

## QUESTION I

### The Nature and Extent of Sacred Doctrine

#### *Article 1: Whether, Besides Philosophy, Any Further Doctrine Is Required?*

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**BLACKFRIARS TRANSLATION**

Whether, besides philosophy, any further doctrine is required?

**PARAPHRASE**

Is it reasonable to think that the reach of our reasoning needs to be extended by divine Revelation?

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St. Thomas holds a very high opinion of what human reasoning can find out. But are its findings enough? Are there things we need to know which reason alone cannot tell us, and which we would have to be told by God Himself?

It would hardly be persuasive for St. Thomas to say that we need divine Revelation just because divine Revelation tells us so. He does quote from Holy Scripture to show that it *confirms* his conclusions, but the argument in this Article is based squarely on reason: We need Revelation because some of the things we need to know cannot be found out by reason alone, and because even many of those things which can be are very difficult for reason to ascertain.

The argument that some of the things we need to know cannot be found out by reason alone depends on the premise that we are made for a supernatural end that surpasses our natural powers. Surely *this* can be known only by Revelation? But consider. We naturally desire our highest fulfillment; our highest fulfillment would have to satisfy our highest power, which is reason; the highest object of reason is God; but we cannot see God in His essence by our natural powers alone. It is therefore rational to believe that if we are to attain this vision at all, we must have divine assistance as well as divine instruction on how to avail

ourselves of it. St. Thomas works all this out in great detail later on in the *Summa*.<sup>1</sup>

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**Objection 1:** [1] It seems that, besides philosophical science, we have no need of any further knowledge. For man should not seek to know what is above reason: “Seek not the things that are too high for thee.” (Sirach 3.) [2] But whatever is not above reason is fully treated of in philosophical science. Therefore any other knowledge besides philosophical science is superfluous.

**Objection 1.** Apparently, we require no teaching but the discipline of philosophy. The book of Sirach urges man not to try to outreach what reasoning can disclose, for such knowledge is too lofty for him. Since philosophy includes everything reasoning *can* disclose, it seems extravagant to have some other teaching too.

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[1] The hypothetical Objector fails to distinguish between two different senses in which one may take Sirach's advice, for although it may mean that we should not seek *in any way* what human reasoning alone cannot find out, it may mean only that we should not seek *by human reasoning alone* what human reasoning alone cannot find out.

In full, the verse he is quoting runs, “Seek not the things that are too high for thee, and search not into things above thy ability: but the things that God hath commanded thee, think on them always, and in many of his works be not curious.”<sup>2</sup> The Latin word *curiosas*, translated “curiosity,” has a double meaning. Although it can refer to the sheer desire for knowledge, which St. Thomas regards as the natural inclination of the human mind,<sup>3</sup> that is not what is condemned here. Rather the passage warns against the idle or meddlesome desire to pry into everything – the “curiosity” not of the wondering mind, but of the distracted senses, as in surfing the internet, the television channels, or the scandal sheets.

[2] St. Thomas has his Objector speaking not of philosophical “science,” but of the philosophical “disciplines” (*disciplinas*). He views them not as distinct from what we call the sciences, but as including them. The discipline of philosophy is simply to investigate the permanent features of reality as far as it can be investigated by human reasoning alone. For him, then, the great distinction is not between philosophy and science, but between theoretical studies (such as mathematics and the study of nature) and practical studies (such as politics and ethics).

<sup>1</sup> See especially I-II, QQ. 1–5. I have supplied explanation and discussion in *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Treatise on Happiness and Ultimate Purpose* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Sirach 22 (DRA), corresponding to verses 21–22 in most contemporary translations. This book, the full title of which is *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*, is also known as *Ecclesiasticus*. It is not to be confused with either the book of *Ecclesiastes* or the book of *Wisdom*, and the Jesus to whom it is attributed is not Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I-II, Q. 94, Art. 2.

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**Objection 2:** [1] Further, knowledge can be concerned only with being, for nothing can be known, save what is true; and all that is, is true. [2] But everything that is, is treated of in philosophical science – even God Himself; so that there is a part of philosophy called theology, [3] or the divine science, [4] as Aristotle has proved. Therefore, besides philosophical science, there is no need of any further knowledge.

