

INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY

REVELATION, FAITH AND THEOLOGY



Revelation: God talks to man as friends.

- From the very beginning of creation, God freely decreed to uplift man by calling him to a *supernatural end*.
- By this calling, the Blessed Trinity invites us to be members of the divine family, to really partake of divine nature, to live an intimate *communion with God*, to become *Godlike* to the fullest extent possible.
- God also wanted man to be free and responsible in the achievement of his supernatural end. Man should take an active part in his own salvation, even though this target surpasses his intellect and energy.
- Without divine guidance, attaining sanctity and salvation would be impossible. To save man, God decided to *reveal himself*, that is, to step into history and address his word to us. At first through the prophets, and lastly through his Son. Thus, he would explain to us his plans for salvation, invite us to follow him, and show us the means to reach him and the obstacles to be avoided.

Response of man to the divine initiative

- The Revelation of God, our Lord and Creator, must be received with *faith*. Believing God—faith—means receiving his Revelation with full obedience, accepting the plan of God, and allowing ourselves to be guided by his Wisdom.
- Faith is the light God gives us to reach eternal life. It enables us to know God intimately, recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd, and follow his commandments (Cf. Jn 10:4). These aspects reveal that *Christian faith has an intellectual value*.
- Faith is a deep disposition that can trigger the most intimate motivations of the heart. We should realize, however, that it cannot be reduced to a vague religious sentiment: “To believe is immediately an act of the intellect, because the object of that act is the truth, which pertains properly to the intellect.
- Faith combines a great light with a certain darkness. The light is the possession of a great truth, that can fill our mind and guide our life. There is also darkness because that great truth is not yet clearly seen, since in this life we cannot see God face to face.
- Faith's tendency towards its own development, the contemplation of God, can be pursued in two ways: the spiritual way, and the intellectual or theological way.
- The *spiritual or mystical way* is followed by the saints, who want to know God better and better. They achieve this by meditating on the word of God and by the help of the Holy Spirit.
- The *theological way* can be followed at the same time as the mystical way. It consists in using all the intellectual powers and cultural resources to understand better divine Revelation.

