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Talk #5

*Systematic Theology and Apologetics*



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# Systematic Theology and Apologetics

## Systematic Theology

Systematic or Scholastic theology uses all of the types of theological reasoning that we examined in the previous talk—positive theology, philosophical arguments to demonstrate revealed truths accessible to reason, theological deduction, and arguments of fittingness for the mysteries of faith—and orders these arguments in an architectonic way like a cathedral. The greatest master of systematic theology is St. Thomas Aquinas, the “Common Doctor” of the Church, and the greatest work of systematic theology is his *Summa theologiae* (the first question of which we have been following in these talks). In the prologue, St. Thomas states that he has attempted to present theology “according to the order of the subject matter,” and not according to the purposes of controversy, so as to facilitate the students’ grasp of theology as an organic, hierarchically structured, and balanced whole. In systematic theology, the order of presentation greatly helps to show the overarching unity of theology and the hierarchy and interpenetration of its various parts.

The structure of the *Summa* mirrors the structure and purpose of the world, which is an *exitus-reditus*: proceeding out from God so as to return back to God. The *Summa* of course especially focuses on man in this regard, who comes from God and returns to Him in beatitude through the moral life, through grace, and through Christ, His Church, and the sacraments. In Part I of the *Summa*, after an introductory question on the nature of theology, St. Thomas begins with God in His existence, attributes, operations of intellect and will, and distinction of Persons. He then studies creation, focusing on the angels and especially on man. Part II studies the moral life by which man orders his actions so as to attain his final end of union with God. To make this possible, however, the Word became flesh and instituted the Church and the sacraments, which are studied in Part III. Peter Kreeft gives a good summary of the structure of the *Summa*:

The structural outline of the *Summa Theologica* is a mirror of the structural outline of reality. It begins in God, Who is “in the beginning.” It then proceeds to the act of creation and a consideration of creatures, centering on man, who alone is created in the image of God. Then it moves to man’s return to God through his life of moral and religious choice, and culminates in the way or means to that end: Christ and His Church. Thus the overall scheme of the *Summa*, like that of the universe, is an *exitus-reditus*, an exit from and a return to God, Who is both Alpha and Omega. God is the ontological heart that pumps the blood of being through the arteries of creation into the body of the universe, which wears a human face, and receives it back through the veins

of man’s life of love and will. The structure of the *Summa*, and of the universe, is dynamic. It is not like information in a library, but like blood in a body.<sup>1</sup>

Within each of the three parts of the *Summa*, St. Thomas’s method is also to proceed in a logical order that mirrors the operation of the mind and the structure of reality. As a good Aristotelian, he holds that in any subject of inquiry, the mind asks certain fundamental questions, which should progress from the most general to the specific. The most basic question is whether something exists in reality, or, in the case of a mystery of faith, why it is fitting that it exist. After the existence of something has been ascertained, the mind wonders what it is, and thus seeks a proper definition that manifests the inner nature of the thing. Finally, one proceeds to study its causes, purpose, subdivisions or kinds, properties, and actions. Action is studied last, following the common-sense notion that *operation follows on being* (*operatio sequitur esse*).

## Branches of Systematic Theology

Although theology is one science because of the unity of its object—God in the light of His own Revelation—systematic theology must structure its investigation according to certain divisions that are developed in “treatises,” or branches of theology. The *Summa of Theology* is the greatest single work of systematic theology, and its subdivisions give a good idea of the various treatises of systematic theology as practiced in the thirteenth century by the Church’s greatest theologian.

The most central theological treatise is Part One of the *Summa*, on the Triune God (*De Deo uno et trino*). St. Thomas treats God in the unity of His nature in *ST I*, qq. 2–26, and with regard to the distinction of Persons in the Trinity in qq. 27–43. There follows a treatise on creation centering on the angels and men (qq. 44–119).

By far largest part of the *Summa* is Part Two, which concerns Moral Theology, and is further divided into two parts: general and particular. General or Fundamental Moral theology gives the general principles of moral theology, and is studied in the First Part of the Second Part (*Prima secundae*) (*ST I-II*). Particular moral theology is studied in the Second Part of the Second Part (*Secunda secundae*) (*ST II-II*), which examines the individual virtues, grouping them around the three theological and the four cardinal virtues (qq. 1–170), followed by the charisms and states of life (qq. 171–189).

