

DIOCESE OF MADISON

# LAY INSTITUTE

Level 1

# CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

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## SECTION I – WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

Basic Text: *Dei Verbum*

Excursus: Sources in theology

1. In addition to Sacred Scripture, many written sources are important witnesses to the doctrine of the Faith and sources for further theological reflection.

Conciliar Texts – esp. from ecumenical councils, also from particular councils  
Patristic writings (The Fathers of the Church)  
Doctors of the Church (universally and perennially valuable)  
Papal documents – encyclical letters  
Writings of theologians

2. Ecumenical Councils have a special importance because they represent the “decision of the Holy Spirit” speaking through the whole Church acting together

There have been 21 Ecumenical Councils thus far in the history of the Church  
Nicea (325) . . . Trent (1545-65), Vatican I (1870-71), Vatican II (1962-65)

3. Vatican II produced 16 documents.

Most important category: Constitutions (4) – liturgy, the Church (2), revelation  
*Dei Verbum* is the Constitution on Divine Revelation

4. Church documents are typically called by the first couple of words in the Latin text.

*Dei Verbum* = The Word of God

“Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith . . .”

### A. REVELATION AND FAITH

#### 1. REVELATION

In order to understand what theology is, we must begin with revelation. What is revelation?

#### CHAPTER I – REVELATION ITSELF

2. In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having in inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.

The story begins with revelation: **God’s** action.

God discloses Himself in words and deed

deeds without words would be ambiguous

words without deeds would give no motive for credibility

In which words and actions has God revealed Himself?

3. God, who through the Word creates all things (see John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (see Rom. 1:19-20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents. Then after their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (see Gen. 3:15) and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation (see Rom. 2:6-7). Then, at the time He had appointed He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation (see Gen. 12:2). Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Savior promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries.

4. Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, "now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). . . . To see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.

The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim. 6:14 and Tit. 2:13).

God reveals Himself:    in the created order (its existence, and its beauty)  
                                  in man (his thirst for God and his conscience)  
                                  to Abraham  
                                  to the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets  
                                  fully and finally in the Person of Christ

## 2. FAITH

What is faith? (And what is it *not*?)

5. "The obedience of faith" (Rom. 13:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) "is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals," and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him.

Faith is my response to God's self-disclosure. It is not my construct. It should certainly not be conceived as the collection of my opinions on matters of a spiritual nature. Faith is my assent to what God reveals (it has very little to do with *dissent*).

Classically, two aspects of faith are distinguished, both of which are highlighted in the passage above:

*fides quae creditur*

"the faith which is believed"

the objective dimension

the content of faith

achieved by mind/intellect

supported by study/inquiry

*fides quā creditur*

"the faith by which it is believed"

the subjective dimension

the commitment of faith

achieved by heart/will

supported by witness of others/prayer/religious experience

## B. SACRED SCRIPTURE

### CHAPTER II – HANDING ON DIVINE REVELATION

7. In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and to impart to them heavenly gifts. This Gospel had been promised in former times through the prophets, and Christ Himself had fulfilled it and promulgated it with His lips. This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those Apostles and apostolic men who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing.

But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place." This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 John 3:2).

#### 1. Scripture in Context

The role of Scripture understood theologically

The whole first chapter of *Dei Verbum* speaks of "Divine Revelation Itself" as the actions and words of God, and of Christ as the sum total of Revelation, *without once speaking of a written text*. The text of Sacred Scripture is first mentioned in Chapter II, under the title "The Transmission of Divine Revelation."

For a Catholic, "revelation" means primarily not the Bible, but the words and acts of God. The Bible is treasured as an authoritative witness to these acts, by which they are transmitted . . . but the words and acts are primary. (Also in Judaism: the Jews do not understand themselves to be the People of God because they received the Old Testament; but because they were once slaves in Egypt, and God brought them out of slavery with signs and wonders. To have been delivered from slavery is far more important than having been given a story about being delivered from slavery.)

The role of Scripture understood historically

The Canon of the New Testament as universally acknowledged by Christians contains 27 books. The first list containing all these books and only these books as the writings acknowledged as Scripture comes from a council at Rome in 382.

It took probably at least sixty years after the Resurrection for all the books of the New Testament to be produced. For the 300 years thereafter, these writings (along with others) were being circulated in the Church and nurturing the life of the Church . . . but during this time, there was no consensus on just which writings were divinely inspired. The Church lived for 350 years without such a decision; and when the decision came it was the decision of the Church. It is absolutely evident that the Bible did not produce the Church.

## Excursus: The Classical Protestant position

### 1. *Sola scriptura* – the Bible alone is the rule of faith

It is important to situation Sacred Scripture with the larger context because one of the central principles of Martin Luther (adopted by all the other leaders of the Protestant movement as well) lost precisely this perspective. The Protestant position is *sola scriptura*: the Bible alone is the rule of faith

This position was a necessary one for the Protestant movement. Denying the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, some other authority had to be identified. Scripture was about the only plausible candidate.

### 2. Weakness of this position.

As noted above, this position is very weak historically.

It is even weaker in practice: all traditional Protestant denominations claim that the content of their faith comes from “Scripture alone” . . . yet there are thousands of different theological positions that they hold contrary to each other. If Scripture unambiguously laid out the doctrine of the faith, they should all be in agreement about it. (Or, a thought experiment: give each of 100 people with no knowledge of Christianity a copy of the Bible and put them into 100 rooms, and ask them to describe the beliefs and practices of a true Christian – they will describe 100 different religions.)