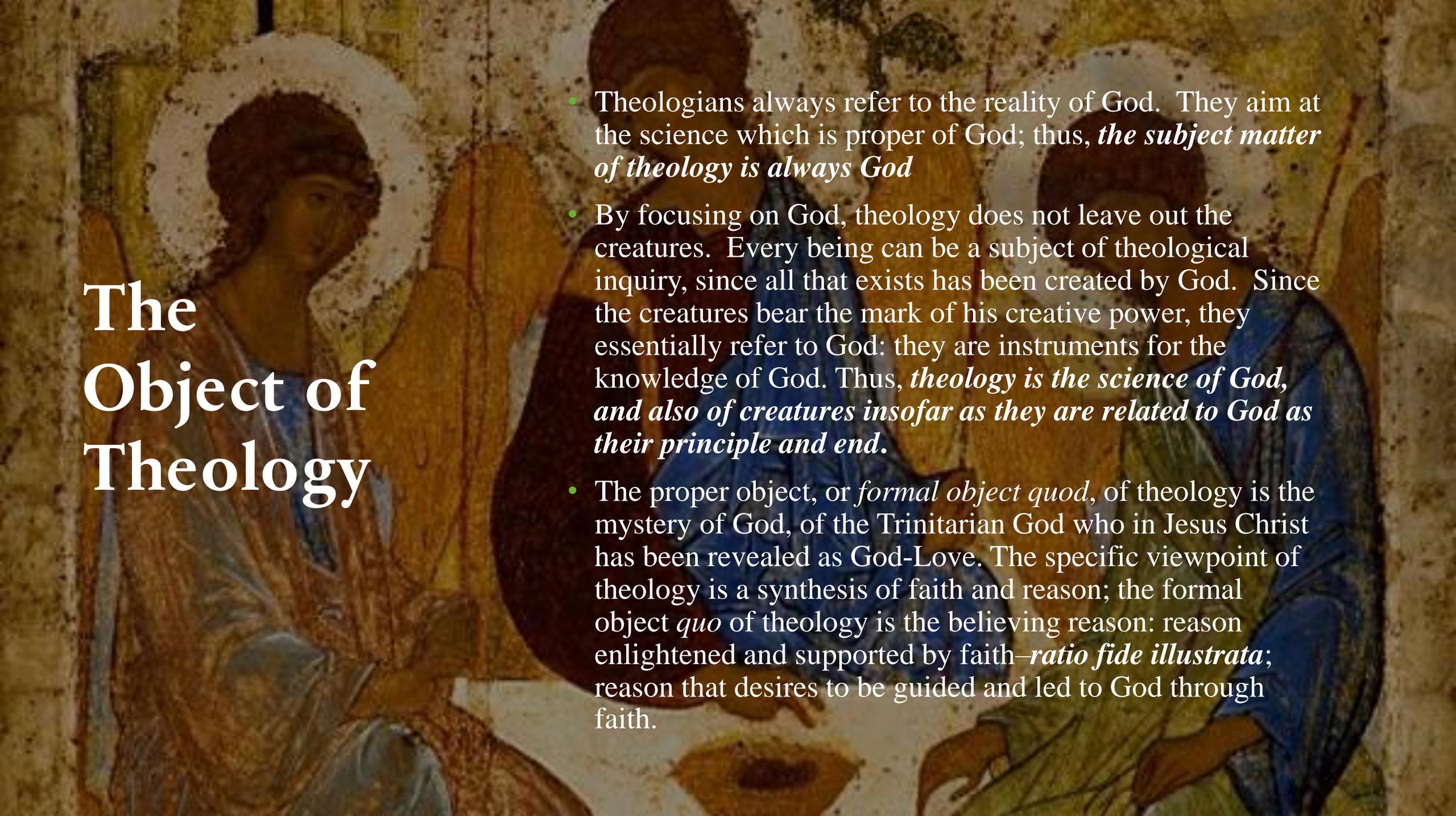
Theology as deepening in the faith

- Theology stems from faith; we can affirm that theology is *fides quaerens intellectum*—faith seeking understanding
- Theologians are not moved by doubts of faith, but by the certainty that God has entrusted to us in Christ “infinite treasures of love” and of wisdom. To acknowledge and appreciate these treasures is a way of worshipping God “in spirit and in truth,” offering him a rational sacrifice, a “spiritual worship.”
- Insofar as possible, each of us should study the faith seriously, rigorously—all of which means theology. Ours should be the piety of children and the sure doctrine of theologians. Our desire to advance in theological knowledge, in sound, firm *Christian doctrine* is sparked, above all, by the will to know and love God. It likewise stems from the concern of a faithful soul to attain the deepest meaning of the world, seen as coming from the hands of God. (CPB, 10)
- Theological formation is especially necessary in our days; we often meet difficult situations demanding a Christian answer, an answer based on faith. Without a solid formation, it is very easy to be confused and influenced by fashionable views and prevailing lifestyles.
- Nor could Christians isolate themselves from the world, refusing to understand and help their contemporaries, and thus failing to be the salt and light of the earth (Cf. Mt 15:16-23).



The term: Theology

- The term theology comes from the Greek *theós-logos*, which means “word, teaching, doctrine, or *science of God*.”
- We are referring here to the *science of Revelation*: the scientific knowledge of divine Revelation.
- “Theology,” John Paul II says, “is a cognitive process through which the human mind, illuminated by faith and stimulated by love, advances in the immense territories that divine Revelation has thrown wide open before it.”
- The first recorded use of the term *theology* is found in Plato. He applied it to poetical myths about the gods and to the scientific discoveries of the philosophers who seek the truth about God. Aristotle used the term *theological philosophy* to refer to the study of the last causes of being, that is, the core of metaphysics or “first philosophy.” This *natural theology* or *philosophical theology* reached a few—but very valuable—truths about a distant, far-away God.
- Christianity brought a complete change in that situation. Through Christian faith, God himself gave us a clear knowledge of his personality and transcendence with respect to the world. Our faith announces God's decision of making us his children.

