

Philosophy and Catholic Theology

A Primer



Philip A. Egan



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Preface

This short primer was originally composed in a different and abbreviated format for the Maryvale Institute, Birmingham, and its excellent distance-learning BPhil degree in philosophy. It sought to address the needs of honors-level undergraduates studying philosophy, in order to outline some of the ways philosophy has influenced theology and in the process to offer those students a kind of *vademecum* of recent Catholic theology. This is why a basic knowledge of philosophy is presumed. The book has since been rewritten in its present form to be of interest to seminarians completing their studies of philosophy and beginning theology, particularly those studying foundational or fundamental theology. It has a revised aim of helping such students to navigate some of the current developments and trends in Catholic theology. However, I hope that, in addition to philosophy undergraduates and seminarians, this short work may be of interest to any student of theology and, indeed, to the general reader who is sensitive to or curious about the influence of philosophy on theology.

The intention throughout has been to avoid excessive technical detail or coverage of matters of academic dispute, except those necessary to our purpose. The book prefers to offer a straightforward survey or overview. Such a project by its nature has to be highly selective and cannot claim to be comprehensive. It reflects the views and interests of its author, who, in advance, apologizes to the reader for the omission of many names of philosophers and theologians and many developments and trends the reader might have wished to have seen included.

If the purpose of this primer is to map out the influence of contemporary philosophies on recent Catholic theology, then the task must necessarily be approached in stages. Thus chapter 1, “Theology,” begins with a discussion of what theology is about and how much human reason—and therefore philosophy—has a role in it and what the nature of that role might be. The Catholic tradition has taken a keen and nuanced view of

these matters, and so, following the mainstream of that tradition, we look at the role of reason in the theological process, the history of theology, the questions theology deals with, its foundations, and some of its basic parameters. Extensive use is made in this section of magisterial statements that have established a clear direction for subsequent theology, namely, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith (*Dei Filius*) of the First Vatican Council (1870) and the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) of the Second Vatican Council (1965). The relevant sections from the text of the former can be found in the appendix, and the relevant paragraphs from the latter were neatly summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (80–95). As these magisterial pronouncements are explored, the chief counter positions are also discussed.

Chapter 2, “Recent Theology,” is about the context in which theology has been done in the recent past and is being done today. The trends and developments that have taken place over the last hundred years or so are examined. Central to Catholic theology during this period has been the far-reaching process of change and renewal that led to Vatican II (1962–1965), and that in some respects caught the wider church unaware. We also discuss the progress made in the period since. The council had a profound and pervasive impact on every aspect of ecclesial life, and this section discusses the principal theological developments that have occurred, together with the key protagonists.

Chapter 3, “Philosophy and Theology,” reaches the heart of the matter by exploring the influence of the various families of contemporary philosophy on this or that strand of theology, on this or that theologian, and on this or that theological issue. Such an enterprise has its risks, as the reader will appreciate, since it could easily fall prey to oversimplification, both philosophical and theological. This is why the author must state at the outset that he is not trying to sum up the history and concern of each philosophy mentioned or to suggest that any individual theologian is in the exclusive thrall of any particular philosophy, even though some theologians do acknowledge their dependence on particular philosophers or on rigorously grounded philosophical presuppositions. Rather, the aim of this section is simply to indicate general influences on a theologian’s thought or work.

Chapter 4, “Theological Method,” looks at some of the theological methods and features of theology from the past, at the functions of the creeds in the early period and the *quaestio disputata* in the Middle Ages, and then how the challenges of the Reformation and modernity were met by neoscholasticism and its thesis theology. After discussing the crisis

of method following Vatican II, the second half of the section explores some of the current “styles” of theology and their philosophical underpinnings.

It would be impossible to offer a primer like this from a supposedly neutral perspective, and in any case this is not our purpose. The concept of theology here is avowedly Roman Catholic, or at least its intention is to fit squarely within the mainstream of the Roman Catholic tradition, giving due value to the statements of the Roman magisterium relating to theology, faith, and reason. I hope, too, that this work will recall aspects of these issues that other Roman Catholic theologians may have neglected. Yet it does all of this irenically and with a critical awareness of the challenges put to the tradition. In any case, much of what is said is not exclusive to the Roman Catholic tradition, and I hope that readers from the Orthodox, Protestant, and Reformed traditions will find in the text useful paradigms and examples to illuminate their own thinking. Where practicable, cross-references to theologians and trends within Orthodox, Protestant, and Reformed theology are incorporated.

Finally, the reader will also notice the influence on this text of the Thomist tradition in general and of the Canadian Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan (1904–84) in particular.

I give thanks to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given me the great privilege of sharing in his sacred priesthood. I would also like to thank the Most Rev. Brian Noble, bishop of Shrewsbury, for his trust, prayers, and untiring support; Father Joseph Flanagan and the Lonergan Institute at Boston College for their encouragement and the wherewithal that enabled the writing of this book; Father Mark Crisp and the staff of St. Mary’s College Oscott for their friendship and Christian example; the students of the college for patiently sitting through my lectures; and Dr. Andrew Beards and those at the Maryvale Institute, Birmingham, for inviting me to make a contribution to their philosophy program.

Philip Egan
St. Mary’s College Oscott
26 January 2008

Chapter One



Theology

In the Western tradition, philosophy (Greek *philos*, “friend,” and *sophia*, “wisdom”) is generally understood to encompass the study and discussion of the correct principles of reasoning (logic), the manner by which human knowing takes place (epistemology), the nature of reality and what exists (metaphysics), and how we should live (ethics). Philosophy, as distinct from theology, claims to base itself solely on rational arguments that prescind from any act of, or commitment to religious faith and belief, although there are branches of philosophy that discuss faith and religion, such as philosophy of religion. Philosophy, then, is a product of human reason. But to understand the influence of contemporary philosophies on recent Catholic theology we must also discuss what we mean by theology, because in some conceptions of theology, human reason is deemed to have little or no formal part. If this is the case, then we cannot raise the question of how contemporary philosophies influence theology. So the first question is: What is theology? What is it about? What is theology for and what does it seek to do? This chapter discusses the nature and functions of theology, and the relationship of reason to theology. Our answers to these questions—about the relationship between faith and reason, and the theology to which it gives birth—will pave the way for a study of the influence of philosophy on theology.

1. *Dei Filius* and the Interrelationship of Faith and Reason

The term theology, first used by Origen (d. 254), comes from the Greek *theou logos*, literally discourse or reasoning about God. Theology can be

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understood to be the rational study of God and religious belief, and in a specifically Christian understanding it is the rational study of the revelation God has given in Jesus Christ. In other words, let us establish the following statement as a working definition to guide our reflections in this first section:

Christian theology is the systematic study of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. It also studies the human experience, understanding, knowledge, and reception of this revelation, and in particular how Christian disciples are expected to live their lives.

This working definition is not meant to be either exhaustive or novel. Indeed, it concurs more or less with the medieval understanding. To medievals the first object of theology was God's own self, God *qua* God, or as St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) put it, *Deus sub ratione Dei* (*Summa Theologiae* [henceforth ST] I-I, q. 1, a. 7), and everything that follows from that, namely, creation in its relationship to God. Contemporary theologies, however, have considerably developed and expanded the way the scope and purpose of theology can be understood. Theologians in the modern era have adopted biblical and historical approaches to theology that focus on the person and work of Christ, his life, death, and resurrection, and how in him the God of salvation has saved and liberated human beings. Again, many recent theologians have espoused an "anthropological turn" in one form or other. They try to see things from an earthly, human perspective, investigating the relevance of divine revelation for humanity and its transforming effect upon the various domains of secular life. They take seriously the belief that the Son of God became incarnate, died, and rose again *pro nobis*, that is, for us and for our salvation.

The working definition envisages theology as based on divine revelation. This has important implications. Is theology the product of divine revelation alone: "This is what God has revealed"? Or does it involve human reasoning: "This is what we understand God's revelation means for us"? Is theology, as some fundamentalist Christians believe, a body of knowledge that has been passed down in the Bible and/or through the church that must be unthinkingly received, believed, and put into practice? Or is it, as some liberal Christians believe, a kind of philosophical reflection on revelation such that anyone, believer or not, can undertake it? Further, is faith necessary—do you need to be a practicing Christian—to do Christian theology? The First Vatican Council (1869–70) dealt authoritatively with many of these questions in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*. The important yet highly

nuanced statement about the relationship of faith and reason that Vatican I made was largely reiterated by John Paul II in his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.

Faith or Reason? Or Faith and Reason?

The relationship between faith and reason was much debated in the nineteenth century chiefly because of the new and challenging philosophies then current, originating in the Enlightenment, together with the rush of new scientific discoveries and technological advances. All of these seemed to underline the power of human reason to reorder nature with confidence and to construct a new, human-made world. In theology the new ideas raised questions about the extent and limits of human reason in relation to the Christian faith. The ongoing controversies over the teaching of Louis Bautain (d. 1867), professor of philosophy at Strasbourg; Cardinal Louis-Jacques-Maurice de Bonald (d. 1870); Felicité de Lamennais (d. 1854), who later formally renounced his Catholic beliefs; Augustin Bonnetty (d. 1879), a major proponent of traditionalism; and Georg Hermes (d. 1831), the controversial professor of dogmatic theology at Bonn, provoked numerous interventions from the Vatican as well as two encyclical letters from Pius IX warning of the dangers: *Qui Pluribus* (1846) and *Quanta Cura* (1864). Attached to the latter was the celebrated *Syllabus of Condemned Errors*.

It is worth noting here some of the early propositions of the *Syllabus* dealing with absolute rationalism and moderate rationalism, both of which were condemned:

4. All religious truths originate from the natural power of human reason. Hence reason is the principal norm by which we can and must reach knowledge of whatever kind of truths.
- ...
6. Faith in Christ is detrimental to human reason and divine revelation not only is of no use but is even harmful to human perfection.
- ...
8. Since human reason is on a par with religion itself, theological disciplines have to be handled in the same manner as the philosophical ones.
- ...
9. All dogmas of the Christian religion are, without distinction, the object of natural science or of philosophy; human reason solely as developed in history can, by means of its natural powers and principles, come to a true understanding of all, even the more profound dogmas, provided only that such dogmas be proposed to reason as its object.
- ...

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11. The church must not only abstain from any censure of philosophy; she must also tolerate the errors of philosophy, and leave it to philosophy to correct itself.
- ...
14. Philosophy is to be treated without taking any account of supernatural revelation. (Pius IX, *Syllabus of Condemned Errors*, DS 2904, 2906, 2908-9, 2911, and 2914/ ND 112)

These disputes about faith and reason formed the background to *Dei Filius* (1870). It is interesting, in this context, to compare and contrast the philosophical context of Vatican I with that of Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* (1998). Whereas in the nineteenth century the critical issue was faith, and whether faith could convey knowledge additional to that attained by human reason, for John Paul II the various postmodern philosophies of deconstruction had undermined human reason and made reason the critical issue, particularly whether human reason could know anything at all with certainty. In fact, it could be argued, the relationship of faith and reason continues to be highly controversial in the early twenty-first century. The philosophico-theological discussion of how faith and reason might be correlated distinguishes Christianity from the other major religions. In his "Address to Scientists at the University of Regensburg" (2006), Pope Benedict XVI explored the use of reason in religion, making the provocative point that if creation had not been made through *Logos*, the Word, then God could presumably ask humans to perform nonreasonable deeds and actions that might even be extreme.

The issue of the relationship between faith and reason raises at least three clusters of questions. First, what is the nature of faith? Is it reasonable? Or is the Christian faith principally a feeling, as Friedrich Schleiermacher (d. 1834) asserted, or a leap in the dark, as Søren Kierkegaard (d. 1855) put it?

Second, does revelation reveal things that are not knowable by reason? Or are the Christian faith and its teachings perfectly reasonable, even rationally demonstrable? Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) spoke of a "religion within the bounds of pure reason." In other words, would it be true to say that what Christians believe about love—that people should refrain from murder, violence, injustice, and oppression—should make as much sense to an unbeliever as to a believer?