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Kreeft, *A Summa of the Summa* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 15.

The Third Part of the *Summa* begins with Christology (*ST* III, qq. 1–59), which looks first at the ontological constitution of Christ, and then at the various mysteries of His life. Mariology is treated within the context of the mysteries of the life of Christ, as is Soteriology, which studies the Redemption worked by Christ’s Passion and Resurrection.

After treating Christ, St. Thomas passes on to Sacramental Theology, in which he studies first the sacraments in general, and then treats them one by one. The *Summa* was meant to conclude then with treatise on Eschatology, which is the study of the Last Things—death, judgment (particular and final), heaven and hell. St. Thomas never completed the project due to a powerful mystical experience on December 6, 1273—when writing on the sacrament of Penance—followed by a rapid physical decline and death. The *Supplement* contains corresponding articles from St. Thomas’s earlier Commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard so as to provide a completed systematic treatment of the whole of theology.

Other parts of theology have become distinct treatises after the time of St. Thomas. The general rule is that a branch of theology becomes further developed to the degree that it is opposed by heresy or the currents of civil society, or is the subject of theological controversy. Ecclesiology became a distinct part of systematic theology after the Reformation in the sixteenth century as a response to controversies on the nature of the Church. Controversies over grace (the *de auxiliis* controversy) and the spiritual life between the Jesuit and Dominican schools led to further development of the theological treatise on grace (*ST* I-II, qq. 109–114). The sixteenth century mystics, such as St. Theresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Ignatius of Loyola, led to the development of Spiritual Theology as a distinct treatise. Through the influence of the Liturgical Movement in the nineteenth century, Liturgical Theology likewise developed as a distinct discipline. At the same time, the development of the Church’s social doctrine in the late nineteenth century led to the development of Social Ethics as a distinct branch of theology. The theological study of marriage and the family has been fostered by the need to defend the Church’s teaching in the face of the sexual revolution and the increasing breakdown of the family in Western society. John Paul II’s development of the “Theology of the Body” is a response to this crisis.

## Fundamental Theology

Another branch of theology developed above all in the last two centuries has been Fundamental Theology, which is the subject of this lecture series. One of the tasks of theology is to reflect in a systematic way on her own identity, foundations, sources, and method. Fundamental Theology is that branch of theology that engages in the systematic reflection on the foundations of the Catholic faith: Revelation, faith, the transmission of Revelation through

Scripture and Tradition, the nature of Apostolic Tradition, the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the task of the Magisterium and her infallibility, the role of reason within theology, and the harmony of faith and reason.

St. Thomas Aquinas studies the foundations of theology briefly in the first question of the *Summa of Theology*. A parallel treatment is given in the first nine chapters of the first book of the *Summa contra Gentiles*. Fundamental Theology is reasonably studied first among the various branches of theology, for it investigates theology’s own identity, object, scientific status, dignity, and methods. This must precede even the investigation of the Triune God.

Fundamental Theology differs from positive theology, which also studies the sources of Revelation, because Fundamental Theology studies these sources in a systematic and global way. Positive theology studies those sources one by one, generally following an historical order.

John Paul II speaks of some of the tasks of Fundamental Theology in *Fides et ratio* 67:

With its specific character as a discipline charged with giving an account of faith (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15), the concern of *fundamental theology* will be to justify and expound the relationship between faith and philosophical thought. Recalling the teaching of Saint Paul (cf. *Rom* 1:19-20), the First Vatican Council pointed to the existence of truths which are naturally, and thus philosophically, knowable; and an acceptance of God’s Revelation necessarily presupposes knowledge of these truths. In studying Revelation and its credibility, as well as the corresponding act of faith, fundamental theology should show how, in the light of the knowledge conferred by faith, there emerge certain truths which reason, from its own independent enquiry, already perceives. Revelation endows these truths with their fullest meaning, directing them towards the richness of the revealed mystery in which they find their ultimate purpose. Consider, for example, the natural knowledge of God, the possibility of distinguishing divine Revelation from other phenomena or the recognition of its credibility, the capacity of human language to speak in a true and meaningful way even of things which transcend all human experience. From all these truths, the mind is led to acknowledge the existence of a truly propaedeutic path to faith, one which can lead to the acceptance of Revelation without in any way compromising the principles and autonomy of the mind itself.