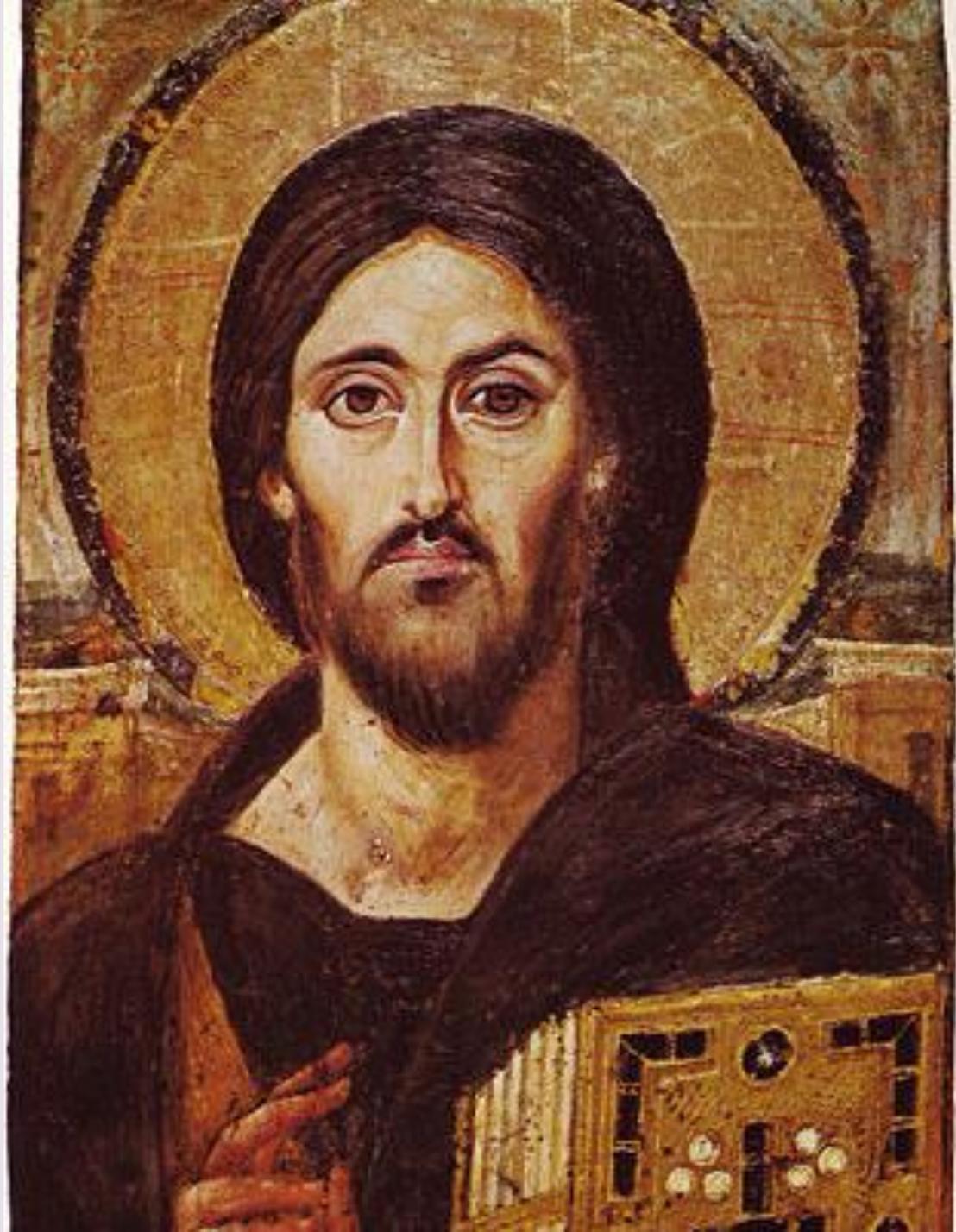


The Object of Theology

- Theologians always refer to the reality of God. They aim at the science which is proper of God; thus, *the subject matter of theology is always God*
- By focusing on God, theology does not leave out the creatures. Every being can be a subject of theological inquiry, since all that exists has been created by God. Since the creatures bear the mark of his creative power, they essentially refer to God: they are instruments for the knowledge of God. Thus, *theology is the science of God, and also of creatures insofar as they are related to God as their principle and end.*
- The proper object, or *formal object quod*, of theology is the mystery of God, of the Trinitarian God who in Jesus Christ has been revealed as God-Love. The specific viewpoint of theology is a synthesis of faith and reason; the formal object *quo* of theology is the believing reason: reason enlightened and supported by faith—*ratio fide illustrata*; reason that desires to be guided and led to God through faith.

Centre of Theology: Christ and the Trinity

- Since God revealed himself in Jesus Christ, in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9), theology is also the science of Christ. There is no other way through which man could get to know the Father and reach God with confidence. Christ is therefore the special object of theology.
- Sound theological reasoning must always bear a reference to Christ and to the Kingdom of God; theology is necessarily Christological and Christocentric.



