



## Chapter 2

# The Equipose Between Faith and Reason in Roman Catholic Intellectual Tradition

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### Introduction

Two *causes célèbres* in early modern times that pitched ecclesiastical authorities against reason and science were those that involved Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) and Galileo Galilei (1564–1642). While Galileo was spared the tortures and horrendous burning at the stake by the dreadful Roman Inquisition, Giordano Bruno, regrettably, was not that fortunate. He was burned alive at Campo de' Fori in Rome for his intellectual audacity.<sup>1</sup> With his last breath, Bruno maintained his innocence in defence of philosophical and religious tolerance. In receiving the death sentence, he held his dignity high by addressing his tormentors: “Perhaps your fear in passing judgment on me is greater than mine in receiving it.”<sup>2</sup> At issue in both cases was the inability of premodern theology to decouple itself from Aristotelian metaphysics and cosmology, whereby ecclesiastical intellectuals failed to understand Galileo’s admonition:

Philosophy is written in this grand book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend

- 1 G. Aquilecchia, “Giordano Bruno.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* viewed 2 October 2023 from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Giordano-Bruno>.
- 2 As reported by Gaspar Schlopp of Breslau in Dorothea Waley Singer, *Bruno: His Life and Thought* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), 179.

the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it.<sup>3</sup>

Sadly, but true, the unfortunate cases of Giordano Bruno and Galileo effectively “left the Church with the stigma of obscurantism and the stigma of a force which opposes freedom of scientific inquiry.”<sup>4</sup> However, a painstaking investigation of the rapport between faith and reason, theology and philosophy, or Christianity and science shows a history of uneasy coexistence, which did not always mean outright conflict and irreconcilable differences. One notable example is St. Augustine’s attitude to the question of faith and reason. He is commonly recognised as the luminary in the intellectual tradition of the Western Church. It could even be said that other philosophical and theological systems or traditions within Roman Catholicism are but footnotes to the intellectual bequeathment of the Bishop of Hippo.

Regarding the subtle compatibility of faith and reason, the Augustinian notion is that Christians begin in faith and proceed afterward to understanding.<sup>5</sup> His classical thesis is this: “We begin in faith, and are made perfect in sight.”<sup>6</sup> In this sense, “faith precedes reason” since according to Augustine, *nisi credideritis, non intelligetis* – “unless you believe, you will not understand.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, faith and reason are conceived as complementary, since the natural desire in believers to understand their faith is not judged as a futile venture or even an irreligious adventure. As laid down by St. Augustine, and followed by his intellectual successors, faith moves the human will to make an assent of

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3 Cited in A. van Helden, ‘Galileo’, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, viewed 2 October 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Galileo-Galilei>.

4 F. Lawrence, “Athens and Jerusalem: The Contemporary Problematic of Faith and Reason.” *Gregorianum* 80. 2 (1999): 223–244 (231)

5 R.E. Cushman, “Faith and Reason in the Thought of St. Augustine.” *Church History* 19.4 (1950): 271–294 (284).

6 Cited in Cushman, “Faith and Reason,” 278.

7 Cited in Cushman, “Faith and Reason,” 271.

belief, and equally serves reason. Faith does not supplant reason in its natural desire to know the truth because reason is that by which the nature of human beings is preeminently fulfilled.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in the Augustinian conceptual optics: “Understanding is the reward of faith.”<sup>9</sup>

Amidst the theological cum methodical debate of their milieu, a contemporary of St. Augustine in the East, St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395) cautioned the rationalist Eunomius against confusing theology with the science of nature. Arguing that *theologein* was different from *physiologein*, Gregory paraphrased Zeno the philosopher, to admonish Enuomius: “One cannot then encompass the unembraceable nature of God in the palm of a child’s hand.”<sup>10</sup> The tension between theology and philosophy was not absent in the Medieval Ages – generally considered as having achieved the most outstanding synthesis between faith and reason. In protesting the overbearingness of philosophy and its intrusion into theology, St. Bonaventure associated philosophy with “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”<sup>11</sup> A certain tendency or thought system that Etienne Gilson has cumulatively identified as “spiritual families” at one time or another appears to exemplify an attitude of tension between faith and reason that has persisted throughout the long history of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> That notwithstanding, it is helpful to remember that early church councils employed metaphysics and its language in order to give verbal expression to the church’s faith. They intended to demonstrate the veracity and reasonability of the Christian

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8 Cushman, “Faith and Reason,” 274; 276.

9 E. Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2020), 15.

10 Cited in J. Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The 1988 Erasmus Lecture” (1988), viewed 9 May 2023 from <https://josephcardinalratzinger.blogspot.com/2008/04/biblical-interpretation-in-crisis-1988.html>.

11 T.S. Quinn, “Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and the Papal Encyclical,” in D.R. Foster & J.W. Koterski (eds.), *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought* (Washington, DC., The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 177–192 (190).

12 Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 6.

belief, since it is aligned with the reality of the deepest yearning of humanity.<sup>13</sup>

This research does not pretend to be exhaustive in its object of study. It aims to articulate the marriage of convenience between faith and reason in Roman Catholic intellectual tradition. This will be done with the aid of literature reviews that highlight the thoughts of selected scholars regarding the subject of research. Firstly, it will look at the place of philosophy in ancient Christianity, which from the outset established the parity and disparity between faith and reason in Christian intellectual tradition. It will equally examine some interventions of the Catholic Church's Magisterium on the intrinsic connectivity between faith and reason. The Magisterium occupies an indispensable place in Catholic intellectual tradition. It understands its role as the defence of the Christian faith. As such, the interest of the Catholic Church in the question of theology and philosophy, or faith and reason, is geared toward promoting a philosophy compatible with Christian revelation. Those terms are employed interchangeably throughout this research. Essentially, concerning the Magisterium in terms of its role in the debate, it sees itself as duty-bound to intervene because, in the words of Joseph Ratzinger: "Theology is born when the arbitrary judgement of reason encounters a limit, in that we discover something which we have not excogitated ourselves but which has been revealed to us."<sup>14</sup>

## Philosophy and Early Christianity

One monument that best illustrates the important place of reason in Christianity is Raphael's masterpiece *The School of Athens* in the Vatican Apostolic Palace. *The School of Athens*, painted between 1509 and 1511, is one of the high points of Renaissance art. In his masterstrokes, Raphael brings together the "Who's Who"

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13 J. M. McDermott, "Joseph Ratzinger on Faith and Reason." *Angelicum* 86.3 (2009): 565–588.

14 J. Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding its Role in the light of Present Controversy* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1995), 8.

of ancient Greek civilisation by portraying the best of the best of Greek thinkers in antiquity.<sup>15</sup> It is the immortalisation of the intellectual achievements of several ancient Greek philosophers, mathematicians and scientists. Tasos Kokkinidis surmises that the intention of Raphael was, amongst other things, “to pay his deepest tribute to the greatest philosophers in history, several of whom had tried throughout their lives to discover the prime mover, or cause, in the universe, a branch of thought called the ‘knowledge of the first causes’.”<sup>16</sup>

Raphael puts into artform what ancient and medieval Christian thinkers had debated and written about in recognition of their pagan forebearers. He brings to life the towering figure of Socrates, considered the founder of Western Philosophy, and Pythagoras with his mathematical theory and his teaching about the “transmigration of souls.” Euclid, the “father of geometry” is accounted for, as also is Ptolemy, the great mathematician and astronomer whose treatise had an overwhelming influence on Western science for most of the Middle Ages. Two ancient Greek philosophers of wisdom, Diogenes (founder of Cynic philosophy) and Heraclitus, the philosopher of flux, are vividly depicted. Above all these luminaries, Raphael, in the most important part of his artwork, brings in the imposing personalities of Plato and Aristotle as the jewels and crowns of learning in antiquity.<sup>17</sup> Both men represented two different schools of philosophy and their thoughts dominated the intellectual environment of Christianity from the earliest Christian centuries. They influenced the Church Fathers and their Christian intellectual successors.