A third complex of questions arises around the precise nature of the relationship between faith and reason. For instance: how, if at all, does theology relate to other fields of knowledge? Does it in any way connect

with the empirical sciences, natural and human? Indeed, could there ever be a contradiction between the principles, positions, and results of theology and those of the sciences, and if so, how might it be resolved and which discipline might have the priority?

Christians might respond to these issues in one of two ways. On the one hand, evangelicals, following the direction set by Martin Luther (d. 1546) and Karl Barth (d. 1968), insist on *sola fide*, faith alone. Faith is far more important than reason. Indeed, the only thing that matters is a personal faith in Jesus Christ. The original sin of Adam and Eve has left humanity a *massa damnata*, with nothing to be proud of. Even reason has been darkened. Before the sheer truth, reality, justice, and glory of God, revealed above all on the cross of Christ, the intellect is like a mirror that has been smashed, the glass emptied out. Humans can know little or nothing about God by the light of natural reason. Jesus Christ alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Light, and it is thanks to his revelation that the saving truths about God are known.

Other Christians have rejected this line of thinking and, largely under the influence of nineteenth-century rationalism and twentieth-century liberalism, have opted instead to subject faith and the teachings of Christianity to reason alone, and even to personal choice and opinion. In this view the human intellect has not been damaged at all by the Fall. Reason is a gift God has given to humans so that they can find the truth and discern the right way to live.

Vatican I took a middle line on these debates. The council envisaged faith and reason as complementary, that is, as mutually and intrinsically interrelated. Human reason was damaged by original sin but not destroyed. The mirror had been cracked, but it was still serviceable. According to *Dei Filius*, divine revelation not only helps humans to cope with those cracks, confirming things that reason can see, but in addition gives access to many other matters of faith that would not otherwise have been known. Thus, the council declared, there are some theological realities that can be known through ordinary human knowing. Some theologians list examples of these, such as the presence of the soul, the existence of God, the reality of human freedom, the natural law, the promise of immortality, and the hope of an afterlife. There are, in addition, many other truths revealed to humanity by Jesus Christ, and these are known by faith.

Vatican I, therefore, stressed two kinds of knowledge: what can be known through reason and what can be known through revelation, the two orders (reason and faith) being not opposed but mutually interrelated.

This position was reiterated by John Paul II in the opening sentence of the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*:

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves. (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 1)

In other words, human knowledge (e.g., science, medicine, and critical scholarship) and religion have one and the same aim, to know the truth. This is why it is not perhaps an overstatement to assert that in the Catholic tradition a high value has always been given to philosophy, science, the arts, and scholarship.

The Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican I, Dei Filius

In *Qui Pluribus, Quanta Cura*, and the *Syllabus of Condemned Errors*, Pius IX condemned two opposing theological trends that were also addressed by Vatican I in *Dei Filius*. These were “fideism-traditionalism” and “rationalism-liberalism.”

To begin with the first pairing: Fideism is the belief that God can only be known by faith and by what he has revealed to us in Jesus Christ. In other words, human reasoning, philosophy, and natural theology tell us nothing about God. Religious truth requires a “leap in the dark”; it might be recognizable by an instinct (Charles Sanders Peirce) or in our feelings (Friedrich Schleiermacher) but not by the intellect. Most Catholic theologians eschewed these views, which were being proposed by certain Protestant or Reformed theologies, notably those of an evangelical or fundamentalist kind, but some of them espoused traditionalism, a kind of Catholic version of fideism. Traditionalism was found in various ways in the nineteenth-century writers mentioned above, notably de Lamennais, Bonald, Bautain, and Bonnetty. Traditionalism asserted that unaided natural reason could not come to know God independently from belonging to or being brought up within a religious tradition, such as being a member of the church. Taken together, therefore, fideism-traditionalism was a distrust of reason, suggesting that faith is ultimately not something rational but what “we just have to accept.”

Rationalism-liberalism, on the other hand, took the opposite line. Rationalism and liberalism made human reason the only or the chief

resource and faculty of humans. Rationalism, in other words, subjects divine revelation to the judgment of human reason: This or that should be believed because it is rationally coherent or reasonably demonstrable. The tenets of rationalism can be seen in the project of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose thought has permeated the modern era. Rationalism can also be discerned before Kant in the writings of François-Marie Voltaire (d. 1778), a lifelong enemy of Catholicism and the vigorous opponent of Blaise Pascal.

Another version of rationalism can be found in the thought of Georg Hermes, whose propositions Pius IX condemned in *Qui Pluribus*. Hermes, whose lifelong ambition was to meet the challenge of Kant, wanted to demonstrate the harmony between faith and reason, giving thereby a secure ground or basis to the truth claims of faith. For example, in his *Positive Einleitung* (1829) he tackled five questions: Are the books of the New Testament externally (historically) true? Is the oral tradition involved in the New Testament historically true? Are the expositions and interpretations of the teaching of Jesus as presented by the church infallibly correct? Is the teaching of Jesus as contained in the New Testament intrinsically true? And are the teachings of Jesus handed down by tradition intrinsically true? Hermes argued that knowledge is subjectively true when we become convinced in our minds that it coincides with its object. But he departed from the Catholic tradition in asserting that the grounds for assent were the same in matters of faith as in every other area of human knowing: what compels is an argument's inner logic ("Hermesianism"). Hermesianism was condemned by the Roman magisterium because it was perceived to be a brand of rationalism. It allegedly reduced divine revelation to human knowing, bringing the truths of faith revealed on the authority of Christ before the bar of human reason while suppressing the supernatural element.

Liberalism in religious and theological matters is somewhat more complex. It eludes an easy definition, partly because it has meant different things at different times. However, for simplicity here we may say that in nineteenth-century terms it was the next step beyond rationalism. Liberalism arguably reduced religion, revelation, and the truths of faith to personal opinion or individual taste, and thus paved the way for early twentieth-century modernism (see below). John Henry Newman (d. 1890) declared himself an opponent of liberalism. He saw himself as engaged in a lifelong battle against it, once famously describing it in his *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) as "the anti-dogmatic principle":

That truth and falsehood in religion are but matter of opinion; that one doctrine is as good as another; that the Governor of the world does not intend that we should gain the truth; that there is no truth; that we are not more acceptable to God by believing this than by believing that; that no one is answerable for his opinions; that they are a matter of necessity or accident; that it is enough if we sincerely hold what we profess; that our merit lies in seeking, not in possessing; that it is a duty to follow what seems to us true, without a fear lest it should not be true; that it may be a gain to succeed, and can be no harm to fail; that we may take up and lay down opinions at pleasure; that belief belongs to the mere intellect, not to the heart also; that we may safely trust to ourselves in matters of Faith, and need no other guide—this is the principle of philosophies and heresies, which is very weakness. (John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 357–58)

The various shades and positions involved in fideism-traditionalism and rationalism-liberalism are complex. Basically, *Dei Filius* traced a middle line between the extremes. It asserted that faith and reason were mutually and intrinsically interrelated. Unaided reason could give us some (certain) knowledge about God and the basic truths of faith, but the gift of faith in divine revelation enabled us to know and be certain about many other truths that would not be knowable by reason alone.

Since Vatican I drew on common elements from the scholastic tradition and in *Dei Filius* established parameters within which most Roman Catholic theologians have operated ever since, it is worth delaying a moment to examine the detail of the council's statements. The relevant sections of the text can be found in the appendix. Here we note four points.

First, on the natural knowledge of God, God can be known by reason alone:

[The church] holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the things that were created, through the natural light of human reason . . . [and] that truths about things divine which of themselves are not beyond human reason can, even in the present condition of humankind, be known by everyone with facility, with firm certitude and with no admixture of error. (Vatican I *Dei Filius*, DS 3004-5/ND 113-44)

Dei Filius asserted that humans can know that God exists, and that they can know certain things about God by the light of unaided human reason. In other words, belief in God can be proved (in the sense of demonstrated

or shown) to be reasonable, to be a rationally and logically coherent stance. Moreover, as noted above, certain basic truths of faith can be known: that God is personal, that humans have souls and that the soul is immortal, that there is a natural law implanted in human conscience, and that heaven is the final goal. These truths of faith can be known by reason alone, according to *Dei Filius*. Moreover, these are truths of faith that have been confirmed by the revelation given in Jesus Christ, and so they can also be known—and indeed, much more can be said about them—through faith. (See figure 1.) Revelation and the gift of faith may be said to enable this basic knowledge to be transcended, and so humans can enter into a real, intimate, and personal relationship with God.

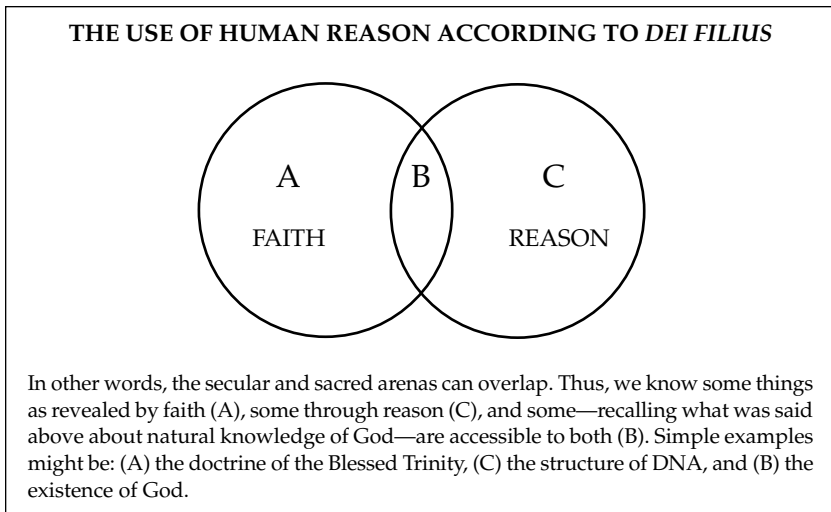


Figure 1

It is worth adding a couple of notes here. In an essay called “Natural Knowledge of God” in *A Second Collection*, Bernard Lonergan made the important observation that while *Dei Filius* said that theoretically it was possible to know God and certain basic truths about God and our salvation, it did not say that this was the manner by which people actually did come to know God. It said only that it was possible. In practice, Lonergan said, most people—especially today—would need the help of grace and the gift of faith to overcome the cultural factors and intellectual baggage that often obscure this knowledge. Moreover, on another point,

we might note how the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 31-35 handles and develops the teaching of *Dei Filius*. When it speaks about knowing for certain about the existence of God, it says that the knowledge of God's existence is not like a proof from the empirical sciences, but rather a collection of "converging and convincing arguments" based on the world humans know and on the marvel of the human person.

Our second point to note is that divine revelation and human reason yield two orders of knowledge:

There is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only in its source but also in its object; in its source, because in the one we know by natural reason, in the other by divine faith; in its object, because apart from what natural reason can attain, there are proposed to our belief mysteries that are hidden in God, which can never be known unless they are revealed by God. (*Dei Filius*, DS 3015/ND 131)

In other words, here *Dei Filius* states that there are two orders of knowledge: that which comes through reason and that which comes through revelation. They differ in their source—one is from human observation, the other from God—and in their object: one is the realm of things known by human reason, the other the realm of things revealed by God. According to the council, therefore, human knowing can take two forms: religious knowing (knowing illuminated by faith) and nonreligious knowing (all other forms of knowing or "reason"). What differentiates them is the object known (either revealed or known by human observation) and the knowing subject (the human being using faith-filled reason or the human being using ordinary reason). If a person has faith and is in love with God, he or she, when exploring the objects of revelation, can discern things not visible to a nonreligious knower. A nonreligious knower might theoretically know about God's existence, the immortality of the soul, and, say, the natural law but not about the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, or the sacraments.