Similarly, fundamental theology should demonstrate the profound compatibility that exists between faith and its need to find expression by way of human reason fully free to give its assent. Faith will thus be able “to show fully the path to reason in a sincere search for the truth. Although faith, a gift of God, is not based on reason, it can certainly not dispense with it. At the same time, it becomes apparent that reason needs to be reinforced by faith, in order to discover horizons it cannot reach on its own.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Letter to Participants in the International Congress of Fundamental Theology on the 125th Anniversary of “Dei Filius”* (30 September 1995), 4: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1995, 8.

## Apologetics

Apologetics uses the resources of theology—both systematic and positive—and the human sciences in order to defend the Catholic Church’s claims that her doctrine corresponds to God’s Revelation. The term “apologetics” comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning to defend or to justify. The English word “apology” comes from the same Greek word, but with a different sense. To make an apology, in modern English, implies that you were wrong and that you admit this and seek to make amends. In the original Greek, however, *apologia* signifies a speech in defense of someone or some position,<sup>3</sup> and in no way implies that one was in the wrong, but rather, in the right. “Apologetics” conserves this original sense, and signifies a justification and defense of Catholicism as being the true religion. A term similar to apologetics was already used by the Fathers of the Church in the second century during the Roman persecution. For example, Justin Martyr made two famous discourses called “Apologies” before the pagan Emperor Marcus Aurelius (who was also a Stoic philosopher). Obviously, the word “apology” here is not used in the modern sense, but in the sense of defending the Catholic faith as the true religion.

The Catholic faith can be rejected—and thus needs defending—in three progressively more radical ways: with regard to the Catholic Church, with regard to the divinity of Christ, and with regard to the existence of God and His attributes. Western society since the Renaissance has been progressively denying these three great pillars of faith. The Protestant rebellion attacked faith in the Catholic Church and her sacraments while maintaining belief in the divinity of Christ and the existence of God. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century began to call into question the divinity of Christ, without denying the existence of God. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed the rejection not only of the Church and of Christ, but of belief in God, the soul, and the public and personal duty of religion. Apologetics, as the defense of the Catholic faith, thus has three principal parts: the defense of the existence of God and His attributes, the immortality of the soul and man’s duties towards God; the defense of the divinity of Jesus Christ; and the defense of the Catholic Church as the supernatural society founded by Jesus Christ as the ark of salvation for mankind.

The theological dialogue of apologetics must begin with some shared foundation. St. Thomas explains that Catholic theology,

since it has no science above itself, can dispute with one who denies its principles *only if the opponent admits at least some of the truths obtained through divine Revelation.*

Thus we can argue with heretics from texts in Holy Scripture, and against those who deny one article of faith, we

<sup>3</sup> This comes from a Greek verb, *apologeomai*: to defend oneself, to speak in defense of someone.

can argue from another. If our opponent believes nothing of divine Revelation, there is no longer any means of proving the articles of faith by reasoning, but only of answering his objections—if he has any—against faith. Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the arguments brought against faith cannot be demonstrations, but are difficulties that can be answered.<sup>4</sup>

Apologetics has no choice but to *limit itself to the arms of its adversary* (or partner in dialogue). Catholics can use arguments from sources of belief shared with Protestants (Scripture and some aspects of Tradition) to show that Protestants ought to accept other Catholic doctrines, insofar as they are implied in what they already accept. With Jews we are limited to the Old Testament, where the Messianic prophecies and figures can be used to show how belief in Christ as the Messiah is in profound accord with their own history and faith. With Muslims, we are limited to the truths of faith that are found in the Koran, or which they accept through natural reason or tradition.

With atheists, dialogue principally takes the form of answering their objections against divine Revelation and using philosophy to demonstrate the “preambles of faith,” those fundamental truths that can be known by reason without the help of faith and which form the basis for belief in Revelation. These truths include an understanding of God, man, and our duties towards God. Knowledge of these truths makes one open to seeking God’s Revelation, and disposes one to recognize the true religion. Apologetics also has recourse to the science of history to show that God has truly revealed Himself to man. Here the historical credibility of Scripture and of the four marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) are defended.

