

The Dialogue Between Faith and Reason According to John Paul II and Thomas Aquinas

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Received: 13 Juli 2023 Revised: 29 September 2023 Published: 30 Oktober 2023

Abstract

Some individuals opt for unquestioning their faith, while others lean more toward reason and distance themselves from faith. The former extreme can lead to anarchic and uncontrolled religious militancy within society, whereas the latter extreme can result in the waning of faith. This study aims to address the placement of the dialogue between faith and reason. The qualitative method, utilizing in-depth literature, is employed for this investigation. The Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* and the writings of Thomas Aquinas were selected as key sources to delve into this topic. The results of this study indicate that discourses about the interaction between faith and reason do not always coexist, there are times when reason is sidelined and there are times when reason is upheld as the main truth. Being a good Christian requires constant effort to have a dialogue between faith and reason. Through this process, faith is enriched by reason, while reason is enlightened by the illuminating light of faith.

Keywords: faith; reason; theology; philosophy; dialogue

1. Introduction

One of my lecturers once encountered a situation in which, as a priest due to his profound study of philosophy, he pondered: “Is the Host that I offer during each consecration truly the Body of Christ? Is the chalice that I lift during each consecration truly the Blood of Christ?” This thought is intriguing as it signifies not a loss of faith, but rather an endeavor to deepen his faith by employing reason to seek answers to his inquiries. The truth of faith is often regarded as something inherently “bestowed” and should be embraced with “humility.” However, some factions argue that since the truth of faith is applicable only to certain groups, it cannot be deemed a universal

truth. These conditions prompted Pope John Paul II to promulgate the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*.¹

The profound significance of the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* is its identification of a parallel relationship between faith and reason, between theology and philosophy. This echoes and renews the First Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, which states, "But although faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind."² In the *drama of the separation of faith and reason*, John Paul II provides a historical picture of the beginning of the separation between theology and philosophy.³ Commencing with the emergence of the first universities in the late eleventh century in Europe, and continuing from the late Medieval period, the differences became sharper as a result of the excessive rationalism of some thinkers, creating a dualism between faith and reason and leading some to glorify faith and reject reason and vice versa.

The radical difference between those who stand for philosophy and those who hold fast to theology has had an impact on the development of Christian Revelation, to the point of denying this revelation. Some representatives of idealism sought in various ways to transform faith and its contents, even the mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, into dialectical structures which could be grasped by reason.⁴ The situation worsened when the crisis of rationalism which gave birth to nihilism took over logic and rationality. John Paul II says, "As a philosophy of nothingness, it has a certain attraction for people of our time. Its adherents claim that the search is an end in itself, without any hope or possibility of ever attaining the goal of truth."⁵ Departing from a situation that was not conducive to the development of theology and philosophy, he developed a way to reconcile theology and philosophy, faith and reason, so that they could stand in harmony according to their basic nature, without compromising their mutual autonomy. The parrhesia of faith must be matched by the boldness of reason.⁶

According to John Paul II, the realist philosophy needs faith to keep it open to its authentic quest, and the articulation of faith needs a realist philosophy committed to the discovery of objective truth.⁷ This condition is found in Thomas Aquinas' teaching; as John Paul II says, "Thomas recognized that nature, philosophy's proper concern, could contribute to the understanding of divine Revelation."⁸ This paper will give portions of Thomas Aquinas' thoughts

¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), <https://www.vatican.va/html>. This Encyclical Letter continues the esteemed Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris*, promulgated by Pope Leo XIII in August 1879. *Aeterni Patris*, aimed at revitalizing Christian philosophy, sought to address the looming challenges posed by the ascent of contemporary and secular philosophies. While, *Fides et Ratio* endeavors to foster a harmonious and balanced discourse between faith and reason, recognizing that faith without reason may lead to superstition, while reason without faith may pave the way for nihilism and relativism.

² Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (1870), Chap. 4. "On Faith and Reason," <https://inters.org/Vatican-Council-I-Dei-Filius>.

³ *Fides et Ratio*, 45-48.

⁴ *Fides et Ratio*, 46.

⁵ *Fides et Ratio*, 47.

⁶ *Fides et Ratio*, 48.

⁷ Montague Brown, *Reason, Revelation, Metaphysics: The Transcendental Analogies*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2021, 34.