The third point is that Vatican I states that faith is a divine gift enabling reason to perceive, understand, come to know, and put into practice the mysteries it cannot exhaust:

If reason illumined by faith inquires in an earnest, pious and sober manner, it attains by God's grace a certain understanding of the mysteries, which is most fruitful, both from the analogy with the objects of its natural knowledge and from the connection of these mysteries with one another and with our ultimate end. But it never

becomes capable of understanding them in the way it does the truths which constitute its proper object. (*Dei Filius*, DS 3016/ND 132)

Reason, according to *Dei Filius*, has an important role in matters of faith. It has the task, when graced by faith, of perceiving revealed truths and of penetrating, exploring, interpreting, asserting, and putting them into practice. On the other hand, human knowing is also limited, and so humans can only come to a certain understanding of the divine mysteries. Subsequently the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 39-43 reprised and expanded the teaching of *Dei Filius*, saying that reason cannot “contain” God, but it can “attain” to God:

39. In defending the ability of human reason to know God, the Church is expressing her confidence in the possibility of speaking about him to all men and with all men, and therefore of dialogue with other religions, with philosophy and science, as well as with unbelievers and atheists.
40. Since our knowledge of God is limited, our language about him is equally so. We can name God only by taking creatures as our starting point, and in accordance with our limited human ways of knowing and thinking.
- ...
42. God transcends all creatures. We must therefore continually purify our language of everything in it that is limited, image-bound or imperfect, if we are not to confuse our image of God—“the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the invisible, the ungraspable” [Liturgy of *St. John Chrysostom*, Anaphora]—with our human representations. Our human words always fall short of the mystery of God.
43. Admittedly, in speaking about God like this, our language is using human modes of expression; nevertheless it really does attain to God himself, though unable to express him in his infinite simplicity. Likewise, we must recall that “between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying an even greater dissimilitude” [Lateran Council IV: DS 806]; and that “concerning God, we cannot grasp what he is, but only what he is not, and how other beings stand in relation to him.” (CCC 39-40, 42-43)

Dei Filius mentions three “intellectual devices” human reasoning can use to expound the sacred mysteries: analogy, the *nexus mysteriorum inter se*, and the connection with our ultimate end. We will consider each of these in turn.

The first device mentioned is analogy, that is, reasoning by proportion or correspondence to realities that are similar to, and yet dissimilar from, those things known by unaided reason. Analogy has been the subject of

much philosophical and theological discussion. Because Christ, “the Word through whom all things were made,” used the whole created order as a means of communicating himself, he was able to use human words, images, and concepts to express the Word of God. This use of analogy is sometimes called the “principle of the incarnation.” One example theologians sometimes give is how Christ saw in human paternity an image of his relationship with the Father. Other theologians have used other analogies and in a more speculative manner. For instance, Augustine’s (d. 430) theology of the Trinity depends on his use of the analogy of the powers of the soul: the intellect, the memory, and the will.

The second device mentioned is the *nexus mysteriorum inter se* (“the interconnection of mysteries among themselves”). Scholastic theology believed that all the mysteries of faith were interconnected and that the revealed truth as a totality formed an organic whole, simple and utterly coherent, with no self-contradictory elements. Scholastic thinkers reasoned that because each particular aspect or expression of faith would fit in with every other aspect, it is possible in some theological reflections to proceed by argument from examples in one area of theology to conclusions in another, discovering the multiple ways the truths of faith are interlinked within an overall harmony. *Dei Filius* seems to support this idea that individual mysteries of faith evoke and answer each other. For example, what the gospels record about the risen body of Christ after his resurrection can enable theologians to reach tentative conclusions about eschatology and about the condition of all humans after the resurrection of the body.

Finally, *Dei Filius* refers to the use of the “connection of the mysteries with our ultimate end,” that is, the relation of the present reality to its eschatological goal. This is the argument that what is dim and unclear now will be made bright and clear then. What is suggested, imperfect, or incomplete in this world will in the next be made perfect, complete, and fulfilled. In this manner, Vatican I asserted, theological reasoning is able in some cases to extrapolate from what is known now to what might be the case in the future.

According to *Dei Filius*, then, reason illumined by faith can reach a certain limited understanding of the mysteries. Eastern Orthodox theologies tend, in contrast to Western theologies, to be much more “apophatic” (Greek *apo*, “other than,” and *phaio*, “to bring to light”). They often hesitate before forming concepts of God and are negatively self-expressive, saying what God is not. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 39-43 seems to be more congruent with such Eastern accents. Western

theologies, on the other hand, tend to be more “kataphatic” (Greek *kata*, “down from above”). They underline the incarnation, how the eternal entered time, that the Word became flesh, and that Christ spoke the Word of God in human words (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 4). *Dei Filius*, while acknowledging the limits, could be said to be firmly in that Western tradition when it goes on to assert that theology can truly say something. To speak of God revealing mysteries, according to Vatican I, is not to imply that there is nothing that can be said or that these are things that cannot at all be understood. A mystery here signifies a “sacred reality.” These sacred realities are ineffable and inexhaustible, so great that although something can be said, their intelligibility can never be exhausted. They can be revisited time and again, and they will always manifest something new. Perhaps a good analogy for this is the notion of love. To conceptualize love or to attempt to contain in a definition what is meant by love is always elusive. Indeed, it is impossible, which is why authors can write books and books about love until the end of time. This is arguably even more the case when speaking of the theological notion of love, *caritas*, since God is love. God has revealed his love in the gift of himself, Jesus Christ. Love is a Person, and so love is much greater, deeper, and richer than any propositional truth or rational conclusion to an argument.

The council’s statements bring to mind a further illustration, the famous story of Augustine meeting a boy on the beach. The boy had dug a hole in the sand and was running to and from the sea with buckets of water. When Augustine asked him what he was doing, he said he was trying to empty the sea into the hole. “But that’s impossible!” Augustine said. “I know,” the boy replied, “but I’ll be able to do that before you can ‘get into your head’ the mystery of the Trinity.” Or again, all the books in the world cannot exhaust the meaning of the parables in the gospels—but that does not stop exegetes from writing about them or preachers from giving homilies.

A fourth and final point from *Dei Filius* is its statement that faith and reason are mutually supportive, although the truths of faith have priority (DS 3017-19). These later paragraphs have provided Catholic theology with some important principles. In the conception of the council, although faith is above reason, faith and reason are interrelated and so cannot contradict each other. There cannot be double truths:

[Although] faith is above reason, there can never be a real conflict between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human

mind, and God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth. (*Dei Filius*, DS 3017/ND 133)

The argument is from Aquinas: it is the same God who grounds all truth, whether secular or divine, and the truth is ultimately one. Where a contradiction becomes apparent this is because, *Dei Filius* claims, either dogmas have not been interpreted properly or understood authentically, or a flawed scientific or critical theory is being proposed as certain:

The deceptive appearance of . . . a contradiction is mainly due to the fact that either the dogmas of faith have not been understood and expounded according to the mind of the church, or that uncertain theories are taken for verdicts of reason. (*Dei Filius*, DS 3017/ND 133)

However, faith and reason can work to assist each other:

Not only can there be no conflict between faith and reason, but they also support each other, since right reason demonstrates the foundations of faith and, illumined by its light, pursues the understanding of divine things, while faith frees and protects reason from errors and provides it with manifold insights. (*Dei Filius*, DS 3019/ND 135)

This is why, the dogmatic constitution adds, the church promotes all the sound activities of human reason such as science, medicine, the arts, culture, and scholarship:

It is therefore far removed from the truth to say that the Church opposes the study of human arts and sciences; on the contrary, she supports and promotes them in many ways. She does not ignore or despise the benefits that human life derives from them. Indeed, she confesses that as they have their origin from God who is the Lord of knowledge (cf. 1 Samuel 2:3), so too, if rightly pursued, they lead to God with the help of his grace. (*Dei Filius*, DS 3019/ND 135)

This point was subsequently taken up by Vatican II in *Gaudium et Spes*: the church upholds the legitimate autonomy of the sciences, and of human affairs and organizations, together with their methods, while insisting only that such disciplines not impinge on matters of faith:

Nor does the Church in any way forbid that these sciences, each in its sphere, should make use of their own principles and of the method proper to them. While, however, acknowledging this just

freedom, she seriously warns lest they fall into error by going contrary to divine doctrine, or, stepping beyond their own limits, they enter into the sphere of faith and create confusion. (*Gaudium et Spes* 36)

Nonetheless, according to Vatican I, the contents of revelation have a priority because they have been revealed by Christ. The church has the task of propounding them in every age and place, and it cannot err. Christians, therefore, must not hold scientific or scholarly positions that are inimical to faith:

Believing Christians are not only forbidden to defend as legitimate conclusions of science such opinions which they realize to be contrary to the doctrine of faith, particularly if they have been condemned by the church, but they are seriously bound to account them as errors which put on the fallacious appearance of truth. (*Dei Filius*, DS 3018/ND 134)

Chapter 4 of the Constitution concludes with canons condemning rationalism (DS 3041), those who propose the absolute autonomy of the human sciences (DS 3042), and the future tenet of the modernists, that advances in science can revise the truths of revelation (DS 3043).

To sum up: *Dei Filius* is said to have traced a middle line between the extremes of fideism-traditionalism and rationalism-liberalism. It asserted that faith and reason were mutually and intrinsically interrelated, that unaided reason could yield some (certain) knowledge about God, but that the gift of faith enables humans to know much more. Faith is not subject to reason (rationalism), or reason to blind faith (fideism). Moreover, faith and reason should not be seen dualistically, as some have done since then, as totally discrete realms in which the sacred and the secular, theology and philosophy, religion and science are divorced, with nothing to say to each other. Rather, one human reasoning process is operative in science, scholarship, and practical affairs, but when enlightened by faith, graced reason can perceive, understand, know, and put into practice the saving knowledge that God has revealed in Christ.

In all these subtle and complex position statements on faith and reason, and on the use of reason within theology, Vatican I established certain general parameters within which Catholic thinkers in the main have operated since. However, the nineteenth-century issue was not only about the use of reason within theology but also about the nature of faith. So now we must ask: What is faith? This also brings us back to one of the original questions: Is faith necessary for the study of theology? Or is

theology simply a work of reason, a critical reflection on revelation such that anyone, believer or not, could do it?

Faith, Reason, and Theology

Our working definition of theology envisaged theology as a reasoned reflection on divine revelation. We then critically examined the meaning of this in relation to the principles regarding faith and reason articulated by Vatican Council I in *Dei Filius*. Theology is faith-filled reason attempting better to understand its object—God—and humanity in relation to God. It involves a constant exchange between faith and reason, the sacred and the secular, religion and culture. It is a reasoned reflection on the Word of God that attempts to grasp the significance of that Word for oneself and for humanity. It follows that theology in the sense outlined here requires the theologian to be a man or woman with faith. Even if, as we shall see, there are aspects or tasks in the overall theological enterprise for which a personal faith commitment is of lesser importance, in general, if the conception of theology discussed so far is accepted, faith is required in order to do theology. This needs to be unpacked.

What is faith? Neoscholastic theology usefully distinguished the *fides quae creditur* (“the faith that is believed”), that is, the content and truths of faith revealed by God, “The Faith,” from the *fides qua creditur* (“the faith by which is believed”), that is, the action of the human subject receiving the gift of faith, one’s freely given faith response and adherence, under the influence of grace, to God’s salvific offer, the act of believing the Word of God and committing oneself to it.

An act of faith (*fides qua*) could be said to be the complete homage and submission of mind and will to God, assenting to what God has revealed (*fides quae*). This act is made because of who God is: God. It is a quality and virtue that flows from love, a gift of the Holy Spirit who floods the heart, enabling the believer to perceive, understand, and know things others cannot. In the phrase of the famous French religious philosopher and Christian apologist Blaise Pascal (d. 1662), “the heart has reasons that reason does not have.” Bernard Lonergan captured the meaning of this well in his splendid saying: “Faith is the knowledge born of religious love” (*Method in Theology*, 115).

