In Search of a Contemporary World View: Contrasting Thomistic and Whiteheadian Approaches

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Papal Infallibility – a Flat Locus. From a Thomistic Position of Ecclesial Independence Towards a Whiteheadian Interpretation as Locus Theologicus Alienus

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Abstract: Thomism which traditionally backed Papal Infallibility creates a special Catholic locus theologicus proprius out of this dogma which depends on a positive straight line between God and men. But in looking into the inevitable spatial aspect of the doctrine, the necessity of Papal Infallibility to teach ex cathedra, the straight line turns into a relative flat locus which depends on processes independent of it. By this topology provided by Whitehead’s Process Philosophy Papal Infallibility turns into a locus theologicus alienus coherent with the philosophical backing of the doctrine.

Keywords: Alfred North Whitehead, Melchior Cano, Papal Infallibility, Thomism, Relativity, loci theologici, topology in theology

Introduction

In referring to history, to historical developments or to the realities located in the past which have implications for the present or which have an ongoing importance for the present, it is helpful to make a distinction between origin and derivation. It is especially helpful if one deals with discourses about the inner relation between present and past. In such discourses one needs to create points to refer to the past and these points are not simply past realities. They constitute a discursive agenda and not lines from past to present.¹ This difference of origin and derivation is helpful to relate Thomas Aquinas and Thomism to each other without the need to imply that Thomism is the only true voice of Thomas Aquinas. Within Catholic Theology, this difference opens alternative perspectives to a major problem in defining faith-claims, namely, Papal Infallibility. But first, I have to show, that Nietzsche’s distinction about origin and derivation in history is really helpful for understanding the relation of Thomism and Thomas.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche used the difference between ‘Ursprung’ and ‘Herkunft’ to present his project of ‘genealogy’ (Nietzsche, “Zur Genealogie der Moral”, 258-264). In 1971, Michel Foucault used that to present the importance of discourse for knowledge as the “real history” of that what is presented as historical facts (cf. Foucault, “Nietzsche, die Genealogie, die Historie”, 180). In this difference a distinction of ‘process’ and ‘time’ can be found but it is not discussed by Nietzsche or by Foucault. Yet, it is hidden behind their approach towards history, discourse and the relativity of history to real discourses.

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Strictly speaking, Thomas Aquinas is not part of Thomism since this intellectual enterprise started almost two hundred years later in a coherent manner. Yet Thomas is obviously an important reason for Thomism. Is Thomas its origin or is Thomism derived from Thomas? One can find the answer by the claim in Thomism that most of its arguments result from Thomas’s philosophy and theology. So, Thomas is a ‘sedis argumentorum’ for Thomism, i.e. a reference point for finding arguments. The term ‘sedis argumentorum’ came up in the 15th century to make clear that one has to search for arguments; they are not simply there out of the blue. The idea behind it was that each scientific approach has its foundation where one finds arguments which have been proven to be valid and which one does not have to reinvent again. These arguments are so called ‘loci proprii’, i.e. reliable sources for one’s own argumentation. In this way, Thomism deals with Thomas Aquinas. He is a locus proprius for the intellectuality of Thomism. This means that in Thomism one can find discourses about Thomas’ philosophy and theology which simply cannot be Thomas’ own philosophy or theology because they are instead reference points. This means at the same time that Thomas is not the cause of Thomism in the sense that he is its origin (“Ursprung”). He is nothing more than the discursive reason behind this intellectual development. Only for that reason Thomism was able to claim at all to bring Thomas into a position beyond his medieval context directly into modernity in order to solve the Church’s problems with modernity and the modern ‘Zeitgeist’. One may say that Thomism is derived from Thomas and that the intellectual prospects of Thomism have a derivation (“Herkunft”) in Thomas, especially in Thomas’s importance for Catholic Theology.

Being a locus proprius means that there is not a timeline from Thomas to Thomism but a discursive line. This distinction is important. The Thomistic discursive line had an impact on ecclesial restauration for most of its tradition but it also had an important impact on the process of modernizing Catholic Theology. One can see that in theological centers of higher education run especially by Dominicans and Jesuits. And one can see it in the fight for identifying Thomism with Thomas which played an important role for internationalizing Catholic Theology. For that reason, the derivation of Thomism from Thomas presents much more than simply an important part in the intellectual history of Catholicism. It gives a hint how religious identities are shaped by intellectual claims to bring in ancient philosophies and theologies right into a contemporary context.

The timeline from Thomas to Thomism which takes their interrelation for granted is simply a construction which is in danger of hiding the discursive reasons behind it. Here Whitehead enters the picture. His philosophy can open a door to the hiddenness of the discursive reasons of Thomism. Whitehead is helpful because his philosophy makes a distinction between time and process. They are not simply the same although they are very much related to each other. For Whitehead, process is not time but a sort of general trajectory by which to relate to time and to get access to the timeline. Processes do become while times are changing. For each process, other processes have an actual meaning since they are taken up by

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2 Joseph Kleutgen called this constellation “Vorzeit”. See his famous pro gram in Kleutgen, Die Philosophie der Vorzeit. He claims that all philosophical aberrations from the ‘Vorzeit’, especially from the principles of scholasticism, originated in Protestantism (“hatten sich auf dem Boden des Protestantismus gebildet”, 11) because they didn’t take seriously enough the close relation of philosophy with theology as proclaimed by the Church: “Sie hätten aus dem einigem Zusammenhang der Philosophie mit der Theologie schließen müssen, daß die in der Kirche seit Jahrhunderten, ja von den ersten Zeiten des Christentums anerkannte Speculation einer wahren Grundlage nicht entbehren, daß sie zwar unvollständig, aber wenigstens in den wichtigeren Fragen nicht irrig sein, daß auch eine richtige Kritik des Erkenntnisvermögens mit dieser kirchlichen Speculation nicht in Widerstreit gerathen können.” (p. 15) ‘Vorzeit’ is a sort of philosophy which is more or less identical with speculative theology. This means that the doctrinal capabilities of the Church are not restricted to matters of faith but must be extended also to philosophy. In support of this ‘Vorzeit’-program Kleutgen claims the Salmantine theologian Melchior Cano and his idea for the so called ‘loci theologici’ (see 14s) because they give the true philosophical principles, the places where theology will find the arguments it needs to be part of the ‘Vor zeit’. We will see later that this is a grave misrepresentation – even a contradiction – to Cano’s program of ‘loci theologici’.

