

REFLECTIONS ON THE RELATION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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The following pages present in summary fashion some of the fruits of a larger piece of research into the relationship between philosophy and theology, as conceived by St. Thomas, who in this matter has justly been considered the outstanding master.¹

In studying the relationship between theology and philosophy we are faced not with one problem but with two: (1) the relation between theology and philosophy as the handmaid of theology, and (2) the relation between theology and philosophy as a purely natural and autonomous wisdom. As St. Thomas never developed a metaphysic in independence of and separate from theology, let us limit the investigation in St. Thomas to the relationship between theology and philosophy as the handmaid of theology. The *Summa theologica* provides an excellent laboratory for this investigation. There we have theology: look at the questions in the *Summa* which treat of the Blessed Trinity. There too we have philosophy as the handmaid of theology: look at the five ways of proving the existence of God, and also at the treatise on the human soul which to a great extent forms the backbone of the course on the philosophy of human nature as given in Catholic colleges.

Are the five ways as presented in the *Summa* philosophy or are they theology? And then, what about the *Summa* itself? Does it present one science and is that one science theology? Or is it a neatly arranged mixture or combination of theology and philosophy?

ST. THOMAS' CONCEPT OF SACRA DOCTRINA

To understand the relation between theology and its handmaid in the *Summa*, we must study the first question of this work, where St. Thomas tells what he plans to do: "Et ut intentio nostra sub aliquibus certis limitibus comprehendatur, necessarium est primo investigare de

¹ Cf. G. Van Ackeren, *Sacra doctrina: The Subject of the First Question of the Summa theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1952).

ipsa doctrina, qualis sit et ad quae se extendat." Here St. Thomas designates the work he is to do as *sacra doctrina*, and he asks: (1) What sort of thing is it? (2) How far does it extend? He answers that *sacra doctrina* is first of all necessary for salvation; it is science, one science, at one and the same time both speculative and practical; it is the highest science, wisdom; its subject is God; it proceeds by argumentation; it makes use of metaphor; and the Sacred Scripture of this doctrine must be explained in its manifold sense.

This question of the *Summa* has been regarded for centuries as the *locus classicus* for theologians in investigating the nature of their science. There is little doubt that St. Thomas is here talking about theological science and that he regards it as one science. If philosophy does enter the unity of theology, what happens to the philosophy which has been taken into theology? Does it lose its specific identity as philosophy? Does it become theology?

Without knowing what theology is in itself it is difficult to know what its relation is to other sciences. So the question arises: What is theology according to St. Thomas? For many scholars who have approached the *Summa*, that question has meant the same as the question: What does St. Thomas mean by *sacra doctrina*?

In the first article St. Thomas says: *sacra doctrina* is necessary for salvation. Does St. Thomas mean to say that theology is necessary for salvation? Thus, immediately, we begin to search for the meaning of the term, *sacra doctrina*. This term designates the subject of investigation in the first question of the *Summa*, and if we would understand what Thomas says in this question, we must make sure we know what subject he is discussing. Otherwise we may understand many things that are true in what he says, but we may miss the point he is trying to make. For example, in reading the statement that *sacra doctrina* makes use of metaphor, I can understand this to mean that Scripture makes use of metaphor (which is true), or that the habit of sacred theology makes use of metaphor (which is also true); and yet St. Thomas is not making either one of these statements.

In the course of the centuries long commentaries have been written by various authors on the meaning of this term in St. Thomas, and they disagree among themselves. This disagreement is but an indication of a deeper disagreement among theologians about the notion of the-

ology itself. To understand what notion St. Thomas has of theology, we must know what he means by *sacra doctrina*.

After reading and analyzing nearly all the commentaries on the first question of the *Summa*, I began to investigate the meaning of *doctrina* in the writings of St. Thomas,² in the hope that perhaps a better knowledge of his use of the term, *doctrina*, would throw light on the meaning of the term *sacra doctrina*. *Doctrina* as used by Thomas has many meanings. Its formal meaning, however, is the action of a teacher imparting new knowledge to his disciple. Thus, it does not mean the knowledge in the teacher nor the knowledge acquired by the student, but the action, the active process, of the teacher in communicating new knowledge to his disciple. What is essential to the notion of *doctrina* is the discourse of reason which is induced in the disciple by the teacher, who functions as a cause of the new knowledge acquired by the disciple. This discourse of reason in the disciple has its beginning, its principle, in pre-existing knowledge and its term in new knowledge acquired.

St. Thomas often compares the notion of teaching to that of discovery. Discovery is a natural action, the natural discourse in the student by which he acquires new knowledge by himself. Teaching (*doctrina*) is an artificial action; it is the rational discourse induced artificially (*per modum artis*) by the teacher in the student. We might illustrate this by a comparison. Discovery, like natural respiration, is a natural action, an operation by which unaided nature achieves certain effects. Teaching (*doctrina*), like artificial respiration, is an artificial action, an operation by which nature as internal cause and art as external minister of nature achieve the same effects as unaided nature does by discovery.

If artificial respiration consisted formally in a certain movement of the hands on the back of the body and not in the vital movement induced in the patient, a person could be said to be giving artificial respiration whether his patient were a man or a mummy. Likewise, if teaching consisted formally in the verbal discourse of a teacher and not in the rational discourse induced in his disciple, a man could be said to be teaching even if all his disciples were asleep before him. We know, however, that in such a situation he is not teaching anybody

² Cf. *ibid.*, chap. 2, for a more detailed treatment of this subject.

anything; he is simply not teaching. Hence, teaching cannot consist formally in the verbal discourse of the teacher. It is an artificial action proceeding from a teacher but received in his disciple.