⁸ *Fides et Ratio*, 43.

on faith and reason. To limit the scope of this paper, I will examine three things: (1) the approaches *Fides et Ratio* offer to reconcile faith and reason, (2) the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas about faith and reason, and (3) the interaction between theology and philosophy.

2. Research Methods

This research employs qualitative and comparative research methods through library research. The utilization of comparative research aims to offer a comprehensive perspective on the historical relationship between faith and reason. The investigation commences with an analysis of the approaches expounded in the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*. Subsequently, additional perspectives are presented based on Thomas Aquinas' treatise on faith and reason.

3. Research Results and Elaborations

3.1. The Encyclical's Approaches

The Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* provides a more contextual basis for the relationship between faith and reason, which John Paul II says are like “two wings on which the human spirit ascends to the contemplation of truth.”⁹ Faith and reason become starting points for any metaphysical quest – theological or philosophical. In other words, philosophy needs theology to illumine its path of inquiry, and theology needs philosophy to confirm the intelligibility and universal truth of its claims. In order to provide theoretical support for these kinds of assertions, John Paul II argues, theology needs philosophies that have a “metaphysical range,” that is to say, “philosophies capable of reinforcing the claims to perpetuity, universality, and meaning-invariance affirmed by the Catholic faith.”¹⁰

John Paul II believes that a journey that has led humanity down the centuries is a journey that has unfolded within the horizon of personal self-consciousness. It means “the more human beings know reality and the world, the more they know themselves in their uniqueness, with the question of the meaning of things and of their very existence becoming ever more pressing.”¹¹ That is why he quotes the admonition “know yourself” from Socrates as a testimony to a basic truth to be adopted as a minimal norm by those who seek the deeper meaning of their life. Many people stumble through life to the very edge of the abyss without knowing where they are going. This happens because those whose responsibility it is to give their guidance no longer look to the truth. In this point, reason through philosophy has the great responsibility of forming thought in the way of the truth. John Paul II describes two challenges to reason in contemporary philosophy: an excessive pessimism about the power of reason (skepticism, relativism, and agnosticism) and an emphasis on the limitations of human knowing. The former provides a challenge in the form of pessimism about the ability of reason to achieve the truth. The latter provides a challenge in the form of weakening and waning faith in the ability of reason to understand something.

⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, preface.

¹⁰ Thomas G. Guarino, *The Unchanging Truth of God? Crucial Philosophical Issues for Theology*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2022, 65.

¹¹ *Fides et Ratio*, 1.

3.1.1 *Credo ut Intellegam*

John Paul II describes the Scriptures as the surest place to see how faith and reason are compatible with each other. “Sacred Scripture,” he says, “indicates with remarkably clear cues how deeply related are the knowledge conferred by faith (*cognitio fidei*) and the knowledge conferred by reason (*scientia rationis*).”¹² He continues, “What is distinctive in the biblical text is the conviction that there is a profound and indissoluble unity between the knowledge of reason and the knowledge of faith... There is thus no reason for competition of any kind between reason and faith: each contains the other, and each has its own scope for action.”¹³ By emphasizing the parallels between faith and reason, John Paul II does not negate the uniqueness of faith and reason.

When explaining *credo ut intellegam*, John Paul II gives particular emphasis to the nature and necessity of faith in two ways: faith as the context for natural *scientia* and *consonant with* it, and faith as the context of natural *scientia* and *necessary for* it. Faith in the first place intervenes neither to abolish reason’s autonomy nor to reduce its scope for action, but solely to bring the human being to understand that in these events it is God who acts. Faith sharpens the inner eye, opening the mind to discover in the flux of events the working of Providence.¹⁴ In the second place, faith gives guidance for people to follow a “good way” to find truth through their reason. John Paul II cites the words of the Book of Proverbs: “The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps” (Prov. 16:9). This is to say that with the light of reason human beings can know which path to take, but they can follow that path to its end, quickly and unhindered, only if with a rightly tuned spirit they search for it within the horizon of faith.¹⁵

If human beings with their intelligence and reason fail to recognize God as the Creator of all, it is not because they lack the means to do so, but because their free will and their sinfulness place an impediment in the way.¹⁶ Therefore, the author of Proverbs identifies “the fear of God as the beginning of true knowledge” (Prov 1:7). Seen in this light, faith liberates reason insofar as it allows reason to attain correctly what it seeks to know and to place it within the ultimate order of things, in which everything acquires true meaning. In brief, human beings attain truth by way of reason because enlightened by faith, they discover the deeper meaning of all things and most especially of their own existence.¹⁷ John Paul II believes that by acquiring wisdom of faith, people acquire understanding. He shows the wisdom of the Cross not only as a challenge to our reason but also as a form of belief in the truth that seems “foolish and weak.” The preaching of the crucified and risen Christ will be the space where faith and reason may meet.