Christianity never totally disdained reason from its earliest encounter with Greek thought and culture. It only shattered Greek rationalism that arose from a chain of mythopoetic thought that sought to liberate the human mind from a pervasively personal

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15 T. Kokkinidis, “The Greek Philosophers ‘Hiding’ in Raphael’s School of Athens.” *Greek Reporter*, viewed 1 August 2023 from <https://greekreporter.com/2023/08/01/ancient-greek-philosophers-raphael-school-of-athens/>.

16 Kokkinidis, “The Greek Philosophers.”

17 Kokkinidis, “The Greek Philosophers.”

web and replace it with broad areas of objective thought.<sup>18</sup> Early Christianity, in many ways, accepted as a given some of the findings and conclusions of ancient Greek philosophers and scientists about the universe, human beings, and the questions of life and death. For instance, about Platonic theistic submissions, St. Augustine wrote: "It is evident that none come nearer to us than the Platonists. Their gold and silver were dug out of the mines of God's providence which are everywhere scattered abroad."<sup>19</sup> He admonished Christians to appropriate the "gold and silver" of the philosophers and to "devote to their proper use in the preaching of the gospel."<sup>20</sup> In the historical sense, early Christian concern about the relationship between faith and reason, or theology and philosophy, was never an abstract question. As Joseph Ratzinger masterfully demonstrates, that concern made possible the first appearances of the images of Christ in classical Christian art. It birthed the first plastic expression of faith in art form.<sup>21</sup>

The iconography of earliest Christian art principally involves three figures: the shepherd, the *orans*, and the philosopher.<sup>22</sup> Of all three, as naturally expected, the figure of the philosopher became very prominent in Christian intellectual circles. The preferred model was the image of the Cynic, the itinerant preacher of philosophy who was not so much concerned about hypotheses but rather busied himself with winning the possession of life by overcoming death.<sup>23</sup> This figure of the Cynic philosopher was adopted and substituted by the Christians. The place of the Cynic was taken over by the Christian philosopher who, instead of carrying a book of philosophy by one of the renowned ancient philosophers, now carried the Gospel of Christ in his hands. He learnt therein not so much from words, but from facts and deeds, of Christ as the perfect and true Philosopher who imparted to him the knowledge of the mystery of death. Regarding the mystery of death as the ultimate existential question that faces

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18 M. Polanyi, "Faith and Reason." *The Journal of Religion* 41.4 (1961): 237–247.

19 Cited in Cushman, "Faith and Reason," 275.

20 Cushman, "Faith and Reason," 275.

21 Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 15.

22 Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 13.

23 Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 14.

human beings, early Christian thinkers understood Christ as the *Philosopher par excellence* because he is the man who overcomes death and gives new meaning to human life.<sup>24</sup>

Besides the agonising question of death, early Christianity boldly identified the Christian God with the God of the philosophers as against the multiple gods of the various religions of their milieu. By jettisoning the whole cosmos of the many ancient religions around them, early Christians made their choice and explained their faith in this manner: “When we say God, we do not mean or worship any of this; we mean only Being itself; what the philosophers have expounded as the ground of all being, as the God above all powers – that alone is our God.”<sup>25</sup> Theirs was a choice favouring the *Logos* (Reason) against myth (fable). According to Ratzinger, one of patristic theology’s greatest insights is this audacious assertion of Tertullian: “Christ called himself the truth, not custom.”<sup>26</sup> Naturally and logically, the human mind yearns for the truth and desires to know it. Once again, as with the philosopher figure, a transformation also took place with the Christian appropriation of the God of philosophers. By conceiving God as the God to whom they could pray, early Christians removed the God of philosophers from the purely academic realm. He became for them the God of faith who is both immanent and transcendent. He is no longer conceived as the external mathematics of the universe but *agape* – “the power of creative love.”<sup>27</sup> There ensued from this transformation two outstanding points: (a) while the God of philosophers is mainly self-centred as pure thought contemplating itself, the Christian God of faith is understood through the prism of a category of relationship; (b) as pure thought, the divinity of the God of philosophers is predicated upon thought alone as divine essence, whereas the God of faith is known as thought and love. By so doing, Christians placed truth and love side by side as constituting one unique reality that pertains to the same God.<sup>28</sup>

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24 Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 14.

25 J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2004), 138.

26 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 141.

27 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 143.

28 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 148.

Historically, Christianity from the outset attracted converts from broad social and intellectual backgrounds. As a religion committed to sacred writings, it soon discovered the need for literate people. However, it was not until the second century that Christianity developed its own distinct and significant intellectual tradition beginning with Justin Martyr (c. AD 100–165). The Christian apologetics, begun by Justin, was continued by other Christian intellectuals such as Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen.<sup>29</sup> Despite their peculiar differences and characteristics, each of them was familiar with Greek philosophy in its various brands such as Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and Pythagoreanism. They judged philosophy, especially Platonism, to be compatible with Christian doctrine.<sup>30</sup> Given the preponderance of Greek thought and its influence in the New Testament and early Christianity, Ilaria Ramelli sustains the view that it is impossible to conceive of a “pure” and unadulterated Christianity. She argues that with the Hellenisation of the New Testament, Christianity itself, as a natural consequence, was equally Hellenised before it became a religion for all nations and all cultures.<sup>31</sup> The Christian intelligentsia of Alexandria in the second and third centuries gave credence to the indispensable role of Greek philosophy in their faith formation. This much is evident in one of Origen’s letters, where he sought to defend himself against his detractors, who chided him for his interest in philosophy. Origen (c. AD 185–254) makes references to Pantaenus (died c. AD 200) and Heraclas (died c. AD 248).<sup>32</sup> Both men were revered Alexandrian Christians and contemporaries of Origen. Pantaenus was versed in Greek disciplines and philosophy, especially Stoicism. Clement of Alexandria succeeded him as head of the famous Catechetical School of Alexandria, and also considered him his teacher and the “best of the Christian masters”.<sup>33</sup> Clement relished Greek

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29 D.C. Lindberg, “Science and the Early Christian Church.” *Isis* 74.4 (1983): 509–530 (513).

30 “Science and the Early Christian Church,” 514.

31 I.L.E. Ramelli, “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism: Re-Thinking the Christianisation of Hellenism’.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 63.3 (2009): 217–263 (217).

32 “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism,” 218.

33 “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism,” 214.

philosophy in his conviction that the truth is one because, as he understood it, every truth “wherever it may be encountered” is ultimately God’s truth.<sup>34</sup> This position of Clement is embossed in his *Stromateis* with this assertion: “Barbarian and Greek philosophy have torn off a piece of the eternal truth . . . from the theology of the Logos who eternally is. And he who brings together again the divided parts and makes them one, mark well, shall without danger of error look upon the perfect Logos.”<sup>35</sup> As for Heraclas, he first studied philosophy before Christian doctrine. He was a junior colleague of Origen and later became his successor as head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. Heraclas, who later became Alexandria’s bishop, was not only a Christian philosopher. He was dressed as a philosopher with his philosophical garb and studied the “books of the Greeks.”<sup>36</sup> In all these allusions, Origen intended to insert himself in a line of reputable contemporaries who were both Christians and philosophers simultaneously. He wanted to exculpate himself from the false accusation of being a Christian in philosophical disguise.

On the contrary, as far as Origen was concerned, it was perfectly possible and consistent to be both a Christian and a philosopher just like Pantaenus, Heraclas, and others of his contemporaries. He was equally driven by the desire “to examine both the heretics’ opinions and what the philosophers claimed to say concerning the truth.” Moreover, as Origen conceived it, philosophy as the search for truth also “renders those who practice it noble, venerable, and glorious.”<sup>37</sup> The comments on Origen and his methodology by Gregory Thaumaturgus (c. AD 213–270) who himself was a student of Origen, reveal the versatility, liberality, and mastery of the Alexandrian scholar regarding multiple sources of philosophical discipline and learning in general:

He required us to study philosophy by reading all the existing writings of the ancients, both philosophers and religious poets, taking every care not to put aside or reject

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34 “Science and the Early Christian Church,” 514.

35 Cited in Lindberg, “Science and the Early Christian Church,” 514.

36 “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism,” 219.