If we should try to speak of the reality signified by the word *doctrina* in St. Thomas in terms of its causes, we would say that its formal cause is the rational discourse in the disciple as induced by the teacher; its material cause, the disciple, or more precisely, the intellect of the disciple; its final cause, the new knowledge which is the term of the rational discourse in the disciple. The teacher is the ministerial cause and belongs to the order of efficient causality; his words are the instrumental causes by which he administers the action of teaching. The light of intellect in the disciple is also an instrumental cause in the production of the new knowledge in the disciple.

Who is the principal efficient cause of the operation? There is no doubt that God is the primary efficient cause. St. Thomas indicates that God is even the principal efficient cause of teaching, at least in regard to any supernatural knowledge.

If *doctrina* in its formal sense means the action of teaching, it may be that *sacra doctrina* means the divine action of sacred teaching.³ In the prologue to the *Summa* we find St. Thomas saying that it belongs to his function as a teacher of Catholic truth to instruct beginners in those things which pertain to the Christian religion. What he intends to present is Catholic truth. Moreover, his work is to be carried out in a manner adapted to the minds of those whom he is teaching. Here we notice that St. Thomas considers his work from four points of view: that of the teacher, his disciples, the matter taught, and the method of his teaching. These four considerations correspond to the four causes that contribute, as we have seen, to the intelligibility of the notion of *doctrina*.

The very first article concludes to the necessity of *sacra doctrina*, that is, to the necessity of some instruction in divine things through revelation. The words which St. Thomas uses to express the instruction which is necessary signify action; they are verbs, *notum facere*, *instruere*. Men must receive this action; they must be instructed. *Sacra doctrina*, then, must mean the action of making known, of instructing men in divine things. It is an action to which man is subject, and to

³ Cf. *ibid.*, chap. 3.

which he must submit himself in order to be saved. This action is received gradually in the recipient, not perfectly in the beginning. Only with the progress of teaching will the disciple be moved to more perfect knowledge. But regardless of whether this teaching is to be received with greater or less perfection, man must submit himself to this action if he is to have the knowledge necessary for directing himself to his supernatural end.

As we pass on to the second article of the *Summa*, a dilemma seems to arise which has bothered commentators for centuries. In the first article St. Thomas has said that *sacra doctrina* is necessary for salvation; in the second article he has said that *sacra doctrina* is science. The dilemma is this: if *sacra doctrina* is necessary for salvation, it cannot be understood to mean the science of theology; if *sacra doctrina* is understood to mean the science of theology, then it cannot be said to be necessary for salvation. A few commentators have tried to solve the dilemma by saying that *sacra doctrina* in this question is an ambiguous term meaning revelation or faith in the first article and the science of theology in succeeding articles. Other commentators have rejected this solution because it would imply that St. Thomas is inconsistent with himself in beginning to treat one subject in the question and then straightway, without any warning, abandoning his original subject for another.

What St. Thomas says is this: "in this way *sacra doctrina* is science because it proceeds from principles. . . ." Here it is difficult to determine whether the term, "science," is being used in the sense of a habit of science, or the generation or operation of science (an action, *scientia in fieri*), or the conclusions of science.

If St. Thomas does not change the subject of his investigation in the articles of the first question, we should conclude that *sacra doctrina* is science in the sense that any teaching activity which communicates scientific knowledge can be called science. It is science in the process of its formation, *scientia in fieri*; for in Thomas' formal use of the term, *doctrina*, *doctrina est generatio scientiae*.

In his other works Thomas frequently uses the word *scientia* in the sense of the generation or operation of science, the movement of reason from principle to conclusion. We should note that the treatment of the nature of science itself in Aristotle occurs in the *Posterior Analytics*,

wherein is studied the third operation of intellect in regard to its proper function, namely rational discourse, movement of reason from one thing known to another. Moreover, in St. Thomas' *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, where he comments on the unity and diversity of science, he considers science from three points of view: (1) science, as rational movement from principles to conclusions (the teaching of scientific knowledge is science in this sense); (2) science, as the effect of demonstration, i.e., science as a body of conclusions; (3) the habit of science. Moreover, in the commentary *In Boethii de trinitate*, question 6, where St. Thomas discusses the modes of speculative science, it is frequently impossible to understand the word *scientia* in any other sense than the generation of science, science in the process of its formation.

Further analysis of pertinent texts in Thomas reveals no difficulty whatever in understanding the term science as predicated of *sacra doctrina* to mean the generation of science, the rational operation by which scientific knowledge is acquired. Thus sacred teaching (*sacra doctrina*) may be called science in so far as this instruction proceeds from principles to conclusions.

THE SUBJECT OF SACRA DOCTRINA

It is in the seventh article, where St. Thomas discusses the subject of *sacra doctrina*, that we finally find the key to the meaning of the term, "science," in the first question of the *Summa*. Here St. Thomas begins by stating simply that God is the subject of this science. For the subject of science is related to science as object is related to habit or potency. The object of a potency or habit is properly assigned as the object under that aspect according to which all things are related to the habit or potency; for example, man and stone are related to the potency of sight in so far as they are colored; hence, that which is colored is the proper object of sight. In *sacra doctrina* all things are treated under the aspect of God, either because they are God Himself, or because they are ordered to God as to their principle and end. Hence, God is the subject of this science.