**Objection 2.** Moreover, knowledge cannot cover anything except *what is*, because *what is* and *what is true* are equivalent and interchangeable. But philosophy covers *all* that is – even God! This is why a certain branch of philosophy is called *theology* or *divine science*, as Aristotle explains in the sixth book of his *Metaphysics*. It follows that philosophy is the only kind of teaching we need.

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[1] What the Objector actually says is that being and truth are “converted” or “convertible” (*convertitur*) – equivalent or interchangeable. St. Thomas fully accepts this premise. What this equivalence means is that just by *being*, things are true. Although we too sometimes speak of actual things as being true – a true friend, a true heart, even a true hound dog – the idea of truth lying in *things* is often puzzling to first-time readers, because we tend to think of truth as residing primarily in propositions, and St. Thomas doesn’t. For example, we say that the proposition “Charles has red hair” is true if Charles has red hair, but false otherwise. As St. Thomas explains in Question 16, Article 5, however, he views truth more broadly. The intellect has truth when its understanding of a thing conforms to the thing itself. Since its understanding may be expressed in a proposition, propositions like the one about Charles’ hair can be true too. But a *thing* has truth when its being – *how it is* – conforms to the *idea* of the thing in some intellect. We might, for example, say that the chair is true because it corresponds to the idea in the mind of the carpenter. Created natures are true because they correspond to the idea in the mind of the Creator. Distorted things are false to their ideas.

One of the great fallacies of our own day is trying to put ourselves in the place of God, as though everything were a human artifact and nothing at all were a created nature. Thus we suppose that we can change the reality of things by changing how we think of them – for instance, we imagine that a biological man is a woman, if only he “identifies as a woman.” This movement has gone quite far. Some persons even “identify” as animals and play fetch, or “identify” as paralytics and ask to have their spines severed. For created beings like us, however, reality doesn’t conform to our thought, as though we were the makers of everything that is; rather our thought needs to conform to reality.

So far, in fact, has the denial of reality gone that in our day, merely to suggest that humans cannot change their sex by an act of will or surgery is likely to cause hurt feelings. Wouldn’t it be more polite to keep silent? Offense is properly taken when someone’s dignity is demeaned. From a Thomistic point of view, however, upholding the *givenness* of the difference between men and women is not an insult to human dignity, but a fundamental requirement of *upholding* it, and the stakes are very high. Trying to uphold the integrity of created nature, but deleting

any mention of sex or gender, would be like warning against treating people as objects, but deleting any mention of violence or human trafficking.

This view is central to the classical natural law tradition which Thomas Aquinas represents, as well as to the theology of the Church for whom he is writing, right down to the present. A good illustration is the 2024 declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita* (literally, “Infinite Dignity”), which addresses the entire range of topics connected with gender ideology. Proclaiming “the need to respect the natural order of the human person,” the document explains that “any so-called sex change intervention, as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception.” Although “biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender)” can be “distinguished,” they cannot be “separated,” so that “Desiring a personal self-determination, as gender theory prescribes, apart from this fundamental truth that human life is a gift, amounts to a concession to the age-old temptation to make oneself God, entering into competition with the true God of love revealed to us in the Gospel.” In short, “We cannot separate the masculine and the feminine from God’s work of creation, which is prior to all our decisions and experiences, and where biological elements exist which are impossible to ignore.”<sup>4</sup>

[2] According to the Objector, if there were something philosophical reasoning could not investigate, then we might be justified in seeking other means to find it out. However, philosophical reasoning investigates everything, even God. The Objector seems to think that just because philosophy investigates everything, it is also able to find out all there is to know about everything.

[3] This time the word used really is “science” (*scientia*). Sometimes St. Thomas uses the term *scientia* for the knowledge of demonstrations from first principles. For this reason, the word can often be translated simply “knowledge.”<sup>5</sup> However, he distinguishes between knowledge we are thinking about, which he calls *actual* knowledge, and knowledge that we hold habitually, which he calls the *habit* of knowledge. The *habit* of science is a stable disposition of the mind, an intellectual virtue: It is the mind’s *readiness* to grasp the connection of truths with first principles.