3 See Füllenbach, “Die Dominikaner zwischen Thomismus und Modernismusverdacht” and Walter, “Den Weltkreis täglich von Verderben bringenden Irrtümern befreien” (Leo XIII.).

4 One can see that in the constructions by Berger, In der Schule des hl. Thomas von Aquin and his Thomistenlexikon.

5 Whitehead follows an ‘epochal theory of time’. He argues “that in every act of becoming there is the becoming of something with temporal extension; but that the act itself is not extensive, in the sense that it is divisible into earlier and later acts of becoming which correspond to the extensive divisibility of what has become.” (Whitehead, Process and Reality, 69) In the following text all quotations from this book are referred to by PR and page directly.
the new process. No process can be understood completely on its own although it is a point of reference to all other processes. If one wants to find out what has changed over time, one needs access to processes related to that change. In this sense, Thomism is a process of its own which wants to open a real access to Thomas Aquinas’ philosophy. But this means that it is inevitably defined not only by itself but by discourses from the outside.

Of course, process philosophy cannot describe the historical reasons leading to Thomism but it may reveal the grammatical reasons, so to speak. In this article I dare to relate Whitehead’s philosophy to Thomas’ intellectual world only on the basis of such a genealogical process. I do not intend to go beyond this narrow focus. The problem I will later bring into play is to demonstrate that processes from an outside are needed to get access to the internal mechanism to define faith-matters in history is Papal Infallibility. It is an important part of the catholic identity-process caused by Thomism. This process had an initial aim which is directed at the modern Catholic Church. Within Thomism, people searched for a stable, positive position of the Church in history capable of forming identity-markers not shaken by history’s relativity over time.

After the Reformation, the Catholic Church was in need of a new identity in early modern times which turned out to be so completely different from earlier times. As with all identities shaped at that time like the identity of the state, of companies, even of artists, the identity the Church was in search of what should enable the Church to understand herself from herself. This was what Thomism was looking for. It was not Thomas which was the major focus of this process. The key point of this new self-contained ecclesial identity was Papal Infallibility as declared by the First Vatican Council. Yet, one can question if this identity really can deliver what it offers – an origin in itself – or if it is simply an ongoing process depending on other processes it cannot control which then it has to hide as usually all normal modern identities do. This is the problem I would like to address here.

Thomas Aquinas as ‘Locus Proprius’ and Its Tension with the Alienating Part of Dogmatic Theology

In 1879, Leo XIII praised “the golden wisdom” of St. Thomas by his encyclical Aeterni patris. In every age, catholic theologians should study Thomas Aquinas’s philosophy and theology. This made Thomism to a sort of official philosophy for the Catholic Church, which was understood at that time as a societas perfecta. This combination of a self-contained identity between what a ‘societas perfecta’ is and Thomism is important. It is not by chance. Being a societas perfecta simply means that the Church is a state, to be precise: a supernatural state.6 Thomism is the backbone of this identification. One may even say: Take Thomism out of the Church and then its identity as societas perfecta falls apart and vice versa. Those movements who want to keep the Catholic Church as societas perfecta are not by chance heavily in favor of Thomism. Only since the Second Vatican Council has the societas-perfecta-identification come to an end; it has not been formally declared but implicitly decided by this council that Thomism as a sort of official philosophy for the Catholic Church is no longer the case.

There is a remark in mentioned encyclical about theology in general which reveals Thomism as backbone of its argumentation. In Number 6 Leo XIII wrote:

> For in this, the most noble of studies, it is of the greatest necessity to bind together, as it were, in one body the many and various parts of the heavenly doctrines, that, each being allotted to its own proper place and derived from its own proper principles, the whole may join together in a complete union; in order, in fine, that all and each part may be strengthened by its own and the others’ invincible arguments. (Aeterni patris, Nr. 6)

The Latin text for “each being allotted to its own proper place and derived from its own proper principles” reads as: “ut suis quaeque loci convenienter dispositae et ex propriis principiis derivatae”. This refers to a classical distinction in early modern Thomism between ‘loci’ and ‘propria principia’, i.e. the places where

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6 For the modern origin of this identification cf. Böckenförde “Staat-Gesellschaft-Kirche”.
7 Denzinger, Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum, number 3137.
one can find arguments with authority along with the principles provided for dealing with them.\(^8\) Just as the difference of origin and derivation opens a door to history and its meaning, the difference of loci and principia is opening a door to arguments and their logic. Whereas by loci one refers to places where one can locate arguments, by principia one holds on to the reasons to refer to them.

This difference of loci and principia is not coming from Thomas and it is not coming from Agricola. By that I mean that the major source of Thomism – Thomas Aquinas – and the major grammar for the origin of Thomism in late 15th century – Rudolf Agricola – are not by themselves the origin of the exceptional doctrinal position of Thomism. The difference between loci and principia belongs to a Thomism which is able to think positively about the authority of history. It has not been the dominating factor in modern Thomism but it may be the backbone to retrieve it from falling completely into the past history of ideas. Thomas Aquinas would not identify loci and principia since for Thomas loci are general rules for theological arguments and not places where those arguments can be found. And Agricola would realize principia as sedes argumentorum, i.e. as a matrix of loci. The difference between loci and principia was invented and heavily used in the School of Salamanca. This school asserted the importance of pragmatics to argue for what is not yet given by arguments in matters of faith and by the logic of argumentation. This difference implies the non-identity of faith and theology which makes theology to a counter-conduct concerning faith.\(^9\) In special circumstances this can even lead to a counter-position, which of course all people which are responsible in ecclesial matters always try to avoid or to prevent. In the history of the Church this was called ‘modernism’ and was attacked as an unfaithful thinking about religion. At the same time this difference gave theology in the long run the chance to function as independent of philosophy, something which was the major innovation of Reformation and which for that same reason took centuries before it was accepted within catholic theology. Yet, both of these two consequences were not in the mind of those who created the School of Salamanca.

Due to the importance of this School for early modern thinking in Catholicism the difference of loci and principia has become an elementary structure for catholic theology through all modernity until today. By that difference the Salamanca school – and here especially Melchior Cano\(^10\) – invented the so called ‘positive theology’ which then was applied to a discipline that catholic theology learned from protestant theology: dogmatics. Protestants began to write about dogmatic theology in late 16th and early 17th century.