Apologetics, therefore, can take the form of positive theology, Scriptural exegesis, historical verification, systematic theology, or philosophical demonstration, according to the needs and presuppositions of those to whom it is addressed.

One of the first examples of apologetics is Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, a Jewish rabbi. Other examples include Aquinas’s *Summa contra Gentiles*, written ca. 1264 to facilitate dialogue and debate with Muslim philosophers;<sup>5</sup> *The Catholic Controversy*, a work of St.

<sup>4</sup> ST I, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>5</sup> The work was apparently undertaken at the request of a fellow Dominican, St. Raymond of Pennafort, who was working in the missions with the Moors. A work written in 1313 by Peter Marsilio O.P. states: “Furthermore, strongly desiring the conversion of unbelievers, Raymond asked an outstanding Doctor of Sacred Scripture, a Master in Theology, Brother Thomas of Aquino of the same Order, who among all the clerics of the world was considered in philosophy to be, next to Brother Albert, the greatest, to compose a work against the errors of unbelievers, by which both the cloud of darkness might be dispelled and the teaching of the true Sun might be made manifest to those who refuse to believe. The renowned Master accomplished what the humil-

Francis de Sales against the Calvinists written in 1594;<sup>6</sup> and John Henry Cardinal Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* of 1845. While writing this work, Newman converted to the Catholic faith because he saw that the Catholic faith was implied in what he already accepted of Tradition as an Anglican.

Apologetics is similar to Fundamental Theology in that both investigate the sources of Revelation in a systematic way. They differ in that apologetics is oriented toward disputation with particular interlocutors, defense of the faith against particular heresies, and the vanquishing of particular objections, whereas Fundamental Theology examines the foundations of the Catholic faith in a systematic, serene, and theoretical way.<sup>7</sup>

## The Ecclesial Character of Theology

Theology is an ecclesial science in two fundamental ways: in its principles and in its mission. Theology is ecclesial because its first principles are those of the faith of the Church, from which all its knowledge is derived; this theological knowledge is in turn meant to aid the Church in fulfilling the mission given her by Christ. Thus it is only from the Church and for the Church that theology can realize its full stature. John Paul II gives a good summary of these two complementary aspects of the ecclesial dimension of theology in *Veritatis splendor* 109:

It is fundamental for defining the very identity of theology, and consequently for theology to carry out its proper mission, to recognize its *profound and vital connection with the Church, her mystery, her life and her mission*: "Theology is an ecclesial science because it grows in the Church and works on the Church. . . . It is a service to the Church and therefore ought to feel itself actively involved in the mission

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ity of so great a Father asked, and composed a work called the *Summa contra Gentiles*, held to be without equal in its field" (quoted in the Introduction by Anton C. Pegis to *Summa contra Gentiles*. Book One: *God* [Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975]. . See J.-P. Torrell, *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2005), 101.

6 St. Francis de Sales, *The Catholic Controversy: St. Francis de Sales' Defense of the Faith*, trans. Henry B. Mackey (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1992).

7 See Henri Bouillard, S.J., "Human Experience as the Starting Point of Fundamental Theology," in *The Church and the World: Fundamental Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1965), 79–80: "The treatise on the grounds of theology demonstrates how Scripture, Tradition, and the magisterium witness to divine revelation, and, on this score, they are the sources and criteria of theology. This discipline is invested with a dogmatic character from the fact that it receives in faith what these witnesses have to say about their own function and their authority. It posits what the Christian message itself considers to be the *dogmatic* foundations of the *science* of faith. The role of apologetics is quite different. Its task is to give an exposition, in a form legitimate in the eyes of the unbeliever, of what the believer considers to be the *rational* foundations of the *decision* to believe. To sum up, on the one hand the intention is to establish in faith the science of faith; on the other, we wish to lay foundations in reason for the act of faith."

of the Church, particularly in its prophetic mission".<sup>8</sup> By its very nature and procedures, authentic theology can flourish and develop only through a committed and responsible participation in and "belonging" to the Church as a "community of faith." In turn, the fruits of theological research and deeper insight become a source of enrichment for the Church and her life of faith.

