saw him in Rome to begin the process of having the *Constitutions* of his religious society approved and to complete his first major philosophical work, *A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*, which was published there in 1830. The book soon achieved wide approval and was accepted as a basis for the teaching of philosophy at a number of seminaries, including that of the Jesuits in Turin. But in 1830 revolution again broke out in Paris. This set off another wave of revolt across Europe and the Papal states were also involved in an insurrection which Metternich suppressed. So it was in troubled times that Rosmini returned to Domodossola, where new companions had come to join the little community. His friend Cardinal Cappellari was elected the next Pope in 1831 as Gregory XVI, and was immediately involved with controversies over separation of church and state in France and Belgium. It is significant therefore that in 1832 Rosmini finished writing his *Five Wounds of the Church*. He looked to Papal Government and the Roman Pontiff, his friend, to give a vigorous lead in re-establishing a new Christian ethos for a rapidly modernising Europe. But these hopes went unfulfilled and so the *Five Wounds* remained in the desk of Rosmini's study, unpublished at this time.

## **The English Mission**

In 1831 an exceptionally talented and devout young man, Luigi Gentili, whom Rosmini had met in Rome, came to Domodossola to join Rosmini's growing religious society. Gentili spoke English, which enabled Rosmini to respond to a request he had received in Rome for help in establishing a seminary for the new English mission. So in 1835 Rosmini sent Gentili with two companions to teach in a college in England. In the 1840's Gentili preached enormously popular and successful missions in the English Midlands and set up a small novitiate for prospective Rosminians. At this time the Oxford Movement brought Newman into the Catholic Church. One of Newman's companions, William Lockhart, was received into the Catholic Church by Gentili. Lockhart subsequently became a member of Rosmini's Institute and later in the 1880's made the first translations of Rosmini's works into English.

## **Critical Years**

The years 1835 to 1838 saw Rosmini move the Italian novitiate into the territory of Piedmont at Stresa on Lago Maggiore, which was nearer Domodossola and out of Austrian sovereignty. He continued to publish books and this period saw the appearance of his *Philosophy of Politics*, *Comparative History of Moral Systems* and the *Anthropology as an Aid to Moral Science*. 1835 to 1839 was also the period in which Rosmini sought formal approval from Rome of the constitutions of his religious institute. He had written these so as to allow the institute to respond to all kinds of charitable works and the needs of the Church, as Providence would indicate. This meant that some features of the Constitutions were novel and these inevitably raised difficulties for the appropriate Congregation of Cardinals and their appointed assessors. The personal friendship which existed between Rosmini and the Pope, and the encouragement which Gregory had given him concerning his institute, required Rosmini to deal with the difficulties at a distance using representatives, rather than going personally to Rome. So it was not until 1839 that Rome approved the *Rule* of the Institute of Charity, drawn from

the *Constitutions*, and the Institute as a Religious Congregation rather than a Religious Order, which would have carried a greater prestige. (3)

Up until the time of his *Treatise on Moral Conscience* published in 1838, Rosmini's books had been widely welcomed in universities and seminaries. No one had previously challenged his religious orthodoxy, but in 1841 books began to appear – mostly anonymous but known to be supported by some Jesuits – which accused him of the heresy of Jansenism and holding a theology of moral conscience which was contrary to accepted authorities such as St Alphonsus. Pope Gregory, after setting up a commission of enquiry, enjoined silence on both sides of the argument in 1842. But this was not before considerable damage had been done to the reputation of Rosmini and his new Institute.

Meanwhile, he continued to direct his rapidly growing religious order. By 1843 there were 40 novices at Stresa. 1846 also saw the total number of his recorded letters reach over 6,000. One of these was to welcome the election of Pope Pius IX, whom the whole world seemed to regard as a 'progressive' and 'enlightened' new Pontiff. Rosmini wrote personally to Pius IX urging him to assume a moral leadership in Europe and to face up to the challenge of the movement towards Italian unity. Austria was of course opposed to any move towards federation of the smaller states, including those of the Pope.

Pius IX had seemed to many in Italy to be the very embodiment of a figure of chairman of a confederation of Italian princes. Moreover, these prospective visions became pressing issues in 1848, as Europe was convulsed once again, first by the uprising in Paris, and then in Vienna, Venice and Milan. Metternich was forced to resign as Piedmont entered the war against Austria. When the forces of Austria threatened the Papal States, Pius IX had to consider his position as a temporal leader. On 29 April he declared publicly that he could not in conscience declare war on Austria in alliance with the other states and handed over the political and military initiative to Piedmont, even though members of the Papal army were already fighting Austria in the northern regions of the Papal States.

Rosmini knew this was an impossible position and that revolution in the Papal States was a looming probability. He did not want the Pope to grant a more liberal Constitution to his states without considering further the position of the Pope as a presidential figure for the whole of a Catholic, united Italy. Rosmini rushed into print his own *Constitution According to Social Justice*, which embodied this role for the Pope, and at last published his *Five Wounds of the Church*.

Austrian forces defeated those of Piedmont in August and an armistice was signed. Piedmont proposed that an envoy be sent to the Pope in a final attempt to salvage the cause of a federated Italy. Rosmini was approached because of his national prestige and because it was known that the Pope was asking for Rosmini's advice in the critical situation. He was reluctant to accept such a mission but his misgivings were overcome by his desire to see Italy unified under a Christian Constitution. He did not want Italy to become like revolutionary France. His reluctance was amply justified in the light of the subsequent events of his mission and the deepening controversies about his own reputation as a author and Founder of his new Institute.

In fact, Rosmini's mission to Rome was short-lived. Although welcomed by Pius as an advisor and promised elevation to the state of Cardinal, his brief from Piedmont was soon changed to one of persuading the Pope to declare war and seek a political alliance. As a result, Rosmini resigned his role as emissary of Piedmont but stayed on to advise the Pope. On 15 November the Pope's prime minister, Pellegrino Rossi, was assassinated by extremist radicals, leaving the way for the occupation of Rome by revolutionary forces. The Pope fled to Gaeta which was in the Kingdom of Naples, on the coast 70 miles south of Rome. Rosmini and others of the Papal court managed to follow a few days later.

At Gaeta, Pius IX continued to consult Rosmini, but it soon became clear that the Papal court and Cardinal Antonelli in particular, were seeking an Austrian solution to the Pope's predicament. The Austrian propaganda machine was organised to undermine Rosmini and those who agreed with his advice. Rumours were spread through Europe that his books were dangerous. He was aware that his position was rapidly becoming

untenable, so after a final call on the Pope in Gaeta, he departed for Stresa. On the way back north, Rosmini encountered Spanish and French troops who a few months later restored the Pope to Rome. On this same journey he was given the news that at a hastily convened meeting in Naples the cardinals of the Congregation of the Index had placed his *Constitution According to Social Justice* and the *Five Wounds of the Church* on the list of forbidden books.

Rosmini submitted to this decision of authority at once but his return to Stresa was filled with anxiety for the effects on the Institute. His fears were well founded since, from 1850 to 1854, a battle raged in Rome over the orthodoxy of his works. Pius IX had called for the Congregation of the Index to examine all his published writing, numbering by then over 80 books, but the appointed experts in philosophy and theology kept returning almost unanimous verdicts of approval of Rosmini. So in 1854 the Pope instructed the Congregation to draw up a notice of dismissal ('*Dimittantur*') of all accusations against Rosmini's works. The notice when issued did not however include an injunction of silence on his detractors and so the way was left open for further accusations in the future.