3.1.2 *Intellego ut Credam*

In Chapter III of *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II accentuates a journey in search of truth. He examines natural reason as a preparation for understanding the Gospel. He begins with the story of Paul in Athens, trying to find common ground with the Athenians (Acts 17:16-34). Paul the

¹² *Fides et Ratio*, 16.

¹³ *Fides et Ratio*, 16-17.

¹⁴ *Fides et Ratio*, 16.

¹⁵ *Fides et Ratio*, 16.

¹⁶ *Fides et Ratio*, 19.

¹⁷ *Fides et Ratio*, 20.

Apostle believes that “in the far reaches of the human heart there is a seed of desire and nostalgia for God.”¹⁸ There is therefore a path that the human being may choose to take, a path which begins with reason’s capacity to rise beyond what is contingent and set out towards the infinite. In many things and many ways, human beings show their longing to know the divine. For this reason, John Paul II argued, they should continue their journey in search of what is good not by turning in on themselves but by opening themselves to apprehend that truth even at levels that transcend the person.¹⁹

Fundamental questions posed to the human being are: “Does life have a meaning? Where is it going?”²⁰ No one can evade these questions, and everyone needs a certitude that allows one to anchor one’s life and give it direction. Every search for an answer will be a decisive moment of quest: will they find the truth or will they give up and believe something that is not the truth? Through the centuries, philosophers sought to discover and articulate such a truth. However, there are many people other than philosophers who try to find answers to these questions throughout their lives. Whatever they are looking for, they have the same goal: to find the ultimate truth.

The search for the ultimate truth does not always produce the expected results. The natural limitation of reason and the inconstancy of the heart can obscure and distort a person’s search.²¹ However, human beings should not live to be constrained by doubt, uncertainty, or deceit. They should believe that a journey to find the truth is a journey that will be guided by the True Truth [God], if they open their hearts to be guided. John Paul II says that human beings will not look for anything without a sense of confidence that one day they will find answers. Therefore, he describes three different modes of truth that differ according to the way human beings approach the truth. *First* are truths that depend upon immediate evidence or are confirmed by experimentation. This is the mode of truth proper to everyday life and to scientific research. *Second* is the philosophical truth that is attained by means of the speculative powers of the human intellect.²² *Third* is religious truth which is to some degree grounded in the truth revealed in Jesus Christ.

John Paul II defines the human being in two related ways. First, a human being is “the one who seeks truth.”²³ But, it is important that anyone who seeks the truth also lives and acts with faith. Therefore, second, the human being must also be defined as “the one who lives by belief.”²⁴ In this case, John Paul II shows that living in belief ultimately means living in trust in Jesus Christ. He uses the example of the martyrs as a group of people who fully entrusted themselves to another Person. Of the martyrs he says, “They know that they have found the truth about life in the encounter with Jesus Christ, and nothing and no one could ever take this certainty from them. Neither suffering nor violent death could ever lead them to abandon the truth which they have discovered in the encounter with Christ.”²⁵ Their search looks towards an ulterior truth that would

¹⁸ *Fides et Ratio*, 24.

¹⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, 25.

²⁰ *Fides et Ratio*, 26.

²¹ *Fides et Ratio*, 28.

²² John Paul II does not mean that philosophical truths belong only to philosophers. Human beings have abilities and philosophical views that guide their life.

²³ *Fides et Ratio*, 28.

²⁴ *Fides et Ratio*, 31.

²⁵ *Fides et Ratio*, 32.

explain the meaning of life. And it is therefore a search that can reach its end only in reaching the absolute. The highest and absolute form of truth given by the martyrs is their infinite love for the truth, namely Jesus Christ, the Truth.

