



Father Antonio Rosmini-Serbati: A Discourse on His Philosophical and Theological System with an Imprint of Fundamental Rights

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Rosmini's works and philosophical ideals purport to propitiate Catholic theology with the susceptibilities of modern day political and social thought. With regard to his instruction from Pope Pius VII, Rosmini found himself wedged between the obligation to renew Catholic philosophy and finding his work on the Index. The former is of much concern according to the tenor of this study. In his task for renewal, Rosmini engaged the theological and philosophical principles of the "ideal being" in order to postulate man's relationship with God, the Absolute Being. In order to determine and materialise such relationship, Rosmini was forced to evoke the principles of anthropology, cosmology and ontology. This path will steer Rosmini to actuate a Christian tradition in which fundamental rights will be maintained. Rosmini believes that in a Christian culture the role between man and God must be firmly established. He would make us believe that his model is inspired by the (divine) light of reason. Although man has some divine qualities (such as the soul or reason which was infused by God into man) he cannot be God. Man would though be able to use these divine qualities bestowed upon him by God to conduct good relations with each other in society and to uphold the fundamental rights of others. This will engendered also a respect of one's fundamental rights even the government or State. Only a Christian society could accommodate this notion in full.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Father Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (hereafter referred to as Antonio Rosmini or just Rosmini) was born in 1797 in Rovereto, an Italian village. The Rosmini family were well-off due to their involvement in the manufacture of silk [1]. His father was Baron Pier Modesto Rosmini-Serbati, a member of a very old and wealthy noble family. His mother was Countess Giovanna dei Formenti from Riva, on Lake Garda. They were cultured, generous and devout people, who zealously promoted the interests of the church. They had four children [1].

Rosmini completed his tertiary training in Theology at the University of Padua and was ordained a priest in 1821. With his exceptional talent for writing, his colleagues encouraged him to write books on theology rather than to meet his duties as priest [2].¹ His publications made a great impression in both spiritual and philosophical circles. He was so popular in church circles that Pius IX considered appointing him as cardinal [3].²

The Catholic Church forbade its clergy to actively engage in national politics. Rosmini's studies, however, actuated him to partake in politics and social reform. He perceived that the educational methods of the Church and the latter's stand on doctrinal matters were not suited to his mind. Rosmini therefore contemplated a revival of Catholicism, when the major forces, nationalism and philosophic idealism, were on a collision course with the Church. Rosmini understood the importance of both movements, but in trying to change the minds of his contemporaries and the Church, he fought a losing battle.

When war broke out between Italy and Austria in 1848, Rosmini was known for his views. The Piedmontese government empowered Rosmini to negotiate a settlement with Pope Pius IX. An account of Rosmini's engagement with the Piedmontese government is cloaked under his work called, *Della missione a Roma... negli anni 1848-49* (1881), which will be discussed in detail under the heading (next chapter in this text), Rosmini's Ideas of Church and State. The upshot of this engagement is that Rosmini denounced the Piedmontese government's deceit.

Rosmini's philosophy and teaching were based on idealism. He placed at the center of his system what he called the "ideal being." He held that the "ideal being" was a reflection of God to be found in every man. He asserted that not only was the "ideal being" the most knowable, but it was the foundation of all else: the rights of the individual and man's concepts of truth and logic and of his political and legal system. Rosmini's thoughts and theories of the "ideal being" found expression in most of his works and especially in two renowned books regarding him, "Of the Five Wounds of the Holy Church" (*Delle Cinque Piaghe Della Santa Chiesa*) and "The Constitution according to Social Justice" (*La Costituzione La Giustizia Sociale*). When Rosmini fell into disfavour, Pius IX had all his works examined for possible error. In 1849 these books were placed upon the Index. But on examination by the Roman Congregation of the Index, these books were declared free from error.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Purpose of the Paper

Rosmini wanted through his works the reconciliation of Catholic theology with modern political, social, economical and legal thought. He was influenced by the works of the English philosopher John Locke and other European philosophers up to the "Critical Philosophy" of Kant in this endeavour. Rosmini's thought was also inspired and shaped by the early readings of Medieval Christian authors including Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. But he had an independent mind and began to form his

¹ Leatham (1982) 125. Cardinal Morozzo advised Rosmini not to attend to other tasks, but rather to consider what Pius VIII told him (Rosmini). The Vicar-General, Monsignor Scavini, quoted the words of Pius VIII to Rosmini as follows: "[...] that [Rosmini] should not undertake that part of the ministry, but that he should attend to the more important work of study and writing books for the benefit of religion and good morals."

