**A Friendly Technological Paradigm: Roman Catholicism and Silicon Valley**

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Book Proposal Commentary

**Overview**

* This proposal is clear, well-written, and includes almost everything the publishers will want to know. The book proposed strikes me as interesting and valuable. The author seems to know a lot and have something significant to say.
* You’ve expressed a specific first-submission preference for OUP, but you do not follow their stated format. You don’t have to follow it absolutely to the letter, but as much as possible you should do precisely what they ask.
* Because of the format OUP likes (which is pretty common in the industry), the overview/summary section will need a drastic restructuring. At the same time, I do not think much new writing will be necessary.
* The “competition” section is effectively absent. This is a real problem, as it’s one of the bits they care about most.

From here, I’ll walk through, summarizing. In your document, I’ve put comments in with the Word comment function, as usual; here, I will go through in the order proposed by OUP, which I strongly recommend you follow.

**Walkthrough In Revised Order**

Title and Author

* Title with subtitle separated by a colon
* Give your name!

Brief Description

* I suggest that you take the entire textual content of page 1 and boil it down to 2 paragraphs. OUP specifies 1-2 paragraphs, and they really do mean that. Some editors will look to see whether the brief description is too long, and if so stop reading right there! The paragraphs should not be super-long, either: I recommend about 5 sentences at most. The whole “brief description” should take up roughly a third of a page.

Outline and Summary

OUP expects that you will summarize the book chapter by chapter, in a very detailed outline. In essence, with this book, they’d expect a scant half-page or so summary of each chapter, in order. In each chapter, you’d talk about where you disagree with X, or build on the work of Y, and so forth. You have chosen not to do this.

I think that by choosing to do things the way that you have, you prompt the reader to ask why, and this means that you *must* immediately present a strong answer to it. At present, this does not appear, and to my eye that’s a problem.

I suggest that you restructure this section and the actual outline you’ve written as follows:

*Introduction*

* All of the material about the general argument, plus some of the methodology. 1-2 paragraphs. Conclude with a sentence or two, separated from the rest, explaining that the book is divided into three principal sections (this last also explains why this section of the proposal doesn’t look exactly like a walkthrough outline, as they expect).

*1: State of the Art*

* Start by explaining the point of this section, i.e., to lay out the current understanding of the two paradigms. List the chapters that comprise this section, with summaries of each, in order.
* Note that the point of summarizing the chapters of section 1 is *not* to lay groundwork for your argument. That’s the point of the *section in the book*, but this is the proposal. Here what you’re really doing is setting the editor’s mind at ease: yes, this author knows what he’s talking about with the history of Catholic theology. And of course, they already presume that, because of your position and so on. So summarize each chapter in one brief paragraph, just laying down enough information that the reader gets the gist of the thing.
* If there are famous, influential arguments to refute, challenge, build on, or whatever, include those with the relevant chapter, as a second paragraph if absolutely necessary. This is part of building up the “competition” section (see below).
* Conclude the section outline with a brief statement of what you’ve accomplished up to this point. This may not be necessary, but probably it will help with navigation.

*2: Genealogy*

* Section 2 is quite different, because this is where the reader encounters something unexpected, i.e., the notion that Silicon Valley is based on a religious, anti-industrial paradigm. Here you can and should be more expansive. Your goal is to convince the reader that you have a legitimate point, it’s based on real research, and you can sound exciting when you talk about it. This is where you begin to *sell* this book.
* Again, begin with an introduction paragraph explaining the point of the section, and continue by listing the chapters, each with its own (relatively expansive) summary.
* This is where to include material about methods, counter-arguments, and so forth.
* Again, conclude with a brief statement of where the argument has come to at this point.
* I find the title of this section odd and distracting. “Genealogy” is now pretty usual, but when you say “Genealogy (History of Technology)” I am confused. If you plan to make an argument about this terminology and method, that belongs in the book, not the proposal. I suggest you pick a simple form of the title you want for now.

*3: Implications and Limits*

* Section 3 doesn’t have to convince the reader that you *know* anything, but rather that you can be persuasive and exciting when you do constructive theological/philosophical work. Here I suggest trying to be a little less formal. Show a little more passion about this.
* Counter-arguments and the like can and should be included, but it looks to me as though by this point you should already have covered most of that.
* Again: brief introduction, chapter-by-chapter outline, brief concluding statement.
* Note that the title of this section seems to me unnecessarily non-dramatic. In addition, your current discussion doesn’t entirely explain what sorts of “limits” you have in mind.

*Conclusion*

* Conclude with a simple summary, more in line with your current “Keynote” than with the summary currently present. In essence, conclude with a quick, punchy, “why this book is exciting.” You should not need anything else at this point: if the reader isn’t following and on-board now, that needs to be fixed earlier.

It looks to me as though 90% of this work is a simple matter of cut-and-paste. For each section and chapter, you have more than enough already written, and most of it is good. Once you have restructured, you will of course have some repetition to cut. Then you can go through and polish, and it’s done.

I suggest that this whole section should be something like 4 pages long: half a page each for the introduction and conclusion, a short page for section 1, a long page or even two for section 2, and then a short page for section 3.

*Nota bene*: Indicate along the way which chapters are included with the submission.