[4] In contemporary English it seems a bit odd to say that Aristotle has “proved” that philosophy includes theology. Isn’t classification arbitrary, so that the various disciplines that we group under the heading “philosophy” are grouped there merely by custom? And isn’t the justification of the claim that philosophy actually does contain a discipline called theology simply the fact that some people called philosophers happen to carry out studies called theology? Certainly, one *might* classify disciplines in a purely conventional way like this – some people do – but it

<sup>4</sup> Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita* (April 2, 2024), [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_dff\\_doc\\_20240402\\_dignitas-infinita\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dff_doc_20240402_dignitas-infinita_en.html), quoting from Sections 57, 59, and 60.

<sup>5</sup> As in Question 14, Article 1, “Whether there is knowledge (*scientia*) in God?”

is much more helpful to attempt a *rational* classification of them, one that corresponds to the actual relationships of their subject matters, and that is what St. Thomas always tries to do. Now what the various theoretical disciplines have in common is that they look into the causes of things. Aristotle says in *Metaphysics*, Book 6, Chapter 1, that besides mathematics and the study of nature, such theoretical disciplines include theology, which he calls “first philosophy” because it deals with the *first* causes of things – in fact the first causes of everything. As St. Thomas explains in his *Commentary* on the work,

[T]he philosophy of nature deals with things which are inseparable from matter and mobile, and mathematics deals with certain immobile things although these are not separate from matter in being but only in their intelligible structure, since in reality they are found in sensible matter. . . . But *the first science* deals with things which are separable from matter in being and are altogether [unchangeable].

Now common [universal] causes must be eternal, because the first causes of beings which are generated must not themselves be generated, otherwise the process of generation would proceed to infinity; and this is true especially of those causes which are altogether immobile and immaterial . . . . From this it is evident that the science which considers beings of this kind is the first of all the sciences and the one which considers the common causes of all beings. Hence there are causes of beings as beings, which are investigated in first philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

By the causes of a being *as a being*, St. Thomas means not just what makes it, say, blue, hard, or alive, but what makes it exist in the first place. This is the most fundamental kind of knowledge, not in the sense that one has to investigate first causes before one can know anything else, but in the sense that ultimately, everything else that we know depends on first causes to make sense.

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**On the contrary,** [1] It is written (2 Timothy 3): “All Scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice.” [2] Now Scripture, inspired of God, is no part of

**On the other hand,** St. Paul writes to his disciple Timothy that all divinely inspired Scripture is useful for teaching, convincing, chastising, and training in righteousness.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), Book 6, Lesson 1. Where the translation has “immobile,” I have substituted “unchangeable,” because the terms movement and mobility are used for change of every kind, not just change of place.

<sup>7</sup> A note on the paraphrase. The Vulgate – the Latin version of the Bible used by Thomas Aquinas – says *ad docendum ad arguendum ad corrigendum ad erudiendum in iustitia*. St. Thomas turns *ad arguendum ad corrigendum* into *arguendum ad corripiendum*. Now *arguendum* can refer to either proving or reproof. *Corrigendum*, in turn, can refer to either correcting or chastising, but *corripiendum* normally refers only to chastising. So, if we take St. Thomas’s *arguendum* in the same way as the Vulgate’s *arguendum*, then St. Thomas’s phrase *ad arguendum ad corripiendum* becomes redundant, for to reprove and to chastise are the same thing. For this reason, I have rendered *arguendum* according to the other sense. Of course, if St. Thomas is trying to quote the

philosophical science, which has been built up by human reason. [3] Therefore it is useful that besides philosophical science, there should be other knowledge, i.e. inspired of God.

But philosophy, which depends on human reasoning, does not take Scripture into consideration. So by adding divinely inspired knowledge to philosophy's findings, we gain.

[1] In the presentation of a disputed question, the function of the *sed contra* is not to present the author's own argument, but to restate the Tradition – in this case, the Tradition that we *do* require a further teaching than what philosophy can provide. This aspect of the Tradition is represented by St. Paul's second letter to Timothy, a young man whom he is training as an apostle and successor to himself. Right after warning Timothy that in days to come, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" and "evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived,"<sup>8</sup> he urges,

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.<sup>9</sup>

[2] The Bible – both the scriptures God gave to the Hebrew people, which the Church calls the Old Testament, and the ones He gave to the Church, which she calls the New Testament – is not a single book, but a compact library of books, which owe their unity to the inspiration of God as authoritatively recognized by the Church. St. Paul's two letters to Timothy became part of the New Testament. However, at the time he is writing, there is not a New Testament yet. So when he speaks of the Scriptures, he is speaking of the Hebrew Scriptures, although the Church regards what he says as true of the New Testament too.