² Rosmini (1861) 125. His self-imposed exile to Gaeta put a spoke in Pius IX's wheel. Pius IX would later be influenced by other unfavourable events to conduct an investigation into Rosmini's works. Rosmini's appointment to cardinal would thus be suspended.

Swartz, NP. *Journal for Christian Scholarship*, p. 189.

own philosophical path. Such a move was necessary seeing from the fact that the relationship between the Church and the State has been deteriorated and a strong mind was necessary to determine such relationship by preserving the integrity of the church against the growing state interest. At the same time, the rise of Jansenism made worse the split between Church and State, in which the former's role would seemed to be exterminated. Rosmini managed to counter this onslaught, but in the process was not unscathed. He was subsequently rendered a marked man in the eyes of state officials and even suffered humiliation by his colleagues, who was influenced by the former individuals.

In this hotch-potch of ideas and traffic about law, philosophy, politics and economics, Rosmini's main aim was the upholding of a Christian tradition and the establishment of the principle of constitutional government. Besides being a philosopher and a political thinker, he was also an educator who drew the strength to restate the Christian tradition. Rosmini set out to contrive such an aim by focusing on the principles of ideal being and Absolute Being which formed the centre of his philosophical and theological system. The idea behind the principles of being was Rosmini's attempts to reflect the attributes of God in humankind. The ideal being pertains to man and the Absolute Being to God according to a natural theology construct and in particular to Rosmini's cosmology and anthropology. Once the divine characteristic of God is divulged in man, the latter would appreciate a higher moral value with regard to other human beings in society. This elevation will spur human beings to appraise the values of natural law and the subsequent upholding of fundamental rights.

In the light of these renditions, and with his aim to evoked a Christian tradition, Rosmini was forced to resurge Thomism. He utilised the anachronistic Thomistic moral perceptions and truths and integrated it with his modern thoughts on politics. In this endeavour he was met some resistances and support as well.

2.2 Design/Methodology of the Paper

The paper is a theoretical study that harks back to antiquarian sources of history. These sources will serve as a reflection and manifestation of the "ideal being" in Rosmini's philosophical and theological constructs. This paper will established whether Rosmini's philosophical and

theological system stands the test of time, and by so doing, justified himself firmly a place in the Catholic philosophical and theological arena in contemporary Christian society.

In short, this paper wants to demonstrate that Rosmini's theological, philosophical, political, economical, legal and other works are forces that need to be recognised by Catholics and non-Catholics alike for the values of fundamental rights. Rosmini encountered two main problems: The first being, the reasons of his political and religious fall from grace in the times of the unification of Italy. And secondly, that despite his vast written outputs, which was a response to the cultural, religious, political and human events of his time, and which were an enormous contribution to the intellectual and spiritual life of Europe, most of his works were denounced under the Papacy of Pius IX. Rosmini's reputation was gradually restored during the successions of Popes John XXIII to John Paul II.

Despite Rosmini's virulent critiques he remained anchored to the genuine values of an authentic Christian tradition, by relying on the principles of reason and faith. He believed that these two principles should be intertwined to bring about a Christian state or society. This put Rosmini on the same level as Thomas Aquinas and Augustine. Kant and his German idealistic vision, however noted that Rosmini failed in this endeavour.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Introduction

Rosmini was a controversial figure in Italy during his lifetime and even for years after his death [4]. Despite his reputation in Italy, he was relatively unknown in Europe. His militancy against civil authorities and some clergy for a Christian state caused his downfall by these protagonists. As a result hereof, Rosmini's works were lost to the mainstream of European cultural, academic and religious life. A great number of Rosmini's published works was put on the Index of Prohibited Books by the Papacy of Pius IX. It was centuries thereafter released to the general public. This research stressed that on an account of the extent of his work and the importance of his publications, Rosmini's works merit comprehensive investigation and a justification for his establishment of a Christian tradition in which laws will uphold the fundamental rights of individuals. His thoughts on

theology and philosophy, in this regard, deserve special attention. As far as his works on theology and philosophy are concerned, Rosmini (as neo-Thomist) concentrates in a typical Thomist fashion on the idea of being [5].³