3.2. The Relationship Between Faith and Reason

John Paul II describes some important moments in the encounter of faith and reason, starting with St. Paul, who entered into discussion with “certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers” (Acts 17:18). The Pope writes that “exegetical analysis of the discourse at the Areopagus has revealed repeated allusions to popular convictions especially of Stoic origin,” which is no surprise since the Apostle knew he had to relate his ideas to the thought of popular philosophers to be understood. “Indeed,” the Pope says, “one of the greatest efforts made by the philosophers of classical thought was to purify in mythological ways the conception that men had of God.”²⁶ Superstitions were recognized for what they were and religion was purified by rational analysis. It was on this basis that the Fathers of the Church entered into fruitful dialogue with ancient philosophy, which offered new ways of proclaiming and understanding Jesus Christ as the Son of God who is consubstantial to the Father.²⁷ In tracing Christianity’s adoption of philosophy, one should not forget how cautiously Christians regarded other elements of the cultural world of paganism, one example of which is Gnosticism.²⁸ It was easy to confuse philosophy as practical wisdom with a higher kind of knowledge. This is what Paul meant when he said, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8). Consequently, theology grew and developed as a separate discipline from philosophy.

The engagement of Christianity with philosophy was neither straightforward nor immediate. This encounter often turned into a dark period of purification of the mind. One of the pioneers of positive engagement with philosophical thinking was Saint Justin. Although he continued to hold Greek philosophy in high esteem after his conversion, Justin claimed with power and clarity that he had found in Christianity “the only sure and profitable philosophy.”²⁹ Throughout history, Christian thinkers were critical in adopting philosophical thought. Origen, one of the prominent figures of early Christian thought, adopted Platonic philosophy to shape his arguments and constructed an early form of Christian theology. As it developed, this new Christian thought made use of philosophy, but at the same time tended to distinguish itself clearly from philosophy.³⁰

²⁶ *Fides et Ratio*, 36.

²⁷ At that time Arius denied the consubstantiality of Jesus Christ with the Father. He made a logical syllogism of the central object of Christian belief. His major premise was “God is unoriginate”; his minor premise was “The Son is originate,” and therefore the conclusion was “the Son, therefore, is not only inferior but other in nature to God.” This teaching was condemned in the Council of Nicaea. (F.W. Green, *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith: The Creed of Nicaea, Three Epistles of Cyril, The Tome of Leo, The Chalcedonian Definition*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1950, 17).

²⁸ *Fides et Ratio*, 37.

²⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, 38. St. Justin wrote his *Dialogue with Tryphon*, a mysterious figure, an old man he met on the seashore, initially leads him into a crisis by showing him that it is impossible for the human being to satisfy his aspiration to the divine solely with his own forces. He then pointed out to him the ancient prophets as the people to turn to in order to find the way to God and “true philosophy.”

³⁰ *Fides et Ratio*, 39.

The Cappadocian Fathers, Dionysius the Areopagite, and especially St. Augustine tried to Christianize Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought.³¹ They wanted to revive the content of the faith, provide explanations that reach the deepest forms of speculation, and minimize errors while explaining the doctrines of the faith. They did much more. In fact, they succeeded in disclosing completely all that remained implicit and preliminary in the thinking of the great philosophers of antiquity.³² They fully welcomed reason which was open to the absolute, and they infused it with the richness drawn from Revelation. John Paul II emphasizes that this was not only a meeting of cultures, reason, and faith, but also it was a meeting of creature and Creator in the depths of human soul.³³

In Scholastic theology, the role of philosophically trained reason becomes even more conspicuous under the influence of Saint Anselm. He uses philosophy to prove the ontological argument for the existence of God. In the *Proslogion*, he emphasizes that human beings are drawn to know God more deeply; he underscores the fact that the intellect must seek that which it loves, and that the more it loves, the more it desires to know.³⁴ Therefore, faith always seeks understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). The fundamental harmony between the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of philosophy is once again confirmed. Faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason; and at the summit of its searching, reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents.³⁵

3.3. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

The particular problem of faith and reason in the Middle Ages was the result of the introduction of Aristotelian philosophy to the West in the early twelfth century.³⁶ How could the rediscovered Aristotelian philosophy be reconciled with the Christian faith? In response, Aquinas adopted an Aristotelian account of reason to explain and defend faith. John Paul II says, “In an age when Christian thinkers were rediscovering the treasures of ancient philosophy, and more particularly of Aristotle, Thomas had the great merit of giving pride of place to the harmony between faith and reason.”³⁷ Aquinas believed that both the light of reason and the light of faith come from God, and hence, there can be no contradiction between them.³⁸ Consequently, Aquinas had serene confidence that reason, rightly employed, would never be able to demonstrate that a claim made by faith is false.³⁹

³¹ *Fides et Ratio*, 40.

