INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY
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Webster’s dictionary defines theology as “The science of God or of religion; the science which treats of the existence, character, and attributes of God, his laws and government, the doctrines we are to believe, and the duties we are to practice... the science of Christian faith and life.” Saint Augustine in the fifth-century defined theology as “Rational discussion respecting the deity.” A. H. Strong, the great twentieth century theologian said that theology is “the Science of God and of the relations between God and the universe.” Charles Ryrie, the popular dispensationalist theologian, says theology is “thinking about God and expressing those thoughts in some way.” (Basic Theology [Wheaton, IL: 1986], 9). Millard Erickson, a modern Baptist theologian says that theology is simply “the study or science of God.” (Christian Theology [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001], 22).

Most simply put, theology is the study of God. It comes from the word *theos* which is Greek for “God,” and -*ology* which is from the Greek word *logos* meaning
“word.” Most literally then the word theology means “words about God” or “the study of God.” If one were to use the term generically, it functions much like “philosophy” or “worldview.” People often use the word this way in secular venues. Many times it is used very specifically, speaking only about God. This is called “theology proper.” But generally speaking theology is a belief system that is built upon intellectually and emotionally held commitments concerning God and man.

Speaking about theology in times past was not thought of taboo as it is today. It used to be called “the queen of the sciences.” It was understood to be the first among pursuits of knowledge, since it was believed that all other pursuits were vitally linked to its dictates. Morality was dictated by it. Philosophy was called its handmaiden. Why was it held in such high esteem then? Because theology itself provides a foundation for your philosophy and worldview, which in turn sets inclinations for your heart, actions, and decisions in all situations. Everything is affected by your theology. For example, if your theology denies the existence of God, then your morality is going to be affected since its basis is not a personal and timeless being. With a theology of atheism (i.e. belief that there is no God) morals become relative to the time and situation. In this case, what is true for one generation may not be true for another. If your theology denies the sinfulness of man, then a bloody sacrificial death to atone for sin becomes repulsive, since, according to your theology, men don’t need to have their sin atoned for. If your theology is polytheistic (i.e. belief in many gods), then you will constantly be trying to figure out which god or gods you should encounter, pray to, and/or appease in order to make their situation “right.” The implications are endless.

In short, theology is a set of intellectual and emotional commitments, justified or not, about God and man which dictate ones beliefs and actions. Neither the word itself is irrelevant, nor the concepts which it seeks to articulate. It is the first pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.

1. Definition of Theology

The word “theology” comes from two Greek words, theos meaning ‘God’ and logos meaning ‘the word about (or the study of) God’ as He is revealed in the Scriptures. Even though our attempts to understand an infinite God will fall short because of our limited understanding (Romans 11:33-36), God has given us the Bible for us to study and understand who He is. Some people try to avoid theology because they believe it is divisive. However, understanding God as He is revealed is uniting and a beneficial thing (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Without theology, our relationship with God would be limited. Practically, theology is reading the Bible to discover what God has said about Himself. Theology teaches us that God is the Creator, Sustainer and Judge of all things; that He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all things; that He is, as Moses learned (Exodus 3:14), the great “I AM”, the free, purposeful, self-sufficient, almighty, self-existing, self-determining Being and not an impersonal cosmic force. Through theology we learn that God has revealed Himself to humanity through His Son Jesus Christ and that through His blood we have eternal life.

In our own lives, we must understand theology in order to live a life of love and obedience. How can we love God if we don’t know Him? And how can we obey Him if we don’t love Him? As we get to know God better through reading His Word, our lives are immeasurably enriched by the comfort and hope that He imparts to those who know, love, obey Him. Inversely, poor theology and a superficial or inaccurate understanding of God will make our lives worse instead of bringing the comfort and hope we long for. Without theology, we have no direction about who God is and what He does, and we waste our lives and lose our souls.

2. Sources of Christian Theology

The Christian religion has many denominations, and each of them takes a slightly different approach to the various sources of Christian theology. However, although they may give the sources differing weights, most Christian groups accept at least four: scripture, tradition, reason and experience. For example, even Protestant groups that tend to place relatively little emphasis on tradition still accept the biblical canon, which was established through early Christian tradition.

Scripture

The Christian Bible is made up of books that were written over the course of more than 1,000 years. It contains numerous genres, including poetry, letters and history. Its first section, the Old Testament, is mostly shared with the Jewish people, while its second half, the
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New Testament, tells the story of Jesus and the early Christian community. The Catholic Bible also includes the Apocrypha, which is an additional 14 books in the Old Testament that are not included in the Protestant and Jewish Bibles. Some Christians believe that every word in the Bible is literal truth while others see it as literature that provides a valuable moral foundation.