## Excursus: The extreme ahistorical position

### 1. The Book of Mormon

The way *Dei Verbum* understands Scripture as a witness to revelation illustrates the difference between Christian Scriptures and the Book of Mormon, which presents itself as revelation-by-text. The Book of Mormon is a text given in a vacuum. Motives for credibility are entirely lacking.

### 2. Moslems and fundamentalists

Without intending it, fundamentalists and Moslems can get themselves into a similar problem.

A clarification by Fr. Joseph Fessio, SJ, about comments made by Pope Benedict XVI: “The most important clarification is that the Holy Father did not say, nor did I, that ‘Islam is incapable of reform.’ [...] I made a serious error in precision when I said that the Koran ‘cannot be adapted or applied’ and that there is ‘no possibility of adapting or interpreting it.’ This is certainly not what the Holy Father said. Of course the Koran can be and has been interpreted and applied. I was making a (too) crude summary of the distinction which the Holy Father did make between the inner dynamism of the Koran as a divine text delivered as such to Mohammed, and that of the Bible which is both the Word of God and the words of men inspired by God, within a community that contains divinely appointed authorized interpreters (the bishops in communion with the pope).”

## 2. Appreciation of Sacred Scripture

Having made this point, we want to back up and – in accord with the spirit of *Dei Verbum* – reassert the unique dignity and value of Sacred Scripture.

### CHAPTER III -- SACRED SCRIPTURE, ITS INSPIRATION AND DIVINE INTERPRETATION

11. Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation. Therefore "all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Greek text).

- Before *Dei Verbum* speaks of the Scriptures, it cites them frequently.
- God did also act to inspire the Sacred Authors who wrote the books of Scripture.
- Sacred Scripture is truly "the speech of the Holy Spirit" – it contains levels of meaning not explicitly intended by the sacred authors (*sensus plenior*)
- Through the devout reading of Sacred Scripture, the Holy Spirit can speak to the heart of the believer.
- And as *Dei Verbum* continues, there is great encouragement of the study of Sacred Scripture.

## C. SACRED TRADITION

### 1. MAGISTERIUM AND TRADITION

What is the Magisterium?

7. . . . But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place." This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 John 3:2).

10. . . . But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.

The word "Magisterium" comes from the Latin *magister* (master, in the sense of teacher). It is used to refer to the whole teaching authority of the Church, historically and in the present.

As seen above, the teaching authority of the Church preceded the text of the New Testament, and was the vehicle through which the canon of the New Testament was fixed. Furthermore, it is the guarantor of a correct understanding of the text of Sacred Scripture and thereby the vehicle through which the unity of the Church is preserved.

Excursus: The relative authority of various magisterial teachings

*CCC* 90 The mutual connections between dogmas, and their coherence, can be found in the whole of the Revelation of the mystery of Christ. "In Catholic doctrine there exists an order or hierarchy of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith."

In older theological handbooks, a system of “theological notes” was used to distinguish the relative authority with which each point was taught. Though no longer in common use as such, these “notes” illustrate a principle that is still entirely valid, viz. that not all magisterial teachings have the same weight, and that not everything taught in the Church is taught authoritatively.

In descending order of importance, these categories were:

- de fide definita – At the end of the world, Christ will come again in glory to pronounce judgment
- de fide ecclesiastica – The dead will rise again with the same bodies they had on earth
- sententia proxima fidei – Immediately after death the particular judgment takes place in which the eternal fate of the deceased person is decided
- sententia theologicae certe – With death the possibility of merit or demerit or conversion ceases
- sententia communis – The punishment of the damned is proportioned to each one’s guilt
- sententia probabliter
- sententia pia
- opinio tolerata

## What is Tradition?

8. And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (see 2 Thess. 2:15), and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all (see Jude 1:3) Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes. . . .

9. Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.

Tradition is not best understood as extraneous traditions, added to the essentials of Christianity as given in the New Testament. On the contrary, Tradition encompasses the fullness of the Faith, as witnessed in Scripture, as it is preached and lived.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

8. . . . This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.

The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. Through the same tradition the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood

and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (see Col. 3:16).

In our Catholic perspective: the fullness of God's self-revelation was present to the Apostles and disciples in the Person of Jesus Christ, most especially in His Paschal Mystery. But their understanding of all that was present to them was very limited. Their understanding had to grow and deepen over time.

The progress in understanding made by the Apostles during the Public Life of Jesus was remarkably limited (as we see in the Gospels). What changed everything was the Gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Once this Gift has been given, Peter knows what he must say to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem.

But, in fact, all that God has revealed in the person of Jesus Christ is not fully known even at Pentecost. It can't be, because the Lord Jesus is God Himself, and as such is an inexhaustible Mystery. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mysteries of God continue to be unfolded over time in the life of the Church. Many times, this has been prompted by new questions and controversies, which have arisen over time – as is most clear in the history of the early Councils.

This is the perspective of the famous theory of the Development of Doctrine, described by John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-91), a great English convert. This idea explains how we can have the dogma of the Immaculate Conception defined in 1854, e.g. It is not a matter of "adding" a doctrine to the Faith. It is a matter of explicitly stating a truth that was present at the beginning, but which only comes to be "drawn out" over time. What has once been believed is never denied. The development must be organic – i.e., in continuity with what has gone before, and growing out of it

### 3. THEOLOGY

It is because the fullness of God's self-revelation is not immediately appreciated in all its depth and for all its implications that theology has an important place in the life of the Church. Theology ("teaching concerning God") has classically been defined as "*fides quaerens intellectum*" – faith seeking understanding.

Theology operates within *fides quae creditur*. It is aimed at understanding, articulating, developing and defending the (deposit of the) Faith.

