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*Introduction to Theology:
Faith Seeking Understanding*

Talk #4

Theological Reasoning



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Theological Reasoning

If theology is indeed a science, it must have specific kinds of theological methods of demonstration by which the science develops and grows in its penetration of the faith. As Aristotle observed, every field of inquiry should use a method proper to it, and it is the mark of a fool to try to use, for example, a mathematical method in a field like ethics.¹ Likewise, it is foolish to try to use empirical methods to disprove the existence of God, for God cannot be observed or be subject to experiment, but must be sought as the hidden first cause of all things. Philosophical rather than empirical methods are needed to demonstrate God's existence and attributes. And a method combining faith and philosophical reason is necessary in order to penetrate into God's Revelation. For theology is a science based on faith in God's Revelation, but it must also use reason in order to think about what God has revealed. Theology, therefore, must have a method proper to it, different both from the empirical sciences and from philosophy.

Many people, Christians or non-Christians, might think that theology does not use rigorous or demonstrative arguments because it is based on the authority of Revelation and Scripture and not on philosophical reasoning. This attitude is referred to as "fideism." St. Thomas poses this objection:

It seems this doctrine does not involve argumentation. For Ambrose says in book 1 of *De Fide*, "Put aside arguments when you are seeking faith." But in this doctrine faith is principally sought, for which reason it is said in John [20:31]: "These things are written that you may believe." Therefore sacred doctrine does not involve argumentation.²

But if sacred theology had no place for reasoned argumentation, then it would not be a science, for all sciences develop by some kind of reasoning. In fact, theology not only makes use of arguments, but does so in multiple ways. There is a richness of means by which theology grows as a science. But what kind of reasoning does sacred theology employ?

Arguments Based on Authority: Positive Theology

A question can be resolved in two ways: by appealing to authority, or to reason. An argument of authority does not indicate *why* something is true, but simply vouches for the truth of a statement because of the authority of the one who affirms it, without setting forth the reasons for its truth. An example of an argument of authority is to maintain that something is true because Aristotle, or St. Thomas, or Einstein, or the Bible, says so. In human sciences, arguments of authority are the weakest and never

have more than probable value. However, they are very useful for those who are learning and cannot yet fully see the arguments.

As mentioned above, there are four questions that one can pose about a given object: Does it exist? *What* is it? Is something true of it? *Why* is something true of it?³ The first and third of these questions can be answered by the authority of a witness. The second and fourth questions penetrate further and cannot be answered simply by a witness, but require grasping the essence and the cause of a phenomenon.

So does sacred theology use arguments of authority or of reason? There are problems with both alternatives. It would seem that if it used only arguments of reason then it would be no different from natural theology, which is a part of philosophy. However, if it used arguments of authority, then this would be contrary to its dignity as *wisdom*, for arguments of authority are the weakest and fail to illuminate the mind as to the *why* of things and their *natures*.⁴

As is so often the case, the answer here is both/and. Sacred theology uses both arguments of authority and arguments of reason. Clearly theology must use arguments of authority, for we know the existence of supernatural things only from faith in the authority of God's revelation. As our senses grasp the data in the empirical sciences, so the supernatural data used by sacred theology is grasped only from the authority of God, for, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:9: "'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,' God has revealed to us through the Spirit." St. Thomas explains:

It is especially proper for sacred theology to argue from authority, because the principles of this doctrine are received from revelation. Thus it is necessary to believe on the authority of those to whom revelation has been made. Nor is this contrary to the dignity of this doctrine, for although the value of an argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest, that based on divine revelation is the most efficacious.⁵

Furthermore, arguments of authority in theology are not limited to ascertaining that something is, or that something

³ See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* book 2, ch. 2, 89b36–90a4.