For the Christian, the faith response to God needs to incorporate a faith response to God’s self-manifestation in Jesus Christ, and then, in the Catholic understanding, this faith response must also include, in a derivative manner, faith in the church, established by Christ to preserve

and articulate his teaching. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains this by noting that faith is not an isolated act. The Catholic Christian is first and foremost a member of the church (CCC 166-69). This is because, it says, the church is the primordial believer bearing, nourishing, and sustaining the faith of the individual, the one through, with, and in Christ, and animated by the Holy Spirit, who, on behalf of humanity, responds to the Father, saying "I believe." Therefore the *credo* of an individual Christian—the *credo* of the individual theologian—always participates in the universal church's *credo* or act of faith. So, summing all this up, we could say that for the theologian to do theology in the sense being envisaged here, she or he must have a faith commitment that is threefold: divine (faith in God), Christian (faith in Jesus Christ), and ecclesial (faith in the church as the divinely authorized guarantor of faith).

Dei Filius envisaged God bestowing a double gift: revelation in Christ (*fides quae*) and the faith needed for the human subject to accept it and adhere to it (*fides qua*). Faith, then, according to Vatican I, is a gift freely given by God that humans are always free to accept or reject. It is ever true: "you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink." The gift of faith—theological, christological, and ecclesial—gives rise to theology, faith enabling believers to perceive, penetrate, know, accept, and put into practice the revelation God has given. Faith enables believers to have certainty about the truths God has revealed, and faith helps them penetrate the sacred mysteries, although always with a limited understanding. Faith as God's continuing gift helps theologians to advance in understanding, to grow in knowledge, and to conform themselves ever more perfectly to what God is revealing. This is not to say that faith is blind. As *Dei Filius* suggested by speaking of a relationship between faith and reason, faith needs to be critical since it involves the use of reason with all its capacities, procedures, and hesitancy. Reason makes use of all its usual exigencies, thus enabling theology to engage in a constant critical exchange as the theologian reflects on God's revelation and its meaning.

If, in the concept of theology as envisaged here, faith is required for doing theology, it could still be argued that some of the tasks theologians perform require a less explicit faith or personal commitment. They could be done by anyone with the requisite academic credentials. For instance, faith is not so much a requirement for textual research, work on the sacred languages, archaeology, and church history as for the tasks of fundamental theology, Christology, ecclesiology, liturgy, and pastoral theology. In some disciplines of theology having faith might be a great

help in motivating one's research, yet many of the expected tasks could be carried out regardless of the theologian's own personal faith commitment. However, there are clearly other disciplines, such as liturgical, moral, and pastoral theology, where one could show that it is precisely the creative application of the theologian's faith commitment that determines the expectations, directs the project, and shapes the outcomes.

Can faith be "proved"? Can theology prove that the mysteries of faith are true? Theology, in the sense discussed here, has its limits, because faith, as *Dei Filius* argued, is a divine gift. Reason, therefore, could not implant faith or gain it as the conclusion to an argument. Rather, reason "stands underneath" faith and submits to it. Consequently, theology would be unable to prove the truth of faith by operating in the same inductive manner as the empirical sciences, by an appeal to data. On the other hand, it could be argued that it is the task of theology, particularly those branches of theology connected with apologetics, to demonstrate the mysteries of faith or even faith itself to be reason-able. To believe could be shown to be the most attentive, intelligent, reasonable, practical, and charitable response to the mystery and gift of human existence.

2. Theology as an Academic Discipline

In this section we will develop some further implications of our definition of theology: After all, if theology requires faith on the part of the theologian, in what sense can we call it an academic or critical discipline?

It could be argued that every Christian does theology insofar as he or she reflects on the experience of faith or tries to understand its teaching and how to put that teaching into practice in his or her life. The history of theology is in effect the history of Christian reflection on the church's experience of faith. Even as an academic discipline at its most technical or most esoteric, theology is still a prolongation of that basic Christian reflection on lived experience. What differentiates academic theology from simple reflection on experience is its style; it proceeds in an academically self-conscious manner. It develops principles, critically examines its sources, follows appropriate methods, and devises serviceable procedures and applications.

Theology became a formally academic discipline in the Middle Ages, when it also began to become more diversified and specialized. Thus Aquinas differentiated theology as the study of revealed truth from what he called "natural theology." Natural theology specialized in what could

be known about God through the use of the natural light of human reason but without revelation, that is, through critical reflection on the universe, the created order, human history, and the course of events. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, spirituality, philosophy, and canon law also became distinct fields or areas of theology. In the eighteenth century modern historical-critical methods of scriptural exegesis turned biblical studies into a clearly discrete department of theology; subsequently the specialization of church history has also become a separate discipline. Today theology incorporates a large number of particular studies, divided either into disciplines such as dogma, biblical studies, spirituality, morals, liturgy, pastoral theology, patristics, and so on, or into treatises such as Christology, ecclesiology, revelation, Trinity, creation, grace, the virtues, and the sacraments. It often adopts historical (sometimes called “positive”) and systematic (sometimes called “speculative” or hermeneutical) approaches.

How, then, might theology as an academic discipline be related to religion proper, the realm of revelation and faith? And on the other hand, how might theology be related to other related forms of critical scholarship such as religious studies?

Theology and Religion

Already in the early church a distinction had arisen between theology proper and religion proper. This is arguably evident in the writings of some of the Fathers of the church, that is, the great bishops, theologians, and writers of the first half of the first millennium. Most of these Fathers were not closeted academics but pastors, often with onerous and challenging responsibilities. Nonetheless, they produced some of the finest and most nuanced theological reflections of all time on the faith. Think of the sheer technical accomplishment of, for example, Augustine’s *De Trinitate* (ca. 416) or the complex arguments of Athanasius (d. 373) in his *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*. But the statements of the councils and synods of the fourth and fifth centuries began to reveal the development of a technical theology using philosophical terms and nonbiblical language to give a more precise articulation and definition of the tenets of Christian doctrine then in dispute. The classic example of this is the way the Council of Nicea (325) used the term *homoousios* (lit. “of the same substance”) to pin down exactly the orthodox belief in the divinity of Christ. From that time onward theology began a long metamorphosis into an increasingly academic and “critical” discipline different from, although directed

toward, religious faith. In effect, theology became a discourse one step removed from everyday religion and its observances. This process accelerated considerably in the medieval period. By the tenth and eleventh centuries the monastic schools adopted new, rigorous, and systematic methods for teaching theology. Attached to the great cathedrals, these schools eventually became Europe's first universities. In them theology was deemed to be the "queen of the sciences."

Today most theologians would agree that theology is not the same as religion. What Christians believe, what they practice, what they love is one thing (religion); how they express this, reflect on it, and critique it is another (theology). This is the background to the famous distinction Cardinal Newman drew in his autobiographical *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864) between a problem and a doubt: ten thousand difficulties do not make a doubt. In other words, theological problems are one thing, matters of faith and religion another. Religion is the lived reality of God's gift of divine love, the human response to the Gospel, whereas theology is the science or critical discipline that examines and discusses this. Some have described the difference as between the art of healing and the science of medicine. Theology may not be necessary for salvation, but Christians believe their religion is. Lonergan once compared the relationship between theology and religion to that between theory and reality, like the relationship of economics to running a business. A few theoretical difficulties about the economic indicators do not prevent the priest from receiving a Mass stipend! Yet religion does invite expression, and so religion and theology are intimately and mutually interconnected. They are to some extent in a dialectical relationship, theology being a theoretical withdrawal that intends a practical return.

Theology and Religious Studies

Many contemporary theologies are attempting to reaffirm their links with both spirituality, on the one hand, and daily life, on the other, restoring the holistic aspects of patristic theology. For Aquinas theology was both a science and a wisdom, that is, a body of organized knowledge about revelation and its meaning and also a practical and salvific philosophy of life (ST I-I, q. 1 a. 2 and a. 6). For him philosophy, theology, and spirituality were distinct yet held together. However, in the fourteenth century, as already mentioned, the study of logic and the exercise of human reasoning (philosophy) became distinct domains that would evolve along their own trajectories, somewhat independently from theology. Furthermore, with the rise of the *devotio moderna* at the same time,

spirituality or ascetical theology began to be clearly differentiated from theology. Where theology dealt with intellectual and doctrinal knowledge about God, spirituality studied and gave advice about prayer, charity, mystical experience, and the disciple's personal relationship with God. The result of these developments and their subsequent evolution, many argued, left theology an increasingly intellectualist enterprise. Today many lament this and aspire to a reintegration of theology with spirituality. They reject tendencies that emphasize the intellectual dimension at the expense of the spiritual. Others, again against any tendency to intellectualism, insist on the Mystery of God that is theology's focus: what can be said about God and the mysteries of faith is nothing compared with what cannot be said. They recall how at the end of the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas pronounced all his work "but straw" compared with the reality of meeting Christ.

Besides reforging the links with spirituality, other theologians express their concern with praxis: theology should not become so intellectualist or so mystical as to be divorced from practical matters and the pastoral application of the Gospel to daily life. This long-gestating concern with praxis reached a climax in the late twentieth century in the period after Vatican II. Karl Marx (d. 1883) had once argued that all religion was an opium, a drug that siphoned off the practical concern and lively energy of the working classes to better themselves and change their lot. Twentieth-century Christian apologetics took increasing note of this Marxist jibe, and in the immediate postconciliar period the Bavarian priest Johannes Baptist Metz (b. 1928) and other theologians associated with the journal *Concilium* endeavored to transcend the personalist categories and philosophies then in vogue in favor of a more practical social and political theology whose outcomes related to earthly concerns. Theology, they argued, should not be concerned merely with personal fulfillment, with ultimate issues, or with the spiritual context of life but should demonstrate how Christian discipleship is dynamically relevant to social, political, and economic issues, not least to the widespread poverty, suffering, and injustice many human beings undergo. This praxis critique has inspired many new theological trends in recent years, notably in liberation theologies, feminist thought, and environmental concern, as we shall see later.

In the working definition, faith is required for doing theology. This prerequisite of faith distinguishes theology from scientific studies of religion, usually called religious studies. The expansion of overseas travel and the discovery of hitherto unexplored ethnic cultures, together with the rise of critical historical scholarship from the eighteenth century

onward, led to the emergence of new comparative studies of religion, religious belief systems, customs, practices, and traditions. Today religious studies explores beliefs, practices, and forms of religion in a comparative manner, with the aid of forms of scholarship that follow methods similar to those of the human sciences. It differs from theology in that it adopts a “from without” approach as opposed to a “from within” stance. Whereas theology is done from the perspective, or at least with the sympathy of, a committed believer, religious studies carefully avoids such religious truth-claims in favor of a phenomenological account of religion. It looks at the phenomena of religion, seeking to explore and categorize the common and distinctive features of the world’s major religious traditions, their history and contemporary development. It employs historical, textual, philosophical, sociological, anthropological, and psychological methods. It explores cultural practices, anthropology, myth, and ritual. It discusses the big issues of life in a critical and informed manner, bringing together topics from ethics and philosophy, yet without any prior commitments of exclusivity. Indeed, at its best it seeks systematically to identify and categorize such commitments.

Finally, theology might be differentiated from “theological studies,” that is, from the theology taught within Western and particularly British university theology departments. The principal distinction between theology and theological studies relates to christological and ecclesial foundation and context. The kind of theology conducted in a seminary, a religious house of formation, or a Catholic university differs from that done in the highly pluralistic theology faculties of a secular university. In the latter, while a theological context might generally be present—belief in God might be taken for granted, it being assumed that many of the lecturers and their students acknowledge a common faith in God—the christological and ecclesial contexts are often more ambiguous, pluralist, or secondary. Lecturers and students may have widely disparate religious and ecclesial commitments even though they might continue broadly to study this or that aspect of Christian (or other) theology. The courses offered—biblical studies, the history of doctrine, the study of religion, ethics, church history, etc.—reflect this situation. Often students in university theology departments are given a wide range of options to choose from: further study of the Bible or the Qur’an, the philosophy of religion, religion within society and politics, contemporary spiritualities, religion within media and popular culture, and so on. The absence of common christological and ecclesial commitments, together with a wide-ranging syllabus of options, influences the style of theology, its purpose, and its

methods. Courses in systematic theology tend to be few. Theology in a seminary is self-evidently geared toward the formation needed for pastoral ministry and religious life and so tends to aspire to a comprehensive overview, with few elective topics. Theological studies, however, are less narrowly focused, with the result that the curriculum is less comprehensive, less systematic, and less all-embracing, and more specialized, creative, and speculative. This creative form of theology, often done in conjunction with religious studies and frequently indistinguishable from it, leans toward hermeneutics, that is, theological commentaries on and insights into current problems or particular questions, typically the disputed issues of moral theology, authority in the church, or gender roles.