In seeking to discover what St. Thomas means by saying that the subject of science is related to science as object to potency or habit,

the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* will be helpful.⁴ There St. Thomas discusses the unity and diversity of science from two points of view: (1) science as an operation, a movement, of reason from principle to term; (2) science as a habit of intellect. The unity of science as a movement of reason from principle to conclusion is to be judged from the unity of the subject in which the movement terminates; for the term of any science is the knowledge of its subject. The unity of a habit of science, however, is to be judged from the unity of its object.

These two points of view from which a science can be regarded have given rise to much confusion concerning the terms subject and object of science. There was no confusion in St. Thomas' mind on this point. The subject of a science is the term of the movement of science. For the process of any science is a certain movement of reason passing from one thing known to another. As every movement proceeds from some principle and ends at some term, so in the operation of science. The unity of any movement is to be judged principally from the unity of its term; the reason why this line (——) is one is that it has one term. Likewise the reason why the operation of any science is one is that it has one term. But since the term of any operation of science is the subject which the science is about, the unity of the operation of any science is to be judged from the unity of its subject.

Diversity in operations of science, however, is not to be judged from their subjects alone, but primarily from their principles. For, as was said above, the progress of science consists in a certain movement of reason advancing from one thing to another. Although the unity of movement is to be judged primarily from its term, the reason for the diversity of movements is found primarily in their principles. The reason why two lines which terminate at the same point are not one is not found in their term considered by itself, because that point is materially common to both. The reason is found rather in the terms as they are related to their principles, and hence primarily in their principles; also, however, in their terms if formally considered, i.e., as related to their principles.

Likewise the diversity of the operations of science is not to be judged from their subjects considered merely in themselves; for diverse opera-

⁴ Cf. especially *In I Post. anal.*, chap. 28, lect. 41 (ed. Leon., I, 305-7).

tions may have the same material subject. But diversity in operations of science must be judged primarily from their principles; also, however, from their subjects if formally considered, i.e., in relation to their principles.

Hence, if an operation of science has one kind of principles, it will have one kind of subject. If it has one kind of subject, it will have one kind of principles. For the unity of the subject and its principles correspond to each other.

We are now able to state clearly the terms of the proportion set up by St. Thomas when he says that science is related to its subject as potency or habit to their respective objects. The subject of the operation of science stands in relation to the operation of science as object to potency or habit. Since St. Thomas is speaking of the formal object in relation to potency or habit, as is clear from his example of the potency of sight, the corresponding term in his proportion must be the formal subject of science. Otherwise the proportion could have no valid meaning.

This proportion is valid because, just as the formal object is the principle of unity of potency or habit, so the formal subject is the principle of unity in the operation of science. Actually the formal subject of the operation of a science is objectively identical with the formal object of the habit of the same science. As principle of unity for the operation of science this *scibile* is called subject; as principle of unity for the habit of science it is called object.

St. Thomas specifies the formal subject of *sacra doctrina* as God. He gives little explanation except to say that all other things besides God are considered in this science only in so far as they are related to God as to their principle and end. He has said the same thing before, in the third article. Moreover, in that article he also specified the formal object of this habit of science, which, as we have indicated, is objectively identical with the formal subject of the operation of the science. For this he invented the term *revelabile*. This term has undergone a variety of interpretations. The trend today is away from the interpretation which John of St. Thomas brought into prominence, namely, the *revelabile* is whatever is scientifically deducible from the truths of faith, toward an acceptance of Fr. Congar's interpretation, namely, "whatever is susceptible of appearing to the intellect under the light

of divine revelation.”⁵ A suggestion from Gilson enables us to be even more precise.⁶ Anything is revealable (*revelabile*) in so far as it pertains to salvation. Truths of exclusively natural import are not revealable, since they do not pertain to salvation. However, all natural truths in so far as they are ordainable to the end of man are revealable, since under this aspect they pertain to salvation. Hence it is not surprising to find in the *Summa* many truths accessible to natural reason. They are there, however, only because of their reference to the economy of salvation. Such truths are not theological in themselves but in their having an order to God as the principle and end of our salvation. Speaking in terms of the habit of the science of theology, St. Thomas finds its unity in the unity of its formal object, the *revelabile*.

We may wonder why he does not mention the term *revelabile* again when speaking of the formal subject of *sacra doctrina*. Actually there is no need to do so. To specify the formal subject of *sacra doctrina* as God is in itself sufficient, because this operation of science is the only one accessible to man in his present state which has God for its subject. The doctrine of natural theology, the only science with which *sacra doctrina* could be confused, does not have God for its subject. Rather, God is the first and final cause of its subject; hence God is considered in natural theology *non tamquam subiectum scientiae sed tamquam principium subiecti*.⁷ So, in saying that God is the subject of *sacra doctrina*, St. Thomas has said enough.

The purpose of the foregoing remarks about the different senses of science in St. Thomas and their corresponding principles of unity was to show that, when St. Thomas begins to speak of *sacra doctrina* as science, he is not necessarily taking for his subject anything other than the subject with which he began his investigation, namely, the action of a teacher communicating knowledge pertaining to salvation, an action which consists in the rational discourse induced by the teacher in the disciple which terminates in knowledge pertaining to salvation.

A more thorough analysis of the whole first question would show

⁵ Cf. Yves Congar's Introduction to my *Sacra doctrina*: "tout ce qui est susceptible d'apparaître à l'esprit sous la lumière de la révélation divine" (p. 17).

⁶ Cf. *Le thomisme* (5th ed.; Paris, J. Vrin, 1947), p. 23 ff.; also *Sacra doctrina*, p. 111.