37 “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism,” 218; 220.

any . . . apart from the writings of the atheists. . . He selected everything that was useful and true in each philosopher and set it before us, but condemned what was false. . . For us, there was nothing forbidden, nothing hidden, nothing inaccessible. We were allowed to learn every doctrine, non-Greek and Greek, both spiritual and secular, both divine and human; with the utmost freedom we went into everything and examined it thoroughly, taking our fill of and enjoying the pleasures of the soul.<sup>38</sup>

Not every Christian intellectual of antiquity was as enthusiastic about philosophy as Origen and his likes. Apart from Tertullian, who most eloquently scorned philosophy among Christian intellectuals, another person who regarded Greek philosophy with contempt was Tatian (c. AD 120–180), the Assyrian compiler of the *Diatessaron* (harmony of the four gospels). His desire to find a “true philosophy” led him through many schools of philosophy until his conversion to Christianity.<sup>39</sup> In his repudiation of classical Greek learning, found in his *Address to the Greeks*, Tatian directed a series of vitriolic attacks against Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and the Epicureans. He detested what he perceived as their intellectual pride: “What noble thing have you produced by your pursuit of philosophy?... Obeying the commands of God, and following the law of the Father of immortality, we reject everything which rests upon human opinion.”<sup>40</sup> Ironically, after his separation from the early church, a similar accusation of pride was brought against Tatian, whom St. Irenaeus portrayed as “excited and puffed up by the thought of being a teacher, as if he were superior to others, he composed his own peculiar type of doctrine” (*Against Heresies* 1.28.1).

The disapproval of philosophy by some Christian intellectuals in their unwavering conviction in the “self-sufficiency of Christian Revelation” is not limited to early

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38 Cited in Lindberg, “Science and the Early Christian Church,” 514.  
39 W. Petersen, “Tatian,” in S.P. Brock et al. (eds.), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition*, viewed 10 August 2023 from <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Tatian>.

40 Cited in Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 10–11

Christian intellectuals of the second and third centuries. According to Gilson, they are present “in all the significant periods of the history of Christian thought.”<sup>41</sup> The author of *Didascalia apostolorum* in the third century admonished his fellow Christians to: “Shun all heathen books. Of what concern to you are strange ideas or laws or pseudo-prophets which often lead inexperienced men into error? What is lacking to you in God’s word, that you should turn to that heathen nonsense?”<sup>42</sup> In the first half of the fifth century, John Cassian (died c. 435), credited for introducing Eastern monastic traditions into the West, promoted sanctity as a surer means to knowledge. While subtly deriding “worldly” learning, Cassian, in his *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium remediis*, lauds the personality of Abba Theodore who was “endowed with the greatest holiness and knowledge.”<sup>43</sup>

In the judgment of Cassian, the saintly Eastern monk did not achieve that feat “from a zeal for reading or from worldly learning but from the purity of heart alone, since he could hardly either understand or speak more than a few words of Greek.”<sup>44</sup> Even the later Augustine, in his *Retractions*, emphasised sanctity and the grace of enlightenment over liberal arts. The older Augustine came to assert that there is no true wisdom that does not lead to sanctity. Typical of Augustinian perception, he conceded that the unlettered, compared with philosophers, excelled in wisdom and sanctity of life, which the liberal arts were incapable of giving to the learned.<sup>45</sup> The ensuing disparagement of secular learning, especially philosophy and dialectics in late antiquity, was occasioned by dialectical inconclusions that many Christian intellectuals abhorred for their propensity to cause dissension and misdirection rather than lead to the truth. This was certainly the context in which, for instance, the Council of Ephesus (431) set itself against any possible theological innovations.<sup>46</sup> St. Gregory Nazianzus, in the preceding century,

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41 *Reason and Revelation*, 8.

42 Cited in Lindberg, “Science and the Early Christian Church,” 515.

43 J. Dietrich, “Boethius’s Reading of the ‘beati Augustini scriptis’ in the *Opuscula sacra*.” *Carmina Philosophiae* 21 (2012): 43–65 (51–52).

44 Cited in Dietrich, “Boethius’s Reading,” 51.

45 “Boethius’s Reading,” 46, 48.

46 “Boethius’s Reading,” 51.

insisted in his *Five Theological Orations* that not all aspects of theology should be subjected to inquiry and debate. Given the nature and subject matter of the discipline, theological discussion was to be “reserved for certain occasions, for certain audiences and certain limits must be observed by those who engaged in it after the ‘purification of body and soul’.”<sup>47</sup> That notwithstanding, the Church Fathers from Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria through the Cappadocian Fathers to Augustine, are praised for their originality in embracing the unlimited dynamism of reason, and for their ingenuity in infusing it with a richness drawn from Christian revelation.<sup>48</sup>

### Philosophy as *Ancilla Theologiae* and Disputes

Drawing from Plato and pre-Christian philosophers, St. Augustine admits that “the supreme God visits the mind of the wise with an intelligible and ineffable presence.”<sup>49</sup> This underpins the belief that truth is one since its source is God, even though faith precedes reason. The great Italian medieval poet, Dante Alighieri (1264–1321), in his magnum opus *The Divine Comedy*, genially weaves together the comingling of Greek philosophy and Christian theology in the Middle Ages. One of the great insights of medieval intellectual attainment is the notion that grace does not destroy nature but instead perfects it. Employing the figures of Virgil and Beatrice, Dante poetically forges a harmony between faith and reason as well as grace and nature. Virgil, the author of *Aeneid*, is the symbol of reason and representative of human knowledge. He guides Dante through *Inferno* up to the entrance of Purgatorio before yielding his place to Beatrice. He afterwards becomes a fellow pilgrim with Dante. For her part, Beatrice is a simple young lady who acts as an embodiment of grace. She takes over from Virgil and assists Dante in completing his pilgrimage from Purgatorio to Paradiso, the heavenly ascent.<sup>50</sup> The implication

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47 “Boethius’s Reading,” 54.

48 Quinn, “Infides et Unratio,” 199.

49 Cushman, “Faith and Reason,” 275.

50 J.W. Koterski, “The Challenge to Metaphysics,” in D.R. Foster & J.W. Koterski (eds.), *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought*, 22–36 (Washington, DC., The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 22–36 (22).

here is that theological knowledge comes to the aid of human knowledge, which remains incomplete and unable to attain divine mysteries which can only be infused in the human mind by divine grace. It poetically underscores the medieval belief that reason without faith would lose its way in the ascent to divine realities.<sup>51</sup>

Pre-eminently, it shows that early and medieval Christianity did not overlook the great strides of the men of antiquity, but rather built upon their foundation. This much is evidently demonstrated by Dante when he arrives with Beatrice at the fourth heaven, which is the heavenly sphere of the sun and the dwelling place of the wise. It is there in the fourth heaven that Dante locates the brilliant circle of the esteemed twelve of great wisdom and learning: Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, Gratian, Peter Lombard, Solomon, Dionysius the Areopagite, Paulus Orosius, Boethius, Isidore of Seville, Bede the Venerable, Richard of St. Victor, and Siger of Brabant.<sup>52</sup> Apart from Solomon, the rest of the men were Christian intelligentsia who were steeped in Greek philosophy. As Augustine's appreciation of the Platonists' *logos* was a propaedeutic to his Christian faith,<sup>53</sup> so too, Aristotelian metaphysics, or another philosophical school of thought, was helpful to the men in the circle of the wise in their understanding and articulation of the Christian faith. According to Fred Lawrence, "the theological distinction between nature and grace at work in Augustine's writings needed the 12th century entry of Aristotle's philosophical writings into the Latin West he had dominated to become fully explanatory."<sup>54</sup>

As already observed, the Church Fathers identified Christianity with the God of the philosophers. They were convinced that the divine Logos is the guarantor of the rationality of the universe, which in turn points towards Himself.<sup>55</sup> Through this prism, there was a broad understanding in the Patristic