⁴ See *STI*, q. 1, a. 8, obj. 2: "Furthermore, if it involves argumentation, it argues either from authority or from reason. If it argues from authority, this does not seem to accord with its dignity. For the argument from authority is the weakest, according to Boethius. But if it argues from reason, this does not seem to accord with its ends, for as Gregory says in a homily [*In Evang.* 2.26 (PL 76:1197)], 'Faith does not have merit where human reason offers its own experience.' Therefore sacred theology does not involve argumentation."

⁵ *STI*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

¹ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.3.1094b12–29.

² *STI*, q. 1, a. 8, obj. 1.

is true of something, but frequently also reveal some of the *what* and the *why* of the matter. For God does not limit Himself to revealing bare facts, but He also reveals the meaning and finality of the divine things that He communicates. Nevertheless, the minds of the faithful must always seek to penetrate ever more deeply into those meanings and purposes through theological reasoning.

Arguments of authority have an entirely different force in sacred theology than they have in the empirical and philosophical sciences, for theology is a science based on faith in God's Revelation, and God can neither deceive nor be deceived. As we have seen, theology is a subordinate science, taking its principles from God's knowledge of Himself, communicated to man through Revelation. Therefore, in terms of certainty, the *strongest* possible argument in sacred theology is one of authority, when the authority invoked is ultimately that of God Himself.⁶ As will be seen in the following chapters, God's Revelation does not reach us without mediation, but is passed on through Scripture and Tradition. The true interpretation of those sources of Revelation is then discerned by the Magisterium of the Church, especially when it speaks with the charism of infallibility received from God. This interpretation of the Magisterium, in turn, then becomes part of Tradition passed on in the Church from generation to generation. Therefore, an argument of authority in theology must involve an examination of Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium.

Consequently, one type of theological argument is to manifest the authority that stands behind a particular affirmation. This can be done by showing that some particular truth is contained in Scripture, or in Tradition, or has been taught by the Magisterium of the Church. This type of theological investigation into the sources of theological doctrine is called *positive theology*.

Such investigations involve an exegetical or historical approach. For example, if a particular truth has been infallibly defined by the Church, the Catholic theologian can show that this truth was already contained in Scripture and Tradition. Or if a truth has not yet been infallibly defined, the theologian can aid the Magisterium in arriving at the certainty that a given truth is actually contained in the deposit of faith. Positive theology, therefore, is an indispensable part of theology, requiring erudition in the interpretation of Scripture, in the history of the transmission of the Apostolic Tradition in the life of the Church

⁶ See *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2: "It is especially proper for sacred theology to argue from authority, because the principles of this doctrine are received from revelation. Thus it is necessary to believe on the authority of those to whom revelation has been made. Nor is this contrary to the dignity of this doctrine, for although the value of an argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest, that based on divine revelation is the most efficacious."

(especially in the Fathers), and in the development of magisterial teaching.

Pius XII gives a good description of the noble task of positive theology in his encyclical *Humani generis* 21:

It is also true that theologians must always return to the sources of divine revelation: for it belongs to them to point out how the doctrine of the living Teaching Authority is to be found either explicitly or implicitly in the Scriptures and in Tradition. Besides, each source of divinely revealed doctrine contains so many rich treasures of truth, that they can really never be exhausted. Hence it is that theology through the study of its sacred sources remains ever fresh; on the other hand, speculation which neglects a deeper search into the deposit of faith, proves sterile, as we know from experience.

Positive theology enriches the other branches of theology, for the sources of revelation contain a rich and inexhaustible theological reflection that must always be soul of all the branches of theology.