3. The History and Scope of Theology

Let us now turn to the history of theology and develop some further implications of our working definition of theology. The aim is not to offer a complete history or chronology of theology, but rather to discern in the evolution of theology what might be called its four principal “differentiations”: thematic, doctrinal, systematic, and historical, reflecting the broadly different concerns theologians have had at different times in history.

In the early church the Fathers explored extensively the Divine Object of faith, that is, God himself, the person and nature of Christ, and the relations within the Blessed Trinity. These concerns were reflected in the great trinitarian and christological councils of the church in antiquity, which laid out in the creeds the principal tenets of orthodox doctrine. In the Middle Ages theologians focused more on matters of virtue and the moral life of the Christian. Many of the questions Aquinas tackles in the *Summa Theologiae* are about how to live a good life and reach the reward of heaven. Later, after the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent (1545–63), Catholic theology tended to concentrate on ecclesiology, that is, on the structure of the church and its authority, defending traditional doctrine from the critiques of the Reformers. It also gave attention during this period to the nature of the sacraments, as theologians developed many of the new medieval insights into liturgy and worship, such as the distinction between the natural and the supernatural or between matter and form. In the twentieth century, with its two world wars and the huge advances in science, medicine, and technology, pressing human issues have come to the fore. Consequently, it could be said that theology

in the early twenty-first century is particularly concerned with anthropological issues and with the relevance of Christianity and religion in general to modernity: What is it to be human? What does the Christian faith say about modern living? How can Christian faith help build a better and more just world?

My thesis here is that behind the attention theology has given to all these different topics at different periods of history lie four fundamental “cognitional” questions that have structured and driven its concerns. These cognitional questions have to do with the sort of knowledge theology is considered to be. Is theology an account of experience? Does it yield the truth? What is its meaning? How has it varied over time and history? Each of these four questions emerged chronologically from the previous one while continuing to structure theological endeavors. Each in turn has led to what might be called a new differentiation within the theological enterprise.

In other words, Christian theology—the systematic study of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ and of the human experience, understanding, knowledge, and reception of that revelation, and in particular how Christian disciples are expected to live their lives—can be treated as a thematization of personal experience, as a set of doctrines, as a system of thought, and as a body of knowledge that has developed historically over time. The questions and the differentiations to which they have led—here called the experiential, the doctrinal, the systematic, and the historical—can be listed as follows:

THE FOUR DIFFERENTIATIONS OF THEOLOGY	
COGNITIONAL QUESTION	DIFFERENTIATION IN THEOLOGY
What is the Christian faith about?	Theology as reflection on lived experience
Which is the true faith Christians should profess?	Theology as doctrine
How do the truths of faith fit together and what do they mean?	Theology as a system
What is permanently true in matters of faith, and what is changeable?	Theology as historical

Figure 2

These concerns might be represented schematically as follows:

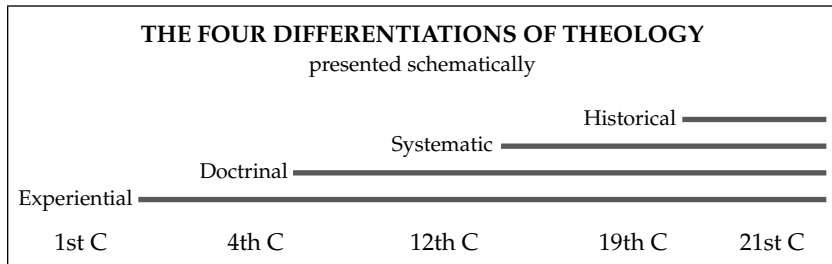


Figure 2a

Theology as Experience

The phrase “theology as the thematization of lived experience” comes from Terry Tekippe (d. 2005) and his fine introduction to theology titled *Theology: Love’s Question* (1991). His point is that theology is an attentive, intelligent, and reasoned reflection on experience, the thematization of the Christian’s lived ecclesial experience of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. Christians reflect on their faith in Christ, what it means, and how to live it in daily life, and they articulate their understanding and reflections in writing, music, speech, art, poetry, and other media. In this sense all Christians do theology insofar as they reflect on and attempt to express their Christian faith.

Theology as an account of Christian experience is a continuous feature of ecclesial life and activity. People meditate on the Scriptures, the liturgy, and the sources of their faith. They write about all this and they produce articles and books. Interestingly, the key practitioners have varied from era to era, and their “products” can be said to have varied according to need and intended audience. In the early church the key theologians were the apostles, evangelists, and writers of the New Testament. They reflected on their experience of Christ and wrote it down in order to communicate it to others in forms such as the gospels and epistles. These first writers were followed by a group of sub-apostolic Fathers including Clement of Rome (d. 99) and the author of the *Didache*, an early treatise with instructions on how to live the Christian life, sometimes called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.

In the second century the principal theologians were the philosophers, thinkers, and apologists who mainly inhabited the eastern Mediterranean. These included Justin Martyr (d. 165) and Tertullian (d. ca. 220). They

made a defense (Gk. *apologia*) of their Christian faith against both Judaism and the Roman empire. They tried to show how Christianity was the fulfillment of Judaism and the ancient prophecies, and distinguished the Gospel from the thought and social life of the Roman Empire.

In the patristic period (200–800) the main practitioners of theology became the bishops who preached homilies, taught and catechized the faithful, and defended orthodox beliefs from the challenges of heresy and other misunderstandings. Many of their homilies have been incorporated into the *Office of Readings* in the Liturgy of the Hours.

In the Middle Ages, monks became the principal practitioners of theology. They studied and reflected prayerfully on the Scriptures and also on the homilies of the Fathers. This practice of *lectio divina*, a meditative reading and reflection, gave birth in time to a welter of monastic commentaries on Scripture.

In the High Middle Ages the key theologians were the teachers of the monastic schools (“scholastics”). Some of these schools became Europe’s first universities. They endeavored to systematize the scriptural and patristic sources into an overall and coherent account of the Christian faith.

In the Tridentine era, between the Council of Trent (1545–63) and Vatican II (1962–65), the chief theologians were the seminary professors and Catholic university teachers whose primary task was to educate clergy and religious in the doctrines of Catholicism. They taught students how to defend Catholic beliefs from the challenges of the Protestant Reformers. This imbued all Tridentine Catholic thought with an apologetic slant. This polemical slant was also mirrored in the Reformation communities, where the key theologians were the scriptural exegetes, teaching ministers how to interpret the Scriptures properly and how to defend their interpretations against Roman Catholic apologists. However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both Catholic and Protestant theology began to feel the chill winds of modernity, particularly modern philosophy, modern empirical science, and modern critical scholarship. All these posed radical questions and challenges to Christian faith, especially to its claim to a divine revelation in history. This endowed apologetics in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, in both Catholic and Protestant or Reformed circles, with an additionally defensive twist.

Today, in the post–Vatican II period, the challenges of modernity and postmodernity are the subject of theology. Theology has become a largely lay-led discipline concerned with the meaning of faith within a secular, pluralist culture. Moreover, the rise of social justice and ecological con-

cerns has challenged theologians to respond to the Marxist jibe that religion is an opium. The emergence of liberation theologies and feminist thought in response attempts to show the relevance of Christianity to a world imbued with inequality, violence, and injustice.

In sum, theology deals with human experience, particularly Christians' lived experience within the social, cultural, and historical context or situation in which they find themselves. Theologians produce books, articles, and other media that are products typical of their time in order to meet the challenges of the time.

Theology as Doctrine

Besides a concern with experience, theology from early on has also had to address the question of truth. There are many and various theological opinions, expressions, and viewpoints, yet when push comes to shove, what is the true, orthodox faith of the church? What do Christians believe for sure? Which is the true belief?

All human beings have a critical faculty of judgment. When viewing, reading, or listening to the claims of another, we ask: Is it so? Is this true? Thus Christians individually and the church as a whole sift the many writings, views, and opinions of theologians. Sometimes in a solemn manner, the church exercises the critical faculty of judgment, determining whether or not the writings under discussion express the true faith of the church. This process can be seen operating informally even within the New Testament, and then within the early church as it dealt with the philosophies and pagan theologies extant in the Roman Empire. This process led in time to the formal emergence of doctrine and dogma as theological features in the life and history of the church. Such doctrine and dogma can be seen in the statements of the early creeds, the symbols and disciplinary decisions of the councils.

This magisterial strand within theology emerged with the first ecumenical council of the church, the First Council of Nicea in 325, although by modern standards it would barely be described as a synod. Nevertheless, the magisterial strand—the need for the church to teach authoritatively what its faith is and to differentiate truth from falsehood—has grown and developed ever since, particularly in the second millennium and in recent times. A glance at a collection of documents and pronouncements such as the Denzinger-Schönmetzer *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* or Neuner and Dupuis' *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* demonstrates this development. Indeed, since Vatican II there have been

many magisterial teachings and pronouncements from the pope, the various offices of the Vatican, and synods of bishops. Rarely altogether noncontroversial, the magisterium has dealt with a wide range of topics it deemed in need of clarification or expression if the Christian faithful were to be shielded from error or guided in a certain direction.

So theology, the systematic study of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and of the human experience, understanding, knowledge, and reception of this revelation, includes not only an experiential element as noted above but also a normative element. In other words, within theology there is a thematization of lived experience and also doctrine and dogma that express the church's authoritative teaching about what is really and truly what Christians should believe. There is also, as we shall now see, a systematic component.

Theology as System

In the High Middle Ages another differentiation emerged within theology as it became a critical academic discipline. The expanding monastic schools, now emerging as the first universities, began to espouse new pedagogical methods reflecting a mentality that sought to bring order and system to learning and knowledge so as to yield a deeper understanding of the Christian faith and how it was structured.

The issues faced by theologians in the Middle Ages were arguably twofold. First, how did the many and varied truths of the Christian faith fit together? After all, the sources sometimes appeared to be full of contradictions and conflicts. The sayings of Scripture were not always coherent: how might the precept of Jesus in Matthew 5:44 ("love your enemies") be reconciled with what Jesus says later in the same gospel about those who might harm one of the little ones (Matt 18:6: "it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea")? In much the same way, the sayings of the Fathers appeared to be inconsistent. Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258), for example, insisted that there was no salvation outside the church (*Letters*, lxxii), and this was also the opinion of Augustine and many others, yet Justin Martyr had argued that just as devout Jews could be saved by following the Law of Moses, so those who died before Christ could be saved by following the natural law of goodness written in their hearts (*Trypho*, 45). Furthermore, the sayings of the Fathers appeared at times to contradict the Scriptures. For instance, how might Augustine's somewhat pessimistic view about the fate of unbaptized babies be

harmonized with 1 Timothy 2:3-5, which states that God wants all to be saved? The scholastic mentality wanted to reconcile, bring together, and systematize all these real or apparent conflicts in the authorities. The high medieval mind-set was encapsulated by Peter Abelard (d. 1142) in his provocative *Sic et Non* (1120). It was a mentality that raised multiple questions about the number and class of the sacraments and the conditions for receiving them, the fruits of the Holy Spirit, the nature and list of capital sins, the multiple forms of grace, the key works of mercy, and so on. It was prompted more than anything by the new theological method of the *quaestio*, which we will examine in a later chapter.

A second concern in the medieval period was with the moral life and how to reach heaven. How do humans live a good life? What do the truths of faith actually mean for the way men and women should live their lives? The hope of heaven and the fear of hell in an era of short life expectancy lent urgency to the Christian life. Thus many of the questions addressed by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* concern the acquisition of virtue.