Rosmini continued to live as quietly as possible through all this, but events took their toll and his health rapidly failed, culminating in his death in Stresa in 1855. In these final years he kept up his indefatigable stream of correspondence with bishops and politicians but above all to members of his Institute, who almost to a man remained faithful to it. He was buried in a tomb in the Church of the Crucified on the hill above Stresa, where a beautiful life-size statue of him by the sculptor Vela remains. Tributes to him poured in from around Italy and across Europe, including messages from Newman and the bishops in England and Wales.

## The Major Works published before 1855

It is useful at this point to supply a list of the major works published by Rosmini during his lifetime. I give the publication dates of the original Italian editions; also the titles and dates of the various English translations (ET), mostly published by Kegan, Paul and Trench, London (KPT) and Rosmini House, Durham (RH). For complete details of the Italian editions see the sources given in the bibliography to this paper.

1. 1830 *Nuovo Saggio sull' Origine delle Idee*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 3 Vols., Piomba, Turin, 1851.  
ET(a) *The Origin of Ideas*, 3 Vols., KPT, 1875.  
ET(b) Vol. II, *The Origin of Thought*, Leominster, Fowler Wright Books, 1987. Vol. III, *Certainty*, RH, 1991.  
ET(c) *A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*, 3 Vols., RH, 2001.
2. 1831 *Principles of Moral Science*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1867. ET, RH, 1988.
3. 1837 *Society and Its Purpose*. ET, RH, 1994
4. 1838 *Anthropology as an Aid to Moral Science*. ET, RH, 1991
5. 1839 *Treatise on Moral Conscience*. ET, RH, 1989
6. 1841 *The Philosophy of Right*. ET, RH, 6 Vols., 1993-96
7. 1845 *The Philosophical System of Antonio Rosmini*. ET, KPT, 1882
8. 1845 *Theodicy*. ET, KPT, 1892
9. 1848 *Five Wounds of the Church*. Latest ET, RH, 1987
10. 1850 *Psychology*. ET, KPT, 3 Vols., 1884 and RH, 4 Vols., 1999

In the rest of this paper I refer to 1. above as *A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas* and give the appropriate volume. The two major works, *Constitution According to Social Justice, with an Appendix on the Unity of Italy* (1848) and *Logic* (1854) have not as yet been translated into English. However, Davidson, in 7. above, supplies extensive translated extracts from the *Logic* and the other major works, including those which were published posthumously and are named below. Davidson's book (4) therefore supplies a valuable compendium of and commentary on Rosmini in English, written at a time not long after Rosmini's death and before his 'condemnation' by the Holy Office in 1887.

### Volume 1 of *A New Essay concerning The Origin of Ideas*

It is also appropriate here to review briefly the purpose and content of this volume that was part of Rosmini's first major philosophical work. In it we begin to discern the methodology and the foundation he was to lay down as the corner-stone for the rest of his output.

One of the most significant facts about his philosophy is its claim to clarify and justify Western traditional beliefs about human nature and the human mind. These beliefs, illustrated in the Delphic oracular injunction to 'Know Thyself', in the Christian interpretation of Plato, Aristotle and Neoplatonism, and in a Cartesian confidence in the mind's reflective knowledge (to think and therefore to be), affirmed the human ability to acquire genuine knowledge of humanity, nature and God. In the face of the increasing scepticism and secularisation which followed the Enlightenment, the French revolution and the divisions amongst Christians resulting from the Reformation, Rosmini attempted to re-establish a rational foundation for knowledge which could not suffer the corrosion of radical doubt, nor the fate of subjective relativism.

Philosophy for Rosmini was indeed the love of wisdom, but it had to be based on secure foundations – above all in the sphere of epistemology. At the very beginning of the account of his *Philosophical System* he writes: 'philosophy is the science of ultimate reasons (*ragioni*)' and 'ultimate reasons are the answers which satisfy the last why's put by the human mind to itself' (4). So, as Rosmini investigated the theories of knowledge supplied by other philosophers of the western tradition in volume 1 of his major work on epistemology, it was not lost on him that both the philosophers John Locke and David Hume had begun *their* treatises on human understanding with the question of the origin of ideas.

Having surveyed the history of western philosophy on this question, Rosmini concluded that a correct methodology was vital in obtaining the right answers about epistemology and the origin of ideas. In this he can be seen to be both modern and post-modern, in the best sense of these words. His work is modern in that he learned the lesson of post-

Newtonian science that careful observation of the facts of experience is necessary for access to the truth. But he did not neglect the facts of the *interior* experience of the human spirit and studied well the observations on this made by the medieval philosophers Augustine, Bonaventure and of course Aquinas.

Rosmini was post-modern in the sense that he did not share in the over-confidence of the Enlightenment Project (as Habermas calls it) which believed that the combination of rationalism and empiricism would establish a progress of human beings towards perfection. Rosmini's also correctly anticipated the account of the role of theory (or paradigm) given by later philosophers of science such as Whewell, and more recently by Popper and Kuhn, in the construction of a metaphysical account of reality. He demonstrated that in the mind's ordering of the facts of perception, it always required a lead from a given or chosen theoretical viewpoint.

Here I want to indicate also the methodological principle by which he judged previous philosophies on the origin and nature of ideas. It is a principle which needs to be understood in fact by all students in their research: namely, that the necessary theory used should assume neither too little nor too much in order to explain the observations. And Rosmini identified the two characteristics of simplicity and elegance as those which enable us to judge whether our theoretical approach is respecting the above epistemological method: neither assuming too little nor too much. Thus in Volume 1 of *The New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*, Rosmini used this methodological principle to classify the various schools of philosophy. He placed the philosophers of empiricism, Locke and Hume, as well as the others of the Scottish Enlightenment, Thomas Reid and Dougald Stewart, in the group who had an inadequate theory. Their restriction of the origin of ideas to sense perception did not allow them to acknowledge those characteristics of ideas such as universality and necessity, and hence to provide an adequate epistemological basis for metaphysics. It also led them into confusion about the questions of substance and essence, the roles of knowledge and judgement in the perception of reality, and to an inevitable scepticism about the quality and reliability of

our knowledge of self and world. In all this there was a slide to nominalism and materialism which impoverished the whole of philosophy.

On the other side of erroneous methodology were the philosophers who assumed *too much* in their theory of the origin of ideas. Here Rosmini included Plato (with his theory of multiplicity of Forms), Aristotle, the Rationalists and Kant. All failed the test of simplicity and elegance. Realising that Kant's critical philosophy would be so influential, Rosmini examined Kant's position extensively. While agreeing with Kant's distinction between the formal and the material elements in ideas, he showed that the innate forms and twelve categories were artificial and unnecessary. Most significantly, Rosmini pointed out the mistake of Kant in his analysis of *synthetic, a priori judgements*. Kant placed the source of the formal part of ideas in the human spirit itself, so removing that essential aspect of **objectivity** from any judgement. This rendered inexplicable those aspects of universality and necessity found in all ideas and hence also removed a firm foundation for metaphysics in a manner just as decisively as the sensism of Locke and Hume.