Although theology operates within one aspect of faith, there is profound interpenetration between the two aspects;  
so that the greatest theologians are also mystics  
(St. Thomas Aquinas and his orders to burn the *Summa Theologiae*)  
and the greatest mystics are also theologians  
(Ss. John of Cross and Teresa of Avila are Doctors of the Church).

## SECTION II – A BRIEF HISTORY OF THEOLOGY

### A. SACRED SCRIPTURE

The work of theology – the application of reason to what is already believed by the person of faith and prayer eager to understand more fully all that has been made known in the Person of Jesus Christ – can be seen to be a constant presence in the life of the Church, from the very beginning. The initial stages of the “Development of Doctrine” can be seen in Sacred Scripture itself – in fact, throughout the New Testament.

To illustrate the point, just a couple of passages from Saint Paul can be cited.

#### **I Corinthians 15:3-26**

<sup>3</sup> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God (that is) with me. Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

<sup>12</sup> But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty (too) is our preaching; empty, too, your faith. Then we are also false witnesses to God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

<sup>20</sup> For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death

Paul first hands on the received truth of the Resurrection of the Lord (3ff)

#### **but then adds**

- application of logic to answer a new question: the resurrection of the faithful (12ff)  
(with further development, the Particular and General Judgment)
- Christ is presented as the “New Adam,” signaling the development of typology (20ff)  
(with further development  
Christ is understood as summing up whole Old Covenant  
Adam-Eve-Tree become types of Christ-Mary-Cross  
Doctrine of Original Sin and baptismal regeneration is elaborated)

Excursus: Typology

Typology is an approach in theology that interprets persons and events in the Old Testament as pointing toward a fulfillment in the New. This approach is present in the New Testament itself (see

Hebrews 7, where Christ is compared to the mysterious Melchizedek). Typology was very popular in the early Church, and flowered especially at Alexandria.

To illustrate how developed this became, consider how the Lord Jesus could be understood as:

- the New Adam (in Adam all die; in Christ all come to life again)
- the New Noah (since He built the New Ark [the Church] by which mankind is saved from death)
- the New Abraham (since He is the beginning of the New Covenant)
- the New Isaac (the beloved Son sacrificed by the Father)
- the New Jacob (since His Twelve followers were the foundation of the New Israel)
- the New Joseph (sold for silver)
- the New Moses (since He leads his people out of slavery, gives New Law, and feeds with manna)
- the New Joshua (his namesake, which name means Savior)
- the New David (descended from David, He is King of a universal and eternal Kingdom)
- the New Solomon (since He is the Word made Flesh)

### **I Corinthians 11:23-29**

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Paul hands on the Institution Narrative, *plus*

- interpretation connecting the Eucharist to the death of the Lord  
(with further development, Mass is understood as true but unbloody Sacrifice)
- necessity of worthy reception of Holy Communion  
(with further development, more exactly specified)
- necessity of discerning the Eucharist as the Body of Christ  
(with further development, Real Presence and transubstantiation)

## **B. THE APOLOGISTS**

Throughout the history of the Church, progress in understanding has come about because of difficulty – clarification became necessary because some errant interpretation needed to be corrected.

Among the very first people whom we call “theologians” were the Apologists. This comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning a reasoned defense. The Apologists sought to explain and defend Christianity to its critics. They used logic, and often pointed out how Christian beliefs were consistent with the wisdom of the best of the Greek philosophers.

### **St. Justin Martyr**

One of the most notable of the Apologists was St. Justin Martyr (†165). He had spent his early life searching for truth, exploring many schools of philosophy. Becoming convinced of the truth of Christianity, he used this training very effectively to explain and defend the Faith to both the Greeks (First and Second Apologies) and the Jews (Dialogue with Trypho).

## Excursus: Charges against the Christians

Christianity was exclusive, leading to resentment:

- Christians refused to let Christ be integrated into Pantheon,  
not accepting the divinities of others to be accepted by them;  
this led to the charge atheism
- Christians lived by a strict moral code;  
not accepting common practice (the games, divorce);  
this led to the charge of "odium generis humanum"

Christianity seemed civilly subversive, giving the state a motive for persecution:

- Christians could not give allegiance to the emperor as divine;  
again, they seemed to be atheists  
and were excluded from political or military service in the Empire

Driven underground, Christians were further misunderstood and feared

- Secretive and cryptic expressions of the Faith led to charges of magic
- Sacramental practices were poorly understood and misinterpreted:  
night meetings and ἀγάπη sounded like lewdness  
the Eucharist sounded like cannibalism and infanticide was suspected

### **The First Apology of St. Justin Martyr**

Justin refutes the charge of atheism, largely by saying that the poets and philosophers were "atheists" by some standard, and even Socrates was accused of the same.

#### **CHAP. IV.--CHRISTIANS UNJUSTLY CONDEMNED FOR THEIR MERE NAME.**

. . . you are well aware, that those of the ancients whose opinions and teachings were quite diverse, are yet all called by the one name of philosophers. And of these some taught atheism; and the poets who have flourished among you raise a laugh out of the uncleanness of Jupiter with his own children. And those who now adopt such instruction are not restrained by you; but, on the contrary, you bestow prizes and honors upon those who euphoniously insult the gods.