The teachings of these Scriptures are not discovered by philosophical methods but revealed by God to the community of faith. Revelation does not mean that God dictated the very words of Scripture, as Muslims believe that an angel dictated the words of the Qu'ran. Rather it means that God supernaturally infused understanding into the minds of authors, and that He guided the process by which the works were edited, sifted, and accepted into the canon.

Notice that whether we need inspired teaching is a different question from how – granted that we need it – the Church can ascertain which writings are

Vulgate exactly and has merely slipped, then it would be more appropriate simply to follow the language of the DRA, as the Blackfriars translators do.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12-13 (RSV-CE).    <sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (RSV-CE).

authentic parts of it. At the moment, St. Thomas is considering only the former question.

[3] It is easy to see why St. Thomas cannot rest with the *sed contra*, so that he has to go on to present his own argument in the *respondeo*. For the *sed contra* does not prove the need for inspired teachings unless we accept St. Paul’s testimony to the fact – and we may not be disposed to accept his testimony to the fact unless we already consider it inspired. To think of the matter another way, if we don’t agree that we *need* teaching inspired by God, then it may be difficult to see why God would have provided any, and so we may be inclined to balk at the suggestion that St. Paul’s words themselves result from that inspiration.

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*I answer that*, [1] It was necessary for man’s salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason.

[2] Firstly, indeed, because man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason: [3] “The eye hath not seen, O God, besides Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee” (Isaiah 64). [4] But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine Revelation.

**Here is my response.** Over and above the philosophical learning searched out by human reasoning, human salvation requires teaching revealed by God,

Why? Chiefly because man’s ultimate goal, God, exceeds the comprehension of his mind. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, only the eye of God has seen what things He has prepared for those who love Him. Here is the problem: In order to direct our purposes and actions to the goal, we must first know what the goal is. And so our salvation required that God reveal to us those things pertaining to the goal which we could not have worked out by reasoning alone.

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[1] The more general meaning of *salutem*, here rendered “salvation,” is safety and well-being. Since the mortal danger to our well-being, the thing from which we need to be saved, is sin, which is separation from God, the more particular meaning of the term is reconciliation with Him. We need to be forgiven for the blame of sin; we need to be healed from its damage; and we need at last to be lifted to the ultimate goal of a human life, which is to become “partakers” in the life of God Himself.<sup>10</sup> What St. Thomas says here is that salvation cannot be attained without knowledge God reveals to us Himself. Not only must

<sup>10</sup> God’s promises, through Christ, are granted “that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.”

<sup>2</sup> Peter 1:4 (RSV-CE).

we understand certain truths about Him, but we must also understand *what to do* in dependence on His undeserved aid, which is called grace.

“It was necessary,” says St. Thomas, that this knowledge be revealed. Since we meet the idea of necessary knowledge again a few lines down, a word should be added about the senses of the word necessity, and in which sense he is speaking in this passage. A thing can be necessary in itself or necessary to some end or purpose. Here we are speaking of necessity of end. Further, a thing can be necessary to an end in either of two senses. According to the first, the end cannot be attained *as well* without it; according to the second, it cannot be attained *at all* without it. When we say that a spoon is necessary for eating soup, we are speaking in the former sense, which is also called the “fitting.” After all, one could just tip the bowl to one’s mouth, but a spoon helps a lot. But when we say that oxygen is necessary for fire, we are speaking in the latter sense, which is called necessity of end *per se*. Without oxygen, fire cannot be. In which sense is St. Thomas speaking in the present passage? The latter. Like fire without oxygen, salvation is utterly impossible without the knowledge Revelation imparts.