³² *Fides et Ratio*, 41.

³³ *Fides et Ratio*, 41.

³⁴ St. Anselm, *The Proslogion* in St. Anselm, *The Major Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.)

³⁵ *Fides et Ratio*, 42.

³⁶ Edward Grant, *The Nature of Natural Philosophy in the Late Middle Ages*. Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, Vol. 52, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 121.

³⁷ *Fides et Ratio*, 43.

³⁸ *Fides et Ratio*, 43; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I,7.

(<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/ContraGentiles.htm>)

³⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, I, q.2, a.3.

(<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/BoethiusDeTr.htm#12>)

3.3.1. Treatise On Faith

Aquinas examines seven dimensions of faith that help believers grow in their journey to know God better. *First*, the object of faith. Aquinas holds that faith has the formal aspect of the object, God himself, and is individualized by its subject. He says,

If we take faith as a habit, we can consider it in two ways. First on the part of the object, and thus there is one faith. Because the formal object of faith is the First Truth, by adhering to which we believe whatever is contained in the faith. Secondly, on the part of the subject, and thus faith is differentiated according as it is in various subjects. Now it is evident that faith, just as any other habit, takes its species from the formal aspect of its object, but is individualized by its subject. Hence if we take faith for the habit whereby we believe, it is one specifically but differs numerically according to its various subjects.⁴⁰

In other words, when believers profess their faith, they are not simply assenting to a list of propositions. Rather, those propositions are the way they speak about God insofar as he is knowable in himself. Thus, their belief depends on God speaking to them; the same truth could be expressed in different ways.

Second, the interior act of faith. Here Aquinas defends the argument of St. Augustine on the act of faith as “cogitating with assent.” He says,

This act ‘to believe,’ cleaves firmly to one side, in which respect belief has something in common with science and understanding; yet its knowledge does not attain the perfection of clear sight, wherein it agrees with doubt, suspicion, and opinion. Hence it is proper to the believer to think with assent: so that the act of believing is distinguished from all the other acts of the intellect, which are about the true or the false.⁴¹

This means that we will assume a proposition to be true even if we have not seen its truth because we respect the testimony and search for the truth of others. This does not mean relativizing the truth but rather placing trust in something that is beyond the ability of reason, where faith becomes a guide to misunderstanding and limited human knowledge.

Third, the exterior act of faith. Aquinas is concerned with the confession and profession of the faith, through the recitation of one or another creed. He agrees that confessing faith is an expression of what the believers believe. As he says,

Now confession of those things that are of faith is referred specifically as to its end, to that which concerns faith, according to 2 Corinthians 4:13: “Having the same spirit of faith . . . we believe, and therefore we speak also.” For the outward utterance is intended to signify the inward thought. Wherefore, just as the inward thought of matters of faith is properly an act of faith, so too is the outward confession of them.⁴²

He also convinces us that confession of faith in certain places and at certain times is important, as he poses,

Thus, then it is not necessary for salvation to confess one’s faith at all times and in all places, but in certain places and at certain times, when, namely, by omitting to do so, we

⁴⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. II, 2, q.4, a.6. from www.aquinas.cc.

⁴¹ *ST*. II. 2. q.2, art.1.