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- 51 Koterski, "The Challenge to Metaphysics," 23; A. Tikkanen, "The Divine Comedy," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, viewed 8 August 2023 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Divine-Comedy>.
- 52 A. A. Maurer, "The State of Historical Research in Siger of Brabant." *Speculum* 31.1 (1956): 49–56 (49).
- 53 Lawrence, "Athens and Jerusalem," 227.
- 54 "Athens and Jerusalem," 227.
- 55 McDermott, "Joseph Ratzinger on Faith and Reason," 569.

and Medieval eras about the existence of some form of unity between faith and reason. It is a presupposition that has generally remained central and relevant to Western intellectual tradition. It was an operative staple in Western Theology from the time of Augustine in the fourth century to St. Anselm and St. Thomas Aquinas in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, respectively.<sup>56</sup> In the context of the medieval world, the question about the nature of that unity assumed a centrality that became heightened when Western Christendom learned more of the achievements of Greek, Jewish, and Islamic philosophers.<sup>57</sup> Early in the thirteenth century, medieval universities grappled with the difficult question of the relationship between theology, philosophy, and the arts. That thorny question prodded itself to encompass the reasonableness of faith, which was crucial in medieval debates on nature and grace as well as faith and reason.<sup>58</sup>

The stage was prepared by St. Augustine, to whom any theologian or philosopher of repute in the West referred between the fifth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>59</sup> Three issues occupied the central stage in the medieval intellectual scene, in regard to which theologians and philosophers appealed to the authority of the North African Church Father. Generally considered as “the manifest of unity of occidental theology,” Augustine represented “the breadth and depth of theology and orthodoxy of theology” in the West.<sup>60</sup> The issues that loomed large on the intellectual scene were: (1) the notion of creation; (2) the existence of a Providential God; and (3) the immortality of the individual soul. The

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56 Quinn, “Infides et Unratio,” 192; A. Dulles, “Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II,” in D.R. Foster & J.W. Koterski (eds.), *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought* (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 193–208 (193).

57 M. Sweeney, “The Medievalism of Fides et ratio,” in D.R. Foster & J.W. Koterski (eds.), *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought*, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 163–176 (164).

58 D. Legge, “Reasonable Belief: The Contribution of Aquinas and his Dominican Followers on the Act of Faith and its Reasonableness.” *Angelicum* 93.2 (2016): 315–330.

59 M. Wriedt, “Luther and Augustine – Revisited,” in J.H. Dragseth (ed.), *The Devil’s Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 39–45 (40).

60 Wriedt, “Luther and Augustine – Revisited,” 40.

intellectuals never questioned the veracity of those fundamental Christian doctrines. Their divergences rather bordered on generating rational explications for those doctrines.<sup>61</sup> In doing so by means of natural reason, St. Augustine had declared reason to be an ancillary to faith. Also, in sketching a broad balance between faith and reason at the dawn of Christian rationalism, he opined that faith, through the light of revelation, helps reason to attain better knowledge of certain doctrines by opening new paths to reason. In the explanation of Michael Polanyi, this was the heart of medieval scholasticism since “the entire movement of scholastic philosophy from Boethius to William of Ockham was but a variation on this theme.”<sup>62</sup>

The works of Boethius lend credence to the above assertion. For instance, in the preface to his *De Trinitate*, he attempted to assure himself of his faith in Augustinian thought by inviting Symmachus to judge “whether the seeds of argument sown in my mind by St. Augustine’s writings have borne fruit.”<sup>63</sup> As explicated by Raoul Carton, a similar intention is operative in *De consolatione philosophiae*, where Boethius seeks wisdom that is compatible with the Christian faith.<sup>64</sup> He writes of the subjugation of fortune and misfortune to Divine Providence – “summum bonum” (highest good) that “strongly and sweetly” has the entire universe in its hands and puts all things in their proper place.<sup>65</sup> He does this after the example of Augustine, as outlined in the *Cassiciacum* dialogues. *De consolation philosophiae* is the crown of Boethius’s philosophical thoughts. It was the most popular book in the Middle Ages, besides the Bible.<sup>66</sup> Alongside other works of Boethius, it functioned as a relief from Aristotelian logic and exerted much influence in the medieval intellectual clime. Cassiodorus (c. 490–c. 585) included the works of Boethius on the

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61 Quinn, “Infides et Unratio,” 190.

62 Polanyi, “Faith and Reason,” 238–239.

63 Dietrich, “Boethius’s Reading,” 43.

64 Dietrich, “Boethius’s Reading,” 43.

65 J. Shiel, “Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, viewed 15 August 2023, from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anicius-Manlius-Severinus-Boethius>.

66 C. Trueman, “Boethius: The Philosopher Theologian” (2006), viewed 7 August 2023 from <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/boethius-philosopher-theologian>.

liberal arts in the library of the monastery, which he established in Vivarium.<sup>67</sup>

Boethius's adaptation of some Greek works into Latin, including Euclid's *Geometry*, aided in the evolution of the quadrivium (music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy) that was studied in medieval universities, together with the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic). His thoughts influenced the training of medieval clergy and the education that was available in cloister and court schools.<sup>68</sup> His domination of the medieval academic clime was wide-ranging. Boethius's translations of the works of some Greek philosophers into Latin gave Western Europe access to those classical works. It is believed that until the twelfth century, Boethius was the only way to access Aristotle's thoughts, in which he was unintentionally portrayed more as a logician and less as a metaphysician. This portrayal of Aristotle would precipitate the great crisis that ensued in the twelfth and thirteen centuries, when many of his writings became accessible in the West through the works of the Arab philosopher Ibn Rush (1126–1198), better known in the Latin West as Averroës. Medieval Christian scholars progressively became aware that some positions of Aristotle on certain questions, like the eternity of the world and the immortality of the soul, were at variance with Christian revelation. The complex undertaking to accommodate Aristotelian metaphysics within the Christian frame of thought called forth the genius of St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, it also repeatedly provoked condemnations from ecclesiastical authorities in 1210, 1215, 1270, and 1277 regarding certain philosophical propositions that were controverted and judged to be in opposition to the Christian faith.<sup>70</sup> That fact notwithstanding, medieval Christian intellectuals updated the Aristotelian tradition by Christianising it.<sup>71</sup> They rejected certain aspects of Aristotelian

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67 Shiel, "Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius."

68 Shiel, "Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius"; Trueman, "Boethius."

69 Trueman, "Boethius."

70 See R. van Nieuwenhove, "Neoplatonism, *Regiratio* and Trinitarian Theology. A Look at Ruusbroec." *Hermathena* 169 (2000): 169–188; Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 45–46.

71 Aviva Rothman (ed.), *The Dawn of Modern Cosmology: From Copernicus to Newtown* (London: Penguin Books, 2023), xvii.

philosophy and incorporated some elements of his worldview into their own theological conceptions. The result of that fusion and blending conception of nature as one of God's "two books". The second book was the Scripture which enabled especially philosophers of nature to read, understand, and appreciate God and his workings in the cosmos.<sup>72</sup>

According to Etienne Gilson some form of "philosophical rationalism" was already in the embryonic stage in medieval times. Its features were made visible in Spain through the writings of Ibn Rushd. His "philosophical rationalism" was a strong pushback against the theologism of his fellow contemporary Islamic scholars. Often known as "the Commentator", Ibn Rushd bequeathed the ideal of a purely rational philosophy to his Latin disciples, collectively referred to as Averroists.<sup>73</sup> They included Siger of Brabant (1240–c. 1281/84), Boethius Dacia (fl. 13th century), and Jean de Jandun (c. 1286–1328). Their most distinctive feature appears to be "their inclination to pursue philosophical arguments to their logical conclusion, regardless of Church doctrine".<sup>74</sup> It was for this reason that the Averroists were considered to have punched above their weight concerning the Christian faith, with the possibility of philosophic rationalism that tended to position itself as a counter-ideology.<sup>75</sup> Averroism functioned as a bulwark of philosophy against theological and institutional encroachments which led its adherents, especially the extremists among them, to postulate that reason and philosophy were superior to faith and faith-based knowledge.<sup>76</sup> This postulation was an inference from the conclusions of Averroës with recourse to Aristotelianism. It did not matter whether those conclusions differed from the Christian revelation. The core teaching of Averroës is sketched out in his treatise, *The Agreement of Religion and Philosophy*, described by Etienne Gilson

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72 Rothman, *The Dawn of Modern Cosmology*, xvii.