Since sacred or Catholic theology has as its first principles the content of Revelation, it can only exist integrally and in fullness within the Catholic Church, who received, maintains, and nurtures that deposit of Revelation. These first principles are derived from Scripture and Tradition (which includes the liturgy as an important element<sup>9</sup>), and are authentically interpreted and defined by the Magisterium of the Church. Thus theology maintains its foundational principles in their integrity only within the Church, and loses these principles through dissent and heresy.

Obviously, this does not mean that theology cannot be done outside the Catholic Church! To the extent that elements of Revelation are conserved outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church, there can be fertile reflection on God in the light of His authentic Revelation. This is true of Judaism and Christian churches and ecclesial communities not in communion with the successor of Peter. *Lumen gentium* 8 speaks of the "many elements of sanctification and truth" that are found outside of the visible structure of the Catholic Church, which include the Old and New Testaments, oral Tradition, and the liturgy and sacraments. These elements make sacred theology possible, and by their very nature lead to the fullness of catholic truth: "These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity" (*LG* 8).

The more a theologian is steeped in Scripture and Tradition as it developed first in Israel and then in the Church throughout the centuries, the more his theology will be able to flourish for being rooted in fertile soil.<sup>10</sup> A great example of this is St. Thomas Aquinas. His work is a synthesis of the whole theological tradition preceding him. As Leo XIII says: "Aquinas, as Cajetan observes, because 'he most venerated the ancient Doctors of the Church, in a certain way seems to have inherited the intellect of all.'"<sup>11</sup>

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8 John Paul II, Address to the Professors and Students of the Pontifical Gregorian University (December 15, 1979), 6. In *Insegnamenti* 11, 2 (1979), 1424.

9 The liturgy uniquely reveals the Catholic understanding of the Triune God, the Church, salvation history, and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.

10 See Germain Grisez, "The Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture," *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010): 184: "He [God] speaks to us not only as individuals, but also, and especially, together, and together we must listen to and appropriate his message and be formed into the communities of faith we are called to be. Only the hearing of the whole Church is fully sound."

11 Leo XIII, Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* 17.

Furthermore, a theologian must always seek to think with the mind of the Church (*sentire cum ecclesia*)<sup>12</sup> as manifested in her authentic Magisterium. This applies not only to the infallible Magisterium, but also to the ordinary Magisterium of the Church, interpreted through the hermeneutics of continuity by which earlier teachings are read in the light of later ones, and vice versa.

Theology is an ecclesial science not only due to its sources, but also on account of its *mission*. That mission involves building up the faith of the Church, which includes helping the Magisterium to define and teach the Catholic faith, aiding in evangelization, guiding the contemplation of her members, assisting in building a Christian culture, and defending the Church's faith from errors and attacks, whether from without or from within.

The Instruction *On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian, Donum veritatis* 1,<sup>13</sup> defends this notion of the mission of theology to build up the faith of the Church, stating that “the service of doctrine, implying as it does the believer's search for an understanding of the faith, i.e., theology, is therefore something indispensable for the Church.” Similarly, Bl. John Paul II in *Veritatis splendor* 109 says that “the Church must constantly reawaken or ‘rekindle’ her own life of faith (see 2 Tim 1:6), particularly through an ever deeper reflection, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, upon the content of faith itself.” Throughout her journey through human history, the Church is called to imitate Mary who pondered the mysteries of her Son “in her heart” (Lk 2:19, 51).

The ecclesial mission of theology has a positive and negative aspect: it is positive in reflecting on and expounding the faith, and negative in defending it from error. St. Thomas explains:

It belongs to one and the same science, however, both to pursue one of two contraries and to oppose the other. Medicine, for example, seeks to effect health and to eliminate illness. Hence, just as it belongs to the wise man to meditate especially on the truth belonging to the first principle and to teach it to others, so it *belongs to him to refute the opposing falsehood*.