Scripture as the primary source provides the normative factor. Indeed God’s purpose in inspiring the written word was to provide us with an objective, normative standard for faith and practice. Now it is possible to overemphasize the Bible. This happens when one devalues the other factors and becomes a legalist. But regardless of that danger, the Bible has to have the primary place in theology. Otherwise theology becomes completely relative. That is, when the Bible is not primary, the element that controls the results of theology is removed. Biblical ideas are left to compete in the marketplace of ideas with no special authority. They have no claim of superiority over other ideas, because one idea is as good as another. This has become the view of many in our culture today.

Tradition

Initially, “tradition” referred to the list of beliefs that were passed down from Jesus to his followers and on to their followers until they reached Christians today. However, today the concept has expanded to include approaches that guide different Christian groups’ interpretations of the Bible. Some Christians, particularly Catholics and Orthodox, place heavy emphasis on tradition, while others are concerned that it can give people a distorted view of the Bible. However, almost all Christian groups use tradition to at least a limited extent. Tradition, on the other hand, represents the results of the grappling of previous generations with Scripture and experience. Thus tradition is the historical and cultural element in the process. No one is free from tradition. Even groups that have made conscious attempts to break from certain traditions have their beliefs and ways of functioning that make up their tradition. Everyone lives in a given culture at a given time in history. Every group and individual has a particular history. There is no escape from tradition.

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them “their own position of teaching authority.” Thus, the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time. Hence, the apostles, in handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to maintain the traditions which they had learned either by word of mouth or by letter....

The Catechism adds: This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, “the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.” “The sayings of the Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and her prayer.”

Roman Catholic Tradition then is the apostles’ preaching, example, and institutions passed down through their successor bishops and expressed in the life of the Church. This Tradition is said to be living in that the Holy Spirit maintains the continuity of the unwritten, apostolic Gospel in the Church, and provides growth in insight into the Tradition through its expression in the lives and worship of the faithful.

Catholic theologian Avery Dulles explains: It had become common, especially since the Counter-Reformation, to think of tradition objectively, as a collection of truths communicated to the apostles and preserved in the church. Without rejecting this notion, contemporary Catholicism shows a deeper awareness that tradition cannot be adequately understood as a body of explicit teaching. Many doctrines are contained in a merely implicit way in tradition considered as an activity or process whereby faith is expressed and transmitted.

So, Tradition is not simply a body of truths, but is a “process whereby faith is expressed and transmitted.” The expression of the Roman Catholic faith collectively by the faithful continually elucidates the Tradition in such a way that previously unseen elements of its content become un obscured. In this way, insight into the Tradition grows.

The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the contemplation and study
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of believers who ponder these things in their hearts. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth. Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her. McCarthy comments about this growth in insight, Since what the Church does reflects what the Church believes, the universal practice of the Church is also considered a reliable witness to the Roman Catholic faith.

**Reason**

Although some people - both Christians and non-Christians - consider reason to be the opposite of faith, many Christians emphasize that it is an essential aspect of their theological approach. They often use reason, like tradition, to help determine how to understand the Bible. However, most Christians do not believe that reason is infallible. Therefore, there will be times that Scripture and tradition conflict with reason, and in those cases most Christians will argue that reason is wrong.

Reason is the processing, or coordinating, factor. We have brains; and we think about what God has revealed, if not consciously, then unconsciously. Of course those of us who do theology must consciously think our way through what God has revealed in Scripture, what we have received from tradition, and what we have experienced.

**Experience**

Most Christians also consider experience, which includes people’s five senses as well as their thoughts and feelings, to be an important source of theological understanding. Although people’s understanding of their experience is subjective, what happens to them is still real, and so Christianity must be able to explain it. However, experience should be used in combination with the other sources of Christian theology, rather than as its only source.

If the Bible is the objective, normative factor, experience is the subjective, personal element. Experience varies from individual to individual. And of course, those who subordinate the other factors to experience become a law unto themselves. Their experience becomes the model for all. Truth is what they perceive it to be.

**The Sensus Fidei**

“The *sensus fidei* refers to the instinctive sensitivity and discrimination which the members of the Church possess in matters of faith.”

The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office: It spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips praising his name. The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when “from the bishops to the last of the faithful” they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals. By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*magisterium*), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The People unfailingly adhere to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life (LG 12).

**Magisterium**

The sacred deposit, Scripture and Tradition, were entrusted by the apostles to the whole Church. The responsibility for interpreting the sacred deposit, however, lies with the *Magisterium* - the bishops headed by the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. The bishops and the Pope are formally considered to be the apostles’ successors.