73 Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 29.

74 Fouad Ben Ahmed and Robert Pasnau, "Ibn Rushd [Averroës]" (2021), in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, viewed 23 July 2024 from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/ibn-rushd/>.

75 Irving L. Horowitz, "Averroism and the Politics of Philosophy." *The Journal of Politics* 22.4 (1960): 698–727 (723).

76 "Averroism and the Politics of Philosophy," 720.

as “a landmark in the history of Western civilization.”<sup>77</sup> Although the doctrinal position of Averroës remains complex and somewhat fluid, the basic premise is that absolute truth, established and demonstrated by pure reason, is possible only in philosophy. His assignment of primacy to reason over faith constituted a big problem for his Christian disciples, whose adherence to Christianity assured them that Christian revelation holds the ultimate, supreme and absolute truth. Despite the apparent disagreement between their Christian faith and philosophical positions, they never discarded either. Instead, they strenuously laboured to find a possible conciliation between faith and reason, theology and philosophy. It was in such endeavours that they incurred the wrath of ecclesiastical authorities and the eventual condemnation of their position, commonly known as the doctrine of twofold truth or double truth: one truth in philosophy (reason) and another truth in theology (faith).<sup>78</sup> A papal decree of 1341 instructed the arts faculty at Paris to adhere to “the science of Aristotle and his commentator Averroes, and other ancient commentators and interpreters of Aristotle, except in cases that run counter to the faith”.<sup>79</sup>

Such a position stood in stark contrast to the Augustinian legacy bequeathed to medieval scholars which became, *de facto*, the traditional viewpoint in maintaining a delicate balance between faith and reason. As one of the outstanding Christian thinkers of the eleventh century, St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), in his interpretation of the thought of St. Augustine, gave it a slightly different hue with his *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand). St. Anselm intended to restate what Augustine had admirably taught in the fourth century about the supremacy of faith over reason. The received Augustinian

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77 Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 29.

78 Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 41; E. Sten, “Boethius of Dacia” (2020), in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, viewed 16 August 2023 from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/boethius-dacia/>; A.A. Maurer, “Boetius of Dacia (c.13th Century)” (1967), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, viewed 16 August 2023 from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/boethius-dacia-c-13th-century>.

79 Cited in Ben Ahmed and Pasnau, “Ibn Rushd [Averroes]”.

viewpoint remained substantially the same, albeit in the different clime of the eleventh century, when logic was the standard science. Through logical demonstrations, Anselm and his contemporaries laboured to achieve a rational understanding of Christian faith that was not opposed to reason, even though faith occupied a higher plane than reason.<sup>80</sup> Until the arrival of St. Bonaventure, the medieval schoolmen did not envisage a hermetic division or separation of philosophy from theology. Philosophy was conceived as only limited to knowledge that can be gained from reason without necessarily the aid of revelation.<sup>81</sup> For his part, St. Thomas Aquinas predicated his intellectual labours upon the concern to show that faith and reason complemented each other in the search for knowledge. His stance was that faith is both reasonable and supernatural because even at the natural level, “the act of believing is to think with assent.”<sup>82</sup> In his commentary on Boethius’s *De Trinitate*, Aquinas concurred that God is the source of both faith and reason, which are necessary requites for the attainment of the ultimate end by human beings.<sup>83</sup> The clearest of Aquinas’s syntheses of the compatibility between faith and reason is found in his *Præambula fidei*. He affirms that the preambles of faith are presuppositions of truth that need reason to be proven as truth.<sup>84</sup>

As Dominic Legge surmised, Aquinas’s clarity on the reasonableness of belief is his enduring contribution to medieval reflections on the relationship between faith and reason. The classic approach of St. Thomas Aquinas to the complementarity of faith and reason came to influence mainline Catholic theology and its stance that philosophy is a helpmate to theology. The former is contemporarily understood as independent in its natural and proper domain.<sup>85</sup> This does not obliterate the fact that other medieval thinkers, such as Alexander of Hales, St. Albert the Great, and even St. Bonaventure, all made a distinction “between the

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80 Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 19–21.

81 McDermott, “Joseph Ratzinger on Faith and Reason,” 573.

82 Legge, “Reasonable Belief,” 318.

83 “Reasonable Belief,” 318.

84 “Reasonable Belief,” 318.

85 “Reasonable Belief,” 318.

order of what *we believe* and the order of what *we know*.”<sup>86</sup> What seemed to have been a big issue for some of the contemporaries of Aquinas was their inability to treat philosophical problems as philosophers, and theological questions as theologians. This intellectual quagmire meant, as Gilson has demonstrated, that some theologians sought “to theologize in philosophy” and some philosophers, in turn, sought “to philosophize in theology.”<sup>87</sup>

Typical of the Thomistic way of conciliation, while faith is not to be understood as a principle of philosophical knowledge, faith remains a sure guide to rational truth against possible philosophical errors.<sup>88</sup> Aquinas describes reason as a “handmaid of theology.”<sup>89</sup> His affirmation is that reason, although weakened by sin, can still attain metaphysical and ethical truths through its proper ability. Following this Thomistic wisdom, it means “there is in principle no theological necessity for reason and nature to gain their rightful autonomy by turning the distinctions between theology, philosophy, and science into separations.”<sup>90</sup> Their conciliation and complementarity require a discernible domain of nature upon which faith builds and perfects. Their unity is accounted for by their identical origin in God, whereby their difference is compared to the difference between God and the created nature of existence.<sup>91</sup> As brilliantly articulated by Aquinas, “faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection presupposes something that can be perfected” (*ST*. 1.2.2.ad. 1).<sup>92</sup> With reason functioning as a handmaid of theology, Aquinas makes this bold assertion: “Hence sacred doctrine makes use also of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason” (*ST*. 1.1.8).<sup>93</sup>

86 Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 49.

87 *Reason and Revelation*, 51.

88 *Reason and Revelation*, 59.

89 D.R. Janz, “Whore or Handmaid? – Luther and Aquinas on the Function of Reason in Theology,” in J.H. Dragseth (ed.), *The Devil’s Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 47–52 (47).

90 Lawrence, “Athens and Jerusalem,” 228.

91 Sweeney, “The Medievalism of Fides et ratio,” 170.

92 Cited in M. Albl, *Reason, Faith, and Tradition: Explorations in Catholic Theology* (Anselm Academic, Winonna, 2009), 49.

93 Albl, *Reason, Faith, and Tradition*, 49.

The harmonious conciliation, first elaborated by St. Anselm in the eleventh century and perfected through the great insight of St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, was never without controversies. The perceived theological problems in the reception of Aristotelian philosophy brought about at least two outstanding ways of conceiving the relationship between faith and reason, theology and philosophy in Catholic intellectual tradition in medieval times. At one end of the spectrum was the Thomist/Dominican conception, and at the other was the Bonaventure/Franciscan conception. This followed the wider availability of Aristotelianism in medieval universities, especially after the ascendancy of Averroism. In reaction to the incursion of Aristotelian philosophy into Christian thought to the detriment of Augustinianism, Bonaventure likened philosophical pursuit to the Genesis story about the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He saw the efforts of philosophers as “a most miserable miracle” in which they sought to change wine into water and bread into stones. For this reason, he chided philosophy, at least in its Aristotelian brand, and thus declared: “It is a very great abomination that the most beautiful daughter of the king (namely wisdom) is offered to us as a bride, and we prefer to fornicate with a base servant-maid and resort to a prostitute.” In response, Aquinas absolved philosophers of any blame. The position of Aquinas is that “those who use the works of the philosophers in Sacred Doctrine, by bringing them into the service of faith, do not mix water with wine, but rather change water into wine.”<sup>94</sup>

It is pertinent to note that the use of Aristotle was occasionally condemned by church authorities, notably his denial of the freedom of the will, his teaching about the eternity of the world, and the denial of God’s foreknowledge and providence. Those Aristotelian ambiguities led to the suspicion of the orthodoxy of St. Thomas and even elicited the condemnation of twelve ascribed propositions of his thought in 1277 by Etienne Tempier, the archbishop of Paris. Those propositions were similarly proscribed in the same year on 18 March at the University of Oxford by the archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Kilwardby,