[2] God is our end, our ultimate fulfillment. However, His essence exceeds the grasp of our minds, because apart from Revelation, all our knowledge in this life comes from sense data. Certainly St. Thomas does not scorn sense data, for through the portal of the senses, the very forms or essences of things enter our minds, stripped of their matter. Moreover, we can make inferences about God through sense data, as we make inferences about other invisible things. For example, by observing that effects have causes, we can reason to the necessity of a First Cause, as we see in the next Article. However, it is impossible to attain the vision of God *as He is in Himself* through sense data – for since God is not corporeal, we cannot sense Him.

[3] Isaiah 64:4 seems to refer not only to the future vision of God Himself but also to the other glories of the future state, for it reads “eye has not seen, O God, *besides You*, what things You have prepared.”<sup>11</sup> When St. Paul quotes this striking exclamation in his first letter to the young Church in the city of Corinth, he emphasizes the vision of God by omitting the “besides You”:

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,” God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.<sup>12</sup>

The Blackfriars translation also obscures the fact that St. Thomas is paraphrasing the words of Isaiah rather than quoting him exactly. In the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible used by St. Thomas, Isaiah is speaking of those who *wait in expectation* for God (*expectantibus*). St. Thomas’s rendering of Isaiah’s statement has him speaking of those who *love* God (*diligentibus*). Probably St. Thomas’s paraphrase is influenced by St. Paul’s remark to the Christian

<sup>11</sup> Emphasis added. <sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:9–10 (RSV-CE).



Church at Rome, “And we know that to them that love [*diligentibus*] God all things work together unto good: to such as, according to his purpose, are called to be saints.”<sup>13</sup>

[4] We can certainly know some things about God by human reason. In fact, we can know quite a number of them, and a large part of the *Treatise on the One God* is occupied with ferreting them out. But according to St. Thomas, knowing *that* certain things about God are true is far different from *knowing God in Himself*, beholding Him in His own being, knowing as we are known. *Just because* we do not know Him in His own Being, many things we need to know about our salvation will escape our grasp unless He tells them to us. We will be like sailors becalmed in a blinding fog who are trying to steer without seeing their destination.

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[5] Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine Revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. Whereas man’s whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth.

Even those divine matters men *could* have investigated by reasoning needed to be made explicit by divine Revelation. Otherwise, only a few would have known them, they would have taken a long time to find out, and they would have been entangled with numerous mistakes. This would be unacceptable, because man’s salvation in God depends utterly on knowing the means of its attainment.

[6] Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine Revelation. It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through Revelation.

We see then that man needed to possess divine truths revealed by God so that his salvation could be accomplished in the best and most certain way. So in addition to philosophical learning discovered by reasoning, he needed a sacred doctrine provided by Revelation.

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[5] Even for some purposes less weighty than salvation, Revelation is necessary in the weaker sense that it helps. For example, although the omnipotence of God can be worked out by reason, the argument is difficult, many people cannot follow it at all, and even those capable of following it make mistakes – yet even those who are mystified by the argument can grasp that God is omnipotent if God tells them. So the omnipotence of God is not impossible to find out without Revelation – just much more difficult.

By contrast, salvation itself is not just more difficult without Revelation; unless God instructs us as to the means of its attainment, it cannot be attained at

<sup>13</sup> Romans 8:28 (DRA).

all. As to this sort of knowledge, those who are capable of following arguments are no better off than those who are incapable of doing so. The human mind simply cannot find it out without divine help.

[6] “Therefore . . . it was necessary,” “it was therefore necessary” – is St. Thomas repeating himself? No. The former *therefore* seems to concern the necessity of Revelation itself. However, the latter *therefore* concerns the necessity of having a *doctrine of Revelation* – a systematic account of what God has already revealed, showing how it is all logically connected.

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**Reply to Objection 1:** [1] Although those things which are beyond man’s knowledge may not be sought for by man through his reason, nevertheless, once they are revealed by God, they must be accepted by faith. [2] Hence the sacred text continues, “For many things are shown to thee above the understanding of man.” And in this, the sacred science consists.

**Reply to Objection 1.** Obviously, matters surpassing human thought cannot be found out by human thinking. But God can reveal them to us – and when He does, we should faithfully assent to them. This is why the passage from Sirach quoted by the Objector goes on to say that many things above human understanding *are shown to us*. These very things are the content of sacred doctrine.