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\(^8\) Cf. as an example: Vaz Barbosa, *Principia et Loci Communes*.

\(^9\) For the idea of counter-conduct, invented by Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, esp. 197s, see Davidson, “In praise of counter-conduct”.

\(^10\) “Das Buch von Agricola [= De inventione dialectica], 1548 in Köln erschienen, handelt von den Örtern, jedoch nicht von den Prinzipien des Dialogs. Die ‘ars inveniendi’, die es lehren will, führt die Leser zur Kenntnis der ‘ars deducendi’ weiter, die man jedoch kennen muß, um die Autorität der Örter und somit auch die eigene Position im Dialog zu definieren. Cano leistet eine solche Weiterführung. Denn er denkt die Quellen des Glaubens als Prinzipien der Theologie. Die ‘ars inveniendi’ muß die ‘ars deducendi’ mit umfassen. Kraft dieser prinzips-theoretischen Erweiterung wird die humanistische Tradition der Topik zu einem Ort der Auseinandersetzung mit Fragen des Glaubens und der Theologie. Sie ist der Ursprung dogmatischer Theologie.” (Klinger, *Ekklesiologie der Neuzeit*, 21s footnote 7) – One can see the process that at this point theology becomes independent of philosophy in the brief history Haldane, *Faithful Reason*, 4-14, presents for Thomism. Haldane doesn’t mention Cano although Cano was the leading figure for Catholic dogmatic theology from the 17th to the 20th century. This is also the reason for Haldane’s verdict that leading figures of the theological relecture of Thomas Aquinas in the 20th century as Joseph Maréchal, Karl Rahner, Bernhard Lonergan which Haldane substitutes to a “Transcendental Thomism” were “never taken very seriously by philosophers” (p. 8). The most influential Thomists of the 20th century, the French theologians combining Maurice Blondel and Thomas Aquinas which were coined by their enemies as ‘Nouvelle Theologie’ – Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac and others – but then became the masterminds behind the Second Vatican Council are not even mentioned by Haldane. This demonstrates the separating issue for philosophy and theology by creating a locus theologicus proprius out of Thomas Aquinas in early 16th century. Since that time it is simply no longer necessary for an important theological approach to be taken seriously by philosophers. For a long time from baroque to early 20th century this lead to the “triumphalism of the Ghetto” (Haldane, *Faithful Reason*, 14) and it was a disadvantage for Catholic theology. But in the Second Vatican Council exactly this being independent from a philosophy which is highly estimated within Church hierarchical structure created the current form of Catholic Church and Catholic Theology. It is a Church ‘within the modern world’ respecting the signs of the times and a theology which cannot raise its issues without firstly looking into knowledge forms from outside of faith and ecclesial matters. Up to now, this has been a major intellectual advantage for Catholic theology and for the Catholic Church.
They were the inventors of a highly positively formed theology. But very soon, Catholics began to use it in the 17th century, especially in the School of Salamanca, and the idea finally found a stronger career within Catholicism than Protestantism. The reason is very simple. It gave the Popes more influence on faith than anything else in theology.

The discipline of **dogmatics** has two sides: speculation on the basis of already existing forms of knowledge, like philosophy and any other original intellectual approaches to knowledge: i.e. principles and reference points which have an authority one cannot avoid respecting as a theologian; hence, **loci**. Pope Leo and his successors praised the principles derived from St. Thomas as eternal wisdom. But they did not reflect on the **loci** one has to pay attention to in order to work with principles. They simply took them for granted and they strictly wanted to avoid accepting the almost revolutionary importance of the difference.

One can understand that because there is a great deal of logic needed to work with them. ‘Loci’ or ‘topoi’ are taken from Aristotle’s conception of a logic which is able to shape methods to find arguments in disputations. Aristotle called that ‘topic’. By Cicero, Boethius and Petrus Hispanus Aristotle’s topic was reinterpreted as part of the intellectual practice to finalize arguments in debates that are logically proved. But these ‘loci’ are not at the same level as dialectics and the logical results of dialectical constructions. For that reason, Thomas Aquinas agreed with Boethius’s idea of ‘sedes argumentorum’ as rules to present arguments but for Aquinas, **loci** are not at the same abstract level of philosophical arguments. They are arguments ‘ex auctoritate’ which Thomas took to characterize theology. Theological arguments are ‘ex auctoritate’. It is the authority of divine revelation that gives theology its **loci** of arguments.

But in that case history is taken out of the process to find arguments. Here **loci** in theology imply simply rhetorical finesse to come to the level of authority but they were not sources of authority themselves. Here, authority comes into a process of raising arguments by links to revelation. This intellectual approach was decisively reinvented by Rudolf Agricola in late 15th century by his “de inventione dialectica” (1479). His approach to propositions which can be used in science introduces processes of presenting arguments, i.e. rhetoric. One has to raise arguments in order to find them and in this process authority can be found or it can be lost. The supernatural is not needed for that. One cannot have arguments without raising them and this process is logically important. For that reason Agricola can reflect on **loci** not only as rules but intellectually proved places one cannot avoid looking into. This brings together dialectics and rhetoric, a combination which would have been unthinkable in a university in the high middle ages. A **locus** is an indispensable factor for scientific argumentation. Each form of science has **loci** out of its own resources – **loci proprii** – but also **loci** coming from other sciences – **loci alieni**. At both types of places one can find arguments. This means that one can invent them, not simply pick them up; even more, one has to invent them by dealing with places outside of one’s own tradition. This is the scientific process – to look where to find arguments one really needs and cannot avoid being confronted with. Here, history is an indispensable part of scientific processes.

History is not this process but a function of it. This difference between history and science, between time and process, between reality and discourse about it was not yet known in early 16th century. But here one has the clue to this perspective. The necessity to deal with history as indispensable authority for theological science was picked up by the School of Salamanca. In Melchior Cano’s “De loci theologici’ the reference to **loci theologici** became the methodology for the new format of theology, called ‘dogmatic theology’. Cano’s text had a major impact on catholic dogmatic theology for the next centuries. He realized the major difference between ‘proprii’ and ‘alieni’. The **loci theologici proprii** are places to find positive arguments, the **loci theologici alieni** are places to find relativizing arguments which nevertheless have a serious authority to deal with God.