This medieval question about the good life and how to live virtuously anticipated in some respects the modern systematic questions about the relationship of religion and theology to culture and everyday living, the meaning of Christian discipleship and how faith and theology might leaven and baptize other domains of human knowledge. In the high medieval period faith infused culture, and yet, once theology began to be differentiated from spirituality and philosophy, the relationship of faith to other domains began to become distinct, then fragmented, and finally compartmentalized. This process was sealed by the new discoveries and directions of science, scholarship, and philosophy after the Enlightenment. In modern times the systematic differentiation within theology raises this issue of the relationship of religion and theology to the natural and human sciences, medicine, the arts, economics, fashion and media, international relations, poverty and injustice, environmental concerns, and all the other diverse domains and issues of contemporary living. What might the doctrines of Christianity say to the modern world? How do Christians express meaningfully the wisdom of the Christian faith in a secular-pluralist world? What in turn might the world, in which the Holy Spirit is at work, be saying to the church? The systematic differentiation in theology, which emerged and developed from the medieval era onward—that is, theology as a system and as a systematized body of knowledge—is crucial today if the meaning of the Christian faith and of religion is to be proclaimed to modern culture.

Theology as Historical

Finally, theology today, which we have argued here is experiential, systematic, and doctrinal, is also historical. Since the eighteenth century and the rise of modern critical scholarship, particularly historical scholarship and the human and social sciences, theologians, although long resistant to the implications of all this, have become increasingly aware that the new or modern world is very different from the world of the Bible, the early church, the Fathers, and the medieval monastics. Moreover, as Christianity spread overseas to the New World, to Asia, and to Africa, cultural diversity was added to historical difference. The issue of historical and cultural awareness is nowadays unremarkable and second nature, but within theology, historical and cultural concerns have made their mark only in relatively recent times. This is an aspect of what Bernard Lonergan and others have called the modern sense of history or "historical consciousness." Modern philosophy reveals the historically and culturally conditioned nature of all truth, thus highlighting the complex relationship between truth and history, permanence and change.

Historical scholarship has had an enormous impact on every domain of twentieth- and twenty-first-century theology. Enormous advances have taken place in the study of the historical sources of theology, notably in Scripture, liturgy, and patristics, and these have powered various renewal movements, furnishing a deeper and richer awareness of the contexts that gave rise to the sources Christians rely on. All areas of theology today are permeated with a historical awareness, arguably absent from the neoscholastic theology that dominated Catholic thought prior to Vatican II. Things were different in the past, and they might be quite different in the future. Historical consciousness thus poses a number of challenges, including an acute awareness of how the church itself, its practices, traditions, and beliefs have changed and developed over time and varied from place to place. How can the Christian faith be the same, true for all time, and yet paradoxically vary, change, and develop? In particular, historical consciousness raises the thorny issue of doctrinal change and development and the need to differentiate what is central from what is peripheral. What is permanently true? What is changeable? For instance, if one pope has stated that women may not be admitted to ordination to the priesthood, is this a permanent truth that binds successor popes, or might things be different again under a different papacy?

Not all Christians are comfortable with recognizing the role of history in theology. Roman Catholicism in general gives this historical differentiation within theology a qualified acceptance. It could be argued that Eastern Orthodoxy gives it a qualified rejection, preferring to inhabit the

patristic world. Protestant and Reformed theologies are divided. Some have reacted with an outright rejection of history (evangelicalism and fundamentalism, which seek in different ways to inhabit the world of the Scriptures), others with an open acceptance (liberal Protestantism).

4. The Function of Theology

We began with a series of questions about theology: What is theology? What is it about? What is theology for and what does it seek to do? We now complete our initial exploration by examining the functions of theology and the sources it uses.

Dei Verbum and the Sources of Theology

The issue of the sources of Catholic theology has to some extent been authoritatively determined by the magisterial pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. Other teaching is contained in the council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. All these documents build on previous statements of the magisterium, especially those of the Council of Trent. They have established important and arguably definitive parameters for subsequent Catholic theology, although these have not been universally accepted or always appropriated by individual theologians.

The teaching of Vatican II might be summed up as follows. *Dei Verbum* 2–6 stated that Jesus Christ is the mediator of revelation and at the same time the fullness of revelation (2). The “Mediator is the message,” we might say.

Jesus . . . completed and perfected Revelation and confirmed it with divine guarantees. He did this by the total fact of his presence and self-manifestation—by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth. . . . The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ. (*Dei Verbum* 4)

Dei Verbum 7–10 then outlined what in effect are the primary sources of the revelation given in Jesus Christ, namely, the Bible, the tradition of

the church (the church's teaching, customs and practices, life and people, the sacred liturgy, and the witness of the saints), and the teachings of the magisterium, this last being at the service of the Word of God expressed in Scripture and tradition. This triadal relationship between Scripture, tradition, and magisterium, proposed by the council and based on the previous teaching of the councils of Trent and Vatican I but developed much more extensively in *Dei Verbum*, mediates to believers today the teaching revealed by Christ. Scripture, tradition, and the church's magisterium, therefore, in the vision of *Dei Verbum*, form the primary media of revelation and the primary sources for theological reflection.

The triad of Scripture-tradition-magisterium, however, must be contextualized within the whole life of the church. It is the church in its totality that manifests and mediates the person of Jesus Christ, his teaching, life, and grace to the world today. According to the council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), the place par excellence where that takes place is in the liturgy (10), which is the work of Christ the high priest (7):

From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, grace is poured forth upon us as from a fountain, and the sanctification of [men and women] in Christ and the glorification of God to which all other activities of the Church are directed, as toward their end, are achieved with maximum effectiveness. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10)

The function of the liturgy in re-presenting Christ is not developed in *Dei Verbum* but is treated implicitly as part of tradition (8). Moreover, *Dei Verbum* does not discuss what might be termed the "secondary sources" of revelation, which are treated *passim* in *Gaudium et Spes*. These secondary sources are essentially creation and history, that is, everything else and every other medium that may be a vehicle of God's self-communication, including personal experience, the thoughts and opinions of others, the understanding of the created order as willed and sustained by God, the beauty of nature and the universe, the events of history, the signs of the times, benevolent social movements such as those for international development, changes to the political world order, and so on. These secondary sources might also include the other world religions since they often mediate aspects of revelation that make more explicit the message given in the primary sources of Scripture, tradition, and magisterium. However, because the Christian faith is founded on the divine revelation given in the historical person of Jesus Christ, who became

incarnate, lived, died, and rose from the dead at a particular time and place in history, all these secondary sources, it is argued, are normed by the primary sources (Scripture, tradition, and magisterium).

According to *Dei Verbum*, then, the Bible and the church's tradition, articulated, guarded, preserved, and applied by the magisterium, constitute the primary sources that transmit the content of divine revelation to Christians today. These sources form the basic infrastructure of Catholic theology. It is worth pausing for a moment longer to examine this triad of Scripture-tradition-magisterium, since it gives method and shape to Catholic theology.

The importance of the issue of the sources of theology becomes particularly apparent in ecumenical dialogues. Interestingly, the 1888 Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion came close to the future position of Vatican II when it approved the so-called Lambeth Quadrilateral, which articulated the four essential principles for a reunited Christian church: the Scriptures, the creeds (Apostles and Nicene), the two sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, and the historic episcopate. Modern Anglican commentators often speak of the importance of Scripture and tradition, although little of the function of an ecclesiastical magisterium. Liberal Anglican theologians have tended to speak of Scripture, tradition, and right reason or Scripture, tradition, and experience. Evangelical and other Reformed theologians follow the traditional Lutheran stance of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), although they would acknowledge traditions of interpretation of the Scriptures or sets of doctrinal principles that regulate how the Bible is to be interpreted.

In all the ecumenical dialogues the same sets of questions can be asked: What is the Bible? Why and how is the Bible authoritative? What is the relationship of the Bible to the church? How can the Bible be applied to modern problems? How is the Bible's meaning to be interpreted authentically? Moreover, every Christian community has traditions, and this leads to a further set of questions: What is tradition? What authority do tradition and the traditions of the churches have? How changeable is tradition in the face of new needs and new questions, such as the ordination of women? Finally, there is a third set of questions: What is the relationship between Scripture and tradition? How are Scripture and tradition related to church authority? How does church authority relate to me, my experience, my personal opinions?

Catholics see in *Dei Verbum* 7–10, the contents of which are neatly summarized and expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 80–95, a much-discussed series of authoritative principles that guide theological

reflection. According to the Dogmatic Constitution, Scripture, tradition, and the church's magisterium are inextricably linked and necessarily interrelated. Scripture and tradition form a complex unity, the deposit of revelation, and this deposit is entrusted to the church, governed by its pastors and guided by its magisterium. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states how Scripture and tradition form a complex unity:

“Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal.”* (CCC 80)

This “one thing” of Scripture-and-tradition is entrusted to the church, whose magisterium has the responsibility for authoritatively interpreting it:

The apostles entrusted the “Sacred deposit” of the faith (the *depositum fidei*),[†] contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, to the whole of the Church. . . .

“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 of the church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.”[‡] (CCC 84–85)

The magisterium, however, is not above this deposit in the sense of being in charge of it but is its servant. Like every Christian, those who constitute the members of the magisterium—the pope and bishops, and the priests, deacons and others who collaborate with them—are under the Word, which they are to receive with open faith and trust:

[The] task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

“Yet this magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to

* DV 9.

† DV 10 § 1; cf. *1 Tim* 6:20; *2 Tim* 1:12-14 (Vulg.).

‡ DV 10 § 2.

this devotedly, guards it with dedication, and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith." [DV 10 § 2] (CCC 85–86)

Scripture, tradition, and the magisterium are ecclesial and dogmatic realities such that they must necessarily go together: should one "fall," the others fall too.

"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." [DV 10 § 3] (CCC 95)

From a Catholic perspective the unity of the triad Scripture-tradition-magisterium is self-evident in light of the transmission of the deposit of revelation in the early church. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex historical process, we may say that the New Testament was the product of tradition. In the very early church the apostles and disciples handed on the Good News of Christ orally. Elements of these early oral traditions eventually began to be put into writing between 50 and 110. Presumably, as the eyewitnesses died, there was a need for catechetical tools to systematize the message, and with the distances involved in the mission to the Gentiles, the need to avoid the danger of distorting the message. What became known by the late second century as the New Testament began to coalesce into a collection of Christian writings, even though in the first 200 to 250 years they existed in pockets in different places, with a great fluidity as to how and where different books were used. Scholars suggest that it was only in the early third century that the present twenty-seven-book corpus became universally stable.

It is noteworthy that many of the fourth-century councils and synods issued lists of the books of Scripture they used in the liturgy and deemed canonical. In other words, they believed they had the authority to establish the canon of Scripture (*kanōn*, lit. a rod, limit, rule, principle), that is, the commonly agreed content or set of books. Yet, as Jared Wicks, SJ (b. 1929) has argued, once that canon of books had been established, the Scriptures themselves henceforth "ruled" the church and its subsequent development. In other words, once the Bible was treated by Christians as normative, the later church submitted itself to it as a kind of instrument that kept the church faithful through history to the original revelation in Christ and the original experience of the apostles. Tradition therefore

had given rise to the Bible and the members of the church wrote it, but later the practice and authority of the church established which books should be included or excluded.

The first serious challenge to the belief that the Bible, the tradition, and the church were intrinsically and reciprocally interrelated occurred during the Reformation. Despite the decadence of the church during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, this was a period of renewal in biblical scholarship. Far-reaching and complex questions began to be posed about where certain doctrines and ecclesiastical practices, not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, had originated. For instance, where did the Bible speak of purgatory, the use of indulgences, the sacrifice of the Mass, the power of the pope, or the intercession of the saints? Many Catholic theologians at the time justified these beliefs and practices by appealing to oral traditions and liturgical customs the apostles had given to the church by word of mouth. They appealed to such texts as John 21:25 (“But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written”). Bishop John Fisher (d. 1535) asserted that the church’s teachings were contained partly (*partim*) in the Bible and partly (*partim*) in unwritten apostolic traditions that had been handed down within the church. However, Luther and the Reformers argued that many of these traditions, doctrines, and practices were superstitious. The church had invented them and added them to what is in the Bible. The church had to be purified by a return to the basics, and so Luther rejected the traditional common teaching in favor of Scripture as the only source of revelation (*sola scriptura*). The Bible alone, in his view, contained everything necessary for our salvation. Johann Eck (d. 1543), who tried to rally the Catholic forces against Luther, argued that the church was a reality more fundamental than the Scriptures. The Bible could only be understood within an ecclesial context. It was not self-interpreting; there were many disputed issues and such problems needed a divinely mandated authority to deliberate and establish the correct interpretation.