Furthermore, like all sacred theology, positive theology must be done in communion with the living Magisterium of the Church. This means that the theologian cannot exercise "private judgment" either with regard to the interpretation of Scripture or Tradition. Rather, the theologian must seek to read the sources of Revelation through the eyes of the Church and her living Magisterium, which clarifies and illuminates those sources. *Humani generis* 21 states:

For, together with the sources of positive theology God has given to His Church a living Teaching Authority to elucidate and explain what is contained in the deposit of faith only obscurely and implicitly. This deposit of faith our Divine Redeemer has given for authentic interpretation not to each of the faithful, not even to theologians, but only to the Teaching Authority of the Church. But if the Church does exercise this function of teaching, as she often has through the centuries, either in the ordinary or in the extraordinary way, it is clear how false is a procedure which would attempt to explain what is clear by means of what is obscure. Indeed, the very opposite procedure must be used. Hence Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Pius IX, teaching that the most noble office of theology is to show how a doctrine defined by the Church is contained in the sources of revelation, added these words, and with very good reason: "in that sense in which it has been defined by the Church."⁷

Theological Reasoning

Sacred theology, however, is not limited to arguments of authority. Its objective is not simply to establish a conclusion by way of the authority of God's Revelation, but also to penetrate that Revelation, so as to grasp the causes, essences, distinctions, interrelations, and consequences of revealed truths, insofar as this is possible. For example, if God reveals that He gives grace to mankind, theology poses the question as to what grace is, what are its causes and purposes, and whether there are different kinds of

⁷ Pius IX, *Inter gravissimas*, Oct. 28, 1870, in *Acta*, vol. 1, p. 260.

grace and how they differ. Theology thus poses questions as to the meaning, causes, essences, implications, and interrelations of what God reveals. It *teaches the believer how to think through theological problems*, so that he can see for himself the reasons for each conclusion, and how they rest on revealed truths and valid universal principles. Only in this way can theology be truly a science and gain some understanding, however limited, of the content of the faith. St. Thomas states his pedagogical objective in *Quodlibet* IV, q. 9, a. 3:

Disputed questions can be ordered to two ends. One kind of disputation is ordered to removing doubt about *whether* something is true, and in a theological disputation of this kind one must principally rely on authorities that are received by those with whom one is disputing. . . . Another kind of disputed question is that of masters in the schools, who seek not simply to remove error but to instruct their listeners and lead them to *understand* the truth under consideration. For this it is necessary that the argument be based on *arguments that uncover the root of the truth*, and make one see *how and why* the thesis is true. Otherwise, if the master decides the question simply by citing authorities, the listener may satisfy himself *that* the thesis is true, but he will acquire no science or understanding and will walk away with an empty mind.

Theological disputations thus can have one of two purposes: to ascertain through an argument of authority that a given thesis is true; or to show how and why a given thesis is true, and how it relates to other truths. It is doubtless extremely useful to show that a given thesis is true because it is taught by Scripture, Tradition, or the Magisterium. As we have seen, this is “positive theology.” If only this type of demonstration is used, however, the reader learns that a thesis is true, but does not come to understand it more deeply, nor to see its relation with other truths. This is not satisfying because the human mind has a natural desire to understand a given truth by seeing it in its cause or root. In other words, if possible, the theologian should offer arguments to show how a thesis follows necessarily from self-evident or certain principles—or at least that it is in harmony with those principles—so that the student in turn becomes equipped to demonstrate it to others.

But here we have to reply to the objection posed above. If arguments of reason are used, will not the merit of faith be lost? Or will not theology be reduced to philosophy, and thus the greater certainty of its claims be lost? On the contrary, faith, which comes from grace, does not destroy reason or lie in opposition to it, but it rather perfects the intellect as grace perfects nature. Thus faith can collaborate with reason and employ reason in its service.⁸ This can happen in different ways in theological argumentation.

⁸ St. Thomas states this crucial principle in *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2: “Nevertheless, sacred theology indeed makes use of human reason, although not to prove the faith, because this would take away the merit of faith. Instead, it is used to manifest other things that are passed on in this doctrine. Since grace does not take away nature, but perfects it, it is

Philosophical Demonstrations Used in Theology

We have seen that St. Thomas distinguishes two types of truth that are revealed by God: mysteries that are above the reach of reason, and truths about God and man that natural reason can reach. Philosophical arguments can *never be used to prove or demonstrate mysteries*, but they can be used to demonstrate truths of the second category which in fact also belong to the natural order. Examples of such truths that can be demonstrated by philosophical arguments include the existence of God, His attributes, the creation of the world out of nothing, the freedom of God in creating all things for His glory, the absolute dependence of every created thing on God, the goodness of the material world and of man, the spiritual nature and immortality of the soul, the substantial union of our body and soul, freedom of the will, the dignity of the human person, the nature of love and the virtues, the existence of natural law, and even the existence of truth itself.