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11 One can still find it in Schleiermacher’s famous differentiation of the different theological branches cf. Schrofner, *Theologie als positive Wissenschaft*. In Bonhoeffer one can find an additional step in this option for positivity. He holds God to be “the concretissimum” and the world as positive reference for all theology which is not blocked by religious presuppositions (cf. Feil, *Die Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers*, 99-103 and 290-324).
13 For this developments see Körner, *Orte des Glaubens – loci theologici*, 93-112. – An influential counter-position to strictly divorce dialectics from rhetoric although being strongly influenced by Agricola comes from Ramus. He was in favor of binary coding for presenting an argument. See Mack, “Ramus and Ramism”.
This difference is of outmost importance but it was hidden by Thomism after Cano. It was even attacked as one can easily see in Kleutgen’s idea of ‘Vorzeit’. Not before the 20th century this difference was reinvented within theological practices. The people who did that were Thomists as well, but they were Thomists like Marie-Dominique Chenu having a completely different approach to Thomas.14

Because of this involvement of historically proven inventive processes one may say that scholasticism and dogmatics do not belong together. This is a simple historical truth. Dogmatic theology is a modern enterprise. Scholasticism is neither its origin nor its context. It is the art of theology to think history by means of propositions of faith. But, of course, at the same time it is simply true, that Thomism and dogmatics went hand in hand in Catholic theology after Reformation – insofar as they reflect on loci theologici. This is their meeting point and at this meeting point one can see that they are completely different intellectual enterprises. Thomism is able to think positively about God without any relativizing. Thomism avoids to think negatively about God as a way to argue in favor of him. For that reason, it is very much in need of positively given principia in order to refer to loci which are underlining an ecclesial given argument. But Thomas has no idea of negative principia which one needs to refer to loci which are relativizing given traditional arguments. Such loci are history in general, other religious truths, ecclesial positions which obviously have been grave mistakes – like the long tradition of Antijudaism – and so forth. Within the Thomistic intellectual approach it is unthinkable that relativizing processes have an indispensable authority to come to terms with God. Yet, in order to be able to defend the dogmatic part of Christian faith one has to deal with relativizing loci theologici like history, philosophy and reason (which was already understood in the early School of Salamanca) and many others like other religious truths, scientific theorems about the origin of the Universe or of life. This is the major reason why Thomism is no longer considered to be the major valid intellectual tool for discourses about God. Thomism even has to struggle to be taken as such a tool at all.

Without the difference of principles and loci, abstract principles are only interesting for philosophers. But for theologians, the starting point is always a real locus, be it scripture, tradition, creeds etc. Principles not related to loci have no meaning for theological discussions. What to do with principles if there are not real faith matters one can use them for? And real faith matters for theology are places where one can find arguments for or against God. Theology has a much more narrow approach to intellectuality then philosophy. In philosophy one starts with zero, in theology one starts always at least with one. To some extent, zero is not thinkable for theologians. In theology, we always suggest that zero is something and not nothing – which, of course, it is not. So, theology is always second-rate whereas philosophy can be first-rate.

To some extent this is a heritage of a basic deliberation in Thomism: Always start with a positive place of arguments and never start with relativizing deliberations. And for this iron rule Thomism always refer to Thomas and it tries to direct everything else of use in the same direction.15 Thomists think that one can positively argue in favor of God on the basis of already fixed faith matters. The reference to natural revelation which is everywhere present in reason is possible for this mode of thinking. Thomas has even five famous ways to deal with that. Within this approach one does not have to argue negatively about God – which means it is not necessary, and even more: it is not acceptable to deal with God as nothingness, as non-existent or even as dead. God is strictly and in all respects a positive reference of thought in Thomism. The reason for that may be found in Thomas Aquinas. Like all scholastic philosophers he had no concept of existence, i.e. a difference between being an entity and the process to become an entity was not available at that time.

14 See Chenu, St. Thomas d’Aquin et la théologie. For Chenu, Thomas is an urban theologian who cannot be understood without the historical development in cities which created not only Cathedrals but universities. Thomas’s philosophy and theology are reflecting these urban processes. This makes him a forefather of the relation between dogma and history Chenu considered to be a principle for theology. This was, of course, heavily attacked by Dominican and Jesuit Thomists in the context of the Holy Office in the Vatican. But in Vatican II, Chenu’s approach to theology (the so called “Nouvelle Théologie”) made doctrinal history and shaped the basis for current theology.

15 “Wenn also der h. Augustin sagt, daß wir alles, was wir erkennen, nicht in uns, sondern in der unwandelbaren Wahrheit, die über uns ist, erkennen, und dadurch als die höchste Norm, nach der wir über Wahrheit urteilen, die göttlichen Ideen selber angibt: so wollte er nach der Erklärung des h. Thomas nichts anderes behaupten, als daß wir darum ein zuverlässiges Urtheil über die Wahrheit unserer Erkenntnis haben, weil die Gesetze, die in unserem Geiste liegen, der ewigen Wahrheit, die in Gott ist, entsprechen.” (Kleutgen, Philosophie der Vorzeit, 92)
The strictly positive mode in Thomism for dealing with the God-matters was very attractive for the Church and it gave Thomism a privileged position. Unfortunately, we are living in an epoch where it is no longer possible to think positively about God, or at least one cannot take that for granted. We have to deal with God and to do theology under the suspicion that God is dead – which means that it is possible that we have killed him, as Nietzsche once said. After Nietzsche’s discovery it is no longer possible to deal with God in a strictly positive mode.

As already mentioned, for dogmatic theology there is another reason why Thomism lost its once prestigious position to be the prime theological discourse. In Thomism the problem of the *loci theologici* were not dealt with coherently. It left out the difference between *loci theologici proprii* which are positive places for arguments and *loci theologici alieni* which are negative, relativizing places of argument although this difference was a major insight of the School of Salamanca. They invented in the 16th century on the basis of Agricola’s rhetorical dialectics. Modern Thomism, especially Neo-Thomism, tried to get rid of the *loci alieni* by simply not dealing with the issue, and then by arguing that *loci theologici alieni* are no real places to find arguments about God. This misrepresentation of alienating but indispensable *loci* – be they philosophy, reason, history or whatever – is due to the fact that they usually do not give positive reasons to deal with God, but mostly negative arguments which are relativizing illusions and utopias about God. But this difference was of utmost importance for catholic theology after Vatican II. This council paid doctrinal respect to a lot of *loci alieni* like other religions, Non-Catholic Christian denominations, human rights, the enemies of the Church, and mankind in general with all its cultures, economies, politics and spiritual engagements. Since this respect is completely missing in Neo-Thomism, its approach to philosophy has lost its authority almost completely in current catholic theology.