Rosmini seeks affinity with the Thomist notion of being. The former has played a decisive role in the recovery of Thomistic studies. There is no greater champion than Rosmini for upholding the Christian tradition of the integration of philosophy and religion as found in the writings Thomas Aquinas of whom Rosmini quotes at length in his books [6].⁴

3.2 The Idea of Being

In one of Rosmini's works, *A New Essay Concerning the Origin of Ideas*, he sets out in an analytical way what the principle of "idea of being" entails. This principle means in the Delphic oracular as "Know Thyself." The Christian equivalent to the principle is embodied in the views of Plato, Aristotle, and Neoplatonism and in the Cartesian axiom, "to think and therefore to be." In simplistic terms, the idea of being means knowledge of humanity, nature and God. Rosmini asserted that to come to that affirmation, one has to embark on simplicity. He therefore denounced the explication of this theory by a plethora of philosophers or scholars. For example, he rejected Habermas's Enlightenment Project, which contrived a combination of rationalism and empiricism to explain what a human being is. Popper and Kuhn's construction of a metaphysical account of reality to establish humanity and God, was also rejected as to verbose a theoretical premise. Rosmini believed that the theories of empiricist philosophers on the other hand assume either too little or too much explication for the principle of "idea of being." He alleged that with regard to the former notion (too little), empiricist philosophers such as Locke and Hume had an inadequate theory, which embroiled them in confusion about the idea of substance and essence, and Rosmini is also sceptical about their rendition of the quality and reliability of knowledge, of the self and the world. With respect of the latter in explaining the "idea" of

being, Rosmini maintained that Plato, Aristotle and Kant failed the test of simplicity. Rosmini openly focused on Kant, while agreeing with Kant on the latter's distinction between the formal and material elements in ideas, he showed that the innate forms and categories were artificial and unnecessary [7].

Rosmini stated in unclear terms, that the "ideal being" is not God, but a gateway which enables us to rise to the knowledge of God. The paper accentuates that this notion is the blueprint for inculcation of the idea of God in societal spheres.

Rosmini also divulged that the Ideal being contained characteristics of objectivity, necessity and unity which supply the logic of our rationality. These characteristics will later contribute to the cosmological and ontological foundations for the existence of God, which can also be termed as natural theology. Under natural theology, our intellect or reason, which also possesses objective and universal attributes will entitle us to rise to a true but negative knowledge of the transcendent God [7].

3.3 Objectivity

Rosmini alleged that the objectivity characteristic of "ideal being" is an object other than us. In support of this contention, philosophers such as Buber, Husserl and Levinas related the concept of "the other" to a dimension which transcends the human being. This notion pertains to the "light of reason" which can also be equated with our ability to be reflective, to be able to turn our thoughts on to our own perceptions and ideas – the intellect [7].

Under the objectivity scenario, Rosmini regards the idea of being as the source of the human intellectual faculty. He asserted that through the intellect, the human being gains access to the transcendent by way of reason and understanding [7]. Rosmini warns, however that this ideal being is not God himself, but merely the possibility of things. He thus, as mentioned earlier, equated the idea of being with the form of knowledge. Rosmini holds that basic knowledge, consisting of the idea of being and its immediate determinations, provides all that is needed for objective thought [7].

3.4 Possibility

Rosmini maintained that the idea of anything can be termed as possibility. Possibility, therefore

³ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae* 1-2, Question 75, article 1.

Rosmini (2001) viii. Rosmini explains the theory of being in his work, *New Essay on the Origin of Ideas*.

⁴ Cleary (1992) 48. Rosmini used natural law dictates against the Austrian and Piedmont suppression of the church officials and Italian population.

should always be considered as the possibility of something. According to Rosmini the characteristic of possibility is the nature of the human intellect. The human intellect has the ability to escape false ideologies and limitations enforced on us by political and social constructions imposed on us by states. Rosmini is bolstered in these perceptions by Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Husserl. Hegel's historicism, however deviated and criticised the possibility theory of the ideal being of Rosmini [7].