At suitable occasions in this critical analysis, Rosmini indicates how these problems can be overcome by having a theory which only assumes a **single** formal element in the origin of ideas. This elegant and simple theory of the presence of the gift to the human spirit of 'being in its ideal form' was one of Rosmini's key contributions to epistemology. According to Rosmini, the intuition of ideal being in general, i.e. in all its universality, does not emanate from the human mind itself but forms, as the medieval philosophers called it, 'the *light* of reason', as a necessary source and constituent in all ideas or concepts. As explained in more detail in Part 2, it creates as it were, the conceptual space in which all understanding and reasoning takes place.

I mention this here only to dispel some lingering doubts perhaps, that Rosmini was an 'ontologist' or pantheist. He was called both in his lifetime. The *ideal being* that stands before the mind, is not God, but a gift which enables us reflectively to rise to the knowledge of God. It also enables us to see that His attributes of necessity and infinity

transcend those of a contingent, limited universe. So God cannot be confused with the universe, as in pantheism. On the basis of the philosophy in *The New Essay*, his posthumous works (see below) develop a philosophical theology of being which expands our understanding of God's *relationship* with the created universe. Rosmini is therefore also relevant to recent discussion of ideas such as panentheism.

In the remaining volumes of *The New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*, Rosmini sets out in a clear, orderly and analytical way what are the characteristics of this ideal being, which forms as it were the conceptual space for the intellect. I will return to this and other aspects of his philosophy in the context of *Fides et Ratio* in Part 2.

### **Rosmini's Final Eclipse**

Lastly in this part, I come to the major cause of Rosmini's eclipse in the 19th century. After his death several major works were published, including the following. I give the translations of the Italian titles.

1859, 1869 and 1874: *Theosophy*, 5 vols. (incomplete)

1882: *Introduction to the Gospel according to St. John*. (incomplete)

1884: *Supernatural Anthropology*, 3 vols. (incomplete)

Some parts of these were incompletely revised or not fully completed by the author and they played an important role in his eventual downfall. However, in the immediate years following his death a continuous stream of secondary literature began to appear in Italian and French. Also German translations of some of his books were made, as well as those into English by Lockhart (Nos. 1(a), 8 and 10 above) and Davidson (7 above.)

The turbulent history of Catholic church-state relations continued under Pius IX. The Pope became ‘prisoner of the Vatican’ in 1870, which condition lasted until the concordat with Mussolini in 1929. All Rosmini’s worst fears for the decline of Papal influence in Europe were therefore realised. Perhaps caused by the continuing popularity of Rosmini- inspired studies in Italy and the appearance of translations abroad, the last years of Pius IX saw attacks on Rosmini appear again in the Italian press. But the election of Leo XIII in 1878 brought a Pope to the Papal throne who was determined on a new social and religious engagement of the Catholic church with the world. His encyclicals on church-state relations, human liberty and a revival of Thomistic philosophy broke new ground for the Papacy. The detailed history of Vatican influences on Leo during this period has still to be written, but his difficulties in obtaining a universal acceptance for neo-Thomism were indicative of internal struggles in the Vatican. (5)

It is probably not surprising therefore, that fearful of an influence which Rosminian thought might have on this more progressive Pope, moves were made to exclude Rosmini from any further claim to orthodoxy. So, in 1887, ‘Forty Propositions’ of Rosmini (taken mainly from the posthumous works in order not to seem to contravene the *Dimittantur* of Pius IX) were ‘condemned’ in the decree *Post Obitum* by the Holy Office at the Vatican. This edict was confirmed by Leo XIII the following year, despite his knowledge of Rosmini’s part in the recovery of Aquinas’ philosophy and the previous *Dimittantur*. The details of the complicated history of this condemnation have not yet emerged although Belti has supplied a recent critical examination of the events (2). At the conclusion of Part 2 of this paper I comment on the publication in Rome, July 2001, of a *Nota* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning the decrees *Dimittantur* and *Post Obitum*. It is sufficient to note here what the text of the decree *Post Obitum* gave as the reason for the condemnation, namely that the doctrines of Rosmini ‘did not seem consonant with Catholic truth’ rather than because they were erroneous. However, these ‘Propositions’ were then automatically included in Denzinger’s catalogue of heretical teachings used in all Roman Catholic theological teaching institutions. So it is not surprising that Rosmini has remained under a theological cloud until very recently.

It is also a mysterious fact, understandable only *sub specie aeternitatis*, that the Catholic Church under the 19<sup>th</sup> century Popes lost its influence in most of the political and cultural life of Europe, but in other regions its missionary and charitable activities thrived. The Institute of Charity was thus helped to survive, to carry on with its teaching, pastoral and other work around the world. But of course the members of the Institute had to treat the philosophical, theological and other non-spiritual works of their Founder with great circumspection and await the restoration of their Founder's fortunes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **PART 2. Rosmini – His Significance for *Fides et Ratio* and for Contemporary Thought and Culture**

### **The Beginnings of Restoration**

In Part 1 above, I have outlined the story of Rosmini's life and subsequent loss both to the Church and to Europe of his philosophy and influence. In the years following this loss, other philosophers, notably the Austrian, Brentano and later Husserl and Heidegger all showed signs in their philosophy that during their early studies of theology they could have been influenced by Rosminian ideas. I will refer to some comparisons between them and Rosmini later. Although the Institute of Charity had to maintain a low profile on matters philosophical and theological after the 'condemnation' of 1887-8, secondary literature on Rosmini's works continued to be published in Italy, together with some new editions of his books and translations.

In the 1930's an Italian National Edition of his major works began to appear which continued through about 30 volumes until the 1960's. This enabled research on Rosmini to pick up again in the Italian universities, especially in the north of Italy. In Stresa the existence of the extensive Rosminian archives also facilitated the development of this research so that more books appeared and conferences were held on Rosminian themes. The centenary of Rosmini's death in 1955 was the occasion of an international

conference and the President of the Italian Republic, Sig. Gronchi, sent this message to the Father General of the Institute of Charity, Giuseppe Bozzetti:

The name and work of Antonio Rosmini belong to the inheritance of our Risorgimento still preserved by Italians as a vital spiritual reality. From it our national conscience was formed, our free institutions born. Rosmini was a teacher of the principle of liberty, keeping a perfect balance between theory and practice; he also powerfully proclaimed the duties and the rights that freedom needs if it is to flourish.

One of the most original and significant thinkers that Italy and Europe produced in the nineteenth century, Rosmini remained ever faithful to liberty in his philosophic writings, while in his political action, he was always constant to the principle of constitutional government. Besides being a philosopher and a political thinker, he was above all an educator, not only by the example of his life, but also by a penetrating and enlightened understanding of the human heart. Profoundly Catholic, through his intellectual activity, through his personal sanctity which reached sublime heights, he drew the strength to re-state the Christian tradition in an organic system that included the vital claims of modern thought. (6)

But as might be surmised, it was under John XXIII that the revival of Rosmini's reputation began in earnest. Peter Hebblethwaite's biography of Pope John records that in the summer of 1961 at Castel Gandolfo, as he prepared for the Second Vatican Council, the Pope rediscovered Rosmini, transcribing Rosmini's writings into his own Journal. (7)

As a student, in 1905 the future Pope John had met and become friends with Ferrari, the Archbishop of Milan. The latter prelate was regarded by his contemporary, Pope Pius X, as 'dangerous' for reviving Rosmini's ideas of the Church expressed in his book *Five Wounds of the Church*. When he became Pope, John XXIII introduced the cause for Ferrari's beatification. So it is not difficult to see the line of communication between

Rosmini, John XXIII and Vatican II, which subsequently embodied Rosmini's aspiration for a closer link between clergy and laity, and between the liturgy and spoken languages.