#### **CHAP. V.--CHRISTIANS CHARGED WITH ATHEISM.**

Why, then, should this be? In our case, who pledge ourselves to do no wickedness, nor to hold these atheistic opinions, you do not examine the charges made against us; but, yielding to unreasoning passion, and to the instigation of evil demons, you punish us without consideration or judgment. For the truth shall be spoken; since of old these evil demons, effecting apparitions of themselves, both defiled women and corrupted boys, and showed such fearful sights to men, that those who did not use their reason in judging of the actions that were done, were struck with terror; and being carried away by fear, and not knowing that these were demons, they called them gods, and gave to each the name which each of the demons chose for himself. And when Socrates endeavored, by true reason and examination, to bring these things to light, and deliver men from the demons, then the demons themselves, by means of men who rejoiced in iniquity, compassed his death, as an atheist and a profane person, on the charge that "he was introducing new divinities;" and in our case they display a similar activity. For not only among the Greeks did reason (Logos) prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the Barbarians were they condemned by the Logos Himself, who took shape, and became man, and was called Jesus Christ; and in obedience to Him, we not only deny that they who did such things as these are gods, but assert that they are wicked and impious demons, whose actions will not bear comparison with those even of men desirous of virtue.

#### **CHAP. VI.--CHARGE OF ATHEISM REFUTED.**

Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both Him, and the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him), and the prophetic Spirit, we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught.

Justin defends the reasonableness of Christian doctrines by employing concepts known and accepted in Greek philosophy. He shows that some doctrines of Christianity are much like teachings of the most respected philosophers. And he makes the logical argument that there is no good reason to persecute Christians because of the discrepancies.

#### **CHAP. VIII.--CHRISTIANS CONFESS THEIR FAITH IN GOD.**

And reckon ye that it is for your sakes we have been saying these things; for it is in our power, when we are examined, to deny that we are Christians; but we would not live by telling a lie. For, impelled by the desire of the eternal and pure life, we seek the abode that is with God, the Father and Creator of all, and hasten to confess our faith, persuaded and convinced as we are that they who have proved to God by their works that they followed Him, and loved to abide with Him where there is no sin to cause disturbance, can obtain these things. This, then, to speak shortly, is what we expect and have learned from Christ, and teach. And Plato, in like manner, used to say that Rhadamanthus and Minos would punish the wicked who came before them; and we say that the same thing will be done, but at the hand of Christ, and upon the wicked in the same bodies united again to their spirits which are now to undergo everlasting punishment; and not only, as Plato said, for a period of a thousand years. And if any one say that this is incredible or impossible, this error of ours is one which concerns ourselves only, and no other person, so long as you cannot convict us of doing any harm.

#### **CHAP. XX.--HEATHEN ANALOGIES TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.**

And the Sibyl and Hystaspes said that there should be a dissolution by God of things corruptible. And the philosophers called Stoics teach that even God Himself shall be resolved into fire, and they say that the world is to be formed anew by this revolution; but we understand that God, the Creator of all things, is superior to the things that are to be changed. If, therefore, on some points we teach the same things as the poets and philosophers whom you honor, and on other points are fuller and more divine in our teaching, and if we alone afford proof of what we assert, why are we unjustly hated more than all others? For while we say that all things have been produced and arranged into a world by God, we shall seem to utter the doctrine of Plato; and while we say that there will be a burning up of all, we shall seem to utter the doctrine of the Stoics: and while we affirm that the souls of the wicked, being endowed with sensation even after death, are punished, and that those of the good being delivered from punishment spend a blessed existence, we shall seem to say the same things as the poets and philosophers; and while we maintain that men ought not to worship the works of their hands, we say the very things which have been said by the comic poet Menander, and other similar writers, for they have declared that the workman is greater than the work.

Justin was not a systematic theologian. His use of the Greeks was rather opportunistic – he was defending his faith and his fellow Christians as well as he could by citing authorities accepted by their persecutors.

Nevertheless, already in Justin we see two characteristics essential to Catholic theology:

1) acknowledgement of valid insights arising from human insight seeking to understand God from his works

- We can see Greek philosophy (and likewise the best achievements of every culture) as a preparation for the Gospel

- We can say that it was a providential gift that revelation of God in Christ came into the world at a time that Greek philosophy was available to appreciate it more fully (rather than criticizing the use of philosophical ideas as a corruption – a position oddly shared by some fundamentalists and modernists).

2) awareness that all the cultural and intellectual achievements of humanity must be judged and most often purified by the fullness of the Faith.

## C. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Excursus: The History of Greek Philosophy

Pre-Socratics: Socrates (known through Plato) is so central in the history of philosophy that those coming before him are known collectively as the pre-socratics. In this period, philosophy consisted in the search for a unifying element or principle through which our very diverse observations and experiences can be understood in a single frame of reference. Some of the most famous pre-socratics were:

- Thales: "All is water."
- Pythagoras: "All is number."
- Heraclitus: "All is change."
- Parmenides: "All is one."

The Golden Age of Greek Philosophy is reached in Plato and Aristotle, who developed systems which addressed all the classic philosophical problems:

- How was the world formed? (cosmogony)
- How does the world work? (physics)
- What are the most fundamental principles governing all reality? (metaphysics)
- How do we know? (epistemology)
- What makes a good life? (ethics)
- What makes a good society? (politics)

Hellenistic Period: After Plato and Aristotle, the most important figures in philosophy were:

- Disciples of Plato and Aristotle, whose work was derivative and inferior (as Plotinus)
- Those who focused on the question of the good life (esp. the Stoics and the Epicureans)

### 1. THE USE AND ABUSE OF PLATO

#### The Philosophy of Plato

The philosophy of Plato is not systematically taught, but is found imbedded in Dialogues, in which the master leading the discussion is Socrates. Some generalizations on the thought of Plato are offered below.

Theology: Plato had a sublime notion of God as immaterial and eternal (– very different from the gods of the Greek poets). This God was the source of all else that is, which emanates from this God.