⁷ Cf. *In Boethii de trinitate*, q. 5, a. 4 c (ed. Wyser, p. 48); also *Sacra doctrina*, p. 111.

that this activity of sacred teaching is the subject of the whole first question. Although such an analysis is impossible here, we should nevertheless listen to St. Thomas' own explanation of how this sacred instruction proceeds, how it accomplishes its results only in a gradual manner, terminating first in faith on the part of the disciple, who is then led on to science and wisdom.

Although man has been given a participation of divine goodness by reason of which his ultimate beatitude consists in a certain supernatural vision of God, this gift did not change the manner of his acquisition of knowledge. Man cannot attain the vision of God except by way of being a disciple learning from God his teacher, according to the words of St. John: "Omnis qui audivit a Patre, et didicit, venit ad me." However, he partakes of this discipline, not all at once, but gradually, according to the condition of his nature. Every disciple of this kind must first believe in order to arrive at perfect knowledge, just as even Aristotle said that one who is learning must believe. Hence in order that man arrive at the perfect vision of beatitude, it is required that he first believe God as a disciple believes his master.⁸

St. Thomas further explains why this instruction first terminates in faith on the part of the disciple:

... no subject is reduced from the state of imperfection to perfection except through the action of a perfect agent. But this action is not at once perfectly received by an imperfect subject in the beginning. First it is received imperfectly, and afterwards perfectly, and so finally the subject arrives at perfection. This can be seen in all natural things which acquire some perfection gradually in the course of time. Likewise we see it in all human accomplishment, and especially in the disciplines.

For in the beginning man is imperfect in knowledge. To arrive at the perfection of science he needs some teacher who will instruct him and lead him to the perfection of science. This the teacher could not do, unless he himself possessed the science in its perfection, comprehending the reasons for the truths that come under his science. In the beginning of his teaching, however, he does not immediately give his disciple the reasons for subtle truths which he is going to teach, because then already in the beginning the disciple would know the science perfectly. Rather he presents some truths for which the disciple does not know the reasons, when he is first being instructed. He will know them later when he has acquired the science perfectly.

And therefore it is said that one who is learning must believe. For otherwise he would not be able to arrive at the perfection of science, unless he believed in the beginning the truths presented; he could not at that time understand the reasons for them.

⁸ *Sum. theol.*, II-II, q. 2, a. 3 c.

Now the ultimate perfection to which man is ordered consists in the perfect knowledge of God. Man cannot attain this knowledge except by the operation and instruction of God who has a perfect knowledge of Himself. However, man is not immediately capable of a perfect knowledge of God from the beginning. He must receive by way of receiving some truths on faith, and through them he is led, by the hand, as it were, to the goal of perfect knowledge.

Some of these truths are such that it is impossible for man in this life to know them perfectly; they entirely exceed the power of human reason. These we must believe so long as we are on earth, but we shall know them perfectly in heaven.

Others, however, are such that we can know them perfectly in this life; for example, those truths about God which can be demonstrated. Yet in the beginning we must believe even these.⁹

St. Thomas also speaks of other truths which can be deduced from those truths which we must believe so long as we are on earth. And these also the disciple can be led to understand (*scire*). Although this knowledge is imperfect in so far as its principles are not self-evident, nevertheless it merits to bear the name "science" in so far as it is a knowledge of conclusions which are seen to follow from principles and is in continuity with God's own knowledge through principles which are accepted on faith.¹⁰

The ultimate end of this teaching is the contemplation of divine truth itself in heaven, where the imperfection of our knowledge will be resolved in the perfect knowledge which God has of Himself. The end which this teaching can achieve here on earth is a contemplation of divine truth, that sort of understanding of God in Himself and all things in their relation to Him as principle and end, in so far as this is possible for reason enlightened by faith.¹¹ Thus sacred teaching is the generation of the habit of supernatural wisdom acquired, a wisdom which is science *par excellence*.¹²

Hence this instruction begins in imparting knowledge which is accepted on faith, leads on to science and wisdom, and has its ultimate term and resolution in the vision of God Himself.

If, then, we understand *sacra doctrina* as the action of a teacher communicating knowledge pertaining to salvation, we can see how it is necessary to salvation and also how it is science. The dilemma which

⁹ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10 c. ¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, q. 14, a. 9, ad 3m.

¹¹ Cf. *In I Sent.*, prol., q. 1, a. 3, sol. 1.

¹² Cf. *Sum. theol.*, I-II, q. 57, a. 2, ad 1m et ad 2m.

seemed insurmountable disappears. For the same action of sacred teaching which is necessary for salvation in so far as it terminates in faith on the part of the disciple (*fides ex auditu*), is also science in so far as it proceeds from the principles of faith to conclusions, a procedure which involves a more perfect reception of the action of sacred teaching.

Such an understanding of the term *sacra doctrina* not only gives unity to the whole first question, but also indicates the kind of unity which we should expect to find in the *Summa*.

The question that a reader may already be formulating in his mind is how this operation of sacred teaching can be one operation and at the same time have such different functions: it communicates a knowledge which is faith; it proceeds as a science from principles to conclusions; it is a science which treats of such diverse things as God and creatures; it is both a speculative and a practical science: it makes use of metaphor as well as metaphysics; it even explains the various senses of Scripture.

If we keep looking for a unity of one single and simple habit of science as the sole habit from which all the knowledge of the *Summa* proceeds, we are deceived. The solution to the problem of the unity of sacred teaching (*sacra doctrina*) has been suggested to us by St. Thomas and is found first in the fact that sacred teaching is an operation of wisdom, and secondly in the fact that its unity is a unity of operation and not a unity of essence.