The next Pope, Paul VI, had also deepened his knowledge of Rosmini while Archbishop of Milan and when installed in Rome he took as his personal confessor a Rosminian priest from the General's household of the Institute of Charity at Porta Latina. However, it was the Rosminian scholar Don Clemente Riva, appointed Consultor to the Catholic Press by Paul VI at the Second Vatican Council, who established the necessary relationships with Popes John Paul I and II which enabled Rosmini's restoration to grace to begin in earnest. The story of Riva's relationship with John Paul I was providential in the extreme and my account of it given below is drawn from the Rosminian magazine *Witness* (No.7, July 1999).

As a doctoral student at the Lateran University in Rome, Don Riva developed his encyclopaedic knowledge of Rosmini and current affairs. His work during these years culminated in a brilliant defence of his thesis on the *Origin of the Intellective Soul according to Rosmini*. It was a delicate moment because it affirmed, in a hostile environment, the genuine interpretation of Rosmini's thought about nos. 20-24 of the forty propositions condemned by the Holy Office. It was also an answer to a thesis on the same subject, presented at the Gregorian University, in which Fr. Albino Luciani, the future Pope John Paul I, not only upheld the condemnation of these propositions, but declared it irreversible!

However, Don Riva was appointed auxiliary bishop of Rome in 1975 by Paul VI. So, when presenting himself to John Paul I after that Pope's election, Riva confessed to his embarrassment at being assistant bishop to a Pope whose opinion about Rosmini's teachings he did not share. But then days later, during the tragically brief month of his reign, the Pope spoke of Rosmini as

a priest who loved the Church, who suffered for the Church; a man of vast culture, of integral Christian faith, a master of philosophical and moral wisdom who clearly saw the delays as well as the evangelical and pastoral inadequacies of the Church. I want to find an opportunity of speaking about Antonio Rosmini and his work which I have re-read carefully. First, I shall meet the Rosminian Fathers and we shall make peace. When I published my thesis on *The Origin of the Human Soul according to Antonio Rosmini*, some of them did not agree with my thought and my analysis. I want the doctrinal decree *Post Obitum*, with which the Holy Office condemned the forty propositions drawn from Rosmini's works, to be reviewed. We shall do it without haste, but we shall do it. (8)

Afterwards, Riva's duties as an auxiliary bishop of Rome brought him into frequent contact also with John Paul II. In his meetings with the Pope, to whom Rosmini was an unknown figure at the time of Cardinal Wojtyla's election to the papacy, Riva always spoke about Rosmini. The Pope had been a keen student of philosophy and a dedicated lecturer in this subject in Poland. When he began to study Rosmini, he discovered a kindred spirit in the search for truth, and a source upon which he could draw in his desire to restore to philosophy its crucial position in contemporary thought.

### **Fides et Ratio**

So this Pope too set up a commission to privately examine Rosmini's works again. The result this time was that in 1994 the Holy See opened the way towards the beatification of Antonio Rosmini. And in 1998, a year after the bicentenary of Rosmini's birth, in *Fides et Ratio* Pope John Paul specifically mentioned the name of Rosmini amongst those philosophers and theologians which the Church has praised for their valuable work.

A few days after the publication of the encyclical, the Pope sent an address to the General Chapter of the Institute of Charity which was meeting in Rome at that time. Having used the name of Rosmini in the encyclical, it was hardly surprising that in addressing the

Chapter he should write of the place of Rosmini in the Church's teaching on faith and reason. In his letter to the Chapter, John Paul wrote:

Your Founder stands firmly in that great intellectual tradition of Christianity which knows that there is no opposition between faith and reason, but that one demands the other. His was a time when the long process of the separation of faith and reason had reached full term, and the two came to seem mortal enemies. Rosmini, however... knew that faith without reason withers into myth and superstition, and therefore he set about applying his immense gifts of mind not only to theology and spirituality, but to fields as diverse as philosophy, politics, law, education, science, psychology and art, seeing in them no threat to faith but necessary allies... Although very much a man of the nineteenth century, Rosmini transcended his own time and place to become a universal witness whose teaching is still today both relevant and timely.

Revealing as these remarks may be, they do not expose the depth to which Pope John Paul is indebted in his encyclical to the philosophical writings of Rosmini. Anyone who reads carefully the encyclical and who knows the philosophy of Rosmini will realise that the text of 'Faith and Reason' can only be understood in the light of its relationship with Rosmini's works. This may seem an over-ambitious claim to make. Certainly to justify it in detail would need more space than is available here, but in what follows I can indicate in outline how profoundly Rosminian thought inspires and underpins what the Pope writes.

The encyclical is not only a reaffirmation of the teaching of Vatican I and II that there cannot be a division between reason and faith, rationality and revelation; it also insists on the foundational place of philosophy in the human search for the truth.

Like Rosmini before him, the Pope outlines the historical and social causes which have driven an ever-widening rift between faith and reason in the period since the European Enlightenment. In the *Introduction* to the encyclical the Pope specifically mentions

(paras. 5 and 6) that one of these causes has been the fragmentation of philosophy with the consequent loss of its role as a source of wisdom, insight and understanding. He notes the rise of a widespread scepticism about the foundations of philosophy and a loss of confidence in its ability to deal with the challenging questions thrown up by an increasingly complex and technological world; and the decline of philosophy has also weakened the rational status of all religious belief and of the intellectual credibility of theology in general.

In his introduction the Pope therefore sets out the context for all philosophical enquiry in words which are very reminiscent of Rosmini. He says:

Driven by the desire to discover the ultimate truth of existence, human beings seek to acquire those universal elements of knowledge which enable them to understand themselves better and to advance in their own self-realisation..... Although times change and knowledge increases ..... it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole. (9)

He then begins to spell out the nature of this core insight and its relation to rationality. And he does so in words which are distinctive in relation to the foundation which Rosmini finds for philosophy in the intuition of being. For example the Pope refers to ‘the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject with the capacity to know God, truth and goodness.’ And again, ‘Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the **first universal principles of being** and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called **right reason** or **orthos logos**’. (10)

Continuing in this section, John Paul says that the use of right reason therefore implies

the need for a philosophy of genuinely metaphysical range, capable that is of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and

foundational in the search for the Truth. .... The greatest challenge at the end of this millennium is to move from phenomenon to foundation. Speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises .... since .... the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being and hence with metaphysical enquiry.

However, perhaps the most significant paragraph in the encyclical in its relation to Rosminian philosophy is no. 66, where the Pope stresses that

Without philosophy's contribution, it would in fact be impossible to discuss theological issues such as for example, the use of language to speak about God, the personal relations within the Trinity, God's creative activity in the world, the relationship between God and man, or Christ's identity as true God and true man. .... Speculative dogmatic theology presupposes and **implies a philosophy of the human being, the world and more radically of being, which has objective truth as its foundation.** (11)

Now it is clear that the Pope would not (could not!) make such claims for philosophy or theology if he did not know that the resources for making them already existed. In fact, much of what he says is redolent of the philosophy of Antonio Rosmini, which is why he gives Rosmini a specific mention in his encyclical. And he also is aware that there will be no contradiction between the Rosminian philosophy and that of Thomism, since as related in Part 1, Rosmini played a decisive role in the recovery of Thomistic studies. Pope John Paul knows also that there was no greater champion than Rosmini for upholding the Christian tradition of the integration of philosophy and religion, as found in the writings of Augustine, Aquinas and Bonaventure, each of whom Rosmini quotes at length in his books.