Within this development one aspect is still unresolved: How are *loci theologici proprii* and *loci theologici alieni* related to each other? How does relativizing knowledge about God empower positive knowledge about God? Is there a rule in place for the relation between both? I want to look into this difference from the position of the most prestigious *locus theologicus proprius* of Thomism which is Papal Infallibility. It clearly belongs to the special *locus* mentioned in Pope Leo’s Encyclical about the importance of St. Thomas.

### The Pope as *Locus Theologicus Proprius*

As already mentioned, Thomism is no longer considered as the obvious starting point for all catholic theology. It has become a part of the past in catholic thinking. Yet, there is one exception. This is Papal Infallibility since Thomism is the intellectual tradition behind this doctrinal position. Thomism not only backs it, its intellectual approach created this doctrine. The Thomistic preferential option for positive theology and for *principia* which deal with positive reference points and which avoid negative references (like the above mentioned *loci theologici alieni*) has a major impact on this doctrine. The question remains if this is weakening the doctrine or not.

The dogmatic approach to an outstanding Papal doctrinal position was only possible with Thomism and its – neglected – capability to realize that doctrine in matters of faith is an art of thinking about history. It is the art of theology to think history and not the art of sociology or philosophy or political science to think history. For that reason theology always looks like a completely odd and a-modern reminder of medieval civilization. Yet it is a pretty modern way to realize a difference which is unavoidable – truth and the proposition of truth – and to accept faith as a pretty subjective matter which nevertheless has a very objective reality.16

Major protagonists for this doctrine in the first Vatican Council which defined this dogma in 1870 like Perrone, Kleutgen, Franzelin were Thomists. The idea of a papal infallibility is older than Thomism, but before Thomism it was only a speculation within canon law.

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This changed after the Reformation and after the Renaissance. In the epoch of the Baroque theologians, who preferred the disputation mode of controversy like Robert Bellarmine, reduced the long list of *loci theologici* common in the Renaissance – the authorities of Scripture, Tradition, Catholic Church, Ecumenical Councils, Roman Church, Old Saints, Scholastic Theologians, natural Reason, Philosophers and finally Human History\(^{17}\) – to only one *locus*. It was the Roman Catholic Church, which meant the Pope. He was considered the one truly relevant place to find a solution in big controversies.

This was important for instance in the fierce fight between Dominicans and Jesuits about divine grace and human freedom, the dispute between Banez and Molina and the followers of their schools. The papal final decision not to decide was very wise. It shaped Papal Infallibility as a doctrinal tool which is independent of all struggles between theological schools. Without this independence it degenerates into a mere power regime without use for intellectual disputes because then, it would always give an advantage to a school but not provide a solution in faith matters. In the 19th century, Pope Pius IX had to avoid that approach when he made a final decision in the 600 years long struggle between the Dominican Order and the Franciscan Order whether the conception of Mary must be considered maculate – the Dominican position – or immaculate – the Franciscan option. By the dogma on Immaculate Conception in 1854 Pius IX decided in favor of the Franciscans. Was that a decision in a school-dispute or a demonstration of another sort of doctrinal practice? Pius IX aimed at the position that infallible decisions belong to the Pope’s personal authority and do not belong to school-traditions. He wanted the First Vatican Council to define papal infallibility in that direction. But in such a subjectivist turn, the difference between *loci* and *principia* would have been erased and the Pope’s teaching position as *locus* would become the very principle of the teaching-process. The Pope would create truth and not only refer to it.

There was a lot of discussion about this point with strong opposition on the part of the German speaking Bishops present in this Council\(^{18}\) and in the Catholic world in general, but especially in Germany and Austria by Ignaz Döllinger and Baron von Hügel, but also in Britain by John Henry Newman. On the other hand, there was also a fierce opposition to that opposition under the leadership of the British Cardinal Henry Edward Manning, Archbishop of Westminster, and other, mostly French, Ultramontanists. A first attempt to find a compromise was to deal with Papal Infallibility within the doctrine about the Church in general. This was blocked by Pope Pius IX. He intervened so as to ensure the definition of infallibility first before considering the Church in general. The opposing minority threatened to leave the Council at that point. At the same time the upcoming war between France and Germany forced the Council to find some common ground and so, a text simply on Papal Infallibility as a major part of the doctrinal nature of the Church was brought into the Council for decision. At this point, the *relatio*, i.e. the official report, by Vinzenz Gasser, Bishop from Brixen in Tyrolia, was decisive. He argued that only God is completely infallible, but the office of the Pope is capable of coming to infallible decisions in disputed questions of faith. The origin of such decisions is not the person of the Pope. It is derived from the Papal ecclesial office. This report prevented that the doctrine could be understood as pointing towards a personal infallibility of the Pope. This made it possible for most of the minority to accept it or at least to leave before the vote in July 1870 without breaking with the Council.

For Gasser’s position, Thomism was decisive. Instead of the idea of *infallibilitas* as personal quality of each Pope, Gasser used the traditional difference between *indefectibilitas* – remaining in truth – and *infallibilitas* – defining truth – to understand the new dogma. *Indefectibilitas* is a quality of the Church and is based on God standing on her side, *infallibilitas* is a qualification proper to Popes and Councils in defining a doctrine.\(^{19}\) The Church which is kept by God in an indefectible status is a locus for finding truths about faith. And ex-cathedra-declarations refer to this locus and they need principles of arguments for relating to such places. An ex-cathedra-qualification of a doctrine is a *principium* for referring to the *locus theologicus* of the Catholic Church. So, the need for ex-cathedra-positions are decisive for infallible statements. But these statements are processes to bring together this *principium* and that *locus*. The sentences such

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18 For the history of Vatican I see Schatz, *Vaticanum I*.
19 Cf. Brosseder, „Indefectibilitas ecclesiae - infallibilitas Papae.“
declarations are creating by this process – i.e. the positively defined doctrines – are becoming *loci theologici* themselves. This means that in the process of declaring infallible doctrines *loci* and *principia* are linked to each other but they must be kept apart in order to keep authority in the declarations. If one loses these distinctions between *infallibilitas* and *indefectibilitas* and between *loci* and *principia* Papal Infallibility is simply a power-mechanism to rule the Church by proposals on truth-matters.