⁴² *ST*. II. 2. q.3, art.1.

would deprive God of due honor, or our neighbor of a service that we ought to render him: for instance, if a man, on being asked about his faith, were to remain silent, so as to make people believe either that he is without faith, or that the faith is false, or so as to turn others away from the faith; for in such cases as these, confession of faith is necessary for salvation.⁴³

Fourth, the virtue of faith. He says, “by the habit of virtue, judge aright of things concerning that virtue; and in this way, by the light of faith which God bestows on him, a man assents to matters of faith and not to those which are against faith.”⁴⁴ Faith enables human beings to participate in the divinity, and is thus the beginning of our divinization. *Fifth*, faith is a grace from God. Man will never achieve faith through his own efforts. He says,

Our actions are meritorious in so far as they proceed from the free-will moved with grace by God. Therefore every human act proceeding from the free-will, if it is referred to God, can be meritorious. Now the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God so that it is subject to the free-will in relation to God; and consequently, the act of faith can be meritorious.⁴⁵

Sixth, those who have faith. In faith, the believer receives not only new understanding of God but also a light of faith, by which his mind is illuminated and his understanding is strengthened. He says, “From the images either received from sense in the natural order, or divinely formed in the imagination, we have so much the more excellent intellectual knowledge, the stronger the intelligible light is in man; and thus through the revelation given by the images a fuller knowledge is received by the infusion of the divine light.”⁴⁶ *Seventh*, the cause of faith. Aquinas says that there are two things requisite for faith:

First, that the things which are of faith should be proposed to man: this is necessary in order that man believe anything explicitly. The second thing requisite for faith is the assent of the believer to the things which are proposed to him. Accordingly, as regards the first of these, faith must need to be from God. Because those things which are of faith surpass human reason, hence they do not come to man’s knowledge, unless God reveals them.⁴⁷

Aquinas assures us that we need to know what God wants us to assent to by faith, and after that, we need to assent to ways of expressing faith. In this case, Aquinas rejects the heresy of the Pelagians, according to which human free choice is the sole cause of our initial interior preparation for faith so that all we need from God is to be informed of what specifically we are to assent to. Rather, he asserts that God is the principal cause even of our preparedness to assent since in the assent of faith we are elevated “beyond our nature.”

3.3.2. Treatise on Reason

Aquinas explains reason in terms of the human capacity to reach the Divine. He recognizes that nature, philosophy’s proper concern, could contribute to the understanding of divine

⁴³ ST. II. 2. q.3, art.2.

⁴⁴ ST. II, q.2. art. 3, ad. 2.

⁴⁵ ST. II, q.2, art. 9.

⁴⁶ ST. I, q.12, art. 13, ad. 2.

⁴⁷ ST. II, q.6, a.1.

revelation. He argues that faith, therefore, has no fear of reason, but seeks it out and has trust in it. Just as grace builds on nature and brings it to fulfillment, so faith builds upon and perfects reason. Aquinas holds that the truths of faith are believable and credible. What makes them credible? He begins with *praeambula fidei*, saying that faith presupposes these truths and needs them to be proven by reason. Illumined by faith, reason is set free from the fragility and limitations deriving from the disobedience of sin and finds the strength required to rise to the knowledge of the Triune God.⁴⁸

Aquinas believes that human reason prepares our minds to receive faith. He says that “human reason in support of what we believe, may stand in a twofold relation to the will of the believer.”⁴⁹ He continues,

First, as preceding the act of the will; as, for instance, when a man either has not the will, or not a prompt will, to believe, unless he be moved by human reasons: and in this way human reason diminishes the merit of faith. For just as a man ought to perform acts of moral virtue, on account of the judgment of his reason, and not on account of a passion, so ought he to believe matters of faith, not on account of human reason, but on account of the Divine authority. Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to the will of the believer. For when a man’s will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof; and in this way human reason does not exclude the merit of faith but is a sign of greater merit.⁵⁰

Reason explains and develops the truths of faith and presents them in scientific form, that is philosophy. Finally, reason defends the truth revealed by God in Scripture. Paul VI says in his Apostolic Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae* (20 November 1974) that without doubt, Aquinas gave the new encounter of faith and reason, by reconciling the secularity of the world and the radicality of the Gospel, thus avoiding the unnatural tendency to negate the world and its values while at the same time keeping faith with the supreme and inexorable demands of the supernatural order.⁵¹

3.4. The Interaction Between Theology and Philosophy

The task of theology requires philosophical inquiry, following the two methodological principles: the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. With the first, theology appropriates the content of Revelation progressively elucidated in Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Church’s living Magisterium. With the second, theology seeks to respond through speculative inquiry to the specific demands of disciplined thought.⁵² Therefore, philosophy contributes specifically to theology in preparing for a correct *auditus fidei* with its study of the structure of knowledge and personal communication, especially the various forms and functions of language. On the other side, theology examines and adopts concepts drawn from a particular philosophical tradition. In this way, theologians are not only able to explain the mysteries of faith in the logical

⁴⁸ *Fides et Ratio*, 43.