Possibility should always be considered as the capability of an event happening. We cannot think of the possibility of nothing. The characteristic of possibility is made clear by an understanding of its role in forming the nature of the human intellect. 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 – for example God [7].

3.5 Necessity

Rosmini alleged that the necessity characteristic of the ideal being contains nothing contradictory. This idea paves the way for a natural theology of God, which arises from the intuition of being by way of its characteristic of possibility. And the idea of being with its characteristics of objectivity, possibility and necessity culminate in the universality principle – which is the foundation of all ideas. Only with the foundation of universality can the principles of justice (as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) be established with regard to human beings in society [7].

It is clear that a point for the application of fundamental rights has been made possible by the explication of the principle of the “idea of being.”

3.6 Rosmini's Natural Theology

An investigation into Antonio Rosmini's theory of anthropology, cosmology and ontology (which will follow later) is necessary for a discussion of his natural theology [8].

Rosmini confirms that the idea of being as encapsulated earlier in the text would eventually lead to a knowledge of God. He identifies the criterion for the idea of being as follows: “[...] [it] is a firm and reasonable persuasion that conforms to the truth. In other words, we not only know something to be true, to be what it is, but

we also firmly persuaded that it is what we know it to be, and have a reason for our persuasion. The criterion is always the idea of being, which precedes every judgment and all reasoning and is therefore inviolate [6].”

But in order to form an idea of God, it is important to determine the nature of man (idea of being). A study of the nature of man requires an analysis of man's physical and divine elements. Therefore a thorough knowledge of Rosmini's anthropology is required [6].

A study of the nature of man (anthropology) moves Rosmini to investigate reality as a whole (cosmology). Cosmology deals with the origin or cause of the world and anthropology deals with the doctrine of man. Anthropology mainly deals with the physical and divine aspects of man. The divine aspect points to the soul which consists of two separate, but mutually exclusive elements [6].

3.6.1 Rosmini's anthropology

Clery interpretes Rosmini's views on anthropology by asserting that there happens to be a close relationship between Rosmini's anthropology and cosmology. Man is an intrinsic component of Rosmini's cosmology. In cosmology man must unite with others and with God. Man can only be understood in terms of cosmology. On the basis of these contentions, man is relative and incomplete without God. Man, however differs from God who is absolutely complete, but shares in what belongs to God alone [1,6].

Rosmini distinguishes God, man and the world as the essential aspects of cosmology and he is of the opinion that the origin of the world can be explained by the discovery of the true nature of man. In cosmology man is in a relationship with God and the world (cosmos). If man reveals the same characteristics as God, for example necessity, universality and eternity, he must then have existed always. If the contrary is true and man has the characteristics of contingency, particularity and temporality, he then must have had a beginning. Rosmini avers that cosmology deals with the nature of man and his cause. This creative cause is God [1].

Cosmology (the creation of the world) is inferred from an analysis of perception, on the basis of which man and the world interact. Anthropology cannot be considered without examining cosmology. Every rounded-off philosophy is

obliged to design an anthropology. Anthropology examines the nature and role of man in the cosmic reality. Rosmini's theory on epistemology and cosmology thus forms the starting point of his anthropology. Rosmini's anthropology mainly focuses on the intellect (soul) and the physical perception (body) of man [6]. These two elements (soul and body) are necessary to formulate an adequate doctrine on anthropology. The soul provides the basis for all other expressions of feeling within man. These two substances may not be dealt with separately. Man is the result of both the reasonable (soul) and the physical (body). In light of this contention, Rosmini emphasises:

"[...] myself is not two subjects but one, which undertakes simultaneously animal and rational activities. I who understand, feel, and I who feel, understand [6]."

This alludes to the fact that the rational element (the soul) which is the source of spiritual perceptions or actions is found in man (the physical body component).

This approach then moves Rosmini to a definition of man. He states that man is an intellectual subject in so far as he contains a supreme active principle [9]. The active principle mentioned in the definition connotes to the soul which shows divine characteristics. An analogy between God and the human soul is therefore assumed. Rosmini's view of man (anthropology) shows similarities with Thomas Aquinas teaching which denote that the soul is divine and the physical not [5].

On account of the divine and not so divine postulates of man, Rosmini's anthropology would therefore serve as basis for moral actions and the origin of rights and duties in the civic or political society.