Many of Eck’s arguments were echoed by the Council of Trent, which stated:

[The] Gospel is contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us, having been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself or from the apostles by the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and have been transmitted as it were from hand to hand. (Council of Trent, *Decree of Reception of the Sacred Books and Apostolic Traditions* DS 1501/ND 210)

Trent then added that the only authentic and authoritative interpreter of the Bible was the church and anyone reading the Bible must do so without conflict with the traditional understanding (DS 1507). Note that the council here was speaking of the Gospel as a primary reality before its written expression. Note too the council's carefully worded formula that the Gospel was handed down "in written books and unwritten traditions." This statement was in fact a compromise. The draft version of the text used the phrase *partim . . . partim* but the council fathers settled for *et*: the Gospel had been transmitted through both written books and unwritten traditions. Nevertheless, thanks to the Counter-Reformation catechesis of Peter Canisius (d. 1597), Robert Bellarmine (d. 1621), and others, the *partim . . . partim* formula gained ascendancy. If a doctrine such as purgatory could not be found in the Bible, it must have come from an unwritten apostolic tradition. Indeed, in the nineteenth century some Catholic theologians even espoused the view that the Gospel was contained entirely in tradition and only partly in Scripture (*totaliter-partim*).

This debate was given new impetus in the mid-twentieth century, in the period of theological ferment following the solemn definition in 1950 by Pope Pius XII of the dogma of the assumption (that the Blessed Virgin Mary at the end of her earthly life was assumed body and soul into heaven). While many would acknowledge that doctrines not explicitly found in the Bible, such as the Trinity or the two natures of Christ, were more or less implicitly contained therein, where was Mary's assumption? Moreover, in this case even tradition was not free from difficulty. Was the only basis for this doctrine, therefore, the widespread popular devotion of the faithful, now definitized by an act of papal authority?

Dei Verbum, which underwent several major revisions before it was promulgated in 1965, settled few of these disputed issues. In fact, the more innovative theologians of the 1950s and the Vatican II period such as Joseph Ratzinger (b. 1927), Yves Congar (d. 1995), Karl Rahner (d. 1984), and Henri de Lubac (d. 1991) subscribed to the view that all the doctrines necessary for salvation were contained implicitly in Scripture, although Scripture and tradition should be read together to be certain. But like the Council of Trent previously, *Dei Verbum* seems to sidestep the dispute about the dogmatic content of Scripture and tradition, preferring to speak instead of their integral and reciprocal connection: they both come from "one and the same divine well-spring," form "one thing," and move toward the same goal (*Dei Verbum* 9: cf. CCC 80).

The relationship of Scripture, tradition, and magisterium is a lively issue relevant not only to Catholic but to all Christian theology. It is also

an interreligious issue in that it raises the question of the status of sacred literature, traditions, and authority within any religion. *Dei Verbum* has undoubtedly been significant in its effect on the church's pastoral life. The Constitution called for a renewed focus on the Bible in the life of the church, and this was widely taken up. A biblical revolution has occurred with effects in every quarter, from parish liturgy and prayer groups to socioeconomic applications of Scripture in religious communities. Meanwhile, the concept of tradition continues to be vibrantly debated in the new questions arising (e.g., gender issues), while the rampant pluralism of contemporary theology has raised the thorny issue of changing traditions. Finally, today perhaps more than any other communion the modern Roman Catholic Church has become a veritable archipelago of differing liturgies, customs, languages, and theological perspectives, and this in turn has raised profound and far-reaching issues for the exercise of the church's magisterium.

St. Anselm's Definition of Theology

When theology was loosely defined above as the systematic study of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and of the human experience, understanding, knowledge, and reception of this revelation, and in particular of how Christian disciples are expected to live their lives, we noted that this notion of theology concurred in some respects with the medieval idea. In his *Cur Deus Homo?* (1079), St. Anselm (d. 1109) offered what became the classical definition of theology: *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding"). What is noticeable in Anselm's definition is that for him theology was something practiced by a person of faith (*fides*). It was an intellectual activity, the desired outcome of which was a greater wisdom or deeper understanding (*quaerens intellectum*) and it presumed both an encounter with objective truth and coherence. For Anselm, in other words, faith and reason worked together in the quest for truth, with reason subordinate to faith. As with any other form of knowledge, theology required an appropriate logical discourse to express itself, which is why Anselm ascribed to philosophy a role as the handmaid of theology, something referred to by Pope John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* (77).

Anselm's definition has often been used as a helpful starting point for discussing the nature and task of theology. The working definition used here is roughly a descendant of it. Yet, as many point out, this medieval definition has limitations in today's context. Some have argued that its implicit depiction of faith as an intellectual assent to revealed truth is too narrow to express the full reality of theology and the richer, more

personalist theology of revelation developed in *Dei Verbum*. Luther, for instance, envisaged faith less as an intellectual activity involving an assent to truth and more as an act of personal trust and confidence in God, a trusting commitment of the heart (*fiducia*, "trust"). Recent theology has taken up these personal and practical dimensions of faith (*fides quaerens actionem*), which are also articulated in the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Faith is a personal adherence of the whole man to God who reveals himself. It involves an assent of the intellect and will to the self-revelation God has made through his deeds and words. (CCC 176)

Others have argued that Anselm was making the assumption that the true faith can be known in its content and scope. Today, they say, there is a pluralism of beliefs, with many different churches and other religious systems present. The huge growth in modern critical scholarship has raised complex questions, and so the scope and content of theology are no longer self-evident as they were for Anselm. "The Faith" has itself become a *quaestio disputata* ("disputed question"). Furthermore, could it be said that the marriage of theology with philosophy implied in Anselm's definition is too narrow? Contemporary theology has to dialogue with many other disciplines besides, if it is to express the Christian message adequately and constructively to a world facing many pressing problems, including poverty, women's concerns, environmental issues, and globalization. Theology, therefore, has to engage not only with philosophy but also with the human sciences of anthropology, economics, psychology, and politics, with medicine and the natural sciences. Indeed, there is a two-way exchange, since the human sciences arguably need theology in order to dialogue with human values and to address such essentially human experiences as death, sin, morality, hope, love, and happiness. To give an example: to address guilt, psychology must necessarily intrude upon the domain of moral theology. Where the human sciences circumnavigate or even deny these dimensions of the human being they implicitly espouse reductionist views of being human. Consequently, it could be argued that in order to integrate the human sciences into theology in a coherent and critical manner, a process that de facto is often attempted, we require not merely a new definition of theology, broader than that of St. Anselm, but also a new way of doing theology, a new method.

One thinker who has given explicit and extensive consideration to these problems is Bernard Lonergan. In his *Method in Theology* (1972), Lonergan is said to have gone beyond Anselm in a manner that retains

the intellectual dimension Anselm privileges but captures better the raft of activities modern theology is called upon to perform. Lonergan offers a description of theology's function, what it does. For him theology "mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion within that matrix" (*Method in Theology*, xi). This new definition requires some thought, but it would seem to be very helpful for Catholic theology. By describing theology as a mediation between religion and culture Lonergan means essentially an intellectual exchange, but the exchange need not be limited to this, since his account would wish to take seriously all the other dimensions of the human person such as experience, decision, practical action, and love (in older language: the intellect, the will, and the heart). By culture here he meant the meanings and values attached to the social, the social being simply a way of living, the communal patterns of living and operating, such that culture is to society as soul is to body. To define theology, therefore, as a mediation between religion and culture would be to speak of a two-way critical conversation between them. The conversation is not just between faith as a set of truths to be communicated and reason as a set of intellectual activities for receiving and understanding them, but a conversation and exchange at many different levels: head, will, and heart, theory and practice, involving different realms and adapted to differing media.

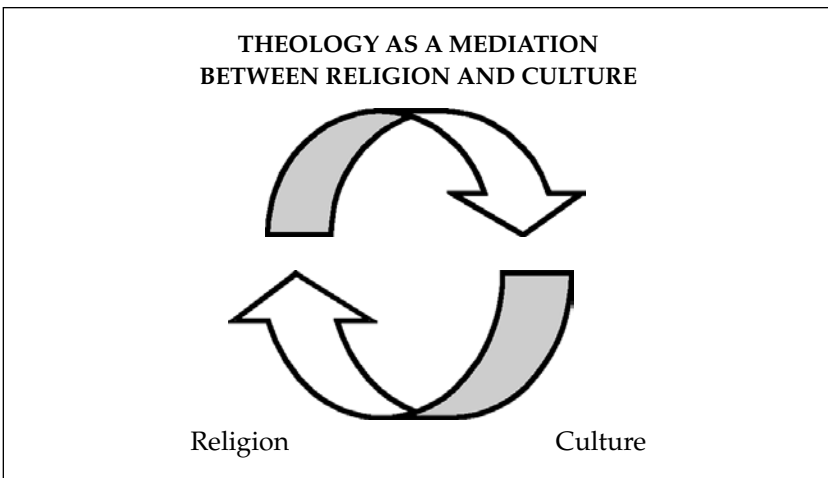


Figure 3

For Lonergan the priority would be on the side of religion: in this case the divine revelation given in Jesus Christ. Religion seeks to communicate itself—its reality, traditions, and customs, its values and activities, its mean-

ings, message, and experience—to contemporary culture. Nevertheless, there is also a return movement whereby questions are put to religion by the culture in which it finds itself, and insofar as these are new they become for religion not only a means of becoming incarnate in that culture but also an important driver or motor of development for itself.

Is Theology a Science?

As faith seeking understanding, as a systematic study of God's self-revelation in Christ and the human reception of that revelation, and as a mediation between religion and culture, theology is an intrinsically rational endeavor, an activity involving the use of human reason. But in what manner? How might the rationality of theology be characterized? Could theology be called a science? Or is theology more like an art? Is it a form of critical scholarship, analogous to the study of, say, philosophy or history?

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas asked the question whether theology was a science. The first objection in this article asserted that theology could not be called a science, because science is said to proceed from human reason, whereas theology proceeds from faith. Aquinas's response to this objection is illuminating:

I answer that sacred doctrine is a science. We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of sciences. There are some which proceed from a principle known by the natural light of intelligence, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like. There are some which proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of perspective proceeds from principles established by geometry, and music from principles established by arithmetic. So it is that sacred doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed. Hence, just as the musician accepts on authority the principles taught him by the mathematician, so sacred science is established on principles revealed by God. (ST I-I, q. 1, a. 2)

For Aquinas, theology was a science. Based on Aristotle's definition of science, it was a science derived from a higher science, in this case divine revelation. Aquinas used the term *scientia* here to mean literally "knowledge." In other words, the knowledge that theology is derived from is the knowledge revealed by God. Moreover, it should be noted that what we translate as "theology" was actually for him part of the

broader notion of *sacra doctrina* (lit. sacred teaching, or teaching about sacred things) rather than theology in the more technical or academic sense used today. Nevertheless, Aquinas's point remains: since science can be any knowledge methodically derived from first principles, either lower (dependent on others) or higher (in this case, revelation), theology, a systematized body of knowledge, is a science.

However, since the seventeenth century a new notion of science has arisen. The new science is based on a method that traces its origins to Francis Bacon (d. 1626). In his *Novum Organum* (1620), Bacon proposed that the philosopher, rather than using deductive syllogisms to interpret nature, should instead proceed by freeing his or her mind from all presuppositions, notions, or tendencies that might determine or distort the truth; he or she should employ inductive reasoning, starting from "the facts" and proceeding to a hypothetical axiom that may then be proven and declared a law. This new scientific method therefore was based on induction, its knowledge derived "from the bottom up" through the observation of data, the postulation of hypotheses, and their verification by experiment. By contrast, for Aristotle science was deductive, that is, derived "from the top down," often syllogistically from higher principles.