## **Rosmini and philosophical foundations**

So, what is it about the Rosminian philosophy that fulfils the task the Pope requires of it?

Let me gather together the required elements:

- (i) What is the basis of the metaphysical claim that we can ‘stand back’ from our own contingency and finiteness and come to know universal truth? How do we escape the ideologies, the ‘metanarratives’ to which Lyotard refers as the basic fear of post-modern philosophers, or the Wittgensteinian ‘forms of life’, and so be enabled to ‘Live in the Truth,’ according to Václav Havel’s famous phrase.
- (ii) What is the origin of those basic ‘Principles of Reason’ to which the Pope refers, such as non-contradiction, causality, etc., which are essential to the critical rational processes of our thinking? Aristotle did not attempt to explain their origin. Can Rosmini?
- (iii) How are these related to a philosophy of being and what is the distinctive nature and function of epistemology and metaphysics?
- (iv) How do we **evaluate** different aspects of the truth?
- (v) How does this transcendence of our finite reasoning power give us knowledge of a transcendent real Being who is God?

And finally,

- (vi) What are the qualities of such knowledge of God and how are they related to revelation and to faith?

In response to these questions, one can summarise the genius of Rosmini by saying that in *A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas* he showed that the intuition of ideal being contained not only an open horizon of infinite possibility for questioning and change, but also characteristics of objectivity, necessity and unity which supply the critical powers and logic of our rationality. This gift which is the origin of our intellect and ‘light of reason’ is also therefore the source and guarantee of our ability to ‘stand back’ from the limitations of subjectivity, to make evaluative judgements which have a core of objectivity and universality, and even rise to a true but negative knowledge of the transcendent God.

In a much clearer way than Heidegger for example, Rosmini sees the intuition of indefinite, ideal being ('general being', as Heidegger calls it) as the source of the human intellectual faculty. It does not arise from the human subject itself, who remains finite, limited and contingent, but who through ideal being **gains access** to the transcendent. It is like the plane of the blackboard upon which a teacher is able to express and communicate her or his thoughts. It must not have any marks on it of its own to begin with, but be a plane of all possibility. Otherwise it would form only the basis of a 'metanarrative' or ideology which elevates part of the truth to the status of the whole. So ideal being forms the *open* intellectual space for and the substratum of our concepts. A remarkable current illustration of this occurs in the feature film (movie) *Pay It Forward* (Warner Brothers, 2000). The teacher of a new 7<sup>th</sup> Grade class of 11-year-olds sets them a project for the coming year. He writes it on the blackboard as: 'Think of an idea to change the world and then put it into practice.' When they complain that it is too hard, he says "maybe, but how about *possible!*". He points out that the realm of possibility exists in their heads, where it can atrophy, or be the means of surprising the world. And so the story of the film begins.

Rosmini explores the presence and characteristics of our intuition of indefinite being in two ways. Firstly, he shows that the process of abstraction of particular features from existing concepts leaves the most general concept (that of 'something') remaining in the mind. Abstract from this idea of 'something' and one is left only with the pure possibility of forming any concept, which is the intuition of being standing before the mind. (One can try this for oneself, starting with any definite concept like 'house'. One can then begin to take away from it mentally its specific characteristics like 'building', then 'structure', etc. What is left in the end is only the idea of 'something').

Secondly, Rosmini demonstrates the innate presence of this indeterminate, ideal being by analysis of the cognitive processes of reason and understanding. He shows that this *intuition* is the basis of the so-called 'Principles of Reason' which have their universal validity for all rational beings in the objectivity of this intuition of being. But here it should be carefully noted that the processes of abstraction and analysis of such Principles

is **reflective** and serves only to bring the role of the intuition of being to conscious awareness. This is quite different from the non-reflective, direct action of the intuition which is spontaneously, unconsciously and necessarily involved in every intellectual function and all reasoning. Thus the child's use of the questioning 'Why?' presupposes the rational use of causality, without the child having reflectively established the principle of cause and effect, or having *reflective* knowledge of its use.

### **Ideal Being and Its Characteristics**

Rosmini identifies and examines the characteristics of this intuited indeterminate being, along with its role in forming the principles of reason, in Vol. II of *A New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*, as follows:

1. **Objectivity.** Thought is always about something, about some object, ideal or real. This corresponds to the scholastic and modern concept of the 'intentionality' of thought and language. It appears in both modern western philosophical schools e.g. in John Searle, representing analytical philosophy, and for example in the Continental philosophers, Brentano, Husserl and Gadamer. Rosmini emphasises that this ideal, indeterminate being is the one presence in the mind which is known intuitively and *directly*, i.e. not by means of a judgement, which is necessary for the formation of all other subsequent ideas. It makes reason possible and was therefore known in the medieval tradition as 'the light of reason', from Augustine to Bonaventure. Rosmini also stresses that as object, standing before the mind as the basis of reason, ideal being is 'other' than us, who form concepts by means of it. Hence Buber, Husserl and Levinas all correctly relate the concept of 'the other' to a dimension which transcends the limitations of finite, contingent beings.

Our idea of 'the other' therefore arises from something that transcends the particularity of race or culture or gender. It is something all intelligent beings will share and so becomes a vital element in our bridge to cross to things that we feel to be foreign or alien to us. To be able to 'stand back' from our feelings and socially constructed attitudes, from even

our genetic limitations, is a philosophical vision of the true freedom of the human being which Rosmini establishes for us in a particularly secure and reassuring way. The property of objectivity in ideal being gives rise to our ability to be reflective, i.e. to be able to turn our thoughts on to our own perceptions and ideas. We are subject, the intuition of being is object, and the source whereby we can have this reflective quality of thought and make evaluative judgements in terms of both the subjective and the objective. Our ideas therefore always retain something of this participation in ideal being, and this objectivity is our road to discovering the truth.

Here it is vital to make the distinction between our reflection on the **processes** of our reasoning and **what we reason about, i.e. the ideas themselves**. As Rosmini points out in Vol. III of *A New Essay Concerning the Origin of Ideas*, the lack of such a distinction has bedevilled European thought since Fichte confused reflective thought about the self with the self itself, and so came to make the absurd claim that ‘the self posits itself’! It is also the problem which Husserl would later take up in establishing the philosophical movement which became known as *Phenomenology*.

Both the traditional hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey and the later development by Gadamer suffer from an inability to escape securely from the hermeneutic circle of the relation of the parts to the whole. Only when we follow Rosmini to an understanding that the intuition of being supplies us with the ultimate holistic context, in which all parts are implicitly contained, is this difficulty overcome. Likewise, post-modern analysis confuses reflection with reflexivity and an inevitable relativism results.