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[1] Can it be reasonable to believe things that we have not found out solely by the use of our own reason? Certainly it can. None of us have seen or heard Marcus Tullius Cicero or Julius Caesar, but we have good reason to believe in the historicity of their deeds because of trustworthy testimony from those who did. Revelation has far more abundant documentation. Moreover, it is confirmed by miracles, which are also attested by trustworthy witnesses (in some cases, hundreds of them<sup>14</sup>). Just because miracles upset the ordinary course of nature, believing in them may be difficult. But a God who has the power to set the courses in which things run would certainly have the power to divert them from their courses – and it is hardly cricket for the skeptic to say that “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence,” but then rule out extraordinary evidence.

<sup>14</sup> In 1 Corinthians 15:3–10 (RSV-CE), St. Paul volunteers the information that after the Resurrection, Christ appeared to numerous witnesses, many of them still alive, which would have made it possible to question them. “For I delivered 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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

[2] St. Thomas often allows his hypothetical objectors to be devious, presumably because real objectors are often devious in the same ways. In this case, the deviousness of the Objector lay in misleadingly selective quotation. Though the Objector quoted only the portion of the passage that warned against seeking what is too lofty for human reason, the next part of the passage, which he omitted, concerns what God reveals:

For many things are shewn to thee above the understanding of men. And the suspicion of them hath deceived many, and hath detained their minds in vanity.<sup>15</sup>

The language of the DRA is a bit archaic; “suspicion” (*suspicio*) here refers to doubts, guesses, or conjectures without sound reason, and “vanity” (*vanitate*) refers to emptiness or falsehood. So the point of the passage turns out not to be that we should not *seek to know* what human reason is unable to find out, but that we should not despise God’s instruction; we should not entertain idle suppositions about that which our minds cannot attain by themselves. Those who try to do so inevitably make fools of themselves.

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**Reply to Objection 2:** [1] Sciences are differentiated according to the various means through which knowledge is obtained. [2] For the astronomer and the physicist both may prove the same conclusion: that the earth, for instance, is round: the astronomer by means of mathematics (i.e. abstracting from matter), but the physicist by means of matter itself.

[3] Hence there is no reason why those things which may be learned from philosophical science, so far as they can be known by natural reason, may not also be taught us by another science so far as they fall within Revelation. Hence theology included in sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Differences in the procedures for obtaining knowledge produce differences in the resulting fields of knowledge. For the very same conclusion – say, that the earth is round – is demonstrated by both the astronomer and the natural scientist, but the former proves it by mathematically, by *abstracting* from matter, while the latter proves it concretely, by *investigating* matter.

In much the same way, nothing prevents Revelation from providing knowledge of certain things to theology, and reasoning from providing knowledge of some of the same things to philosophy. Yet revealed theology is a different *kind* of theology than philosophical theology.

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[1] Sciences are differentiated not only according to their subject matter, but also according to how they deal with their subject matter.

<sup>15</sup> Sirach 3:25–26 (DRA), emphasis added, corresponding to verses 23b-24 in most contemporary translations.

[2] St. Thomas considers the various arguments for the spherical shape of the earth in his commentary on Aristotle's treatise *On the Heavens and the Earth*.<sup>16</sup> The arguments used by physicists rely on properties of matter, such as weight:

1. The earth must have a spherical shape because every part of the earth is compressed toward the middle by its heaviness.
2. Heavy bodies falling from the sky have the same inclination toward the earth no matter from what part of the sky they come. Consequently, additions to the mass of the earth are made equally on all sides, and the resulting shape must be spherical.

By contrast, the arguments used by astronomers, which abstract from such material properties as weight, include the following:

1. The shadows cast by the earth on the moon during lunar eclipses are circular, showing that the earth itself must have a circular outline.
2. If we move a small distance to north, south, east, or west, what we see of the stars changes. In fact, as St. Thomas remarks, various astronomers not only in Aristotle's time but also later have shown that the circumference of the earth can be calculated by observing how great a distance on earth produces a difference of one degree in the heavens. (Although he treats this as a third astronomical argument, it seems to elaborate the second one.)