Distinction and relation between Faith and Theology

- Theology cannot be defined as “reason applied to the data of faith.” For the theologian, faith is not a set of data, a piece of information like any other. It is, above all, the motor of his research and the main light that will make it possible. Faith is not just the “raw matter” of the theologian; it is his instrument as well. Faith, organically united to reason, is necessary for understanding divine Revelation.
- We should make here a distinction between the *content of faith* (the revealed truths, or *fides quae*) and the *light of faith* (the virtue of faith—*fides qua*—that makes the act of faith possible).
- It is not enough for the theologian to know the revealed truths; he also needs the light of faith in order to understand and interpret them properly. A non-believer could scientifically study Christianity and revealed truth, for example, in order to establish its differences with other religions. However, this would not be theology, but one of the sciences of religion (history, phenomenology, or philosophy of religion).
- Without the virtue of faith, it is not possible to do true theology; the scholar would be groping in the dark, unable to penetrate or appreciate the word of God.

A wide-angle photograph of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Italy, taken from a distance across a bridge. The massive dome is the central focus, with its intricate architectural details and the Latin inscription 'PAVLVS V BVRGHESI ROMANVS PONT MAX AN MDC XII PONT VII' visible on the facade. The sky is overcast, and lush green trees are visible on the right side of the frame. The overall scene is a classic view of one of the world's most famous religious landmarks.

THEOLOGY IN
THE LIFE OF THE
CHURCH AND OF
EACH FAITHFUL

The Church as subject of Theological works

- The Magisterium of the Church is one of the sources of theology. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit guides the pastors so that, enlightened by theology on the riches of Revelation, they authoritatively bring a deeper understanding of the Gospel to the life of the Church. The fruits of salvation will thus be more abundant.
- Theology provides the Magisterium with support, inspiration, and food for preaching, catechesis, missionary work, and even for new definitions of faith.
- Theology has the capacity and the responsibility to enlighten the pastoral activity of the Church, as well as the apostolate and spiritual life of each Christian.

Need for Theology for the Church

- Theology is extremely important for the life of the Church. Besides its scientific value, theology shares in the salvific function of Christian faith.
- Theological knowledge prepares and confirms the transmission of the Christian message to other persons. It is also helpful for understanding the preaching of the faith in all cultures. It defends the doctrine of faith against the doubts or attacks that may arise in each historical period.
- Without the help and guidance of theology, apostolate could fall into superficiality, error, and activism. An essential part of Christian apostolate is the *apostolate of doctrine*: fighting religious ignorance, drowning error in an abundance of light, of doctrine.
- Theology offers a sure guidance for preaching and for spiritual direction.
- Theology always has an ecumenical dimension. As it penetrates ever deeper into divine Revelation, it manifests the value and appeal of the truth about God, man, and the world that only the Catholic Church possesses completely and without error. The Church desires that the way of helping our separated brethren be kept in mind in the study and exposition of the doctrine of faith.
- Theology is also a most effective help in the missionary work of the Church. She must preach the Gospel to all peoples and cultures of the world. The evangelization of peoples with very different cultures faces a very serious problem: making them understand, love, and practice the immutable Gospel in a familiar language.
- Theology can shed light on this work of evangelization.

The Mission of the Theologian in the Church

- Theologians have a special *ecclesial responsibility*: making sure that the talent they have received—the capacity to penetrate deeper into the deposit of faith with their intelligence—yields fruit for the glory of God and the benefit of souls.
- In the Church, theologians are “teachers...to prepare the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). A good theologian should feel this responsibility, aware that scientific work is also a service to the Church.
- Theology is a service of the Church; the theologian should feel himself dynamically involved in the mission of the Church, particularly in her prophetic mission.
- A clear manifestation of that ecclesial outlook, “feeling with the Church”—*sentire cum Ecclesia*, is the willingness to rectify any personal opinion that may break the union with the Magisterium of the Church. The role of the theologian is geared to the building up of ecclesial communion, so that the people of God may grow in the experience of faith.



