

F.J. Clemens and Some Aspects of Neo-Scholasticism in the Education of F. Brentano



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Abstract Among the few publications which consider the Scholastic roots of Brentano's thinking, an article by Dieter Münch stands out. In it, he claims that the Aristotelian studies of Brentano and his whole philosophical project are inspired by the German Neo-Scholastic movement. Münch presents the Neo-Scholastic tendency as an ultra-conservative and reactionary program against modernity. Now, such a description makes almost inexplicable the fact that Brentano, who was educated in this context, could have developed a wholly personal and independent philosophy. To approach this framework objectively, I propose to pay attention to F.J. Clemens, a Neo-Scholastic who influenced Brentano's way of thinking. It is true that Clemens puts faith above reason and affirms that any conclusion obtained through the power of reason must be discarded when it contradicts faith. However, this is not an ultramontane innovation but simply the traditional theological point of view. He also argues that St. Thomas should be followed as a guide to orient oneself in the process of rational inquiry. Nevertheless, he doesn't want to understand philosophy as a repetition of Aquinas' claims; on the contrary, he rather proposes an intelligent use of tradition, which allows us to delve deeper into philosophical truth. For this very reason, he does not discard modernity or condemn it altogether. This perspective is also reflected in the early writings of Brentano, where he showed discontinuity from the Neo-Scholastic school of thought.

Keywords Franz Josef Clemens · Franz Brentano · Neo-Scholasticism · Ultramontanism · Catholicism

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1 Introduction

So far, the Scholastic roots of Brentano's thought have not received much scholarly attention. Apart from the recent volume of *Brentano Studien* (Band 15/1, 2017) on the "early Brentano," one of the few older exceptions was an article published in both French and German by Dieter Münch, in which the author dealt with Brentano's reception of Aristotle (see Münch 2004a, b). Münch claims that to understand the Scholastic context of Brentano, it is important to appreciate one of the most significant teachers of the young Brentano, F.J. Clemens, who was an editor of the journal *Der Katholik*. In this journal, Münch finds a "Catholic" project of cultural diffusion, which is essential in forming a proper understanding of Brentano's approach to Aristotelian studies. As Münch sees it, the main objective of this project is the defence of the theses of Thomas Aquinas, who personifies a perfect synthesis of Aristotelianism and Catholicism. Supposedly, Aquinas also represents a summit of human knowledge that cannot be overcome. With him, the progress of human thought ends and therefore the Neo-Scholastics only need to defend his system from the attacks of the modern philosophers.¹ However, I believe that this description of Clemens' purposes is deficient.² For this reason, I would like to focus on Clemens' works and thoughts in so far as they influenced Brentano's own philosophical point of view.

¹"Dies führt zu einem Konzept einer *philosophia perennis*, das heißt zu einer Konzeption, die Wissenschaft und Philosophie nicht mehr als historisch bedingt betrachtet, wie dies für die Deutsche Theologie charakteristisch war. Zwar gab es bis zu Thomas von Aquin eine Entwicklung, doch diese ist zu einem Abschluss gekommen. Man kann daher die im *Katholik* vertretene Auffassung durch das Schlagwort vom Ende der Geschichte der Philosophie charakterisieren. Danach besteht die Aufgabe für die gegenwärtigen Philosophen nicht darin, ihre Zeit in Gedanken zu fassen, sondern darin, sich das im Großen und Ganzen durch Thomas von Aquin vollendete aristotelisch-katholische System anzueignen" (Münch 2004a, 176). Similarly: "Clemens [...] was a member of an intransigent and combative movement which sought to support and defend Catholicism on Thomistic grounds. His theories published in *Katholik* provoked in fact a schism between a group of German theologians led by Döllinger and the Ultramontanists of Mainz" (Albertazzi 2006, 12).

²Here we have a more accurate presentation of Clemens' mind: "Für eine zeitgemäße Erneuerung der christlichen Philosophie will Clemens bei Thomas von Aquin anknüpfen, in dessen Denken die 'philosophia perennis,' einen Gipfelpunkt erreicht hat. Wenn man ihm folgte, könnte man die Irrwege der neueren philosophischen Bemühungen vermeiden. *Dennoch geht es Clemens nicht um einen sklavischen Anschluß an Thomas*. Auch in der Vergangenheit hat sich die christliche Philosophie nicht an alle Einzelaussagen von Thomas gebunden gewußt. *Die thomanische Philosophie ist nicht in allen Punkten vollendet, aber ausbau- und vollendungsfähig; schließlich ist auch die neuere Philosophie nicht in allen ihren Richtungen zu verwerfen*" (Walter 1988, 138; my italics). Similarly: "Early neo-scholastics especially did not conceive of themselves as merely turning back the clock, but sought to defend scholastic thought as a way of solving contemporary problems" (Schaefer 2007b, 454). See also Piolanti (1988, 21–61), Schaefer (2007a, 482–487), Russo (2013, 256).