Epistemology: There is an order of ideal Forms, through which the things we see in this world come to exist. Through knowing these forms, we recognize individuals to be what they are, and appreciate their relative perfection.

Cosmogony: Beginning in absolute perfection, the process of emanation generates less perfect things. The link between the spiritual and material realms is the Demiurge, who works with pre-existing chaotic matter, and fashions it according to the Forms.

Anthropology: The soul is immortal, it pre-exists the body and during that period directly apprehends the Forms. The good life is achieved by rising above appearances to contemplate the Forms and the Form of the Good. The goal of the soul is a “return” to the realm of the Forms.

### **Saint Augustine (354-430)**

Augustine saw convergence between the philosophy of Plato and the revealed truth of the Faith, and fruitfully used some of the concepts found in Platonism to probe further into revealed mysteries.

Some of the valuable aspects of Platonism were:

- the transcendence of God
- the dynamic of origin in God and return to Him (exitus-redditus)
- the immortality of the soul
- the value of a turn from created realities

Critique of Platonism:

- Most importantly: Platonism errs by equating the material with evil
  - this would mean that God cannot be the creator and sustainer of all
  - the goodness of creation would be denied
  - it would be difficult to acknowledge the Incarnation

Augustine’s solution is the theory of evil as privation.

### **The Confessions of Saint Augustine**

#### **Book XII, Chapter XI**

11. Already hast Thou told me, O Lord, with a strong voice, in my inner ear, that Thou art eternal, having alone immortality. Since Thou art not changed by any shape or motion, nor is Thy will altered by times, because no will which changes is immortal. . . . Likewise hast Thou said to me, O Lord, with a strong voice, in my inner ear, that Thou hast made all natures and substances, which are not what Thou Thyself art, and yet they are; and that only is not from Thee which is not, and the motion of the will from Thee who art, to that which in a less degree is, because such motion is guilt and sin; and that no one's sin doth either hurt Thee, or disturb the order of Thy rule . . .

Here we find understandings of spiritual realities highly influenced by Plato

- impassability of God
  - (not at all the image suggested by the Old Testament)
- metaphysics based on separate substances with their own existence
  - (later applied to angels)
- evil as privation

13. Whence the soul, whose wandering has been made far away, may understand, if now she thirsts for Thee . . . if she now seeketh of Thee one thing, and desireth that she may dwell in Thy house all the days of her life? And what is her life but Thee? And what are Thy days but Thy eternity, as Thy years which fail not, because Thou art the same? Hence, therefore, can the soul, which is able, understand how far beyond all times Thou art eternal; when Thy house, which has not wandered from Thee, although it be not co-eternal with Thee, yet by continually and unfailingly clinging unto Thee, suffers no vicissitude of times.

- immortality of the soul
- the movement of *exitus-reditus* (going out and return)
- the notion that spiritual substances are not eternal, but are not bound by time (later applied to angels)

## The Gnostics

Gnosticism (from the Gk γνωσις = knowledge). Gnosticism existed as a movement apart from Christianity, but there were also Christian Gnostics.

Gnostics accepted and heightened the dualism already found in Plato: “the spiritual is good, the material is evil.”

God is transcendent and unknowable; the demiurge is the creator and as such evil.

Man as mixture of spiritual (good) and material (evil).

Understanding of Christ (Christology) is docetic – Christ **seems** to be man.

Salvation must be immaterial. It comes through a secret knowledge (γνωσις), revealed to the elect.

## 2. THE USE AND ABUSE OF ARISTOTLE

### The Philosophy of Aristotle

Aristotle aspired not only to have a unified theory which could account for everything we experience, but actually to analyze all existing fields of knowledge in some detail. His works include systematic treatises on logic, cosmology, metaphysics, anthropology, ethics, politics, zoology, rhetoric and poetry.

Aristotle had a far more positive appreciation of the physical world than did Plato. He held that all knowledge begins in the senses. Aristotle used logic as a powerful tool to analyze the information received through the senses. His constant effort was to make distinctions, with which one could better understand.

Some of the most significant and famous distinctions in Aristotle were:

*esse* (the act of being) and essence (the kind of thing something is)

substance (what a thing is) and accidents (qualities a thing has, which could be different without affecting its nature)

act (the possession of a perfection) and potency (the ability to have this perfection) – which was important in the analysis of causation.

### Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

By the time Christian theology was first flowering, the works of Aristotle had been lost in the West. Shortly before the time of St. Thomas, they began to be available in translation from Arabic, which versions had been preserved and studied by Moslem scholars.

### *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas

The most famous work of St. Thomas is the *Summa Theologiae* (Summary of Theology). The *Summa* follows a strict pattern in its articles:

The question is posed.

The wrong answer is proposed, introduced with the word "Videtur" ("It seems")

Several arguments (sometimes invoking authorities) are cited as evidence for this incorrect answer.

Another authority, supporting the correct position is cited, introduced with the words "Sed contra" ("But on the contrary")

Thomas' position is given in the corpus of the article, introduced with the words "Respondeo dicendum" ("I respond saying")

Each of the arguments given in support the wrong position is answered; if an authority had been cited, Thomas shows how the statement can be understood differently.

### **I, q 1, a 2: Whether God exists?**

...

I answer that, The existence of God can be proved in five ways.

...

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

This proof of the existence of God relies directly on Aristotle's analysis of causation. Aristotle himself referred to the divine as the "Unmoved Mover" and "Uncaused Cause."