THEOLOGY AS SCIENCE AND AS WISDOM



Theology as science

- St Thomas Aquinas was the first to establish that the Aristotelian concept of science, “Knowing with certitude through causes,” properly and strictly applies to theology.
- Science is an explanatory knowledge of things through their real causes, which allows us to know why things are the way they are, and the truth of our statements about them.
- This definition of science applies perfectly well to theology;
- The statements of theology:
 - are extraordinarily certain, since they share in the supreme certainty of faith;
 - explain things through their real causes: the divine Will and God's nature;
 - respect all the rules of logic, so that the theologian can account for his knowledge, and others can verify his conclusions.

Theology as Wisdom

- Wisdom is the knowledge of all things through their ultimate causes. These two elements—maximum scope and depth—are also found in theology:
- As the science of God—who is the beginning and end of all things and the most radical of all causes—theology studies the deepest causes of being and of the destiny of man and the cosmos.
- Like philosophical theology (Theodicy), theology studies God. However, unlike the former, theology obtains all the truths it teaches from that same God, who revealed himself. Based on the Revelation of the divine intimacy, theology partakes of divine science and thus reaches the eternal reasons of all things.
- Theology is not just one more wisdom among the human lores; it is Wisdom. It is knowledge through the highest Cause, through the very Principle of the order of history and of the world.

Functions of Theology

- Theology draws a list or catalog of the truths of faith (*catechism* or *symbol of faith*), specifying all the aspects and details that Holy Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium attest about each of them.
- It studies the content of each revealed truth, and explains it through analogies, and examples, in order to penetrate its meaning.
- It reflects on the whole set of revealed truths, in order to show their harmony and unity; this implies comparing the truths to reveal their interrelations. The intellect can thus see the revealed truths as a structured body.
- It critically analyzes the objections that have been brought up against the truths of faith in each historical period, in order to show their fallacy.
- It studies culture and life from the point of view of faith, to judge them with the knowledge about creation given by Revelation. Thus, we can incorporate to Christian wisdom the positive elements in culture and denounce the anti-human corruptions that may have crept into them.
- The First Vatican Council, by affirming that faith does not conflict but harmonizes with reason, affirmed these functions. Theology is thus at the service of faith. It reveals the treasures of truth, goodness, and beauty contained in our faith.



THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD



Faith and Reason in the Christian study of God: relations between faith and reason

- The *theological method* is the organized body of principles and procedures theologians use in order to understand the faith. It is proper of a science to proceed by argumentation: starting from what is already known (premises) in order to reach new truths (conclusions). Theology also formulates new propositions about God (theological conclusions), based essentially on God's own Revelation; it also uses logic and other resources of human culture useful for its purpose.
- Christian theology has a high regard for reason's efforts to reach some knowledge of God, since God himself endowed man with the capacity to know his Creator. Theologians use this knowledge, together with other philosophical data, as preambles of faith--*preambula fidei*. These are truths that prepare and bring man closer to faith. Such are the existence of God, the spiritual nature of the human soul, man's capacity to know the truth, human freedom, and the need for religion.

Recourse to the authority and demands of reason



- Since Theology is the science of Revelation, theological argumentation has some specific characteristics. One of them is its extensive use of the *argument of authority*. Theology usually bases its conclusion on the personal testimony of God, on the authority of God who reveals it. It does not use only reasons intrinsic to the subject matter--which are mediately or immediately evident in themselves. Theology's strongest argument is "God said so"--*Deus dixit*.
- Argument of authority--backing a proposition on the testimony of a prestigious authority on the field--carries little weight in human sciences. Although frequently used in ordinary life, its scientific value is only provisional. It does not make science, but merely prudent opinion. In Theology, however, arguments based on the authority of God have full scientific validity. They produce a stronger certitude than any argument based on intrinsic reasons
- Certitude based on God himself, through the Word of God, rests on the most solid and unshakable foundation that can be found. It does not rest on the truth of created beings perceived through a created intellect, but on the First Truth--source and origin of all truth--perceived through faith--a participation of divine light, much higher than the light of reason.

The two stages of Theology:

- Theology is the science that aims at the understanding of the faith--*intellectus fidei*. In order to reach that goal, theologians must first listen to Revelation, and then try to understand its meaning more in depth.
- This description outlines two stages or moments in the theologian's work: the speculative thought (*intellectus*), must be preceded by the attentive listening to the Gospel (*auditus*).
- This leads to the distinction between positive and speculative theology.