Appropriately, therefore, is the twofold office of the wise man shown from the mouth of Wisdom in our opening words (Proverbs 8:7): to meditate and speak forth of the divine truth, which is truth in person (Wisdom touches on this in the words “my mouth shall meditate truth”), and to refute the opposing error (which Wisdom touches on in the words “and my lips shall hate impiety”). By *impiety* is here meant falsehood against the divine truth.<sup>14</sup>

It is impossible to defend the faith against heresy or attack without doing theology.

12 This is the title of a list of rules for thinking with the Church in St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, nn. 352-370.

13 Issued by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith on May 24, 1990.

14 *SCG*, bk. 1, ch. 1, nos. 3-4, trans. Anton C. Pegis, 1:60-61.

Perhaps it is not superfluous to point out that the ecclesial nature of theology also applies to Biblical exegesis. In the last two centuries, exegetes have not infrequently treated the Bible as if it were a document of ancient literature like any other, capable of being examined “impartially” without respect to faith commitments or ecclesial Tradition. This cannot be the case, for Scripture is “the very soul of theology” (*Dei Verbum* 24). If theology only reaches its fullness within the Church, which it helps to defend and build up, then that part of theology that focuses on the interpretation of Scripture must likewise, and *a fortiori*, be an ecclesial science.

Benedict XVI, in his apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* 29, stresses this point:

The intrinsic link between the word and faith makes clear that authentic biblical hermeneutics can only be had within the faith of the Church, which has its paradigm in Mary's *fiat*. Saint Bonaventure states that without faith there is no key to throw open the sacred text: “This is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, from whom, as from a fountain, flow forth the certainty and the understanding of all sacred Scripture. Therefore it is impossible for anyone to attain to knowledge of that truth unless he first have infused faith in Christ, which is the lamp, the gate and the foundation of all Scripture.”<sup>15</sup> And Saint Thomas Aquinas, citing Saint Augustine, insists that “the letter, even that of the Gospel, would kill, were there not the inward grace of healing faith.”<sup>16</sup>

Here we can point to a fundamental criterion of biblical hermeneutics: *the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church*. This is not to uphold the ecclesial context as an extrinsic rule to which exegetes must submit, but rather is something demanded by the very nature of the Scriptures and the way they gradually came into being.

Pope Benedict then quotes the 1993 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*:

Faith traditions formed the living context for the literary activity of the authors of sacred Scripture. Their insertion into this context also involved a sharing in both the liturgical and external life of the communities, in their intellectual world, in their culture and in the ups and downs of their shared history. In like manner, the interpretation of sacred Scripture requires full participation on the part of exegetes in the life and faith of the believing community of their own time.<sup>17</sup>

As Scripture was forged in the faith of Israel and the Apostolic Church, so the interpretation of Scripture must always be made in the light of the Apostolic faith that continues to live and organically develop in the Church.

15 St. Bonaventure, *Breviloquium, Prol.: Opera omnia*, V, Quaracchi 1891, pp. 201-202.

16 St. Thomas, *ST I-II*, q. 106, a. 2.

17 Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (15 April 1993), III, A, 3: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 13, No. 3035.

## The Harmony of Faith and Reason

Since theology seeks to know God through faith and reason, it is essential that these two sources be kept in intimate harmony. Faith and reason, when rightly used, cannot conflict because they come from the same God who is both the Creator and Revealer. Human faith in a false religion or cult, however, can be opposed to reason, for such faith does not come from God. Thus the conflict between faith and reason is felt much more acutely in religions other than Catholicism, as in Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, has always been the great defender of human reason, and of the arts and sciences in general. Ironically, the Church's defense of reason has become increasingly energetic in the past 150 years, as Western culture, while progressively distancing itself from Christian faith, has been gradually sinking into skepticism with regard to the power of reason to know speculative or moral truth. Faith and reason, far from being adversaries, mutually support each other.

The First Vatican Council confirms the harmony of faith and reason:

However, though faith is above reason, there can never be a real conflict between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, and God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth. The deceptive appearance of such a contradiction is mainly due to the fact that either the dogmas of faith have not been understood and expounded according to the mind of the Church, or that uncertain theories are taken for verdicts of reason...