First, let us try to see the meaning of wisdom.¹⁸ Most of us understand wisdom as the source of order: *sapientis est ordinare*. But this is a property of wisdom, something which follows necessarily from that sort of knowledge which is wisdom. Hence, if any knowledge is also a wisdom, there must be in that knowledge a certain community or universality which is the meeting place of other sciences and from which other knowledges have their order.

For example, there is a whole genus of knowable things—things which exist in the kind of matter which in some way falls under the senses and in which motion takes place. Corresponding to this order of things there are the natural sciences, such as physics, chemistry,

¹⁸ This summary on wisdom is drawn, for the most part, from B. J. Muller-Thym, "Recapturing Natural Wisdom," *Modern Schoolman*, XVII (May, 1940), 64-68.

physiology, etc. Each of these deals with one kind of being and with one kind of intelligibility; that is, each is about one kind of subject and has its own principles. But if we consider the various natural sciences, one among them, physics (as Aristotle understood the term), is more universal, because it seeks out the causes common to all things which exist in matter observable by sense, i.e., things which exist as bodies. And all the other natural sciences suppose the kind of matter which the physicist deals with. Physics is the meeting place of all natural sciences. Its very universality or community is the reason why it stands at the head of those other autonomous sciences and is the source of their order.

And thus to a certain extent physics takes to itself the name of wisdom. In fact, we call it the philosophy of nature. Yet it does not completely live up to the name of wisdom, because it is neither absolutely common to all being, nor is it coextensive with the order of natural sciences; there are some problems in the natural sciences with which natural philosophy does not deal. Nevertheless it is a wisdom, but a particular wisdom.

There is another genus of knowable things—the things studied in mathematical sciences. Of these sciences, too, there is one which stands at their head, because it studies the absolutely common conditions of existence for such things. That science is generally referred to as number-theory. It is a wisdom because it is the meeting place of all mathematical sciences and is that in which and from which they have their order. But as it is neither absolutely common nor coextensive with the order of mathematical things, it too is a particular wisdom.

In that science which studies being as being (*ens in quantum ens*) will be found principles and causes which are absolutely common. Metaphysics is a science, like chemistry and biology, because it demonstrates conclusions from its principles. But although every science studies being, metaphysics, by devoting itself to questions about the very act of being, is at once the meeting place of all sciences, and by reason of its absolute community it is wisdom, simple and unqualified. Thus metaphysics stands at the head of all human sciences and is that in which all other sciences find their order. As the *finis omnium scientiarum*, it is the source of their order, since *ordo est ex fine*.

SACRED THEOLOGY: THE HIGHEST WISDOM

But there is yet a higher wisdom, a wisdom which is supernatural, yet through faith can be acquired by man. For, as St. Thomas says, all who have true knowledge have set down as the end of human life the contemplation of God. This contemplation, however, is twofold. One is by means of principles derived from creatures, and this contemplation is imperfect by nature. This contemplation Aristotle sets down as contemplative happiness. It is natural wisdom, the wisdom of metaphysics—the highest part of which is natural theology—and to this contemplation all philosophical knowledge tends.

There is another way of contemplating God, contemplation in which God is seen immediately in His essence. This is perfect contemplation. The saints enjoy it in heaven and it is in some imperfect way possible for man here below, presupposing faith.¹⁴ When we speak of this contemplation as imperfect, we mean that it is imperfect not by nature but by reason of the conditions in which it is found here on earth.

Since whatever leads to an end must be proportioned to that end, man must be led to this contemplation of God here below by knowledge not originating from creatures but inspired by the divine light. And this knowledge has its origin in the revelation of God's own knowledge of Himself; it is sacred theology.

Sacred theology as the highest of sciences which can be acquired by man is not only in command of all other sciences but also makes use of them as its vassals. Something similar takes place in the arts, whenever the end of one art is subordinated to the end of another. For example, the art of pharmacy, which is the preparation of drugs, is subordinated to the end of the art of medicine, which is health. Hence the doctor gives prescriptions to the pharmacist and makes use of the drugs prepared. In a similar way, since the end of all philosophy is below the end of sacred theology and ordered to it, theology is in command of all the philosophical sciences and uses them as its servants.¹⁵ Thus the lower sciences are ordered to the higher. Particular natural wisdoms are ordered to the highest natural wisdom. And the highest natural wisdom is ordered to the supernatural wisdom of sacred theology.

¹⁴ Cf. *In I Sent.*, prol., q. 1, a. 1, sol.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

This order among sciences does not deprive the lower sciences of their autonomy. For, although the principles which are common to all sciences, e.g., the principle of contradiction, sufficient reason, causality, etc., are proper to metaphysics, the lower sciences are nevertheless capable of discovering their own proper principles and elaborating conclusions from these principles in independence of the higher sciences. A lower science does not subject a higher science to its scrutiny. A biologist cannot judge the work of the natural philosopher on the basis of the principles of biology. If a lower science uses any knowledge from a higher science, it simply accepts it without questioning its validity. A higher science which is a wisdom, however, not only can make use of knowledge derived from its inferiors, but is also capable of subjecting their work to the scrutiny of its own principles.

Here a difference must be noted between wisdoms, especially between the wisdom of metaphysics and the wisdom of sacred theology.¹⁶ Metaphysics, which is concerned with questions about the very act of being, considers all being whatsoever, but *tantum in communi in quantum sunt entia*. Hence metaphysics is not capable, in virtue of its principles, of descending to the consideration of questions about particular kinds of being, such as moral questions or questions proper to the natural philosopher. For the *ratio entis*, from which the metaphysician must derive his conclusions, is diversified in diverse beings and therefore is unable to give rise to a specialized knowledge of things. A metaphysician may tell a moral philosopher or a biologist that his work violates the principle of sufficient reason, but as metaphysician he cannot do or re-do the work of either. His principles simply do not carry him into the particular aspects of being with which the moral philosopher or biologist deal.