On account of his soul man possesses reason. The fundamental activities of the soul consist of the intellect, the will, the senses and reason. According to Cleary, Rosmini believes that man is the unity within whom the intellect and the senses interact [6].

The relevance and practical implications of Rosmini's theory of knowledge (idea of being) can be judged in human society. He believes that in human society the relationship between people can be judged in the social context [6]. On the basis of political and juridical philosophy, a social basis can be provided for his

fundamental doctrine of rights [6]. The establishment of a human society consists of man's wishes to unite and thus reach a goal which would not be possible otherwise for the individual [6].⁵ On account of this, Rosmini feels an affinity with the teaching of Thomas Aquinas [10].⁶ Cosmology, ontology and anthropology need to continuously interact with each other. These form the basis of Rosmini's idea of being and a foundation for his theological and social philosophy.

3.6.2 Rosmini's cosmology

Rosmini divides cosmology into theology and natural philosophy [8,1]. In dealing with cosmology, he discusses the cosmic law as those laws that are common to all people. It is obvious from the literature that cosmic laws imply natural law [1]. Although this is not pertinently stated in the sources, it appears that cosmic laws would be natural law because these laws organise man's relationship with God and man,

⁵ Cleary (1992) 33. *The key to proper understanding of any society lies in the willed desire of the members to be together for the sake of reaching a goal that would be impossible or difficult to achieve otherwise. This willed desire may be ontologically irrevocable, as in the case of marriage, or revocable, as in the case of societies which may be dissolved with the members' consent, but in every society some act of will is needed for the constitution of the corporate body. Without this act of will, the external apparatus of society is a delusion.*

⁶ D'Entreves (1965) 9. *In his work, De Regimine Principum, Thomas Aquinas alleges that the co-existence of man in civil society is natural and essential for man: "[...] si ergo natural est homini quod in societate multorum vivat [...]" Thomas Aquinas consequently mentions that a social life is of fundamental importance to man because he as an individual would not be able to provide for all his needs. This implies that social life is beneficial for human existence. Thomas Aquinas states: "[...] Cum autem homini competat in multitudine vivere, quia sibi non sufficit ad necessaria vitae, si solitarius maneat, oportet, quod tanto sit perfectior multitudinis societas, quanto magis per se sufficiens erit ad necessaria vitae. Habetur siquidem aliqua vitae sufficientia in una familia domus unius, quantum scilicet ad naturalis actus nutritionis, et prolis generandae, et aliorum huiusmodi; in uno autem vico, quantum ad ea quae ad unum artificium pertinent; in civitate vero, quae est perfecta communitas, quantum ad Omnia necessaria vitae; sed adhuc magis in provinciali una propter necessitate compagnationis et mutui auxilii contra hostes [...]" (A social life is desirable for humanity because man will not be able to provide for his life if he leads a sole existence. This therefore means that a social co-existence is more perfect because man can as such provide for his life needs. There is a self-sufficiency in every household as far as the elementary necessities of food and raising children is concerned. Similarly everything that is needed for a job or profession is found in one place. The city, for example, is a perfect society because it provides everything that is essential for the preservation of life. A province is a better example because there is social support against hostilities).*

mutually with each other [6].⁷ There is thus an analogy between the cosmic laws and natural law [10].⁸

Cosmology sets out to determine the nature of reality. Reality means in this context:

“[...] a feeling, which in turn leads us to that first act or intimate essence of what is real, by which we know things in our perception of them.” [6].

As outlined earlier, cosmology which forms part of metaphysics deals with the issue(s) of the origin of the world. The origin of the world can be explained by the discovery of the true nature of man. In cosmology man stands in a relationship with God and the world (cosmos). If man shows the same characteristics as God, for example necessity, universality and eternity, he should always have existed. If on the other hand, man has the characteristics of contingency, particularity and temporality, he must have had a beginning. The latter is acceptable because cosmology provides that man is not his own existence but that he has a cause and origin exerted from outside, namely God.

Cosmology cannot be fully dealt with without associating ontology, in particular theology with it [1]. One cannot understand cosmology (the existence of the world) without dealing with the nature and operation of its author, God. Knowledge of God's existence is an essential requirement for man to enable him/her to understand God's decree of natural law. This Thomist perception forms part of Rosmini's theory of knowledge (epistemology).