### **I, q 3, a 3: Whether essence and existence are the same in God?**

**Objection 1.** It seems that essence and existence are not the same in God. For if it be so, then the divine being has nothing added to it. Now being to which no addition is made is universal being which is predicated of all things. Therefore it follows that God is being in general which can be predicated of everything. But this is false: "For men gave the incommunicable name to stones and wood" (Wisdom 14:21). Therefore God's existence is not His essence.

**Objection 2.** Further, we can know "whether" God exists as said above; but we cannot know "what" He is. Therefore God's existence is not the same as His essence--that is, as His quiddity or nature.

**On the contrary,** Hilary says: "In God existence is not an accidental quality, but subsisting truth." Therefore what subsists in God is His existence.

**I answer that,** God is not only His own essence, as shown in the preceding article, but also His own existence. This may be shown in several ways.

First, whatever a thing has besides its essence must be caused . . . Therefore, if the existence of a thing differs from its essence, this existence must be caused . . . But this cannot be true of God; because we call God the first efficient cause. Therefore it is impossible that in God His existence should differ from His essence.

Again, Thomas relies directly on Aristotle's metaphysics for the argument.

At first glance, it may seem that we are very far from the teaching of the carpenter from Nazareth about His heavenly Father . . . but in point of fact, this is beautifully in accord with the revelation of the Divine Name to Moses. Asked His proper name, the Lord God replied, "I am who am."

### III, q. 75, a 2. Whether in this sacrament [of the Eucharist] the substance of the bread and wine remains after the consecration?

...  
**On the contrary**, Ambrose says: "Although the figure of the bread and wine be seen, still, after the Consecration, they are to be believed to be nothing else than the body and blood of Christ."

**I answer that**, Some have held that the substance of the bread and wine remains in this sacrament after the consecration. But this opinion cannot stand: first of all, because by such an opinion the truth of this sacrament is destroyed, to which it belongs that Christ's true body exists in this sacrament; which indeed was not there before the consecration. Now a thing cannot be in any place, where it was not previously, except by change of place, or by the conversion of another thing into itself. . . . Now it is evident that Christ's body does not begin to be present in this sacrament by local motion. First of all, because it would follow that it would cease to be in heaven: for what is moved locally does not come anew to some place unless it quit the former one. Secondly, because every body moved locally passes through all intermediary spaces, which cannot be said here. Thirdly, because it is not possible for one movement of the same body moved locally to be terminated in different places at the one time, whereas the body of Christ under this sacrament begins at the one time to be in several places. And consequently it remains that Christ's body cannot begin to be anew in this sacrament except by change of the substance of bread into itself. But what is changed into another thing, no longer remains after such change. Hence the conclusion is that, saving the truth of this sacrament, the substance of the bread cannot remain after the consecration.

Secondly, because this position is contrary to the form of this sacrament, in which it is said: "This is My body," which would not be true if the substance of the bread were to remain there; for the substance of bread never is the body of Christ. Rather should one say in that case: "Here is My body."

Thirdly, because it would be opposed to the veneration of this sacrament, if any substance were there, which could not be adored with adoration of *latria*.

Fourthly, because it is contrary to the rite of the Church, according to which it is not lawful to take the body of Christ after bodily food, while it is nevertheless lawful to take one consecrated host after another. Hence this opinion is to be avoided as heretical.

### The Latin Averroists

The most prominent Moslem authority on Aristotle was Averroes (so important, he was commonly called "the Commentator.") In fact, he was more an Aristotelian than he was a Moslem.

Averroes saw that some doctrines of Islam were irreconcilable with positions of Aristotle (who, for example, held the eternity of the cosmos). Averroes therefore formulated the "doctrine of the two truths." According to this approach, when the Koran and Aristotle are in conflict, one must conclude that there is a "religious truth" that is helpful for simple believers while a contradictory "philosophical truth" actually describes the real situation.

Christians who followed the same approach were called "Latin Averroists." They had no impact on the life of the Church, but serve as another historical example of those who refused to give primary allegiance to the doctrine of the Faith. (Belief in the eternity of the cosmos remained the respectable scientific position until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Einstein's theory of relativity indicated an expanding universe.)

## SECTION III – CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

Basic Text: *Fides et Ratio*

*Fides et Ratio* (*Faith and Reason*, 1998) is an encyclical of Pope John Paul, written to validate the importance of both faith and reason as ways to ascend to the contemplation of the Truth.

(A *New York Times* editorial in 1998 observed how remarkable it would have seemed to people living at the beginning of the twentieth century that at the end of the century, the Pope of Rome would be one of the strongest voices speaking in defense of reason.)

### A. THE CRISIS OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

In all ancient and medieval philosophy, there was a fundamental confidence that we reliably apprehend the real world and can take common human experience as the starting point for philosophy.

#### *Fides et Ratio*

5. On her part, the Church cannot but set great value upon reason's drive to attain goals which render people's lives ever more worthy. She sees in philosophy the way to come to know fundamental truths about human life. At the same time, the Church considers philosophy an indispensable help for a deeper understanding of faith and for communicating the truth of the Gospel to those who do not yet know it.

Therefore, following upon similar initiatives by my Predecessors, I wish to reflect upon this special activity of human reason. I judge it necessary to do so because, at the present time in particular, the search for ultimate truth seems often to be neglected. Modern philosophy clearly has the great merit of focusing attention upon man. From this starting-point, human reason with its many questions has developed further its yearning to know more and to know it ever more deeply.

Complex systems of thought have thus been built, yielding results in the different fields of knowledge and fostering the development of culture and history. Anthropology, logic, the natural sciences, history, linguistics and so forth—the whole universe of knowledge has been involved in one way or another. Yet the positive results achieved must not obscure the fact that reason, in its one-sided concern to investigate human subjectivity, seems to have forgotten that men and women are always called to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them. Sundered from that truth, individuals are at the mercy of caprice, and their state as person ends up being judged by pragmatic criteria based essentially upon experimental data, in the mistaken belief that technology must dominate all.