Outstanding Features

* Include all the material from “Core Difference” through “Purpose,” trimmed down to brief bullet-point entries. The reader should be able to scan this quickly and understand its parts. One of the main purposes of this section is actually for internal “sales”: assuming the acquisitions editor likes the book, they will have to “sell” it to the board, and a big part of how they do this is to extract the best bits from the outstanding features.
* If this book has a reasonable place in an undergraduate course, especially one that’s taught on a lot of campuses, this is a good place to say so: they love that.

Apparatus

* List any form of apparatus that you’ll need. Obviously a bibliography and endnotes, but is there anything else? From what I see here, I don’t think you need anything. *Say so*. This section is largely negative for them: if you say you need 37 photographs, for example, that’s bad, because it’s expensive and complicated. If (as I suspect) you don’t need anything but text, that’s good and should be stated explicitly.

Competition

This is the only real weakness of your proposal as it stands. Everything up to this point is largely cosmetic restructuring. But the competition thing is *crucial* and currently not addressed.

The point of “competition” is not to demonstrate originality, i.e., that your book isn’t a rehash of something already done. The point is rather to show that the book is part of an existing discussion, preferably a lively one. If there are lots of books arguing about something, that means a new book on the same issues has a natural audience who will buy and argue about it—and that means the publisher sells books.

I suggest that you go through your list of books and pull out a few to engage with directly. Pick books that are closely related to yours, of course, but insofar as possible you want to choose books that the editor has heard of, and better yet knows are selling well. You want a good paragraph of discussion for each such book, explaining what it does, what it fails to do, how you’re engaging with it, etc. For your reference, I include OUP’s remarks on this:

1. Consider the existing books in this field and discuss specifically their strengths and weaknesses. Spell out how your book will be similar to, as well as different from, competing works.
2. Consider what aspects of topical coverage are similar to or different from the competition. What topics have been left out of competing books and what topics have been left out of yours?
3. Please discuss each competing book in a separate paragraph. (If possible, please provide us with the publisher and date of publication as well.) This information will provide the reviewers and the publisher a frame of reference for evaluating your material. Remember, you are writing for reviewers and not for publication, so be as frank as possible regarding your competition. Give credit where credit is due, and show how you can do it better.

This is a section on which to spend a lot of time and effort. I have heard one senior editor say that “Every author thinks his [sic] book is completely new and there’s no competition.” They don’t mean competition that way: they mean books that grapple with *some* of the same issues. Your object is to demonstrate that your book engages with an active, dynamic field of argument, and that everyone who has any connection to that field will want to pick it up and read it. Secondarily, you aim to demonstrate that, having read your book, everyone involved with the field will have to cite it in everything they write thereafter.

I think that once you have a couple of pages of detailed discussion like this, you could include the rest of your annotated bibliography material at the end. The point of doing so is simply to demonstrate, once again, that there is an active literature here.

Primary Market

* Given the topics dealt with in this book, it seems to me very likely that there are courses, collegiate and graduate, that could make use of some or all of it. Tell them what those courses are (maybe give one or two examples from places like Harvard and Chicago and Yale), and explain briefly how the book could fit into the curriculum. It’s fine if only part of your book would get used: they expect that, and use electronic distribution to make it work. If they believe that this book will appear on a lot of syllabuses, they will be excited to publish it, because that means guaranteed ongoing sales.
* It is worth listing the major conferences at which they might make sales of this book (AAR, for example). This gives them a sense of what kind of market they’re really aiming at. If you go to a lot of conferences, be sure to list the ones where OUP always has a big display, because that means they already spend money in that area.

Status of the Work

* You currently say you’re going to complete it in 36 months. That’s fine, but it’s kind of a blank, open space. Say exactly what is already written or drafted. List anything partly published—they don’t like that, so I hope there isn’t much—and more positively mention papers you’ve given, workshops, anything like that. They want to feel confident that this project is actually under way and that you really will complete it in the listed time.
* You say that the manuscript will be 70-80,000 words. This is very short, only about 3 standard journal papers. I think they will find that worrying: how can this author imagine he’s going to accomplish all of what he says he is—and it’s an ambitious project—in a book that short? If you really mean what you say, I suggest writing a brief paragraph to explain how you’re going to pull it off. You don’t want the editor to read the proposal and come away nervous that you’ve bitten off more than you can chew. You also don’t want them to worry that in the end you’ll turn in a 500,000-word monstrosity. At the same time, if you actually think this will take 150,000 words, *say so*: if they accept the proposal you will sign a contract based on the length you’ve specified, and if you’re way off from that when you submit the MS, they can and very likely will reject it outright.
* If you plan to include any images or copyrighted material, explain what that is and how you’re going to get it. If (as I suspect) you won’t include any of that, say so: once again, you’re giving confidence that you’ve thought this through and there won’t be any unexpected obstacles preventing timely completion and publication.

Sample Chapters

Remember to include this!

Author

Include your brief author bio last, and be sure to attach your CV with the submission.

**Concluding Remarks**

I think that this is a strong proposal for a book they ought to like. To my eye, the main things to work on are:

* Restructure the summary into the outline-overview format OUP specifies, which is pretty common across the industry. This is mostly cut-and-paste and some polish, as all the real work has been done.
* Include a serious discussion of competition. Allow a good couple of pages for this.
* If at all possible, present this book as something that will get picked up in courses.
* The MS time and length need some discussion and expansion, as currently they’re worryingly opaque.