Ontology deals with man's knowledge of the existence of God. One cannot understand metaphysical or spiritual issues without understanding the temporal issues (cosmology). On its own, cosmology can thus not be a whole or independent science in itself. It can only form

part of a higher science, namely ontology, in particular theology [1].

3.6.3 Rosmini's ontology

Rosmini divides the science of ontology into two parts, namely ontology itself and natural theology [8,1]. He is of the opinion that ontology deals with being and its essence. As far as the essence of being is concerned, three forms are identified, namely the ideal, the real and the moral [1].

The essence of being must be identical in all three forms, although these forms differ from each other. Rosmini contrives these differentiations in order to form a reference to God and man. He therefore remarks that God is Absolute Being, whereas man is limited (ideal being). God as Absolute being is perfect, whereas man as ideal or real being is imperfect. The moral form serves as a bridge between God and man. Man must unite with God. It is the task of the moral form to affect the unity between God and man. Rosmini states therefore: “[...] moral good is infinite in its nature, always having infinite being for its object. Limited being is never seen by perception as alone and as having no relation but to itself, but always as united to the ideal [...]” [1].

Although man is identical with the divine image, God, man and God differ in essence from each other. Man though shares in the Absolute Being (God) by means of his soul component [1]. This divine entity, the soul, points to the presence of natural law (law of God) in and among people.

The notion of ontology alludes to *analogia entis* between God and man and this perception is implied by the principle of *imago Dei* (image of man to God). According to Rosmini's ontology, God can only be understood as the Absolute Being. Since God cannot be thought of except as real, He is not a mere ideal postulate of reason, but a subsistent reality [1]. Under the influence of Stoicism, the *imago Dei*, is viewed as the spark of the divine which is present in man. Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas considered human reason as the sign of the image of God [1].⁹ The Being, therefore is the object of reason and serves as the principle for reality as expresses in ontology [1].

⁷ Cleary (1992) 37-44. Rosmini's treatment of the law differs from that of Thomas Aquinas, but it has a similar application and intention. Both Rosmini and Thomas Aquinas are of the opinion that the law holds out the prospect of reaching the general welfare of the individual and society. However, unlike Thomas Aquinas fourfold classification of the law, Rosmini distinguishes between individual and social rights. Although their classifications of rights differ, it is clear that their content undoubtedly overlaps.

⁸ D'Entreves (1965) 109. Thomas Aquinas postulates that there are a threefold order in man, namely reason, divine law and man's relationship with his neighbour.

⁹ Davidson (1882) 333. God instituted the natural law for the rational ordering of the civil and political community. Reason is the medium whereby man interprets natural law. On account of man's upholding of natural law precepts, he is thus brought closer to God. Davidson means Rosmini would have followed a similar approach.

The moral form, in relation to reality, forms the ideal Being. In correlation to Hegel's dialectic materialism, Rosmini contends that man's moral form (thesis) combines with the real form (the maintenance of the law) (antithesis) in order to realise the Absolute form (God) (synthesis) [11].¹⁰ The Absolute Being is endless and essentially perfect. One can therefore assume that moral goodness is according to its nature endless, namely that God is the Absolute Being. The Absolute (and perfect) Being can thus not be man. The imperfect limited being or the "ideal being" (man) is not self-dependent but usually combines with the Absolute Being which is perfect and endless. This forms the real characteristics of what is moral and which includes the entire being. Insofar as the being is moral, it has the capacity to bring the subject or man in harmony with his object, namely God. Man's alignment with God perfects man as subject with respect to the compliance with his rights and duties in the civic and political community.

3.6.4 Rosmini's natural theology

In his many theological discourses, Rosmini deals with the Absolute Being, namely God, primarily. According to Rosmini, man does not have the ability to reach a full science and potential of the Absolute Being, God. The Absolute Being (God) in his totality and completeness is thus not subject to human knowledge. Human intellect can only know that which is revealed to man by nature. Man tends to link something positive to God with which human intelligence shows similarities. These similarities are accompanied by differences so that the one cannot form an adequate understanding of the Absolute Being, God. One knows that God exists rather than what he is. On the question how human intelligence knows God, Rosmini answers that, for example, when one mentions that God is intelligent, this does not mean that God is subject to the same standards for human intelligence [8]. The term analogy