The theologian, however, by reason of the light of his science, is capable of descending into questions handled in the lower sciences,¹⁷ because his concern is with all things not merely in so far as they are being, but in so far as they are revealable, i.e., in their reference to the economy of salvation. To take but one example, we are aware how many questions of natural philosophy have reference to salvation, e.g., the body-soul relationship, the relationship between the human faculties, the question of evolution, etc.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, prol., q. 1, a. 2, sol., et ad 1m.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

Now, in so far as these questions fall within the scope of the theologian, he has a right to the tools of any or all sciences needed to handle them. We must recall here that the theologian is interested not merely in proving that something is true; this can frequently be done from the authority of God's revelation. His main concern is in understanding how and why a truth pertains to salvation and how it is true. And for this *intellectus*, it happens more often than not, revealed principles alone are insufficient. Not that revealed principles in themselves are insufficient; it is rather because of the rational mode of man's knowledge which is not changed by the fact that he has been placed in the supernatural order. Owing to the weakness of his own intellectual light even when illumined by faith, the theologian needs the help of other sciences in achieving his goal, the *intellectus fidei*. And in using these sciences for his own purpose, he is doing theological work; the intellectual operation is an operation of theology. Thus, as Gilson remarks, "a proposition can be theological even though none of its premises is *de fide*. The whole of philosophy can be made to become theology, if the theologian uses it, under the formal reason of the *revelabilia*, in view of the final cause of theological speculation, and in its light."¹⁸

But how is it possible for philosophy, when used by the theologian, to become theology? Does metaphysics, for example, lose its essence when used by the theologian? Is philosophy "absorbed" by theology? The solution to this problem involves not merely the question of theology as the highest wisdom but the unity of the operation of wisdom. We have already seen that St. Thomas' use of the term *sacra doctrina* to designate the work he does in the *Summa* leads us to look for the unity of this work not in the essence of one simple habit but in a unity of operation.

An operation may be one even though it involves the exercise of many powers or habits or virtues.¹⁹ For example, in adult perception, we use some of the external senses, the internal senses, the intellect, the will, and perhaps one or other appetitive sense in one and the same undivided operation. What is the relationship between the acts of the

¹⁸ Quoted from a letter to the author, dated Dec. 8, 1952.

¹⁹ For a fuller explanation of the unity of human operation cf. G. P. Klubertanz, S.J., "The Unity of Human Activity," *Modern Schoolman*, XXVII (Jan., 1950), 75-103.

various powers in such a human operation? St. Thomas explains this relationship when he treats of the human act:

In the genus of natural things there is a whole composed of matter and form, as man, of body and soul; and he is one natural being, though he has a multitude of parts. So also in human actions, the act of the inferior power is as matter to the act of the superior power which moves it. For this is the way in which the act of the first mover is as form to the act of the instrument. And so it is clear that the imperium and the commanded act are one human act, just as any whole is one, though it is many according to its parts.²⁰

The human act, therefore, is a whole, a composite. It is as much a unity in the order of operation as man is a unity in the order of essence. The act of the lower power and the act of the higher power form one composite, one whole, which has real parts. These parts are related to each other as matter to form. The act of the lower power is as matter in the sense that it is something to be ordered or directed. The act of the higher power is as form in the sense that it directs or orders the act of the lower power.

In treating the question whether the human operation of Christ is one or many, St. Thomas discusses the various types of operation which a human nature can have, distinguishing the merely organic and vegetative level of operation, the sensitive level in so far as it acts independently of reason, and the properly human act.

. . . when the lower agent acts by its own form, then there is one operation of the lower agent and another of the higher. But when the lower agent acts only in so far as it is moved by the higher, then there is one identical operation of the higher and lower agent. Therefore, in any merely human being, the operation on the elemental level and the operation of the vegetative soul is not the same as the operation of the will, which is properly human. Likewise, the operation of the sensitive soul in so far as it is not moved by reason is different; but in so far as it is moved by reason, the operation of the sensitive and rational parts are the same. . . .²¹

Thus the human act is found to be composite, a whole, having real parts which are related to each other as matter to form. The act of the lower power is as matter because it is orderable to an end beyond its own specifying object; the act of the higher power is as form because

²⁰ *Sum. theol.*, I-II, q. 17, a. 4 c. ²¹ *Ibid.*, III, q. 19, a. 2 c.

it orders and directs the lower to an end beyond its own object. And since in the order of operation the end is form and therefore principle of unity, the human act is one because the acts of the lower powers are directed to one end.

We notice, too, that this doctrine of the unity of the human act is expressed by St. Thomas in terms of instrumentality. The instrument precisely as instrument—that is, in so far as it does not act in virtue of its own form but according as it is moved—does not have an operation apart from the operation of the principal cause. The operation of the instrument and of the principal cause are but one composite operation.

Now something similar takes place in the operation of theological wisdom. The theologian, in either teaching or pursuing his science, uses many of the lower sciences. The operation of wisdom, however, even though it makes use of other sciences, is one operation. The lower sciences are as matter because they are ordered or directed to an end beyond their proper object. The imperium of theological wisdom is as form because it orders or directs these acts of the lower sciences to the end of theological speculation. There is real unity of operation. For the end to which the whole operation is directed is one, and is as form and principle of unity of the composite reality.