So although both physics and astronomy consider the shape of the earth, their methods differ, showing that they differ more in their methods than in the topics they consider. Needless to say, the conclusions of sound physics and of sound astronomy can never disagree; if they seem to, there is an error somewhere.

[3] From the example of other fields of systematic knowledge, such as physics and astronomy, we see that different sciences can investigate the same questions in different ways. So there is nothing unreasonable in the fact that philosophy considers certain questions about God by philosophical methods alone, but sacred doctrine considers many of the same questions by applying the same logical tools to the additional data of Revelation. Consequently, the term "theology" names two fields, not one. One kind belongs to philosophy, the other kind to the doctrine of the faith. Today, the former kind is sometimes called natural theology, or philosophy of religion, while the latter kind is sometimes called revealed theology. Just as sound physics and sound astronomy cannot disagree, sound natural theology and sound revealed theology can never disagree. Although they consider God from different angles, they are considering the same God.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Exposition of Aristotle's Treatise on the Heavens*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher and Pierre H. Conway (Columbus, OH: College of St. Mary of the Springs, 1964), Lectures 27 and 28, available at <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/DeCoelo.htm>.

DISCUSSION:

**Preambles to Faith – and Preambles to Reason?**

It would be easy to suppose either that we need *only* human reasoning or that we need *only* Revelation. St. Thomas believes we need both. For on one hand, human reasoning does not tell us enough. For instance, as we find in the next part of this Commentary, reason can work out that there is a God, but it cannot tell us how to be forgiven our transgressions. We need God Himself to tell us that. On the other hand, just showing that there is a God is quite a lot, for if there were *no* God, then there would be no point in even considering whether He had revealed anything. By contrast, if He exists, then we can go on to consider the possibility of Revelation.

Logically, then, the teachings of reason are *preambles* to faith. As St. Thomas writes:

The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected.<sup>17</sup>

Can the relation between reason and faith ever go in the other direction too? In several ways, apparently so.

- First, faith may sometimes precede reason in the order of discovery. For example, someone who has been brought up in Christian faith and who has always believed in God may discover only in adulthood that the reality of God can also be philosophically demonstrated. Just because he does already believe in God, he may take the demonstration more seriously.
- Second, faith may call reason's attention to things that reason *could have* found out by itself, but hasn't noticed. For example, even though we have interior experience of our own personhood, the *concept* of the person was not discovered by Western philosophy until the early controversies over the Trinity, the one Substance in three Persons.
- Third, faith may provide reason with additional data that it *could not* have found out by itself, data which it can work with once it is supplied. For example, once the mind has been informed that God is not a monad but in a sense a community – not Aristotle's "thought thinking itself,"<sup>18</sup> but a burning unity of three Persons joined in love – it can go on to ask *What difference does it make that this is true?*
- Fourth, faith may break through the shackles we fasten on our intellects. Without faith, there may be many things that our minds are able to know, but that they would rather pretend not to know. For example, if I have no confidence in the possibility of divine forgiveness, then I may be afraid to

<sup>17</sup> I, Q. 2, Art. 2, ad 1. <sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 12, Chapters 7, 9.

listen to my conscience. In fact, I may not even want to be forgiven, because then I would have to change – and if I have not been informed of the possibility of innocence and freedom, then I may prefer continuing in vice. In either case, I avert my eyes from the inscription on my heart; I try to rub it out; failing that, I cover it up with a shroud of rationalizations.

- Finally, faith may enable us to have confidence in reason in the first place. Atheists often say they trust in reason (a truncated reason) instead of faith. Empirically, however, we find that many who lose faith in God lose faith in reason too. The reason is not difficult to understand, for as we see later, if there is no First Cause, then ultimately nothing makes sense. By contrast, if we do trust His reality, if we know that He is not just a blind force but a God of love and wisdom, and if we further have confidence that our own powers of reason are His gift, then everything changes. The terror of the abyss, the awful sense of meaninglessness, and the mocking specter of absurdity will no longer have power to keep us from using our minds.

The upshot is that although logically, reason is a *praeambulus fidei*, a preamble to faith, in other ways the relationship may work in the other direction. For many of us, then, faith may be a *praeambula amicitiae cum ratione*, a preamble to friendship with reason.