Positive Theology

- Positive Theology is the task of determining scientifically, with exactitude and intellectual rigor, the actual content of Revelation and the order followed by God in revealing the great theological themes.
- For this, the theologian must study sciences like Biblical History, Hebrew, Greek, History of dogmas, and History of Theology.

Speculative Theology

- Once the content of Revelation is clearly determined, the theologian must go deeper. This second aspect is *speculative theology*: the intellectual effort to penetrate Revelation and show the order and harmony between the different revealed truths. It is also called *systematic or scholastic theology*.
- Rather than distinguishing two types of theology, it would be more proper to consider two different moments or stages: a positive stage and a speculative stage of the theological work. Both stages are necessary for theology.

The Theologian and Philosophy

- A theologian should be able to use all the cultural resources that could help him to understand Revelation better. Philosophy is a privileged and necessary tool for fruitful theological work.
- To understand the divine realities, theologians must use analogies with facts of experience; philosophy can supply this knowledge. The Magisterium of the Church has especially recommended to theologians the study of metaphysics, without which even the terms of the dogmatic formulas could be misinterpreted.
- Not all the philosophical systems have the same degree of wisdom. It is not just a matter of how close their conclusions come to reality; often their very principles are tainted by error. Therefore, the Church issues guidelines on some philosophical systems that, containing serious natural errors, cannot help theologians illumine the faith. If a theologian were to use a philosophical system weighed down by error, he would easily reach a mistaken interpretation of the faith.

The Theological authority of St. Thomas

- Since Theology plays an essential role in Christian life, there is the certain danger that it could cause serious harm to souls. Thus, the Church has repeatedly set a model and master for theologians to learn how to think under the light of faith: St Thomas Aquinas. The Church calls him *Doctor Communis*, the "common or universal doctor" of all theologians.
- St. John Paul II has pointed out that the doctrine of St Thomas will always be valid, since it is based on the immutable principles of reality: "It is from this proclamation of being that the philosophy of St Thomas derives its ability to grasp and *affirm* all that shows itself to the human intellect (what is given by experience, in the widest sense) as a determinate existing being in all the inexhaustible richness of its content."



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THE SOURCES OF THEOLOGY

SACRED
SCRIPTURE



The study of Scripture, soul of theology

- "The study of Sacred Scripture should be the soul of theology," the Second Vatican Council says. And St. Pope John Paul II stresses it again: "The study of Sacred Scripture is, as it were, the soul of Sacred Theology, which rests upon the written word of God together with the living Tradition, as its perpetual foundation."
- Theologians should always have recourse to Sacred Scripture to stimulate, inspire, and adjust their intellectual work.

Authority of Sacred Scripture in Christian Theology

- The four Gospels and the other sacred books of the New Testament were written during the life of the Apostles, by a special divine Providence, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They contain the essentials of the Apostolic teachings. The Church believes that these books, as well as those of the Old Testament, truly have *God for their author*, and that Sacred Scripture authentically contains the word of God.
- The essential trait of Sacred Scripture is its being *inspired by God*, not so much its being a religious writing, or dealing with the history of Revelation. Through the hagiographer or human writer, God is the true *author* of each and every Sacred Book. Therefore, the Sacred Books cannot contain any error. The Bible does not only contain revelations from God, but it is also the word of God, written by God for our salvation.
- The Church preserves and transmits to all men the sacred texts inspired by God. She determined the canon or list of sacred books and is assisted by the Holy Spirit to give their authentic interpretation.
- But Sacred Scripture is not the only source of theology; it is not fruitful to restrict oneself to this source exclusively. The Second Vatican Council teaches, "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, that is entrusted to the Church"; thus, "sacred theology relies on the written word of God, taken together with sacred Tradition, as on a permanent foundation.

What is Apostolic Tradition and how it is recognised

- How can the theologian have access to Revelation? Christ made sure that his saving Revelation, the Gospel, could reach all men in its integrity. By divine Will, the content of Revelation--the revealed truths and institutions: moral precepts, the way of praying, sacraments--is transmitted through men, through the Church, as an inviolable *deposit of faith*.
- The Church continues the mission of the Apostles, faithfully transmitting the Gospel of Christ to men generation after generation. This task of transmitting Revelation is called *Sacred Tradition*.
- The Tradition of the Church is sacred, because the Church received a supernatural assistance from God to transmit the Gospel: "I am with you always, to the close of the age;" "the powers of death shall not prevail against her" Mt 28:20
- The theologian must have the certitude that any new formulation of the faith remains faithful to the true meaning transmitted by the Church. Especially useful in this regard are the testimonies of the faith of the first Christian generations: their liturgy, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and the archaeological remains. These and other sources of Tradition are the object of Sacred Liturgy, History of the Church, Patrology, and also Canon Law.