Even though the highest certainty of such truths comes from Revelation, it is useful to give a philosophical proof for at least two reasons. First, because a philosophical demonstration shows the reasons and causes as to *why* something is the way it is. This is much more satisfying to the mind, which naturally desires to know not only *the fact* that something is a certain way, but *why* it is so. Thus it helps believers to grasp the harmony of faith and reason.⁹ Secondly, this type of philosophical demonstration is capable of teaching those who do not share the Catholic faith, for reason has a universal appeal. Thus philosophical demonstrations help those whose belief in God is shaky or non-existent.

It is interesting to note that Revelation itself affirms the power of reason to come to a natural knowledge of God. The book of Wisdom treats of the natural evidence of God’s existence in 13:1-9:

For all men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing Him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan; but either fire, or wind, or the swift air, or the circuit of the stars, or the mighty water, or the luminaries of heaven, the governors of the world, they considered gods. Now if out of joy in their beauty they thought them gods, let them know how far more excellent is the Lord than these; for the original source of beauty fashioned them. Or if they were struck by their might and energy, let them from these things realize how much more powerful is he who made them. *For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen.*

necessary that natural reason serve the faith, as the natural inclination of the will yields to charity.”

⁹ See Francisco Suarez, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, prooemium, xxiii: “Scholastic theologians . . . use natural theology as a servant, to confirm supernatural truths and from the harmony of both kinds of theology to enable the mind of the faithful to rest more easily in those truths.”

... But again, not even these are pardonable. For if they so far succeeded in knowledge that they could speculate about the world, how did they not more quickly find its Lord?"

In the *Summa theologiae* and his other theological works, St. Thomas makes very frequent use of this kind of philosophical argument to demonstrate revealed truths that belong to the natural order. Such arguments can be taken from any sound philosophy. Obviously a false philosophy cannot be used in the service of faith, and any philosophical argument that is contrary to a revealed truth is shown to be false by that very fact. Revelation and the Magisterium of the Church thus provide a great safeguard to Christian philosophy by preserving it from errors contrary to revealed truth, which thus enables it to perform its task more perfectly of illuminating the natural order. Pius XII, in *Humani generis* 29, writes:

It is well known how highly the Church regards human reason, for it falls to reason to demonstrate with certainty the existence of God, personal and one; to prove beyond doubt from divine signs the very foundations of the Christian faith; to express properly the law which the Creator has imprinted in the hearts of men; and finally to attain to some notion, indeed a very fruitful notion, of mysteries. But reason can perform these functions safely and well only when properly trained, that is, when imbued with that sound philosophy which has long been, as it were, a patrimony handed down by earlier Christian ages, and which moreover possesses an authority of an even higher order, since the Teaching Authority of the Church, in the light of divine revelation itself, has weighed its fundamental tenets, which have been elaborated and defined little by little by men of great genius. For this philosophy, acknowledged and accepted by the Church, safeguards the genuine validity of human knowledge, the unshakable metaphysical principles of sufficient reason, causality, and finality, and finally the mind's ability to attain certain and unchangeable truth.