2. **Possibility**. The idea of anything, Rosmini points out, in so far as it is not self-contradictory, is termed its *logical possibility*. As explained above, abstraction of contingent elements from any idea (e.g. *house*) leaves the idea of *something* remaining in the mind. Conversely, starting from the notion of *something* (which is still intelligible since we understand the injunction to ‘think of something’) we can add particular features until we arrive at a specific idea (e.g. that of *house*). The idea of *something*

therefore has the possibility of subsequent *determination* and this characteristic is found to inhere in the intuition of being since it itself is the possibility of forming any idea, even that of *something*. Possibility, therefore should always be considered as the possibility of something, as we cannot think the possibility of nothing.

Because of misunderstandings expressed about this characteristic of ideal being, in his *Philosophical System* (4) Rosmini is at pains to point out that this aspect of being is not to be considered as a 'mere possibility'. Rather it is a true essence capable of being determined as genus, species or as an idea of an individual. He also develops at length the difference between ideas and things which exist in reality. He uses the word 'subsist' to emphasise the nature of this latter form of existence or *mode* of being. *Real beings* only become known by us as subsisting when we join the sense-perception of something *felt* with the idea of existence (being) and make the judgement that they really exist, i.e. subsist.

However, the profound significance of this characteristic of *possibility*, inherent in the intuition of being, is only made clear by an understanding of its role in forming the nature of the human intellect. The aspect of *possibility* in ideal being shows us the basis of the ability of the human spirit to escape from the false limitations which ideologies, hegemonies, and political or social constructions would seek to impose on us. We are able to discern that there exist possibilities **different from** and outside these structures, and here lies the source of freedom which is the basis of all questioning and the search for the truth. In Heidegger's phrase, 'Questioning is the piety of thought'. Václav Havel has also described this ability to question and even to resist heroically an ideological and repressive regime in his book *Living in Truth*.

Other modern philosophers have also recognised this characteristic of possibility, which is the mode of existence of concepts. One of these was Kierkegaard who died in the same year as Rosmini. They jointly provide the most formidable criticism in European thought of Hegel's historicism and progress to the Absolute Idea. Heidegger too, tells that the one lasting philosophical legacy which he took from Husserl was the understanding that *possibility* was the defining characteristic of all ideas. It is therefore a most potent

concept. One should look out for the significance of the corresponding word in all languages and different kinds of texts and contexts!

3. **Necessity and Universality.** These characteristics are discerned by the further analysis of the concept of *possibility*. What is recognised as *logically* possible, i.e. containing nothing contradictory, must of necessity remain so. What is possible in thought is always necessarily so. But the processes of thought must be clearly distinguished from those of the imagination. The former are infinite in possibility, but the latter are limited to what has been provided by sense-experience. Rosmini points out that the inappropriate use of the imagination in dealing with epistemological questions often leads to serious errors. When applied in the formation of other concepts from analysis of the idea of being itself (*a priori*) or from the use of sense perception as well to form the ideas of subsisting things (*a posteriori*), this characteristic of **necessity** in ideal being is the basis of the Principle of Non-contradiction. When we try to put contradictory elements together in a single idea we see and feel the necessary force of the contradiction. Our idea of necessity, so important for a natural theology of God, therefore arises from the intuition of being by way of its characteristic of possibility.

Rosmini shows that the other Principles of Reason, namely Cognition, Cause and Substance, etc., also depend on the application of the idea of Being. They take the form of judgements put into the form of a proposition; for example the Principle of Substance, (*accidents cannot be thought without a substance*) and of Cause (*a new entity cannot be thought without a cause*). These first judgements are then **principles**, which enable others to be deduced from them, and this process of deduction is called *reasoning*. So, for example the **idea of justice** becomes the *principle* of ethics when we reason and systematise its applications. These principles derive their **universality** from the objectivity, possibility and necessity of ideal being in that it is the foundation of all ideas. Only with such a foundation can the principles such as that of justice (as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) be established as *universal* principles which are not constrained and limited by the particularities of place or culture or religious belief.

Continuing, with Rosmini, the analysis of the characteristics of the idea of being, we find:

4. Ideas are therefore **immutable** (because of their necessity) **and infinite** (in that any idea can be applied to an infinite number of appropriate real, subsistent beings).
5. **Simplicity** (not extended or having parts).
6. **Unity** (ideal being implicitly contains as possibility **all** concepts).
7. It is **indeterminate** (capable of being united in human sense perception to feeling and therefore of becoming determined and so giving rise to the intellectual perception of real objects and the formation of ideas of them).

### **The Intuition of Being and the Ground of Ethics**

Knowing things in themselves also enables us to love and evaluate them objectively as good. Rosmini, in his *Principles of Ethics*, can therefore supply a basis for our ethics which rejects a relativism in our moral values. This is in contrast to the social construction of ethics which is often found in the work of contemporary philosophers, for example Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor.

### **Truth and Certainty**

Truth for Rosmini has an intimate relationship with our intuition of being as the source of objectivity in our knowledge. Ideal being, as knowable and understandable in itself, is **truth** and as John Paul emphasises above, we find fulfilment of our rational nature in following it. When therefore we seek the truth in some particular situation we have a principle or exemplar of truth which informs our rational enquiry. Truth can then also be seen as the Principle of Philosophy itself in its search for wisdom.

Rosmini's investigation of the nature of certainty and the sources of scepticism also depends on his understanding of the nature of truth. He investigates these in Vol. III of *A New Essay*. He defines certainty in a remarkably modern way. Certainty arises, he says, as a 'firm and reasonable persuasion that conforms to the truth'. Truth, as a quality of

knowledge, is 'being as understood' and so is the ultimate source of our understanding and rationality. It can be seen as having the three aspects: **correspondence** (involving objective intellectual perception of the real); of **coherence** (in principles of thought and the lawfulness of reality); but also of **openness** to all possibility, which as seen above is provided by the characteristics of ideal being.

As the Pope points out in *Fides et Ratio*, contemporary philosophy has largely given up on the search for foundations – it often refers to the lack of an *Archimedean Point* or a *God's Eye View* available to human knowledge. Both in Husserl's phenomenology and in analytical philosophy one finds a confusion between truth and certainty. This is an inevitable source of scepticism concerning the validity of epistemology and the foundation of knowledge. Rosmini's pages on these topics (paragraphs 1044 to 1157 in Vol. III of the *New Essay concerning the Origin of Ideas*) are a superb clarification of the relationship between knowledge, truth and certainty, and an antidote to modern scepticism.

Rosmini analyses the sources of scepticism, which insists that our ideas are founded on illusion or on an infinite chain of reasoning, so that we have no firm foundation for knowledge. He replies that neither claim can undermine the foundation of our intellect which is the light of being as understood in itself. Its presence in the mind cannot be claimed to be illusion since that would be contradicted by this very claim to be the truth! When being is recognised as the *foundation* of all knowledge it is also seen to be the principle (the Truth) by which all propositions (or ideas) are ultimately judged as true or false. Rosmini points out that in this grasp of an *ultimate* reason, knowledge, truth and certainty come together – we realise that we cannot be threatened by scepticism since we possess a knowledge (of being) that reasonably and necessarily persuades us of its certainty, but at the same time leaves us free to explore its infinite possibility. He emphasises that scepticism results only when we are not satisfied with the truth but seek some *further* justification, so placing certainty beyond truth. This is a deception since being, as Truth, is the ultimate principle of all critical enquiry.