APOSTOLIC TRADITION



Monuments of Tradition

- *Liturgy* is a living witness of the faith and praxis of the Church. It is absolutely necessary in order to understand the Christian spirit. The ecclesiastical prayers and sacramental rites express the faith of the Church with full authority.
- Many of the events in the *History of the Church* have been promoted by the Holy Spirit; he sheds light on the unsuspected scope of Christ's teachings. Thus, the life of the Church contains elements which can spur theological research; for example, Marian devotion, the lives of the saints, and lay spirituality.
- The Holy Fathers, or *Fathers of the Church*, are saints of the early Church; by a special grace of God, they left us in their writings a privileged testimony of the living Tradition of the Gospel. They are truly Fathers of the Church; through the Gospel preached by them, the Church received life. They are builders of the Church as well, since they built the primary structure of the Church over the only foundation laid down by the Apostles: Christ.
- The Fathers of the Church have an exceptional doctrinal authority. Their unanimous agreement on one issue is a sure rule of faith, showing the true sense of the Church's interpretation of Revelation. However, only their moral consensus is required: there may still be some dissenting voices among them. The issue must refer to faith or morals, and their stand must be in agreement with the teaching of the Church. The real value of the doctrine of the Fathers lies not in being their personal interpretations, but in the fact that this doctrine transmits the faith they received from the Church.

MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH

What is the Magisterium and to whom does it correspond?



- Christ promised his Church a personal assistance in her task of evangelization and salvation of men. He ordinarily lends that assistance through the pastors who, as his Vicars, lead the Church in his name. He did it first through the Apostles, and later on through the bishops who succeeded them in the pastoral ministry.
- One of the functions Christ entrusted to the pastors of his Church is the **Magisterium**, that is, the teaching of the Gospel of Christ in the name of Christ, who is the only Teacher and Pastor of our souls: "He who hears you hears me" (Lk 10:16).
- The Second Vatican Council declared: "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office [Magisterium] of the Church alone."
- The Magisterium of the Church is an **explanatory source** of theology, since it only gives an interpretation of Revelation, without adding nor removing anything from the deposit of faith. The Magisterium is subordinated to the Gospel.
- Since only the Church authentically preaches and faithfully interprets the word of God, the Magisterium, although not the ultimate rule of theological truth, is the proximate and universal rule of truth. It is the theologian's safest rule for understanding the salvific truth.

Principal acts of the Magisterium

- One of the most important historical responsibilities of the Magisterium is composing the *Symbols of faith* (Creeds) and the *Catechisms*, which contain and summarize the basic truths of Revelation. The oldest and most revered Symbols are the *Apostle's Creed*, the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, and the *Athanasian Creed*
- The Magisterium is *ordinarily* exercised through the preaching of the word of God by the bishops, the successors of the Apostles. The ordinary Magisterium of the Bishop of Rome, successor of St Peter and head of the college of bishops, enjoys a special authority. The Pope can also--on his own or together with the bishops gathered in an Ecumenical Council--exercise the Magisterium in an *extraordinary* and solemn way, defining some truth of faith that must be believed by all Christians.
- Not all the revealed truths are included in the dogmas defined by the extraordinary Magisterium of the Church. Usually, the pastors only define the truths that are controverted. "People need more careful instruction about the truths of faith when errors arise, lest the faith of simple-minded persons be corrupted by heretics. These circumstances led to the formulation of several symbols, and to the definition of the dogmas." (St. Thomas Aquinas)

Magisterium and Theology

- Without fidelity to the Magisterium, it is not possible to carry out true Theology. By leaving aside the authorized interpreter of Revelation, we risk misunderstanding the word of God.
- Theologians must often consult the teachings of the Church.
- The theologian's fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church is shown in his willingness to accept and preserve the fundamental notions that the Church has used to define dogmas. These are especially authoritative formulas of the faith of the Church.
- We should also keep in mind that "Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."
- The three are complementary instruments of the same divine plan for the integral transmission and conservation of the saving Revelation throughout the centuries.