On the basis of this difference infallibility functions as a category to differentiate matters of doctrine. Propositions a Pope declares to be infallible cannot fail to be true because they are guaranteed by the Church’s *indefectibilitas*. This is not the case for the person defining them, i.e. the Pope, and for propositions which are not issued as *ex-cathedra- declarations*. This means that a proposition is not true in an infallible manner because the Pope states it to be so. But the Pope has to state a proposition as infallible because it is true and provides solutions of a disputed matter. For that reason, it is pretty hard for Popes to find propositions which are “*irreformabiles*” and this is the reason why there are only very few such defining acts.

The idea to declare papal infallibility a dogma comes from a part of Thomism which identified the Church as *societas perfecta*. If there is only one positive intellectual way to God – the basic Thomistic idea – then one needs an ecclesial instance to make this possibility visible and so to make it an ecclesial practice. The visibility of faith, of truth in faith, of doctrines about truths in faith is decisive for the *societas-perfecta*-modus of the Catholic Church. Visibility is much more than a simple positive declaration of ecclesial matters. It is considered to be the Church’s gate to God and for the indispensable position of the Church in between God and Man. Only the Church and the visibility she guarantees can give human beings access to God’s presence which is of use in history. This is the real theological reason for all these seemingly irrational power struggles which tried to force Catholicism into believing in Papal Infallibility. Truth must become visible at some point in order to get the importance it deserves. This is true for all truth but ever more for all the truth about God. The visibility of God-Truth is of utmost importance at any place and only the Pope is capable to create *this visibility* within the Church and for mankind in general. The point is visibility and not truth. Truths about God can be found completely independent of the Pope but for their visibility the Pope and his capability to make it visible is necessary. Without him there will always be a lack of truth which can be demonstrated in history against the failures of history. The Pope is the only one having an authority to demonstrate the definite visible truth of a direct positive link with God. This is the conviction and for that reason his *locus theologicus* stand above all others and for this reason Papal Infallibility must be declared an ecclesial doctrine of highest authority. All other *loci theologici* must be taken of a secondary rank.

There is one weak side in this line of argumentation. The reason for this position is neither the Bible or tradition, nor reason or scholasticism. The reason is Gallicanism, i.e. a historical development within early-modern France. It was the French mode of Conciliarism claiming the spiritual and political independence of the French Church from the Pope and his Curia. It was for a long time the official position of the French *Ancien Régime*. In intellectual matters, papal infallibility played a major role for that reference. In Gallicanism the Pope’s singular teaching position was considered to be a *locus* for everybody outside French Catholicism. This made the French Church a sort of aristocratic counter-conduct against the monastic option taken by

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20 The dogma states: “Romanum pontificem, cum ex cathedra loquitur, id est, cum omnium christianorum pastoris et doctoris munere fungens, pro suprema sua apostolica auctoritate doctrinam de fide vel moribus ab universa ecclesia tenendam definit, per assistentiam divinam, ipsi in beato Petro promissam, ea infallibilitate pollere, qua divinus Redemptor ecclesiam suam in definienda doctrina de fide vel moribus instructam esse voluit; ideoque eiusmodi Romani pontificis definitiones ex sese, non autem ex consensu ecclesiae irreformabiles esse.” (Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, number 3074) The definitions of the Pope issued ‘ex cathedra’ are ‘irreformabiles’. A Pope has only this infallibility if and when he is stating these definitions (“cum ex cathedra loquitur”). Besides such statements he cannot claim this position which does not mean that he may not tell the truth if he is not issuing infallible propositions. Yet, their doctrinal authority is not on the same level as ex-cathedra-decisions.

21 For recent debates see Hell, *Papstamt*, Pottmeyer, “Die jüngste Diskussion über die Definition des päpstlichen Primats” and Powell, *Papal infallibility*. An interpretation of analytical Thomism which wants to avoid relativism but creates a stumbled relativity to Scripture and Tradition which is alien to the goal of the dogma is proposed by Haldane, *Faithful Reason*, 59-74. Yet, his considerations do not reflect on authority as a strictly historical grammar to search for arguments.
the Thomists in favor of the Pope’s singular position. Exponents of Gallicanism like Richer\textsuperscript{22} were in favor of Papal monarchy when it is a constitutional one. Their opponents like Bellarmine were in favor of absolute monarchy and for a sort of empire of souls.\textsuperscript{23} This strengthened the position of French Ultramontanism which finally succeeded in the 19th century with the position to make a doctrine out of Papal Infallibility. The final dogma on the matters claims that infallible declarations create sentences which are “ex sese non autem ex consensu ecclesiae irreformabiles”. They do not result out of a process of common deliberations but with no apprehensions. So, the shortest way for the Catholic Church to find truth is by the Pope. For that reason, the doctrine of Papal Infallibility is seen as a \textit{locus theologicus proprius} in the mainstream of catholic theology.

But in order to come to this place – i.e. to this \textit{locus theologicus} – one has to look for its place, i.e. to get \textit{principia} capable to refer to it. But then the picture changes very rapidly beyond the bounds of Thomism and the \textit{locus theologicus} becomes very precarious. This is not a negative criticism. It is already present in the formulation of the dogma.

\textbf{Papal Infallibility Beyond Thomism – the Topic ‘Ex Cathedra’}

Papal Infallibility is not simply an idea but an actual rhetorical position having its special logic for presenting propositions of truth. It depends on a teaching position located in a real space: “cum ex cathedra loquitur”, as the formulation of the dogma states. A Pope teaching in an infallible manner virtually has to sit on his teaching-seat in front of people he wants to teach. This doctrinal position is a real place in a Church – the teaching seats of the Bishop of Rome in his episcopal Cathedrals St. Peter and the Basilica of the Lateran. This means to teach in an infallible manner is not a private but a public position and it needs a real place. This \textit{locus theologicus} needs a space for functioning the way it is used for.

This brings me to a simple question: What sort of \textit{locus} is a teaching position in need of a real space? This question is not yet answered by the view that it is a \textit{locus proprius} because in our days it has become a global position.\textsuperscript{24} This means that it is no longer a purely intra-ecclesial matter and this gives reason to think if it ever has been that way.