¹⁰ The triad thesis, antithesis and synthesis is often used to describe the thought of the German philosopher, Hegel (Phenomenology). This term, however originated from Fichte (Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre – 1794). Hegel attributed the terminology to Immanuel Kant. The terminology was developed by Johan Gottlieb Fichte. This philosophy was also identified as German idealism: (1) the thesis is an intellectual proposition; (2) the antithesis is simply the negation of the thesis or is a reaction to the proposition; (3) the synthesis solves the conflict between the thesis and antithesis by reconciling their common truths and forming a new thesis.

should rather be used in this context. Copleston mentions that with regard to the aforesaid, Rosmini unwittingly aligned himself with the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas when the latter avers:

"[...] we cannot mean that God is intelligent in precisely the same way that a man is intelligent: we cannot, that is, by using the term in an univocal sense. Nor can we be using it purely equivocally. If we were, the term would have no meaning when applied to a being transcending our natural experience [...] we predicate of God something positive to which human intelligence bears some resemblance [...]" [12].

One can only know God in a way that exceeds human intelligence. One can, however, not form a positive understanding of God, but rather a negative one. This sort of cognition is called negative and is the only sort possible in natural theology, which treats of being in its absoluteness, of being not as known to man, but as it is in itself [1].

Natural theology reveals the existence of the ideal and perfect Being (God) and thus offers offshoots for a Christian foundation of fundamental rights in the civic or political society. Rosmini identifies four proofs for the existence of God, thus establish himself as an independent thinker by designing his own natural theology which differs in some instances with that of Thomas Aquinas. There are, however, certain tangents between Rosmini's natural theology and the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas. Two of Rosmini's proves of the existence of God correspond with Thomas Aquinas's natural theology [13].¹¹ The fact that Rosmini's other

¹¹ Strauss et al (1980) 18-9. According to Strauss et al, there are parallel readings between Thomas Aquinas's first proof of the existence of God and Rosmini's third proof. Thomas Aquinas's first proof of God provides that nothing can move without being moved and this contributory moving thing, in turn, moves. An endless series is impossible and therefore there must be a First Calm Mover. Thomas Aquinas calls this First Calm Mover God. This first proof of the existence of God finds affinity with that of Rosmini who bases his First Cause of everything on the fact that reason moves from the contingent to the essential. Both recognise a first cause of everything, namely God. The fourth proof of Thomas Aquinas for God's existence finds affinity with Rosmini's fourth proof of God. Thomas Aquinas's fourth proof reads as follows: There are degrees of goodness, truth, and so on. There is a best, a truest, and so on and consequently also something that exists in the superlative. There must thus be something that is the origin of the existence, goodness, and so on of all existing things. Thomas Aquinas calls this God.

proofs of God differ from those of Thomas Aquinas does not mean that Rosmini did not maintain a Christian view of God. As indicated clear tangents can be identified by some of these two astute theologian-philosopher's natural theology doctrines.

An explication of Rosmini's natural theology or proves for the existence of God is as follows:

- (i) The first proof is that the essence of Being is not merely nothing, but rather something that is eternal and essential. The essence of the perfect Being which is eternal and essential must also have substance and morality. The essence of Being is endless and exists under all three forms (ideal, real and moral) [1]. It is God.
- (ii) The second proof for the existence of God is derived from the ideal form of the perfect Being. The ideal form is the light that creates intelligence. This light is the eternal light and the eternal object [1]. The subject as eternal light must have complete, non-transient knowledge. God is perfect knowledge, God is eternal light and God is everlasting. The subject which also exists as endless object will be the endless action of goodness and more perfection. The perfect Being is thus absolute. It is God.
- (iii) The third proof is derived from the real form. According to this precept, reason or thought moves from the contingent to the real – to the First Cause of everything [14].¹² It is God.
- (iv) The fourth proof is derived from the moral form. Moral law and virtue are endless. The worthiness of moral law is eternal, essential and absolute. God would have been nothing if it did not have an absolute existence. There is thus an Absolute Being, namely God [1].