Not only can there be no conflict between faith and reason, but they also support each other since right reason demonstrates the foundations of faith and, illumined by its light, pursues the understanding of divine things, while faith frees and protects reason from errors and provides it with manifold insights. It is therefore far removed from the truth to say that the Church opposes the study of human arts and sciences; on the contrary, she supports and promotes them in many ways. She does not ignore or underestimate the benefits that human life derives from them. Indeed, she confesses: as they have their origin from God who is the Lord of knowledge, so too, if rightly pursued, they lead to God with the help of His grace. Nor does the Church in any way forbid that these sciences, each in its sphere, should make use of their own principles and of the method proper to them. While, however, acknowledging this just freedom, she seriously warns lest they fall into error by going contrary to divine doctrine, or, stepping beyond their own limits, they enter into the sphere of faith and create confusion.<sup>18</sup>

Pope John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio* (*Faith and Reason*) treats beautifully of the relationship between these two forms of knowledge. It opens with an affirma-

<sup>18</sup> Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, ch. 4, DS 3017, 3019; *CF* 133, 135.

tion of their complementary, harmonious, and equally necessary character:

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.

John Paul II also confirms the harmony of faith and reason in *Veritatis splendor* (*The Splendor of the Truth*) 109:

By its nature, faith appeals to reason because it reveals to man the truth of his destiny and the way to attain it. Revealed truth, to be sure, surpasses our telling. All our concepts fall short of its ultimately unfathomable grandeur (see Eph 3:19). Nonetheless, revealed truth beckons reason—God's gift fashioned for the assimilation of truth—to enter into its light and thereby come to understand in a certain measure what it has believed. Theological science responds to the invitation of truth as it seeks to understand the faith. It thereby aids the People of God in fulfilling the Apostle's command (see 1 Pt 3:15) to give an accounting for their hope to those who ask it".

Pope Benedict XVI, in his famous Regensburg lecture, also discusses the importance of this synthesis of the Israelite principle of faith with the Greek patrimony of philosophy. He speaks of the danger of rejecting this Catholic understanding of the harmony between faith and reason, whether in the Islamic world, the Protestant world, or the modern secular world. He aroused the ire of the Islamic world by citing the comments of a Greek Byzantine emperor: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."<sup>19</sup> Benedict comments on this as follows:

The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature. . . . For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality.

Such an attitude makes it impossible to offer to God what St. Paul (Rom 12:1) calls our "reasonable service" or worship.<sup>20</sup> Benedict XVI goes on to quote this text from Romans: "Consequently, Christian worship is, again to quote Paul – 'λογικη λατρεία,' worship in harmony with the eternal Word and with our reason." The Catholic conviction that every society is to offer to God through the Church whatever is valid in its philosophy and culture

<sup>19</sup> In the footnote of the official text, Benedict explains: "In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic."

<sup>20</sup> Douay-Rheims translation. The Neo-Vulgate has: "*rationabile obsequium*." The RSV translates this difficult text rather inadequately as "spiritual worship."

only makes sense with the belief that God is the *Logos*, the Word that is the source of all rationality, whose seeds have scattered among all the sons of men.

After securing the attention of the world with this introduction concerning Islam, Benedict then focuses on the Catholic understanding of the harmony of faith and reason, especially with regard to its roots in classical Greek philosophy. Like St. Clement of Alexandria, he sees the conjunction of Biblical faith and Greek philosophy as a providential event that was clearly part of God's plan for the entire life of the Church. Benedict points out an interesting symbol of the providential nature of this harmony in a curious event narrated in the Acts of the Apostles (16:9-10) during St. Paul's second missionary voyage, in which the Holy Spirit bars him from speaking the Word of God in Asia Minor (Turkey): "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." As a result, St. Paul brought the Gospel to Greece for the first time. Benedict comments:

This vision can be interpreted as a "distillation" of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry. . . . This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history—it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.

The thesis that the critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith has been countered by the call for a dehellenization of Christianity – a call which has more and more dominated theological discussions since the beginning of the modern age.

Benedict critiques this attempt to de-hellenize Christianity, because it would paradoxically take away the catholic (universal) character of the Church, which is universal by its openness to reason as such, wherever it is found functioning rightly. The supernatural faith of the Church is the true answer to the philosopher's quest for the full meaning of life. Thus the Church, which preserves and announces the supernatural Revelation of God, is called to be the Bride of the *Logos*, the Word who orders all things.