Conceptually, Papal Infallibility is a position to unite people behind truths in order to solve problems in faith matters once and for all. It is not a position of power but of authority. The Pope has not a direct line towards everybody but a broad extension in relation to everybody and this is his position “ex cathedra”. It is simply placed before people who listen but whose attention is part of the whole process. An ex-cathedra-decision cannot be forced upon believers and it cannot be ignored by the faithful. It is something in the middle, so to speak.

This brings in the difference of \textit{potestas} and \textit{auctoritas}. It is very important for the doctrine but it is at the same time a very strange position within modernity and its usual habit of critical approach to knowledge. Here, truth comes by authority and not by science. Authority is not a conception of religion but of politics. The Roman civilization invented it, it was not known in ancient Greece. In ancient Rome, the Senate had \textit{auctoritas} whereas the Consuls had \textit{potestas}. This meant that the Consuls had to consult the Senate before taking an important decision but they were not obliged to follow the Senators. Yet there were good reasons not to decide against a declared position of the Senate. So, authority is a very tricky thing. It doesn’t come by office or by force. It is only comes when people are convinced of something which is declared for them.

In taking up a position of Theodor Mommsen that authority is less than an order and more than an advice\textsuperscript{25} Hannah Arendt has tried to describe it as an advice which those people to whom it is given do not deliberate not to follow. The advice is that good that one grasps its importance immediately. Authority is this process.\textsuperscript{26} It is strictly only possible within history because only history can tell if it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Edmond Richer was a major voice of Gallicanism by his book on the ecclesial and political power in 1611. Cf. Denis, \textit{Edmond Richer et le Renouveau du Conciliarisme}.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Tutino, \textit{Empire of souls}.
\item \textsuperscript{24} See the still hesitant deliberations about this obvious change by Lies, “Zum globalen Verständnis von Ex-Cathedra-Entscheidungen”.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Cf. Mommsen, \textit{Römisches Staatsrecht}, 1038 and 1034.
\item \textsuperscript{26} See Arendt, “What is authority?”
\end{itemize}
has been present – although authority is not dependent on history but on processes creating history such as people following an advice given to them. When a Pope issues an infallible statement he relies on authority, i.e. his position must have a convincing power like the advice that Hannah Arendt is speaking of.

This “cum ex cathedra loquitur” in Vatican I is not only a topic which can be identified by topography: a chair in the choir in front of the flock, close to the altar so that the faithful have to listen with religious admiration. This chair has its own logic. It is the logic of teaching truth by authority. This is a topological problem: Which logic is necessary to deal with definitions *ex cathedra*? And which logic must be avoided if a Pope wants to teach with infallibility? This topological quest is still an unresolved problem in Catholicism. In my opinion it can be solved by means of Whitehead’s thinking. I propose to use a geometrical offer in Whitehead’s philosophy.

**God Beyond Euclidian Geometry – Locus Theologicus as a Point by Extended Processes**

Whitehead has an interesting opinion about process in his ‘Process and Reality’. He argues that two different discourses are necessary to understand processes: a discourse about qualitative “prehensions” of previous entities within the process of concrescence of a given actual entity here and now, and a discourse about the distribution of entities in space that divides them from one another spatially. Concrescence relates the process to time, divisions to space. Relativity is crucial in both respects.

Within the theory of extension an important category is “flat loci”. A whole chapter is dedicated to them in part IV of Whitehead’s PR. 27 Here, relativity is brought to Euclidean geometry and this transforms points, straight lines, planes, regions in terms of the extensive continuum which Whitehead sees as the basic characteristic of the present epoch of the Universe. Whereas Euclid had created an ideal universe of geometrical forms, Whitehead formulates a geometry out of the relativistic reality of the Universe.

Whitehead discusses especially Euclid’s fourth definition in the *Elements*. 28 This fourth definition is dedicated to the straight line and says: “A straight line is a line which lies evenly with the points on itself.” Whitehead observes that here Euclid creates a confusion between ideal forms and concrete physical things because of the words “evenly” or “evenly placed”, how should it be translated. The term “evenly” is not further defined and nothing is deduced from it. It is a sort of Kantian ‘Anschauung’ and not a specific form, concept, category or whatever else one prefers as basic element of abstract mode of thinking. Whitehead tries to solve this problem by reference to extension which means by relating actual entities of a nexus to the form-dimension of this problem. Instead of Euclid’s first definition in Book I of the *Elements*, saying: “A point is that of which there is no part”, Whitehead proposes: “A point is a nexus of actual entities with a certain ‘form’; and so is a segment.” (PR 302)

This looks like a highly sophisticated distinction which is only relevant for mathematicians disputing very special problems and having very special interests. Of course, it is such a dispute. But at the same time, it is much more than that and it is related to other questions. If one relates to a point – is it indispensable to relate to the point simply as a point – or is it indispensable to realize what are the external relations having importance for the point one wants to designate. Whitehead denies that it is possible to relate to a point all by itself. It may be that a point has no parts in the sense that there is no temporal change within the making of the point. But this does not mean that there is no becoming which constitutes such a point. There is no point which is not a crossing of all sorts of relations. For that reason it is always possible to refer to a point from outside of itself. It cannot be considered by purely internal references to itself but only by external relations being present at the same time.

This is one of the reasons why the geometrical element ‘point’ is useful to understand physical reality.

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28 Euclid, *Elements*. Euclid’s elements are considered to be probably the second most printed book in the 16th century after the Bible. So, it has been a discourse shaping early modern times in solving problems.
It is not a pure idea but a way to describe reality in abstract terms. Access to a point is only possible from beyond itself; instead it can only be realized as an important crossing of matters which are relevant for it. This changes geometry which is not simply dealing with ideal elements capable to be applied to physical realities. It is dealing with the nexus of an extension which is actualized in any continuum within our cosmic epoch.

One gets rid of muddled physical realities like Euclid’s “evenly placed” without ending up in a Platonisms of eternal objects in order to understand geometry. One can look into its spatial dimension as being relative to processes – i.e. Whitehead’s aim for his philosophy in general. Thus he can say: “Thus geometry is the investigation of the morphology of nexus.” (PR 302)

This applies to all geometrical elements, which means also to this muddled phrase “evenly placed”. To get to that Whitehead assumes so called ovate classes and all geometrical elements can be discussed relatively to a special ovate class belonging to them. Mathematics is not my special field and I cannot give you the mathematical proofs for that. And it is not my topic here. I am dealing with the loci theologici, and especially with the locus theologicus of Papal Infallibility. Decisions resulting from this capability are points of reference for faith-matters. This is expressed by their nature as ex-cathedra-decisions. On the basis of Whitehead’s grammar for geometry such points cannot be understood simply by themselves. They are crossings of all sorts of relations which are indispensable to refer to them.