Moreover, besides being inductive, modern science, unlike its classical and medieval predecessors, is also empirical, that is, it consciously restricts the data permitted to sense data and to what is measurable. Interestingly, Bacon was himself a religious believer, yet while he envisaged philosophy to be rational because it was based on reason, he saw religion as not rational because it relied on faith in revelation.

Since the eighteenth century these new inductive and empirical methods have been applied not only to the natural sciences and mathematics but also to the study of human phenomena. This has given rise to the human sciences of politics, anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, psychology, and economics, which mimic the natural sciences and use the same methods. While it is true that in the last hundred years science itself has undergone a paradigm shift from the cast-iron laws and necessity of Newtonian physics to quantum mechanics, statistical probabilities, and verifiable possibilities, induction and empirical observation are still central characteristics.

The modern sciences originally defined themselves over and against God and theology. They proposed beginning with facts, that is, eschewing all theological or other presuppositions. In this process they explicitly excluded the data of divine revelation. In other words, the empirical

method systematically limits the field or range of admissible data to the data of sense, to what can be demonstrated by observation and measurable statistics. Consequently, God can never be the object of the empirical sciences. God is not another object in the world like other objects. The nearest the empirical sciences can come to religion is when the human sciences such as religious studies or psychology focus on the role of religion and study its functioning in a culture or an individual. These human sciences operate, of course, only from the outside, treating religion as an observable phenomenon. They cannot interpret or assess the actual experience of religion or its essence and truth claims.

Besides the data of revelation, the natural and human sciences also either exclude or generally circumscribe the "data of consciousness," the inner personal world of experiences, feelings, memories, images, likes and dislikes, personal choices and decisions. This inner world is expressed especially in human intersubjectivity, symbols, art, music, poetry, literature, language, ways of life, and religion. The empirical sciences are unable to explain love, hate, peace, joy, happiness, beauty, and all interior and personal elements of human individual and communal experience except in their statistical, biological, and psychological antecedents, conditions, trends, principles, and occurrences. True, the human sciences might be able to help diagnose problems and propose remedies or suggest more effective manners of conduct and interpersonal relations, yet they do so always from the outside as treating observable and empirically measurable personal or social phenomena. They cannot interpret, assess, or evaluate the personal experience itself. These "from within" or interior elements of human, personal, and communal experience are not data of sense in the empirical order but rather internal or personal data of consciousness.

However, besides empirical science, mention should be made of critical scholarship, which has come to the fore since the nineteenth century. Scholarship might be said to comprise such domains as philosophy, history, literature, the study of art and music, exegesis, and so on. A scientist might also, of course, be a scholar, applying the principles of contemporary natural and human sciences to, say, an understanding of ancient history, and a scholar might also be a scientist, drawing on historical knowledge to enrich a contemporary theory. Scholarship does deal with such personal and inner data of consciousness, and the scholar is the one expertly able to categorize, discuss, compare, and assess such domains, developing an intimate knowledge of the meanings, intentions, and values of different people from other times and places. Unlike the

sciences, scholarship does not generally seek to reach hard and fast principles and laws, but rather to understand the meaning or intention, the truth and falsehood, the right or wrong of particular statements, trends, and actions.

Theology is not a science in the sense of an empirical science because it does not circumscribe its data in the way the empirical sciences do. However, theology is similar to the empirical sciences in that it is rational discourse methodically developed. Without limiting itself to the data of sense or the data of consciousness, it nevertheless uses human reason with all its native capabilities. Moreover, like the modern human and natural sciences, theology too is scientific in that it adopts methods based on the self-same cognitional operations the empirical sciences are based on: data-hypothesis-verification, while adding to this a method for evaluation. Its methodology, as we shall see later, can be inductive, as a reflection on the data of consciousness and experience, but it can also be deductive, as faith seeking understanding.

Theology is most similar to critical scholarship: for example, philosophy and history. Like all scholarly endeavors it has its own mode of discourse, a technical terminology, and methods of demonstration. It endeavors to relate itself ultimately to the data of consciousness and to internal, personal realities. Together with research and interpretation, it also includes judgment and evaluation.

But unlike both empirical science and critical scholarship, theology has as its specific focus the data of divine revelation: God, the revelation of Christ, being a religious person and a member of a religious community. This data is communicated partly as an “outer word,” that is, through the transmission of certain historical data about Christ and his teaching, and partly as an “inner Word,” that is, through the internal religious experience of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, making a person capable of hearing and open to the Gospel. The data of revelation—the gift of faith—broaden, deepen, and transfigure human horizons. Beyond both science and scholarship, and without losing the rationality of both, theology views the data of sense and the data of consciousness in relation to—as shot through with—divine revelation. Faith is the “added extra” that makes theology transcend the worlds the empirical sciences study and the worlds critical scholarship studies, to study human beings in their relationship to God. It is this realm of faith that gives theology its specificity (see figure 4) and makes it *sui generis*, unique. Theology, it could be argued, “sublates” or subsumes both science and scholarship and becomes in itself the most general and comprehensive, the most profound and fundamental of all studies.

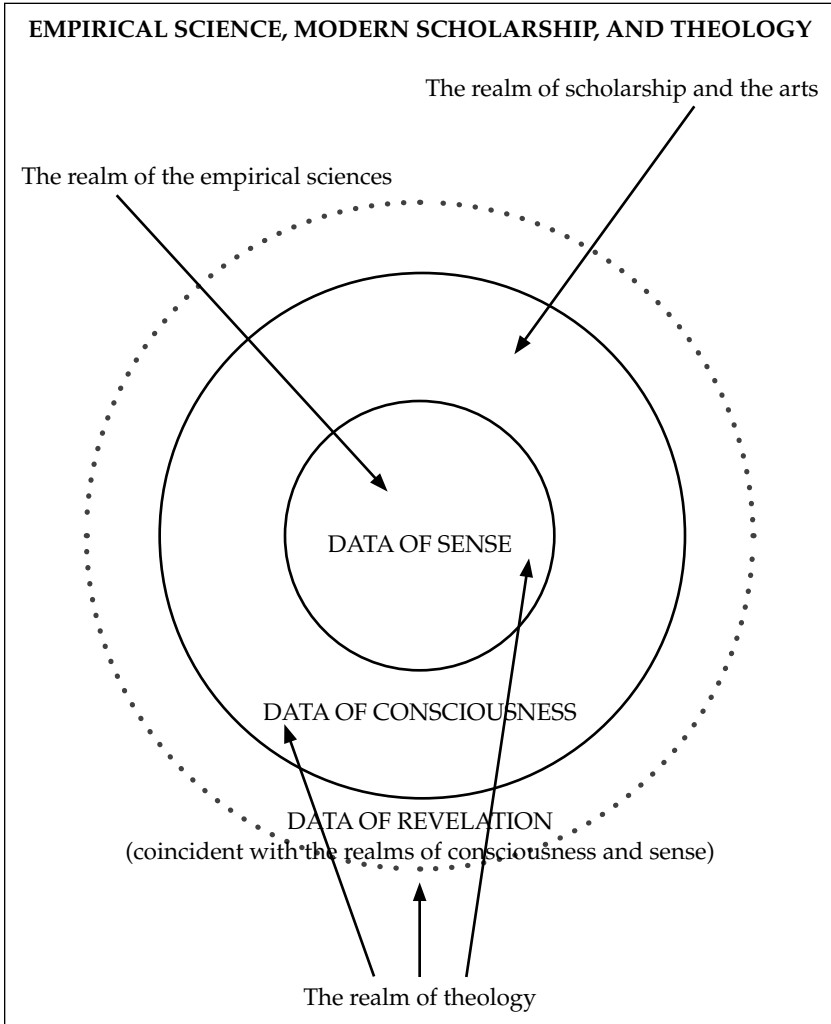


Figure 4

**RECENT CATHOLIC THEOLOGY:
SELECT FEATURES AND TRENDS**

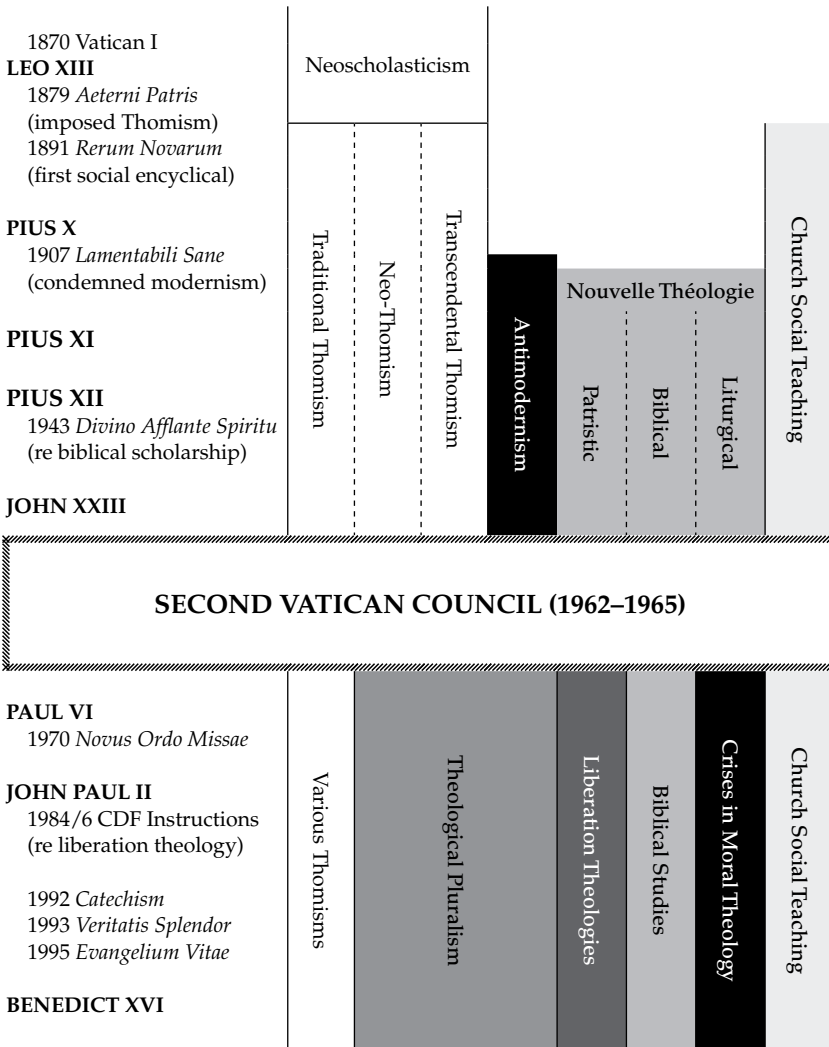


Figure 5

Chapter Two



Recent Theology

In this chapter we draw closer to our topic, the influence of contemporary philosophies on theology, by examining the general trends and developments in theology in the period leading to and from the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). The aim is to offer readers a systematic overview, sketching the historical context within which we will consider, in the next part, the influence of this or that school of philosophy. To make the task manageable we have generally limited ourselves to Catholic theology. To gain a more complete picture, readers would need to acquaint themselves with some of the overlapping trends and convergences in Protestant, Reformed, and Orthodox theology over the same period.

Undoubtedly the key event for recent Roman Catholic thought has been the Second Vatican Council (see figure 5). All the great theologians of the last century were in some way involved with it: Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans Küng, Karol Wojtyła (later Pope John Paul II), and Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI). The council, with the trajectories leading up to it and flowing from it, has undoubtedly occasioned one of the most vibrant periods ever in Catholic, and indeed all Christian, theology. Although closely related to the impressive scientific and technological advances of the period, the striking social and historical upheavals of the mid-twentieth century, the struggle between competing world politico-economic ideologies, and the aftermath of two devastating global wars, Vatican II has often been hailed as “the” religious event of the twentieth century. It was preceded by and itself initiated a process of radical philosophical and theological renewal that has resulted in today’s pervasive theological pluralism—a variety of different