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94 For this paragraph and citations, see Nieuwenhove, “Neoplatonism, *Regiratio* and Trinitarian Theology.”

possibly on the orders of the pope. The same prescriptions were reaffirmed in 1286 by John Peckham.<sup>95</sup> Apart from his canonisation in 1323, Aquinas was further rehabilitated on April 11, 1567, when Pope Pius V (1566–1572) proclaimed him “Doctor of the Church.” His stardom became firmly cemented in the Roman Catholic intellectual hall of fame during the modernism crisis towards the end of the nineteenth century, when he was put forward as an irreproachable model and champion of orthodoxy.<sup>96</sup>

Alongside Bonaventure and Aquinas, John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) and William of Ockham (c. 1280–c. 1349) were the four great thinkers of High Scholasticism.<sup>97</sup> While the controversy about the thoughts of Aquinas lasted, Duns Scotus and especially Ockham became his ardent critics. The affirmation has it that “Aquinas perfected the great ‘medieval synthesis’ of faith and reason, and Ockham destroyed that ‘synthesis’.”<sup>98</sup> This was achieved by his doctrine of nominalism, conceived as “via moderna,” in opposition to scholastic realism, classified as “via antiqua.”<sup>99</sup> Following in the footsteps of Bonaventure in doubting the possibility of reason to attain divine knowledge without the help of faith, Scotus and Ockham, albeit in opposition to each other, took issue with Aquinas’s doctrine of faith. Scotus was so preoccupied with the rationality of faith that he deprived it of its supernatural character. Employing what he calls “acquired faith,” he taught that it is possible to believe the Gospel through natural faith without necessarily resorting to the help of supernatural grace.<sup>100</sup>

95 Legge, “Reasonable Belief,” 323; Nieuwenhove, “Neoplatonism, *Regiratio* and Trinitarian Theology.”

96 M.-D. Chenu, “St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, viewed 18 September 2023 from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Thomas-Aquinas/Last-years-at-Naples>.

97 J. Hause, “John Duns Scotus,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, viewed 20 September 2023 from <https://iep.utm.edu/john-duns-scotus/>.

98 S. Kaye, “William of Ockham (Occam, c. 1280–c. 1349),” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, viewed 20 September 2023 from <https://iep.utm.edu/ockham/>.

99 D.M. Hockenbery, “Introduction,” in J.H. Dragseth (ed.), *The Devil’s Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 1–10 (4).

100 Legge, “Reasonable Belief,” 324.

Scotus prepared the ground for Ockham, who became his bitter opponent and took an opposing stance. Ockham may be described as a *fideist* for his stance that belief in God is a question of faith and not knowledge. Another Franciscan confrere who influenced him was Peter John Olivi (1248–1298). While disproving theology as a science, he rejected any possible proof of the existence of God.<sup>101</sup> His destruction of medieval “synthesis” was so radical that the extremity of his conclusion may be construed as, “that absolutely nothing could be proved about God in the light of natural reason, not even his existence.”<sup>102</sup> Armed with dialectical probabilities like Averroës before him and yet unlike the Arab philosopher in his rationalism, Ockham became almost omnipresent in European universities in the late Middle Ages. That era progressively witnessed the wrecking of scholastic philosophy and theology, quickening “the final divorce of reason and Revelation.”<sup>103</sup> Despite the overwhelming influence of Ockham, a counterweight to him and to Scotus was Tommaso de Vio [Cardinal Cajetan] (1468–1543). He stood at the threshold between medieval theological tradition (especially in its Dominican variance) and the modern period. He made his mark with his criticisms, which were principally directed against Scotus. Where Duns Scotus had downplayed the supernatural dimension of faith with his rationalistic explanation, Cajetan stressed the supernaturality of faith as its constitutive dimension.<sup>104</sup>

## Divergences and Contentions in the Modern Era

One constant referent in the intellectual tradition of the great medieval theologians and that of the early church fathers is the affirmation that faith, due to its belonging to the divine, remains superior to all natural knowledge.<sup>105</sup> The Catholic position asserts that faith’s motive is God’s authority, not human reason. It insists that faith is an act of the intellect. On this basis, it maintains that reason can discover the truths which are proposed by faith.

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101 Kaye, “William of Ockham.”

102 Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 61.

103 Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 61.

104 Legge, “Reasonable Belief,” 329.

105 J. D. Horgan, “Newman on Faith and Reason.” *An Irish Quarterly Review* 42.166 (1953):132–150 (132).

Following thereof, Catholic tradition recognises five attributes of faith: (a) reasonability, (b) supernaturality, (c) certainty, (d) free, and (e) meritorious.<sup>106</sup> It balances the understanding that mutual illumination and support exist between faith and reason.<sup>107</sup> Hitherto observed, someone like St. Bonaventure, and others in his Franciscan tradition, feared that reason, especially Aristotelianism, might swallow up faith, which is the bedrock of theology. According to Joseph Ratzinger, the separation of philosophy from theology begun by the Seraphic Doctor became radicalised by Martin Luther (1483–1546) with his *sola scriptura*, which kick-started the process of de-Hellenising theology.<sup>108</sup>

This is hardly surprising, since Luther's intellectual development was rooted in Ockham's nominalist tradition. Christine Helmer holds that the historical Luther is in reality "more medieval, more Catholic, more mystical and more philosophical astute."<sup>109</sup> His polemics against philosophy may be considered as his way of taking part in the late medieval battles between two rival schools of thought.<sup>110</sup> In taking a side in the said intellectual battle, he accepted the nominalist position to couch his philosophical synthesis with the conclusion that God in his full majesty is beyond human comprehension. He also acknowledges that "After the fall of Adam, God did not take away this majesty of reason, but rather confirmed it."<sup>111</sup> This did not obstruct his operative conceptual optic regarding the incapacity of human beings to know God. As far as Luther was concerned, all that can be known about God is already revealed in the scriptures and the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>112</sup> While he may not be regarded as a rationalist in matters of faith, his distrust of the power of fallen reason made him lay so much emphasis on the absolute primacy

106 Horgan, "Newman on Faith and Reason," 136.

107 McDermott, "Joseph Ratzinger on Faith and Reason," 581.

108 "Joseph Ratzinger on Faith and Reason," 573.

109 C. Helmer, "Does Luther have a 'Waxen Nose'? - Historical and Philosophical Contextualization of Luther," in J.H. Dragseth (ed.), *The Devil's Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 23–25 (24).

110 Helmer, "Does Luther have a 'Waxen Nose,'" 25.

111 Janz, "Whore or Handmaid," 48.

112 Hockenbery, "Introduction," 5.

of faith.<sup>113</sup> His postulation that knowledge of reality is only possible through perceptions links him to the development of modern science. This began tentatively during the Renaissance with some publications such as *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*) in 1543 by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), and progressively matured in the seventeenth century.<sup>114</sup> Like Galileo a century after him, and echoing Plato before him, Copernicus opened his book with a caution to the reader: “Let no one untrained in geometry enter here”.<sup>115</sup> It was a preview of the central stage that geometry and mathematics would occupy in the evolution of modern science.

In the wake of its maturity at the dawn of the seventeenth century, modern science also issued forth on the wings of modern philosophy, starting in 1637 with the publication of René Descartes’s philosophical and mathematical treatise, *Discourse on Method*. In the affirmation of Timothy Quinn, modern philosophy, from its inception in the seventeenth century through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was transfused by “anti-theological ire.” Its basic tenet was the emancipation of reason from any authority, natural or supernatural. As far as its founders were concerned, the “new science” ought to remain “metaphysically neutral” by keeping itself untainted without the slightest supposition or claim to the supernatural order.<sup>116</sup> Its architects included Francis Bacon, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Baruch Spinoza. With his two influential publications, Spinoza elevated the thoughts of Descartes to the extreme. In the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), Spinoza denied divine authorship of the Bible, describing it as any other historical literature. He rejected miracles as possible divine interventions in nature. Spinoza, in his *Ethics* (1677) denied the existence of a supernatural or spiritual realm. He posited that all that existed was only matter, postulating that everything occurred

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113 Legge, “Reasonable Belief,” 329.