⁴⁹ *ST. II-II*, q.2, a.10.

⁵⁰ *ST. II-II*, q.2, a.10.

⁵¹ *Fides et Ratio*, 43; Apostolic Letter *Lumen Ecclesia* (20 November 1974), 8.

⁵² *Fides et Ratio*, 65.

and conceptual structure of the propositions in which the Church's teaching is framed, but also, bring to light the salvific meaning of these propositions for the individual and for humanity.⁵³

In the past, there were historical facts that confirmed the value of philosophy's autonomy, which remained unimpaired when theology called upon it; but it showed as well the profound transformations that philosophy itself had to undergo. It was because of its noble and indispensable contribution that, from the Patristic period onwards, philosophy was called the *ancilla theologiae*.⁵⁴ The title was not intended to indicate philosophy's servile or purely functional role with regard to theology. Jacques Maritain, in an *Essay on Christian Philosophy*, commented on the adage *Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae*, saying,

That philosophy is placed in the service of theology when, and only when, in its own workings theology employs philosophy as an instrument of truth in order to establish conclusions which are not philosophic but theological. *Ancilla*, then, it may be, but not *serva*, for theology handles philosophy in accordance with its own proper laws; a Minister of state, yes, but a slave it can never be.⁵⁵

John Paul II is convinced that both philosophy and theology must relate to each other. Theology undertakes to expose what can be known about God through Revelation; therefore, theological knowledge is a process of progressive and collective reflection to enhance and clarify foundational knowledge. Philosophical knowledge, on the other hand, emerges from new philosophical insight, which does not change, but serves to ground and incorporate new knowledge. He also warns of the danger of doing theology and philosophy separately. He says,

Were theologians to refuse the help of philosophy, they would run the risk of doing philosophy unwittingly and locking themselves within thought structures poorly adapted to the understanding of faith. Were philosophers, for their part, to shun theology completely, they would be forced to master on their own the contents of the Christian faith, as has been the case with some modern philosophers. Either way, the grounding principles of autonomy that every science rightly wants to be guaranteed would be seriously threatened.⁵⁶

4. Conclusion

Challenges in the development of modern culture could become serious challenges to the Christian faith if those involved in them forget the help of reason in gaining deep and clear insights into the existing difficulties. Therefore, it is essential to embody philosophical wisdom and methodology to explore the revealed truth in the Christian faith and encompass the metaphysical dimension of truth in all philosophical endeavors.

This study has led to three conclusions. First, there will always be a tension between faith and reason; nevertheless, the most crucial aspect is the courage to purify each other to pursue a deeper understanding. Second, John Paul II presents the fundamental relationship between faith and reason as a complementary relationship while maintaining the unique nature of each. To avoid the trap and domination of reason, humans should not live in a state of doubt, uncertainty, or deceit.

⁵³ *Fides et Ratio*, 65.

⁵⁴ *Fides et Ratio*, 77.

⁵⁵ Jacques Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*. (<https://maritain.nd.edu/aeocp15.htm>.)

⁵⁶ *Fides et Ratio*, 77.

They must be convinced that the truths of reason are perfected by the light of faith. In this way, they discover the deeper meaning of everything, especially their own existence. Three, Aquinas demonstrates that faith and reason are inherently interconnected. He believed that if reason appeared incompatible with faith, it was not genuine reason, and what appeared to be faith was not faith, as it opposed true rationality. Thus, he formed a new synthesis, grounded in the belief that reason, illuminated by faith, would assist humans in living with a good conscience and developing moral virtues. This transformation shaped the relationship between reason and faith in the centuries to come.

Both Aquinas and John Paul II hold that to accept the harmony of reason and faith means to promote both the defense of human dignity and the proclamation of the goodness of God. There is no more urgent duty than to lead people to discover both their capacity to know the truth and their yearning for the ultimate and definitive meaning of life. Through the new understanding of philosophy, which is also true wisdom, people today will come to realize that their humanity is all the more affirmed the more they entrust themselves to their faith. Only within this horizon of truth will people understand their freedom in its fullness and their call to know and love God as the supreme realization of their true selves.

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