Hence, just as the human act may involve the exercise of many powers and still remain one act, so the act of theological wisdom may involve the use of many lower knowledges and still remain one. In the human act the lower powers are not destroyed nor are they absorbed by the higher. The powers themselves remain distinct, but their acts form a real composite unity of order. So, too, in the act of theological wisdom the lower sciences are neither destroyed nor absorbed, but these knowledges under the direction of theology form a real composite unity in the operation of wisdom.

“In the acts of the soul an act which is essentially of one power or habit receives a form and a species from a higher power according as the lower is ordered by the higher. For if someone performs an act of bravery for the love of God, that act is indeed materially one of bravery, but formally one of charity.”²² Likewise, if a theologian demonstrates the existence of God with a view to the end of theological speculation and in its light, as Thomas does, e.g., in his fourth way, his

²² *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 13, a. 1 c.

act is materially one of metaphysics but formally one of theology. It is in this way that the whole of philosophy *qua* philosophy can be made to become theology, if the theologian uses it under the formal reason of the *revelabilia*, in view of the final cause of theological speculation, and in its light.

So far we have indicated how the acts of the lower sciences are related to the imperium of theology. They stand in the relationship of matter to form, of instrument to principal cause. Now what is the relation between the habits of these sciences and theology? In a classical text St. Thomas gives us a lead:

... if anyone makes the proper consideration, these three virtues (*sapientia, intellectus, scientia*) are not equally distinct from each other, but in a certain order; as happens in potential wholes of which one part is more perfect than another, as the rational soul is more perfect than the sensitive and the sensitive more perfect than the vegetative. For it is in this way that science depends on understanding (*intellectus*) as on the higher, and both depend on wisdom as on the highest which contains under itself both understanding and science, passing judgment on the conclusions of the sciences and on their principles.²³

St. Thomas would say, then, in view of the text cited, that the lower habits of science used in theology are related to theology as parts of a potential whole. The first suggestion of theology as a potential whole that I have been able to find outside of the text cited above is found in Yves Congar's article, "Théologie," in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*. Other Dominican authors have since taken to the idea. But a good deal of work remains to be done before even the notion of a potential whole is clarified.

The greatest confusion in the matter seems to arise from the misuse of Thomas' example of the human soul as a potential whole. This has led one author to define a potential whole as a "totality . . . [which] is in each part according to its whole essence but not according to its entire power."²⁴ This, I presume, is a translation of Thomas' description: "Totum autem potentiale adest cuilibet parti secundum se, et secundum aliquid virtutis, sed non secundum perfectam. . . ."²⁵ How-

²³ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 57, a. 2, ad 2m.

²⁴ T. C. Donlan, O.P., *Theology and Education* (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1952), p. 12.

²⁵ *In I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 4, a. 2, ad 1m.

ever, Thomas continues: “. . . immo secundum perfectam virtutem adest tantum supremæ potentiae; et ideo prædicatur quidem sed non adeo proprie sicut totum universale.”²⁶

Of the human soul we can predicate any one of its potential parts because the soul is a simple, non-composite reality. We can say, for example, that the soul is sensitive soul or the soul is vegetative soul. For the whole essence is in each of its parts. The habits and virtues, however, as potential wholes are not simple but complex realities. For example, the habit of justice has many really distinct parts. Although I can say that an act of obedience is an act of justice, I cannot say with equal truth that the habit from which this act of obedience immediately proceeds is the habit of justice. I can say, however, that the human soul from which sensation proceeds is rational soul, but only because the human soul is a simple reality.

We must maintain the distinction of parts in potential wholes which are not simple. The habits of intellect remain distinct realities even when they become parts of a potential whole. The habit of sacred theology does not enter the intrinsic constitution of any of the lower sciences. Theology is not part of metaphysics any more than charity is part of justice. Charity, for example, although it be the form of all the virtues, is not part of the essence of the virtues it informs. It is an extrinsic form which specifies only in so far as it directs the *acts* of the other virtues as means-ends to its own ultimate end. Justice is justice even though it never be informed by charity. Likewise, metaphysics is metaphysics even though it be never used by a theologian. The habit of sacred theology is not intrinsic to the essence of any of its potential parts. The potential whole is not necessarily intrinsic to the essence of its parts, but, as St. Thomas says, “adest cuilibet parti.”²⁷ If we confuse the meaning of potential whole, we may end up by saying that the habit of sacred theology is identical with the habit of metaphysics, which is entirely false.

We have seen that in the operation of theological wisdom the acts of the lower sciences are united in a composite whole, whose real parts

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cf. *In III Sent.*, d. 33, q. 3, a. 1, sol. 1: “potentialis vero pars neque prædicationem totius recipit, neque in constitutionem ipsius oportet quod veniat, sed aliquid de potentia totius participat. . . .”

are related as matter to form, as instrument to principal cause. We have also indicated the relationship suggested by St. Thomas of the habits of the lower sciences to the habit of sacred theology. They are potential parts of theology, in so far as they are subject to theology.

Hence the wisdom of sacred theology is capable of ordering and directing the lower sciences in the pursuit of its own ultimate end precisely because, having as its formal reason the *revelabile*, it is the science of God *qua* supernatural end of man and all things. It aims to communicate, in so far as possible for human intelligence enlightened by faith, a vision of God Himself as the supernatural end and therefore the beginning of man and all things whatsoever, a vision of world order which sees all things in their proper relationship to the Trinity Itself. Because sacred teaching is a science of the ultimate end, it is the only science which is at one and the same time speculative and practical. For not only all things to be known participate in this order of finality, but also all things to be done. This vision which, as habitual, is the habit of sacred theology is the only habit which man can acquire that is capable of integrating and ordering all his activity whether speculative or practical; and thus it is the soul not only of all Christian thought but of all apostolic endeavor. If Catholic education fails even to aim at the communication of this habitual vision of world order, it thereby ceases to be Catholic education. To exclude theology from the Catholic university is like depriving the body of its soul.