Since philosophical arguments are not always free from error, they must always be used in theology with an awareness of their limitations and with a sense of intellectual humility. Obviously, they must never be confused with revealed truths, as St. Thomas explains:

Sacred theology also uses philosophical authorities where they were able to know the truth through natural reason. Thus Paul, in Acts 17 [28], quotes Aratus where he says, "As even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'" But sacred theology uses these authorities as extrinsic and merely probable arguments. On the contrary, it uses the authorities of canonical Scripture as proper sources that establish conclusions with certainty. It also uses the authority of other doctors of the Church as proper sources of theological argumentation, but only furnishing probable arguments. For our faith rests on the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the books of canonical Scripture, and not on any revelation made to any other doctors.¹⁰

In this text St. Thomas establishes a hierarchy of sources that can be used in theology. In the first place is the authority of canonical Scripture. To it we must add the authority of the Magisterium of the Church. Secondly, there are the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. However, insofar as they are speaking as private theologians, their authority merely establishes probability in their favor.¹¹ Finally, there are the arguments of good philosophers. Again, their authority merely establishes probability, and only in the philosophical sphere (truths accessible to reason regarding God and man), and their arguments must always be critically examined by both reason and faith.

Theological Deduction

Philosophical arguments are clearly useful with regard to revealed truths that are also accessible to human reason. But does philosophical reasoning have any role to play regarding supernatural mysteries not accessible to reason? Such mysteries include man's elevation to a supernatural end, the beatific vision, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, sanctifying grace, the theological virtues, the sacraments, the Church, and the inspiration of Scripture. Reason can help to understand such mysteries more deeply through the methods of theological deduction and arguments of fittingness.

Reason can use revealed truths as the basis for *deducing* other truths from them. This is called *theological deduction*. St. Thomas points out that theological reasoning begins with the articles of faith, and then proceeds to deduce other conclusions from them:

As other sciences do not argue to prove their principles, but argue from their principles to demonstrate other truths in these sciences, so *this doctrine does not argue in order to prove its principles, which are the articles of faith, but from them it goes on to prove something else*; as the Apostle from the resurrection of Christ argues in proof of the general resurrection (1 Cor 15).¹²

The reasoning in this particular case mentioned by St. Thomas (1 Corinthians 15) proceeds from two premises: that Christ truly rose from the dead; and the fact that Christ was constituted head of His Body, the Church, and is in intimate solidarity with His Body. Therefore, it can be inferred that the Resurrection of the Head of the Body indicates the destiny of the members of the Body, as long as they persevere in the Body to the end. Since Christ was resurrected, His Mystical Body and Bride will also be resurrected.¹³

¹¹ Where there is a consensus of the Fathers of the Church on a given point of doctrine as to be definitively held, it can be inferred that they are speaking not merely as private theologians, but as witnesses of Apostolic Tradition.

¹² *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8.

¹³ This example of the general resurrection is not only a theological deduction that follows from Christ's Resurrection, as St. Paul shows in 1 Cor 15, but also a revealed truth in its own right.

¹⁰ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

For another example of theological deduction, we may begin with the truth of faith that Christ is true God and true man. On this basis the early ecumenical councils worked out Trinitarian and Christological doctrine. From Christ's true divinity, it can be deduced that He is omnipotent, omniscient, supremely merciful, and supremely just, in that He is God. Likewise, insofar as He is truly man, it can be deduced (against heresies like Monophysitism that diminish Christ's humanity) that He has a rational soul with a human intellect like ours, as well as a free human will (distinct from the divine will)¹⁴ and human passions, although all this without sin.

The conclusions of theological deduction may also be contained explicitly in Revelation, whether in Scripture or in Tradition. As a result of theological deduction, in addition to being known in themselves, certain mysteries can also be known in their dependence on other over-arching revealed truths. This is the case, for example, with Christ's free human will. It is known directly from many texts of Scripture, such as Christ's prayer in Gethsemane, and it can also be known by theological deduction from the broader truth of Christ's humanity. Likewise, the general Resurrection, which St. Paul shows can be inferred from Christ's Resurrection, is nevertheless a revealed truth in its own right.