## **Real Being. The Body, the Senses and the Soul**

Rosmini's philosophy and psychology of human feeling, self and person is almost as fundamental and far reaching as his treatment of ideal being. These he develops in Vol. II of his *New Essay*, in the *Anthropology as an Aid to Moral Science* and in the *Psychology*. Here we engage with the **real** as opposed to the ideal. According to Rosmini, we experience real being through feeling. We all have a feeling of ourselves, of personal experience individually our own. For Rosmini, this stems from what he calls the *fundamental feeling* of our own body of which we are usually only dimly aware, but which we can have conscious access to by careful attention, meditation and reflection. Rosmini shows, or rather directs our attention to the fact, that the fundamental feeling of our own body also provides us with a sense of space, and the richness of the possibility of bodily *movement* into the felt space around us, and so of our subjective awareness of time.

Sensations are also feelings but these are not constant in time but vary according to the particular sensory inputs from our sense organs. However, Rosmini points out that they are unified into our sensory experience since they are in fact all modifications of the underlying *fundamental feeling* of our body. He continues by noting that in sensations there are always **two** components which can be distinguished. One is the **subjective feeling** of touch, taste, etc., as we the subject of the feeling are changed by the sensory input; the other is the sense-perception of the stimulus and cause of the sensation. The latter Rosmini calls the **extrasubjective** part of the sensation.

This analysis of bodily feeling and sensation is one of the most important made in his philosophy, since it allows us to understand correctly how we perceive the world as external to ourselves. It is essential in the elucidation of the so-called 'mind-body' problem, the nub of which is the apparent opposition between mind and body as expressed by Descartes. Rosmini expands on this in Vol. I of the *Psychology*. Here I note that his distinction between the subjective and the extrasubjective allows us to recognise the equal reality of both. The extrasubjective includes the phenomenological, scientific

field of experience in which we seek to discover the laws which govern reality. A scientific investigation is a necessary part of our account of reality but not an exclusive or sufficient one – the subjective aspect, as Rosmini shows, is equally real. This distinction is therefore very relevant to current scientific and philosophical discussion of human consciousness. I further indicate below how this account of ideal and real being allows him to formulate a correct and adequate basis for metaphysics, as required of philosophy in *Fides et Ratio*.

Rosmini's account of sentient beings (given in particular in the *Anthropology*) proposes that they have a *soul* which is constituted by a feeling that terminates in a felt body and in unshaped spatial extension. His definition of the human soul is 'an intellective and sensitive subject or principle, having by nature the intuition of being and a feeling whose term is extended (the body), besides certain activities consequent on intelligence and sensitivity'. Rosmini's exploration of the feeling-felt relationship in the *Anthropology* and *Psychology* is still an unsurpassed investigation of phenomenology going far beyond that of Merleau-Ponty or Heidegger. It enables him to make the vital distinctions between self, ego and person; and to give a profound examination of our spirituality and the nature of the human soul, which is so lacking to philosophers and theologians today.

A number of other remarkable attributes of humans then become more understandable. For example, in Rosmini's observation of the 'fundamental feeling' of our own body we find a basis for the unitary nature of separate sensory experiences as seen in the phenomena of synesthesia, where colours are associated with sounds or tastes, etc. But perhaps the most striking of these spatial attributes is the 'out-of-body' or 'near death' experience. As medical resuscitation techniques have improved, these 'near death' experiences have been reported with increasing frequency. Rosmini proposes that the one aspect of bodily experience which will remain after death is a sense of space. In the reports of these out-of-body, near-death experiences, a consistent feature is their spatial quality, sometimes remarkably similar to the 'tunnel of light' as depicted in the 15<sup>th</sup> century painting by Hieronymous Bosch of *The Entry of the Blessed into Heaven*.

## Epistemology, Metaphysics and God

Rosmini's paradigm of rationality and feeling allows him to clarify the distinction between epistemology and metaphysics, particularly as regards our concepts of reality and its development in the sciences and in theology. His short treatise *Preface to the Metaphysical Works* (which is inserted at the beginning Vol. I of *Psychology*) should be part of our essential reading in today's uncertain climate of understanding in the relationship between science, philosophy and theology.

Rosmini points out that the historical progress of philosophy has enabled it to clarify that part which deals with the sciences of **ideal** being, i.e. epistemology and logic. These should therefore be clearly distinguished from **metaphysics** which can then be seen to deal with a group of sciences treating philosophically of the theory of **real** beings (psychology, cosmology, and natural theology). As we have seen, philosophy according to Rosmini is the search for ultimate foundations or reasons, because it looks for unity and universality. Science, as Stephen Hawking reminds us in *A Brief History of Time*, can ask 'how' questions but not 'why?' Metaphysics is therefore distinct from the physical and biological sciences since these consider corporeal, real being via investigation of their phenomena, efficient causality and laws. Metaphysics in contrast studies not 'pure reality' separated from the idea but rather its ultimate foundations and final causes. As noted above, real objects become objects of knowledge only via their relation with and in ideas. Bare reality is only perceived by feeling and cannot be perceived directly by the intelligence, i.e. is not in itself an object of knowledge. The understanding always terminates in ideas even when directed towards real things.

Since the first principle of real being requires an absolute being, containing the ground of all being, then metaphysics requires a treatment of this being too and this is usually called **Natural Theology**. So metaphysics can also be seen to divide into two parts:

(a) '**Ontology**', which treats of being as such, both contingent and necessary, (as Rosmini does in the *Theosophy* and *Supernatural Anthropology*) and (b) '**Natural Theology**' (which treats of the Supreme Being, or God, by ideal-negative reasoning).

Looking at the theological implications of his philosophy, we can see that the ‘otherness of being’ includes the concept of the otherness of God. We are able to have a rich concept of this transcendent Being because all the characteristics of ideal being, that is of necessity, infinity, etc., (which we saw above form the ground of our understanding and rationality) are the ones which we ascribe also to God, only now as applied to a real Being. Rosmini is clear and explicit however, that such knowledge is ‘negative knowledge’, as the traditional theology had described it, but is nevertheless true for all that. He explains that the idea of God we have in this life we possess through our understanding of the relationship between cause and effect, the limited and unlimited, the imperfect and perfect, and so on. However, our human nature, consisting of both the intellectual and the real, does not allow us to be satisfied with the idea of a supreme Being that cannot be experienced as real. Rosmini writes:

We have an essential profound need within us, the first need of human nature, which continually prompts us to desire a full, positive idea of God. We want to perceive him, to have a direct vision of him. But such longings of nature cannot be entirely satisfied here on earth. Incapable of perceiving God Himself by natural means we have recourse to analogies of Him, the best of which we find in intelligent spirits such as the human soul. We bring these analogies together and from them compose the concept as well as we can. This explains why religions themselves have recourse to symbols, a necessary supplement for the positive, beatifying idea of God which we lack here on earth, but to which we aspire unendingly without knowing it. .... The symbols we have of God do not give us therefore any perception of the divine essence. These likenesses and symbols possess nothing more than a distant analogy with God. (12)

.....when we speak of God we are talking of one who has relationships with real things, with feelings and with ideas.... With *real things*, he has the relationship of cause. We know this because we know the effects of God, as we call this thing unknown to us. It is true that the effects do not reveal the cause itself, which remains veiled, as it were. But it is also true that these effects are so proper to this

cause that they are impossible to any other..... With *feelings*, God has the relationship of *supreme good*. We continually desire a happiness of which we have only a universal notion. In the same way we desire the hidden being whose possession forms happiness. With *ideas* God has the relationship of *being which is per se intelligible*. (13)

However, our philosophical, rational but negative knowledge of God can be combined with the knowledge of God which comes with revelation. Of course Christians also believe in and experience the faith and grace which flows from God Himself, so producing a real relationship with Him which is as complete as is possible in this life. As Rosmini continues:

“We can however meditate [on the philosophical knowledge of God] which is entirely made up of certain relationships between God and creatures..... All that reflection can discover about God consists not in reducing symbols to conceptions, but in developing the negative part of the idea of God. Here symbols can be discarded altogether. The negative part, in fact, consists in the *relationships* between God and ourselves....