It has happened therefore that reason, rather than voicing the human orientation towards truth, has wilted under the weight of so much knowledge and little by little has lost the capacity to lift its gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being. Abandoning the investigation of being, modern philosophical research has concentrated instead upon human knowing. Rather than make use of the human capacity to know the truth, modern philosophy has preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited and conditioned.

... While, on the one hand, philosophical thinking has succeeded in coming closer to the reality of human life and its forms of expression, it has also tended to pursue issues—existential, hermeneutical or linguistic—which ignore the radical question of the truth about personal existence, about being and about God. Hence we see among the men and women of our time, and not just in some philosophers, attitudes of widespread distrust of the human being's great capacity for knowledge. With a false modesty, people rest content with partial and provisional truths, no longer seeking to ask radical questions about the meaning and ultimate foundation of human, personal and social existence. In short, the hope that philosophy might be able to provide definitive answers to these questions has dwindled.

The fundamental confidence of classical philosophy was first called into question by Rene Descartes (†1650). Descartes began with the observation that we can sometimes err because appearance deceives or because of an internal problem in the perceiver. He professed a desire to begin from a position of which he could be absolutely and unequivocally sure. The result was his famous dictum, “Cogito ergo sum” (“I think therefore I am”).

This seemingly simple move has altered the direction of philosophy ever since. Philosophers came to analyze not things in themselves, but rather their own ideas. Immanuel Kant (†1804) held that we know only appearances, not things in themselves. He also taught that we may *a priori* judgments to which real things conform.

Most contemporary philosophers treat the possibility of knowing (epistemology) and the operation of our language (linguistic analysis) . . . and never get beyond these issues. They are never able to treat the real world we encounter (which was taken for granted as a starting point by the ancients).

The logical culmination of this approach is found in Friedrich Nietzsche (†1900). According to Nietzsche, there is no true universe, that is, no coherent unified reality to be understood. Instead, I am thrown into a meaningless chaos, and it is up to me to create meaning by the force of my will. To do so is to be the *Übermensch* (the Superman). It is not man’s wisdom in discerning the truth that is important, but his will to power by which he can impose his preferred meaning on others and the world. Nietzsche was the intellectual godfather of Nazism.

The influence of Nietzsche is still uncomfortably clear in, for example, contemporary humanities departments. There professors teach that the received texts (of Shakespeare, Tolstoy, whomever) do not really mean anything in themselves. It is perfectly acceptable for us to impose on them from whatever hermeneutic (interpretational approach) we choose – so we get a Marxist reading of Shakespeare, and a radical feminist reading of Shakespeare, and so on.

## **B. PHENOMENOLOGY**

As a scholar, Karol Wojtyla was deeply impressed by a contemporary philosophical school called phenomenology. This philosophy takes seriously the difficulty of knowing, but affirms that we really do apprehend real things reliably.

Phenomenology speaks about real things “disclosing” themselves in appearances (sounding a little like Kant). But unlike for Kant, these appearances are trusted. No single disclosure gives us exhaustive knowledge of something, but each disclosure really does give us a glimpse of some true aspect of the thing. The more complicated something is, the richer it is in disclosing itself “from many angles.”

This approach gives full weight to the complexity of reality, and recognizes that even physical and human reality is full of mystery.

Phenomenology is not so much a philosophical system as it is a method – a method that respects complexity (and even mystery) and is open to contributions from many sources.

In *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul does not impose (nor even mention) phenomenology, but many passages are very much in accord with a phenomenological approach.

### **Respect for the achievements of various cultures:**

1. In both East and West, we may trace a journey which has led humanity down the centuries to meet and engage truth more and more deeply. . .

Moreover, a cursory glance at ancient history shows clearly how in different parts of the world, with their different cultures, there arise at the same time the fundamental questions which pervade human life: *Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?* These are the questions which we find in the sacred writings of Israel, as also in the Veda and the Avesta; we find them in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, and in the preaching of Tirthankara and Buddha; they appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles, as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. They are questions which have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart. In fact, the answer given to these questions decides the direction which people seek to give to their lives.

- In various cultures, similar questions and insights arise when thoughtful people are contemplating the same reality.
- Different cultures have their own contributions to make as they draw unique insights from their own perspectives. (Note how Pope John Paul lived this insight in his papal trips around the world.)

### **A path between relativism and triumphalism:**

2. The Church is no stranger to this journey of discovery, nor could she ever be. From the moment when, through the Paschal Mystery, she received the gift of the ultimate truth about human life, the Church has made her pilgrim way along the paths of the world to proclaim that Jesus Christ is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (*Jn* 14:6). It is her duty to serve humanity in different ways, but one way in particular imposes a responsibility of a quite special kind: the *diakonia of the truth*.<sup>1</sup> This mission on the one hand makes the believing community a partner in humanity's shared struggle to arrive at truth;<sup>2</sup> and on the other hand it obliges the believing community to proclaim the certitudes arrived at, albeit with a sense that every truth attained is but a step towards that fullness of truth which will appear with the final Revelation of God: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully” (*1 Cor* 13:12).

- A Christian must say that the Church has received the ultimate truth in the Person of Jesus Christ. To deny this for cultural relativism (we have your truth, you have yours) would be a denial of the Faith.
- But to say, “We have the truth; shut up and listen” does not seem to be the way of a Christian. With a phenomenological approach, the encyclical can say that the Truth has been disclosed to us in the Person of Jesus Christ, but the fullness of the Truth remains a Mystery which will lie beyond our comprehension until we see God face-to-face. Therefore, true insights arising in other cultures (sometimes needing to be purified) can be appreciated.