When the conclusion is itself a revealed truth, theological deduction is still very useful in showing the connection and harmony between the mysteries and giving some insight into their hierarchy and necessity. When the theological conclusion is not directly revealed in itself, it is said to be "virtually" or implicitly contained in Revelation. Theological deduction then makes explicit what otherwise would only be implicit. This type of reasoning is very important both in combating heresies and in explaining the faith.¹⁵

Analogical Use of Philosophical Concepts in Theology

In making analogies between truths of the natural order and revealed truths, theological reason takes philosophical concepts and elevates them to speak analogically about supernatural mysteries. The First council of Nicaea, for example, famously employed the philosophical term *consubstantial* (*homousios*) to clarify the sense in which Christ's divinity is to be understood, and to exclude the Arian heresy. Similarly, the word *hypostasis* or *person* was used to speak about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

14 See, for example, the Letter of St. Agatho to the Emperor (680–681AD) against the Monothelite (one will) heresy, trans. Henry R. Percival in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 14:333: "For how is it possible not to acknowledge in him two wills, to wit, a human and a divine, when in him, even after the inseparable union, there are two natures according to the definitions of the synods."

15 See the classic work by Francisco Marin-Sola, *La evolución homogénea del dogma católico* (Madrid, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1952).

Arguments of Fittingness

Theological deduction is not the only use of reason to deepen our understanding of the mysteries of faith. Reason can also provide *arguments of fittingness* to show that a given revealed truth is extremely fitting. An argument of fittingness is a method of argumentation used *not to prove* the truth of revealed supernatural mysteries since they cannot be proved, but rather *by means of analogy to show why such a mystery makes sense and is worthy of God*. These arguments are directed primarily to those who already believe because of the authority of God's Revelation. They presuppose faith, but seek to penetrate to a certain extent why it is fitting that things should be as God has chosen. For example, reason alone cannot prove that God can become incarnate, or that He has actually done so. However, once we believe this on the authority of Christ and the Church, then we can ask why it is *fitting* that God has become incarnate. Reason can address why it is fitting that Christ established a Church, why He instituted seven sacraments, and why He suffered death on the Cross. Reason can address the fittingness of why God created the world, why He elevated men to the supernatural end of the beatific vision, why He gives them sanctifying grace, and why He instituted the Old Covenant and the Mosaic Law. We can even ask why it is fitting that God be a Trinity.

Although these arguments are directed primarily to those who already believe, they can also be very helpful to those who are inquiring into the faith and are looking for its harmony with reason. In such cases, however, it must be made clear that the argument of fittingness is not put forward as a cause of our holding it, or as the source for our certainty. Catholics believe mysteries with firm faith not because we have great arguments of fittingness for them, but because they have been revealed by God and declared as such by the Church. St. Thomas speaks of arguments of fittingness in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, book 1, chapter 9:

We only believe things which are above human reason because God has revealed them. Nevertheless, there are certain persuasive arguments that should be brought forth in order to make divine truth known. This should be done for the training and consolation of the faithful, and not with any idea of refuting those who are adversaries. For the very inadequacy of the arguments would rather strengthen them in their error, since they would imagine that our acceptance of the truth of faith was based on such weak arguments.¹⁶

Nevertheless, this type of theological argumentation is exceedingly fruitful and is perhaps the principal way in which faith seeks understanding. The arguments of fittingness have their foundation in *analogy*. They take a philosophical principle that is valid in the natural order and extend it analogically to the supernatural order. A good example of this is the explanation of the Trinitarian

16 *Summa contra Gentiles*, book 1, chapter 9

processions developed by St. Augustine and St. Thomas. They seek to explain the procession of the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity by an analogy with the operations of intellect and will, the highest operations in spiritual creatures. In men, the immanent operation of knowledge is fruitful in that it produces an interior word—the concept. Now it is reasonable to think that the eternal operation of knowing in God would be no less fruitful, and thus it should produce an interior word in God. However, everything that can be said to be in God *is* God, for God is absolutely simple. The Word of God thus *is* God, and says everything that He is. And likewise it is reasonable to think that the eternal operation of love that is in God would also be fruitful, producing an eternal *Gift of self* which would ultimately also be God, for God is love. This procession of love in God is indeed the procession of the Holy Spirit.