THEOLOGY IN A CATHOLIC COLLEGE

In the light of this brief and very inadequate study of St. Thomas' notion of *sacra doctrina* and its relation to philosophy and the other sciences, what conclusions may, in a tentative way, be drawn about the place and function of theology in a Catholic university?

First of all, if the habit of supernatural wisdom called sacred theology is the only communicable habit of mind capable of integrating all Christian thought and activity in a vision of world order, then it seems beyond question that a Catholic institution of higher learning which professes to train Christian leaders must make its primary aim the communication of such an habitual outlook and attitude toward the universe of God and men. Without this vision of world order the restoration of all things in Christ is impossible,

Pope Pius XI, in his Encyclical on Christian Education, has said that "the true Christian, the product of Christian education, is the supernatural man who thinks, judges, and acts constantly in accordance with right reason illumined by the supernatural light of the examples and teaching of Christ." If we translate this ideal into terms of habits of mind and will, we find no habit of mind or will capable of achieving this integration other than the wisdom of sacred theology. True, not all students are capable of participating in this wisdom in the same degree. Many unlettered persons may be more supernaturally wise than some who have spent their lives in the pursuit of this wisdom. But this is due to special graces, especially the *gift* of divine wisdom which God gives immediately to the soul without the intervening instrument of a human teacher.

Secondly, it is clear that the wisdom of sacred theology is the only adequate principle of integration in a Catholic university. True, the wisdoms of metaphysics, number theory, philosophy of nature, and even literature, especially the classics, are principles of integration, but in hierarchical fashion headed by theology.

One thing in particular should be noted here: for any principle to operate, it must first exist. The integrating principle of sacred theology does not exist in the curriculum, nor in the library, nor in the textbook, nor in the buildings on the campus. The only place where it can exist is in the teacher. Hence, the importance of teachers in a Catholic university who are well advanced in theological wisdom. This does not mean that every teacher must be a theologian, nor even the majority of them. Even non-Catholic teachers can do wonderful work in our universities if they confine themselves to their subject. For theology does not enter the intrinsic constitution of any natural knowledge. The orientation of knowledges and arts may be left to the Catholic philosopher and theologian, who either in his classes or in a series of orientation lectures to the student body can show how the various knowledges fit into the vision of world order. However, an integrated faculty is much more important in any college than the curriculum itself. Hence the importance of faculty meetings and discussion; perhaps even classes in theology could be given for the faculty.

Thirdly, if we intend to teach theology in our universities, we can-

not be content with presenting just an assortment of supernatural truths which seem to have an immediate bearing on the lives of the students. We should teach *theology*, aiming not merely at knowledge of and consent to what the Church obliges us to believe, but at understanding and contemplation which is the fountainhead of Christian perfection and sound Catholic action.

Theology, which is essentially the science of world order in a supernatural universe, should find a reflection of its order and totality in the theology curriculum. Hence the curriculum should not consist merely in a number of uninterrelated courses having no definite prerequisites or sequence. In this regard two fundamental ideas which emerge from a study of Thomas' teaching in the *Summa* seem extremely important. First, the order intrinsic to theology itself is the order of teaching theology; and second, the tools and techniques of communication must be suited to the capacity of the student.

Those who would make the seminary course the model of theology for the college emphasize the first principle. Others who reject the seminary course as a model and would point theology for the laity exclusively to the intelligent and efficacious participation in the Mystical Christ, emphasize the second principle. It seems rather that both principles demand equal emphasis.

The seminary course is not and should not be *the* model for the college theology course, not because the order of theology itself need be different in the college, but because college students are different from seminarians. It would seem that, instead of violating the order intrinsic to theology, we should rather apply the principle of adaptation within that order. Even the penny catechism begins with a study of one God in three Persons. But in the explanation of these truths the catechist tries to adapt his teaching to the capacity of his pupils. Moreover, even at this initial stage of Christian education the teacher should have the hope of teaching his pupils the rudimentary beginnings of thinking, judging, and acting constantly in accord with right reason illumined by the supernatural light of the examples and teaching of Christ. These are the very first tottering steps toward the habit of acquired supernatural wisdom. In college as well as in the seminary this habit should be consciously pursued, but here too in accordance

with the level of intellectual development of the student, and with emphasis on the particular spheres in which the student will lead his intellectual, social, and moral life.

Fourthly, although the philosophical sciences are important, very important, in the development of this habit of wisdom, it would not be correct to conclude that we can in no way develop this habit without previous formal training in philosophy. True, the philosophical sciences are potential parts of theology. But the principal part of a potential whole is not entirely dependent on any of its parts. The power of sight, for example, is related to human intelligence as one of its potential parts, but even a blind man can develop his intellect. It would be much easier, however, if he had access to the power of sight as well.

Likewise in theology, it is much easier to capture as well as to communicate the vision of world order if we have access to the philosophical sciences. Yet even without them the task is not impossible. Augustine, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria were not great metaphysicians, but they were good theologians and saints. It seems, therefore, that we should try to communicate the wisdom of theology in accordance with the capacity of the Catholic high-school graduate we encounter in college, and use those tools and techniques of human reason which will enable him to capture, in so far as he can, the vision of world order. If we do not wish to call this teaching by the name of theology, we probably shall have to look a long time for any theologian of rank who would be on our side.