### **Saint Thomas Aquinas as model:**

43. A quite special place in this long development belongs to Saint Thomas, not only because of what he taught but also because of the dialogue which he undertook with the Arab and Jewish thought of his time. In an age when Christian thinkers were rediscovering the treasures of ancient philosophy, and more particularly of Aristotle, Thomas had the great merit of giving pride of place to the harmony which exists between faith and reason. Both the light of reason and the light of faith come from God, he argued; hence there can be no contradiction between them. . . .

44. Another of the great insights of Saint Thomas was his perception of the role of the Holy Spirit in the process by which knowledge matures into wisdom. From the first pages of his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas was keen to show the primacy of the wisdom which is the gift of the Holy Spirit and which opens the way to a knowledge of divine realities. . . . Yet the priority accorded this wisdom does not lead the Angelic Doctor to overlook the presence of two other complementary forms of wisdom—*philosophical* wisdom, which is based upon the capacity of the intellect, for all its natural limitations, to explore reality, and *theological* wisdom, which is based upon Revelation and which explores the contents of faith, entering the very mystery of God.

Profoundly convinced that “whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit” (*omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*), Saint Thomas was impartial in his love of truth. He sought truth wherever it might be found and gave consummate demonstration of its universality. In him, the Church's Magisterium has seen and recognized the passion for truth; and, precisely because it stays consistently within the horizon of universal, objective and transcendent truth, his thought scales “heights unthinkable to human intelligence”. Rightly, then, he may be called an “apostle of the truth”. Looking unreservedly to truth, the realism of Thomas could recognize the objectivity of truth and produce not merely a philosophy of “what seems to be” but a philosophy of “what is”.

- Saint Thomas is praised especially for his method, and his receptivity to wisdom coming from many sources.

- But the goal of the encyclical is not to reestablish Thomism as a monopoly, used exclusively in theological reflection or seminary training. Nor is the intention to jettison Thomism in favor of a lesser alternative.

### **The Church's role in philosophical inquiry**

51. This discernment, however, should not be seen as primarily negative, as if the Magisterium intended to abolish or limit any possible mediation. On the contrary, the Magisterium's interventions are intended above all to prompt, promote and encourage philosophical enquiry. Besides, **philosophers are the first to understand the need for self-criticism, the correction of errors and the extension of the too restricted terms in which their thinking has been framed.** In particular, it is necessary to keep in mind the unity of truth, even if its formulations are shaped by history and produced by human reason wounded and weakened by sin. **This is why no historical form of philosophy can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth, nor to be the complete explanation of the human being, of the world and of the human being's relationship with God.**

## **C. MYSTERY**

The goal of *Fides et Ratio* is to vindicate the claims of both faith and reason.

The phenomenological method has great value:

- addresses the crisis of modern philosophy (the difficulty of knowing)
- assimilates the insights of historical theology
- invites dialogue with other cultures.

But the greatest strength of the method is its profound appreciation of mystery – the Mystery of God, the mysteries of the Faith, and the mystery of the human person, and even the mysteries of the created world. The encyclical is shot through with references to mystery

### ***Reason before the mystery***

13. It should nonetheless be kept in mind that Revelation remains charged with mystery. It is true that Jesus, with his entire life, revealed the countenance of the Father, for he came to teach the secret things of

God. But our vision of the face of God is always fragmentary and impaired by the limits of our understanding. Faith alone makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently.

In short, the knowledge proper to faith does not destroy the mystery; it only reveals it the more, showing how necessary it is for people's lives: Christ the Lord “in revealing the mystery of the Father and his love fully reveals man to himself and makes clear his supreme calling”, which is to share in the divine mystery of the life of the Trinity.

### ***Current tasks for theology***

93. The chief purpose of theology is to *provide an understanding of Revelation and the content of faith*. The very heart of theological enquiry will thus be the contemplation of the mystery of the Triune God. The approach to this mystery begins with reflection upon the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God: his coming as man, his going to his Passion and Death . . .

97. . . . The dogmatic pragmatism of the early years of this century, which viewed the truths of faith as nothing more than rules of conduct, has already been refuted and rejected; but the temptation always remains of understanding these truths in purely functional terms. This leads only to an approach which is inadequate, reductive and superficial at the level of speculation. A Christology, for example, which proceeded solely “from below”, as is said nowadays, or an ecclesiology developed solely on the model of civil society, would be hard pressed to avoid the danger of such reductionism.

If the *intellectus fidei* wishes to integrate all the wealth of the theological tradition, it must turn to the philosophy of being, which should be able to propose anew the problem of being—and this in harmony with the demands and insights of the entire philosophical tradition, including philosophy of more recent times, without lapsing into sterile repetition of antiquated formulas . . .

- In Western theology, Mystery was always acknowledged in principle (of course), but presentations of systematic theology did not seem to take it very seriously – if there was something we had not figured out, it was a pretty insignificant detail. Mystery is always been central to the theology and liturgy of the East. Therefore, the approach offered here is very promising as an element in ecumenical understanding.

This approach to theology is very consistent with the spirit of our opening discussion about revelation, faith and theology.

- God discloses Himself.
- He does so fully and perfectly in the Person of His Divine Son.
- But the fullness of the mystery present in Christ is not fully comprehended.
- In the life of the Church and in faithful theology, we see the Mystery coming to be more deeply appreciated.