This type of theological reasoning is a sublime argument of fittingness for the Trinity, but it does not prove that God is a Trinity of Persons to a non-believer. We know that God is a Trinity from the Revelation made by Christ. However, once we know that by faith, it is beautiful to seek to penetrate and understand, as far as possible, the mysteries that we believe and adore. This is faith seeking understanding.

Another beautiful example of an argument of fittingness is given by St. Thomas to explain why Christ instituted seven sacraments. As certain elements are necessary for man's natural life, so analogous elements are necessary for man's supernatural life. St. Thomas divides these necessary elements into two groups: those necessary for the life of each individual, and those necessary for man as a social creature. What is necessary for each individual is birth, nourishment, maturity, healing in times of illness, and preparation for death. What is necessary for man's social life is marriage and government. So likewise in the supernatural life these elements are necessary: spiritual rebirth through Baptism, spiritual nourishment in the Eucharist, spiritual maturity through Confirmation, spiritual healing through Penance, spiritual preparation for death through the sacrament of Anointing of the sick, the elevation of matrimony to a sacrament, and spiritual government through the sacrament of Holy Orders.¹⁷

17 See *ST III*, q. 65, a. 1; and his short treatise “On the Articles of Faith and the Sacraments of the Church,” in *The Aquinas Catechism* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2000), 254–56. See also the Council of Florence in its decree for the Armenians in 1439: “There are seven sacraments of the New Law. . . . The first five of these are ordained to the interior spiritual perfection of the person; the last two are ordained to the government and the increase of the whole Church. For by baptism we are spiritually reborn and by confirmation we grow in grace and are strengthened in the faith; being reborn and strengthened, we are nourished with the divine food of the Eucharist. If by sin we become sick in soul, we are healed spiritually by penance; we are also healed in spirit, and in body in so far as it is good for the soul, by extreme unction. Through Orders the Church is governed and receives spiritual growth; through matrimony she receives bodily growth” (DS

Such reasoning would be insufficient to establish the fact that Christ established seven sacraments. However, once the seven sacraments are known through Tradition, theology reflects on why Christ instituted precisely these seven sacraments by establishing an analogy between the natural and the supernatural life.

The First Vatican Council also explains this type of theological reasoning:

If reason illumined by faith inquires in an earnest, pious and sober manner, it attains by God's grace a certain understanding of the mysteries, which is most fruitful, both from the *analogy* with the objects of its natural knowledge, and from the *connection* of these mysteries with one another and *with our ultimate end*. But it never becomes capable of understanding them in the way it does the truths which constitute its proper object. For divine mysteries by their very nature so excel the created intellect that, even when they have been communicated in Revelation and received by faith, they remain covered by the veil of faith itself and shrouded as it were in darkness as long as in this mortal life “we are away from the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by sight” [2 Cor. 5:6].¹⁸

This text specifies that arguments of fittingness can shed light on a mystery of faith through the use of analogy in three ways. It can establish an analogy between the mystery and some natural reality known by human experience. An example of this is the analogy between the sacraments and the essential elements of human life, as seen above. A second way is by establishing an analogy between two mysteries. Thus St. Paul argues for the general resurrection of the faithful on the basis of Christ's Resurrection (1 Cor 15). A third way is by establishing an analogy between a particular mystery and our supernatural end. Thus the Incarnation and the Eucharist can be shown to be extremely fitting in relation to man's end of union with the Blessed Trinity.

1311; D 695; CF 1306). Paul VI took up this idea in his Apostolic Constitution on the sacrament of Confirmation, *Divinae consortium naturae* of 1971: “The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.”

18 Dogmatic Constitution on the Faith, *Dei Filius*, ch. 4 (DS 3016, D 1796, CF 132).