With Papal Infallibility a spatialization of doctrine takes place which is realized by a contextualization – only clear and distinct sentences can be issued as infallible. This is not that far in principle from the textual reference to the sola-scriptura-reference of the Reformation. Both points of reference create a contextualization of doctrinal authority. Both are not that far apart from each other, because both are thinking of God on the basis of the authority of a special locus theologicus. Here, I only want to look into what sort of space is used for Papal Infallibility.

One observation is important: By these spatializations of theological argumentation, being it papal infallibility or sola scriptura, processes are realized: One has to look where one can find so called ‘sedes argumentorum’ which contain such loci. By the doctrine of Vatican I and on the basis of Thomism and in its mode of societas perfecta, the Catholic Church has found a ‘sedis argumentorum’ foremost in the locus of the Pope. His process of doctrinal teaching, i.e. definitions ex cathedra, refers to a geometrical element. It is obviously not a point in the Euclidian manner. It is a real seat and configuration of physical reality. Bringing in Whitehead’s considerations of flat loci, the question arises which sort of nexus one has to look into in order to understand this geometrical element.

Thomism followed a sort of Euclidean geometry for theological positions: It draws a straight line between man and God using reason and this is called natural revelation. The line is a positive one, which means one actually can draw an even line between the two involved points: man and God. And the Pope’s position is to determine if such a line drawn by reason of faith is actually straight. This straight line needs a geometrical element in the Church, the Pope’s doctrinal chair, in order to become visible. The Pope does not create this line but he can judge if an assumed line produces truth in faith-matters. He is a sort of master of the Euclidean ‘evenly placed’. This makes out of the Thomistic God a Euclidean point which allows such a straight line to man which the Church makes visible.

But teaching ex cathedra is not only a line, but a nexus of actual entities which create a point for teaching not from the teaching alone but from a lot more being involved here. The geometrical element of this chair is created by processes full of prehensions of previous actual entities, a s one may argue with Whitehead. The position of the teaching chair is ‘ex sese’ but the cathedra is not created ‘ex sese’. Only the issued statements are irreformabiles ‘ex sese’. In other words, in looking to the extension of these processes one can discover something pretty precarious for the validity of Papal Infallibility: the relativity of the content in this geometrical line drawn from the Pope to the truth in faith.

This ‘natural line’ between man and God, expressed by the Pope’s teaching, is a nexus of processes. It is not a straight line, it is a geometrical element which should be considered in historical context. There are a lot of external relations coming into the internal aspects of this process. In theological terms, this means that no infallible statement stands for itself but only in relation to the already fixed tradition. But other loci theologici like reason, philosophers and history are also part of this process.
As soon as one accepts that there are a lot of such points that overcome the concept of a straight-line, then relativity comes in – and that is the reason why Thomism always tried to stick to this Euclidean understanding of God. Thomism wants to avoid relativity. But in a constellation of different teaching points which all hold the same authority one cannot avoid relativity. For that reason the element ‘ex cathedra’ can be read as a flat locus. Whitehead deals with such a geometrical element in Definition 6 of the mentioned chapter of PR:

The locus of points incident in a flat geometrical element is called the ‘content’ of that element. It is also called a ‘flat locus’. (PR 306)

In doctrinal matters this content is not dependent on the person using the teaching position – it is not a private matter belonging to somebody. It is a public event. Or to put it in another of Whitehead’s terms: it is a feeling. The combination of a flat geometrical element and the feeling involved turns the topographical matter into a topological one. In the theory of extension this is called a strain:

There is nothing in the real world which is merely an inert fact. Every reality is there for feeling; it promotes feeling; and it is felt. Also there is nothing which belongs merely to the privacy of feeling of one individual actuality. All origination is private. But what has been thus originated, publicly pervades the world. Thus the geometrical facts concerning straight and flat loci are public facts characterizing the feelings of actual entities. In so happens that in this epoch of the universe the feelings involving them are of dominating importance. A feeling in which the forms exemplified in the datum concern geometrical, straight, and flat loci will be called a ‘strain’. (PR 310)

There are qualitative elements in a strain which one cannot avoid to deal with. This is the case of ‘ex-cathedra’-position. For that reason Papal Infallibility cannot function within a societas perfecta, i.e. simply on its own. It cannot dominate positions it creates; it is dependent on the truth-character of its definitions. Everything depends on the truth-character and not on the position. This truth-character is a flat position. Because of the flatness of Papal Infallibility this doctrinal position is precarious for the Pope and the Church in general. It confronts them with surprises they cannot handle by themselves. It is a precarious position, i.e. it is a locus theological alienus.

**Conclusion**

The same locus that the Thomists in baroque times and in the ultramontane context looked to as the supreme locus theologicus proprius which guarantees the visibility of all positive arguments in favor of God and faith matters is not a positive one. First and foremost it comes with aspects of relevant issues from the outside which have a relativizing effect on faith. Papal Infallibility provides us with with discourses foreign to theology and faith matters in the first place. Doctrines issued by this locus theologicus have to take into account all sorts of points relevant for the flatness of its position. This means: In the dual matrix of the loci theologici Papal Infallibility has the same position as philosophy. Its authority comes from outside itself into theology and it confronts the negative arguments one cannot avoid taking into account in faith matters. The very relativity that Thomism wanted to avoid by its philosophy of the ‘Vorzeit’ comes back in the affirmation of Papal Infallibility. This is not simply a bizzare Whiteheadian interpretation of it but an unavoidable process for defining matters of faith.

One cannot use this locus theologicus as part of a utopia but one is confronted with heterotopias. Infallibility is a precarious process by reason of relativity. It ends up in the self-relativizing of the Church in doctrinal matters. Its relevance is that of a flat locus and just for that reason it involves a very complicated relativizing nexus. For that reason almost no Pope dares to use it.

29 See for this concept Foucault, “Von anderen Räumen”, 935.
References