¹² Venter (1970) 14. *The third proof of Rosmini's existence of God runs parallel with that of Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle. Aristotle determines the first proof of God's existence in the following way: No thing can itself be the cause of its own movement or change. The cosmos must have a cause, an origin that is beyond it. Since Aristotle considers the cosmos eternal, its origin must also be eternal. In addition, its origin must be perfect because he is the norm against which everything in the material world must be tested. He is also the first cause of everything that moves and changes on earth. He Himself can however not move. The Greeks detests movement and assimilate it with impurity. To Aristotle and also Thomas Aquinas, God is the cause of all movement which can itself not move. God is the pure Form, the end goal of perfection towards which everything must endeavour.*

According to Thomas Aquinas, natural theology proves that we know God through our reason. Rosmini, on the contrary, assumes that we can know God by means of the "light of reason." Rosmini argues further that we cannot know more about God than is allowed by the necessity of the essence of Being. According to Davidson, Rosmini would have believed that this formed the restriction of our knowledge which we have from or of God in the natural domain [1].

Rosmini reiterates that our knowledge of God is negative knowledge [1]. Negative knowledge which man has of God lies for instance in the fact that it is illogical to state that God also has fundamental rights. One cannot form a perception of God without exceeding human intelligence or reason:

"[...] but this absolute being, which we neither intuit nor perceive, we can know no more than is shown us by the essence of being, the object of the idea. This is the limit of the knowledge which we can have of God in the natural order, and hence our knowledge of the divine nature may be called a negative-ideal knowledge." [1].

Fundamental rights can only be applied in respect of man and not in respect to God. God is the ontological source from which fundamental rights in the civic or political society derive:

"[...] [man [...]] mean a substantial relationship, that is, a relationship found in the intrinsic order of being of a substance. When these constitutive, ontological elements of a person are found in the human subject, we have arrived at the concept of human person [...] 'person' as the fount of moral, human action, is the foundation of all right in human relationship because its very own worth is drawn from that which ultimately forms the human intellectual subject. The moral excellence and superiority by right, which elevates the human person above the whole of nature, must have the same source as all morality and right [...] we find ourselves in need of a suitable basis for the development of our understanding of the nature of human rights [...]" [6].

Clarey argues that according to Rosmini, human rights can be traced ontologically to God. The innate dignity of man is conferred by God on human beings by their existence as intelligent

beings (the creation of the soul in man). In so far as ontology concerns, man becomes moral and partake in the infinite and acquire an infinite value. Man thus spontaneously moves to unite himself to all beings and loving them. He gives himself to all beings and they give of themselves to him. Such is the end of human beings, which can invoke respect for the upholding of fundamental human rights in society [9].

The essence of a natural theology shows similarities with some characteristics of traditional natural law. The natural law elements, such as eternity, necessity and so on are comparable to the factors in Rosmini's natural theology dictates. Eternity and necessity which comprises of the attributes of God implicate also the precepts of natural law. Rosmini states:

"[...] [natural law] is absolute, unchangeable, impassable and eternal because these are all properties essential to the law of justice and uprightness." [9].

The divine and sublime characteristics give natural law its higher status. Natural law is a God-given law from which one can deduce the principles of law, justice and the upholding of good morals.¹³ Human reason enabled man to autonomously know that part of natural law that attached to him when making good and moral decisions that is bolstered by law. According to this perception, man can deduce his claim to human rights from the Christian precepts of natural law [5].

4. CONCLUSION

This study can with certainty denotes that Rosmini has succeeded in establishing a Christian tradition of culture, which encapsulated respect for the practising of fundamental rights in the society. This research has took us from Rosmini's sentiments on cosmology, anthropology, philosophy, theology and ontology, to a plethora of European philosophers who agree with Rosmini and also the viewpoints of those who criticise his social and political constructs.

From the gist of this study one can proceed from the approach that man (the ideal being and not the Absolute Being) is a reasonable and moral being and thus a bearer of fundamental rights. The sources of Rosmini's ideal being tenets, like

anthropology, cosmology and ontology, thus provides a basis for a theory of fundamental rights in society and a knowledge of God. On the basis of his ideal being postulate, Rosmini succeeded to contrive an assimilation between God and man in the sense that the latter elevated by the former possesses fundamental rights which must be respected by all, even by the civil authority or State. The full practising of these fundamental rights is only possible in a Christian society, in which a clear basis for the separation of Church and State have been contrived.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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