114 Hockenbery, “Introduction,” 5.

115 Cited in Rothman, *The Dawn of Modern Cosmology*, xii.

116 Quinn, “Infides et Unratio,” 179–180; 182

by necessity because the universe was regulated by eternal and necessary laws.<sup>117</sup>

Taking over from where Descartes had left off, Spinoza laid the ground for the Enlightenment rationalists for whom reason alone was deified as the primary tool and key for the study and understanding of nature and its manifold mysteries.<sup>118</sup> He is credited to have introduced the “hermeneutics of suspicion” in furtherance of “the Cartesian search for indubitably certain foundations from nature into historical knowledge.”<sup>119</sup> In the same optics are to be inserted Immanuel Kant’s *Religion within the limits of Reason Alone* (1793). Its aim was the rehabilitation of the Lutheran theological place of eminence in Europe against the deism that had become prominent in England and other places.<sup>120</sup> As for the birthing of German idealism, it came into being through the efforts of Gottfried W. Leibniz (1646–1716) in his endeavours to apply mathematically the tools of Descartes to the harmonisation of reason and revelation. As German idealism is generally considered to have reached its zenith in Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), David Hockenbery affirms that “the secularization of Lutheran theology was virtually completed in Hegel.”<sup>121</sup> Ironically, while adopting a Lutheran theological mindset, Hegel and those in his school of thought became convinced that reason is superior to faith. The result is the effective swallowing up of theology by philosophy with the Hegelian integration of two distinct but mutually interdependent disciplines. Against the absorption of faith by reason, particularly as conceived by Hegelianism and the semi-rationalists, the traditionalists in the nineteenth century took the opposite direction. Although they accepted the traditional view that reason ought to be illuminated by faith, they went too far in the assertion that philosophy was true if it was based on revelation and accepted in faith. What ensued, over time, was a battle in the

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117 U.L. Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement*, New York: Oxford University Press, New York, 2016), 14–15.

118 Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment*, 15.

119 Lawrence, “Athens and Jerusalem,” 233–234.

120 Hockenbery, “Introduction,” 9.

121 Hockenbery, “Introduction,” 9.

trenches where Catholic neo-Scholastics were up in arms against Cartesian rationalists and German idealists, especially in the context of post-Enlightenment modern Catholicism.<sup>122</sup>

The staunch opposition of the founding generation of modern philosophy against any perceived intrusion of faith into the domain of philosophy begat a set of three theories against faith and the supernatural order. They are (1) idealism and atheistic humanism, with a strong tendency to submerge the idea of religion; (2) scientific positivism and pragmatism, with their inclination towards the reduction of reason to instrumental uses and the truncation of human moral involvement with the world; and (3) eclectic historicism and nihilism, which deny the possibility of absolute truth, leading ultimately to the collapse of the entire horizon of human meaning. All three sets of theories are illustrative of a crisis in three important areas of concern in the contemporary epoch: metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology.<sup>123</sup> In some sense, they may be described as a furtherance of the Enlightenment in disguise, with its pragmatic materialism that abhorred the miraculous, and also caused a deep rift between matter and spirit.<sup>124</sup> In its efforts to ward off the intrusion of faith into the domain of reason, modern philosophy regrettably strayed into its own dogmatism, whereby reason became less concerned with the speculative quest for the first principles. It rather busied itself with epistemology, understood as something “within our power” and “useful for life.” On display is the presumption of scientific dogmatism to unilaterally settle the question of faith and reason in favour of practical reason to the exclusion

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122 A. Dulles, “Can Philosophy be Christian? – The New State of the Question,” in D.R. Foster & J.W. Koterski (eds.), *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought*, pp. 3–21 (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 3–21; K. Schelkens, J. A. Dick, & J. Mettepenningen, *Aggiornamento? – Catholicism from Gregory XVI to Benedict XVI* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 41.

123 Quinn, “Infides et Unratio,” 189; also see the analysis in H. de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995).

124 G. Ashenden, ‘The problem with prioritising ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue at the Synod’, *Catholic Herald*, viewed 28 September 2023 from <https://catholicherald.co.uk/the-problem-with-prioritising-ecumenism-and-inter-faith-dialogue-at-the-synod/>.

of faith. This was done in the belief that reason has the means and the ability to settle everything.<sup>125</sup> It is the same perennial quarrel between faith and reason that emerged in another form, particularly as the rationalists sought to belittle the role of faith. Such presumption is reminiscent of the empiricism of Francis Bacon, John Locke, and David Hume and the likes of Voltaire and John Stuart Mill, with their epistemological insistence that true knowledge is essentially from sensory experience and empirically based.<sup>126</sup> The postmodern worldview that privileges the empirical sciences as progress and development owes a lot to empiricism. The same is equally true of the pragmatism and the begetting of contemporary philosophical naturalism which in turn is charmed by the success of the empirical sciences which according to Jon Jacobs, “has been one of the main motivations for thinkers to embrace naturalism”.<sup>127</sup>

## Conciliation of the Two Wings

To safeguard the deposit of faith and caution against the errors of rationalism and fideism, the Roman Magisterium has had to wade into the debate by taking a middle ground after some precipitations and pitfalls in its hostile and defensive rhetoric against modernity and certain innovations associated with it.<sup>128</sup> The popes, by the middle of the nineteenth century, had issued a series of documents that contained condemnations and admonitions regarding faith and reason. One such document is the *Syllabus of Errors*, issued on 8 December 1864 by Pope Pius IX (1846–1878). Numbers 1 to 7 of that encyclical condemned pantheism, naturalism, and absolute rationalism that disregarded divine revelation and even considered faith as injurious to the

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125 Quinn, “Infides et Unratio,” 191.

126 Richard Fumerton, Anthony M. Quinton, Baron Quinton and Brian Duignan. “Empiricism.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/empiricism>. Accessed 23 July 2024.

127 Jon Jacobs, “Naturalism” (2002). *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://iep.utm.edu/naturali/#:~:text=Naturalism%20is%20an%20approach%20to%20philosophical%20problems%20that,without%20a%20distinctively%20a%20priori%20project%20of%20theorizing>. Accessed 23 July 2024.

128 Schelkens, et al, *Aggiornamento*, 41.

perfection of human beings (*Syllabus of Errors* 1–7).<sup>129</sup> A crucial document that effectively set the parameters of Catholic thought on faith and reason is the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, produced by the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), entitled *Dei Filius*.<sup>130</sup> Against fideism, the council taught that “God can be known with certainty from created things by the natural light of human reason” (*Dei Filius* 2). In its disapproval of rationalism, it confessed faith:

to be a supernatural power, by which, by the aspiring and helping grace of God, we believe to be truths revealed by him, not because of the intrinsic truth of things seen by the light of natural reason, but because of the authority of God’s revealing mind who can neither deceive nor be deceived (*Dei Filius* 3).

The First Vatican Council provided a solid platform for the Church to navigate the vexatious problem of conciliation between faith and reason. It also set out the basis for further progress.<sup>131</sup> According to Karim Schelkens and others, Vatican I may be regarded as the “first broad and official attempt” by the Catholic Church to confront the post-Enlightenment era. Similarly, according to the same authors, neo-Thomism became its underpinning philosophical and theological *vade mecum* in confrontation with modernity.<sup>132</sup> Neo-Thomism received official papal backing in 1879 with Pope Leo XIII’s publication, *Aeterni Patris*.<sup>133</sup> Using it, he sought to influence Catholic intellectual life with the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. The Angelic Doctor was presented as a sure and true guide of Christian approach to

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129 Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors* (1864), viewed 28 September 2023 from <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/syllabus-of-errors-9048>.

130 Pius IX, “Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*” (1870), viewed 28 September 2023 from <https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/constitutio-dogmatica-dei-filius-24-aprilis-1870.html>.