This object [God] does not cease to be religious, and become merely philosophical, as soon as we turn our reflection upon it. Philosophy has no power to denature things by occupying itself with them; the God of philosophers is not less God, and the object of the intelligent soul’s worship is not less the object of worship when the soul applies its most noble part, its own intellectual activity, to such an object. The systematic division between philosophy and religion is false. Religion embraces the whole of God, and philosophy that part which is worked out with reasoning.... St. Thomas’ sublime treatises on God did not cease to be religious despite the wonder of its depth of thought and the acumen of its reflection, nor was it ever considered other than theology. (14)

## Conclusion

Rosmini writes with an admirable clarity and focus which is consistent with modern analytical thought, but he is also meticulous in not permitting the part to be mistaken for the whole or the necessary for the sufficient, as so often is the case in contemporary philosophy and science. But above all he stands the test of relevance to our current difficulties, whether these are over understanding our soul, our self, consciousness, truth, certainty, the basis of ethics or religious belief, hermeneutics, providence, or the Triune God. In the pages above I have endeavoured to indicate the ways in which his writing fulfils these characteristics and so provides the secure foundations for philosophy to which Pope John Paul II points in *Fides et Ratio*.

In March 2000 Cardinal Ratzinger spoke of the Pope's continuing initiative on reconciliation with those who have been offended by the Church's past injustices and sins. He included in his remarks reference to the prophetic warnings expressed in the sacred text of the *Apocalypse*, necessary at all times for the local churches and the Universal Church. 'This type of prophetic admonition' he said, 'which is an awareness of our being sinners, this too occurs in the history of the Church. We could think ..... in times nearer our own, of Rosmini's *Five Wounds of the Church*.' (15)

On 1 July 2001 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published in Rome a *Nota* on the 'doctrinal decrees concerning the thought and works' of Antonio Rosmini. (16) It was signed by Cardinal Ratzinger (Prefect to the Congregation) and Bishop Tarcisio Bertone (Secretary) and contained a concluding paragraph indicating that it was issued with the approval and on the instruction of Pope John Paul II. This 'Note' immediately occasioned a great deal of comment, including articles in the *Osservatore Romano* and in *The Tablet*. It is significant that nowhere is any link made in the 'Note' between the move to repentance for past injustices (instigated by Pope John Paul) and its considerations of the decree *Post Obitum* of 1887. However the 'Note' is of considerable import both for the cause for the beatification of Rosmini and for the orthodoxy of Rosmini's teaching and works.

There are many observations which could be made on the details of the *Nota*, especially concerning the relationship between the decrees *Dimittantur* of 1854 and *Post Obitum* of 1887, and also between the neo-Thomism of Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* and the influence of Thomas Aquinas in the works of Rosmini. I have stressed above the positive connection between Aquinas and Rosmini. Here I will simply add that the 'Note' clearly states: '..... it must be recognised that extensive, serious and rigorous scientific literature on Antonio Rosmini's thought has been developed in the Catholic field by theologians and philosophers of various schools of thought, and this has shown that interpretations contrary to faith and Catholic doctrine do not correspond in reality with Rosmini's genuine position.' Further, it concludes that 'the meaning of the [forty] propositions, as understood and condemned by the Decree [*Post Obitum*] does not in fact pertain to Rosmini's genuine position but to possible conclusions from the reading of his works.'

These pronouncements of the Congregation are clearly sufficient to remove all suspicion within the Church of possible heterodoxy on the part of Rosmini himself. It is certainly in accord with the sentiments expressed by John Paul II in his letter to the General Chapter of the Institute of Charity quoted above (p. 21) and in *Fides et Ratio*, where the Pope numbers Rosmini amongst those whose works are considered to be 'significant examples of a process of philosophical enquiry which was enriched by engaging the data of faith.' (17)

It is therefore with some confidence that we can now look forward to an era in which Rosmini will be recognised as providing the necessary foundations for philosophy as required in *Fides et Ratio*. As his works become more widely read they will be seen as a guide to solving some of the most pressing current difficulties for philosophy, society and religious belief. In the wisdom of Rosmini's teaching will be found an invitation to explore more deeply the human condition and the richness of its possibilities both in this life and the next. For it echoes the words of his Master, 'I am come that they may have life and have it more abundantly'.

## Notes and References

1. This article is based on the text of two lectures given in April 2000 at the diocesan seminary of St. John, S'Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands. The lectures were given at the instigation of Professor Wil Derkse, director of Radboudstichting.
2. R Bessero-Belti, *La Questione Rosminiana*, Stresa, Edizioni Rosminiane Sodalitas, 1988. ET, *The Rosminian Question* (translated by John Morris and available from Rosmini House, Durham, DH1 5DR, UK).
3. Terence P Watson, *From Constitution to Rule. A Brief History of the Approval of the Institute of Charity*, Durham, Rosmini House, 2000.
4. *The Philosophical System of Antonio Rosmini-Serbati*, translated by Thomas Davidson, London, Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1882, pp. 1 and 4.
5. D A Boileau, *Cardinal Mercier: A Memoir*, Louvain and Paris, Peeters, 1996.
6. Quoted in Claude Leetham, *Rosmini – Priest, Philosopher and Patriot*, Baltimore, Helicon Press, 1958, pp. xiii - xiv.
7. Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII - Pope of the Council*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1984, p. 53.
8. Camillo Bassotto, *Il Mio Cuore È Ancora a Venezia*, Venezia, 1990, p.131. ET, *Witness*, No. 7, 1999.
9. *Fides et Ratio*, paragraph 4. ET, *Faith and Reason*, London, The Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, 1998.
10. *Ibid.*, para. 83
11. *Ibid.*, para. 66
12. Antonio Rosmini, *A New Essay Concerning the Origin of Ideas*, Vol. III, Durham, Rosmini House, 2001, para.1238.
13. *Ibid.*, para. 1239
14. *Ibid.*, Appendix 9
15. *Osservatore Romano*, Rome, 9 March 2000.
16. *Nota della Congregazione per la dottrina della fede sul valore dei decreti dottrinali concernenti il pensiero e le opere del Rev. Do Sacerdote Antonio*

*Rosmini Serbati*, Roma, dalla sede della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, il 1 luglio 2001.

### **Bibliography**

1. Further historical details of Rosmini's life can be found in ref. 6 above. This also contains a bibliography to 1995 and a full list of his works, pp. 483-496.
2. An introductory account of Rosmini and summaries of the principal themes in all the major works can also be found in: Denis Cleary, *Antonio Rosmini: An Introduction to His Life and Teaching*, Durham, Rosmini House, 1992.
3. A complete catalogue of the published primary and secondary literature currently available is supplied in *Edizioni Rosminiane*, from Centro Internazionale di Studi Rosminiani, Corso Umberto I 15, 28049 Stresa (VB), Italy.