131 Dulles, “Faith and Reason,” 208.

132 Schelkens, et al, *Aggiornamento*, 70–71.

133 Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris* (1879), viewed 28 September 2023 from [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_04081879\\_aeterni-patris.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html)

science and knowledge, and as a model for the integration of faith and reason.<sup>134</sup> Hence, the pope impressed it upon bishops "... to restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and to spread it far and wide for the defense and beauty of the Catholic faith, for the good of society, and the advantage of all the sciences" (*Aeterni Patris* 31). Following the example of Leo XIII, the popes of the first half of the twentieth century also issued a series of relevant documents on the same matter. For the repudiation of the agnostic and historicist theses of modernism, the Congregation of the Holy Office published *Lamentabili Sane* (3 July 1907) which was followed by the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* of 8 September 1907 by Pope Pius X (1903–1914). For his part, Pope Pius XI (1921–1939) condemned Marxist communism for its materialist determinism. Pope Pius XII (1939–1958) with his encyclical *Humani Generis* of 12 August 1950, explicitly cautioned against *nouvelle théologie* as one of the theses that threatened the foundations of Catholic doctrines. This was due to its tendency towards historicism and dogmatic relativism.<sup>135</sup> The churning out of those documents is not altogether surprising. In the affirmation of Dulles, "the role of reason in preparing for the assent of faith" remained a major preoccupation for the Catholic Church from Vatican I to the Pontificate of Pius XII.<sup>136</sup>

That concern appeared less acute at the convocation of Vatican II (1962–1965). However, the council reaffirmed the position of Vatican I on the distinction between the orders of faith and reason.<sup>137</sup> Without the ferocity of past contentions that worried his successors, it is natural to see Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio* of 14 September 1998,<sup>138</sup> as the culmination and crowning of Catholic thought on the themes of faith and reason. Therein, he writes: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (*Fides et Ratio* 1). In confirming that there cannot be

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134 Schelkens, et al, *Aggiornamento*, 70–71.

135 Dulles, "Faith and Reason," 194.

136 Dulles, "Faith and Reason," 194.

137 Dulles, "Faith and Reason," 194.

138 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (1998), viewed 5 May from [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html).

a conflict between faith and reason since both are gifts from God who cannot contradict himself, John Paul II insists that the Magisterium has the right and duty to condemn philosophical doctrines that are opposed to the truths of faith (*Fides et Ratio* 55, see footnote n. 72). A novelty in John Paul II's treatment of the issue is the introduction of a pneumatic dimension. He declares that philosophical and theological wisdom stand to be perfected with the infusion of wisdom by the Holy Spirit, which helps the human mind attain knowledge of divine realities (*Fides et Ratio* 44).<sup>139</sup> While lauding contemporary thinkers such as John Newman, Antonio Rosmini, Vladimir Soloviev, and Vladimir Lossky, he remains critical of scientism, pragmatism, and nihilism. This is because of their propensity to question the capacity of the human mind to transcend factual reality in their empirical preoccupations and denial of metaphysics (*Fides et Ratio* 74, 86–90).<sup>140</sup>

As for Pope Benedict XVI (2005–2013), the unity between faith and reason was undoubtedly one of his favourite topics. He returned to it throughout his pontificate, calling for reunification and cooperation of faith and reason. He disapproved of what he saw as the forceful separation of faith and reason, especially in the West where a false notion of reason in its exaggerated independence appears to have claimed the upper hand.<sup>141</sup> In 2007, exalting St. Thomas Aquinas, Benedict XVI cautioned that “when man limits his thoughts to only material objects, he closes himself to the great questions about life, himself and God.” He contended that the Christian faith does not limit human reason and human liberty. On the contrary, “faith supports reason and perfection; and reason, illuminated by faith, finds strength to raise itself to the knowledge of God”.<sup>142</sup> As far as he was concerned, the success of Christianity is explained by its extraordinary capacity to make a synthesis between reason, faith and life.<sup>143</sup> In his encyclical

139 Dulles, “Faith and Reason,” 202.

140 Dulles, “Faith and Reason,” 203–205.

141 D.M. Garland, “Faith, Reason, and Scripture: Greek Thought and Biblical Faith in Benedict XVI.” *Angelicum* 90.4 (2013): 799–820.

142 Benedict XVI, *Angelus* (28 January 2007), viewed 30 September 2023 from [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20070128.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20070128.html).

143 McDermott, ““Joseph Ratzinger on Faith and Reason,” 575.

on hope, *Spe Salvi*, he associates Christianity with reason. He identifies reason as the gift of God to human beings, insisting that “the victory of reason over unreason is also a goal of the Christian life” (*Spe Salvi* 23).<sup>144</sup> It means that genuine progress is not truly possible without reason’s openness to the saving forces of faith (*Spe Salvi* 23).

Pope Francis continues in the footsteps of his predecessors by highlighting the intrinsic connectivity between faith and reason as rooted in Catholic tradition. In his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013), he appropriates the thoughts of John Paul II in *Fide et Ratio*, to delineate how faith and reason support and strengthen each other (*Lumen Fidei* 32).<sup>145</sup> He recalls the experience of St. Augustine in whose life “we find a significant example of this process whereby reason, with its desire for truth and clarity, was integrated into the horizon of faith and thus gained new understanding” (*Lumen Fidei* 33). It follows that “the security of faith” shines a light on “the material world” and “also trusts its inherent order” by calling human beings “to an ever-widening path of harmony and understanding” (*Lumen Fidei* 34). Through the awakening of wonder, faith encourages research not to be “satisfied with its formulae” and “broadens the horizon of reason to shed great light on the world which discloses itself to scientific investigation” (*Lumen Fidei* 34). It was precisely from such perspective that the medieval schoolmen understood theology as a “science of faith” interpreted as “a participation in God’s knowledge of himself” (*Lumen Fidei* 36).

## Conclusion

The Catholic Church, at certain times, has had to intervene to preserve the delicate connection between faith and reason, against rationalism on one side of the pole, and fideism on the

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144 Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (2007), viewed 30 September 2023 from [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html).

145 Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (2013), viewed 1 October 2023 from [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130629\\_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html).

other side. The history of the marriage between faith and reason in Catholic intellectual tradition has often been fraught with tensions and extremes. As Timothy Sean Quinn perceptively surmises, the seemingly harmonious synthesis between faith and reason in Christian thought may be described as more of an idealisation than a historical reality.<sup>146</sup> The tension between faith and reason has existed since the emergence of the Christian faith.<sup>147</sup> For instance, Justin Martyr in his *Apology*, sought to find a link between Hellenism and Christianity, or between philosophy and Christianity by demonstrating its reasonableness. Tertullian (c. AD 155/165–220), for his part, rejected the appropriation of philosophical categories. His rejection of it is couched in his celebrated aphorism as elaborated in the seventh chapter of his treatise, *On Prescription against Heretics*: “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic? I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic or a dialectic Christianity. After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research.”<sup>148</sup>

That discord has often lurked in the background, as evident in the Bonaventure cum Aquinas disagreement on the rapprochement between faith and reason. This research has demonstrated that the conciliation of the two wings was achieved neither overnight nor by a stroke of the pen by ecclesiastical authorities. It was a process that evolved and matured with time throughout the Christian centuries. The Magisterium has had to wield the stick to reinforce a balance without necessarily truncating the liberty of research even though, in certain instances, the stick came down heavily on certain intellectuals who ventured to think outside the box. Despite the strong tendencies of intellectual currents that would prefer that Jerusalem and Athens had nothing in common, the middle ground has often claimed victory at the end of the day. In the absence of the acerbity of the past, contemporary popes energetically disapprove of philosophical categories and scientific theories that deify reason and ridicule faith. Instead of conflict, Catholic

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146 Quinn, “Infides et Unratio,” 190

147 C. Rosental, *Lessons from Aquinas – A Resolution of the Problem of Faith and Reason* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2011), 1.

148 Cited in Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 9.

## Philosophical Theologies in South Africa

intellectual tradition favours a coexistence and cooperation between faith and reason, theology and philosophy, Jerusalem and Athens, the Church and the Academy.