This sacred synod [Vatican II], following in the steps of the First Vatican Council, teaches and declares with it that Jesus Christ, the eternal pastor, set up the holy Church by entrusting the apostles with their mission as he himself had been sent by the Father (cf. Jn. 20:21). He willed that their successors, the bishops namely, should be the shepherds in his Church until the end of the world. In order that the episcopate itself, however, might be one and undivided he put Peter at the head of the other apostles, and in him he set up a lasting and visible source and foundation of the unity both of faith and communion. This teaching concerning the institution, the permanence, the nature and import of the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and his infallible teaching office, the sacred synod proposes anew to be firmly believed.
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by all the faithful, and, proceeding undeviatingly with this same undertaking, it proposes to proclaim publicly and enunciate clearly the doctrine concerning bishops, successors of the apostles, who together with Peter’s successor, the Vicar of Christ and the visible head of the whole Church, direct the house of the living God (LG, 18).

That divine mission [the spread of the Gospel], which was committed by Christ to the apostles, is destined to last until the end of the world (cf. Mt. 28:20), since the Gospel, which they were charged to hand on, is, for the Church, the principle of all its life for all time. For that very reason the apostles were careful to appoint successors in this hierarchically constituted society (LG 20). In order to fulfill such exalted functions [those ecclesiastical functions of the bishops], the apostles were endowed by Christ with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit coming from them (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:4; Jn. 20:22-23), and, by the imposition of hands (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6-7), they passed on to their auxiliaries the gift of the Spirit, which is transmitted down to our day through Episcopal consecration (LG 21). By virtue of this apostolic succession, “because she is founded on the apostles,” and “continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles...through their successors.” (CCC 857).

...the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith (DV 10).

This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. Avery Dulles adds: since revelation is public, the church requires a way of publicly proclaiming the doctrine that expresses or safeguards that revelation. Catholics find evidence in the New Testament that Christ commissioned Peter and the apostles with the responsibility of overseeing the life and witness of the church. The pope and the other bishops are regarded as successors, respectively, of Peter and the other apostles. One of their most important tasks is to keep the church in the truth of the Gospel by proclaiming sound doctrine and condemning doctrinal deviations. In this function the hierarchy constitutes the church’s official teaching body, or magisterium.

The Pope, a word which comes from a Latin term meaning father, is the Bishop of Rome and the head of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Boettner, at his coronation, the Pope is triple crowned as the Father of Princes and Kings, Ruler of the World, and Vicar of our Savior Jesus Christ. Later documents (i.e. Vatican II) emphasize the Pope’s title as Vicar of Christ and his supreme ecclesiastical authority. ...the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, namely, and as pastor of the entire Church, has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.

The Lord made Peter alone the rock-foundation and the holder of the keys of the Church (cf. Mt. 16:18-19), and constituted him shepherd of his whole flock (cf. Jn. 21:15 ff.). It is clear, however, that the office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter (Mt. 16:19), was also assigned to the college of the apostles united to its head (Mt. 18:18; 28:16-20). According to the Catechism, The “power of the keys” designates authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate after his Resurrection: “Feed my sheep.” The power to “bind and loose” connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church.

Liturgy

Liturgy is another most important source of theology. Two key patristic phrases are consistently employed to defend the reunion of liturgy and theology with a foundational emphasis on liturgy. The primary dictum, set forth in the fifth century by St. Prosper of Aquitaine (and source of endless debate), asserts that the law of prayer establishes the law of belief. The second phrase, promulgated much earlier in the second century by St. Irenaeus (probably the oldest use of the principle), suggests that one’s theological opinion should be established by the eucharist. Liturgical experience for the Fathers was thus both a source and a canon for their theological thought. In other words, the hermeneutical foundation for patristic theology was
located in the Church’s liturgical tradition, the *lex orandi*, described as “the epiphany and the experience of the Church of herself and of her faith.”

Theology seeks to understand and interpret the tradition of the Church through the liturgy. However, to do so requires theology to turn to the liturgy not only as the source of theology but also as its object. Schmemann’s “Orthodox hermeneutic” thus places the liturgy as its object strictly as a means to the ultimate end of discovering the liturgy as the source of theology, as the “real ‘key’” of both the liturgy and tradition. If liturgy must be the source of theology, then theology must first show how liturgy can be this source. How does liturgy function as source? This is the fundamental hermeneutic question.

An example of theology demonstrating how the liturgical tradition functioned as a source in the early Church by observing that during the early centuries of the Church a “theologian” would have been a bishop with two primary duties: 1) in his church presiding over his community’s liturgical celebration, i.e. preaching and administering the Eucharist; and 2) in his community caring for the members of his flock. A theologian in the early church was primarily a pastoral liturgist.

The bishop and his flock regularly encountered the Word of God in the homily and in the eucharist. Theology was simply a description of that encounter. Discerning the dynamic *lex orandi-lex credendi* [“law of prayer-law of belief”] is not simply a question of asserting that what the Church believes is already somehow expressed in liturgical texts and rites, but more fundamentally that what the Church believes is an articulation of what is accomplished by God in the liturgy and experienced and first known there by the Church.

This is an important distinction that is a clear echo in two ways. First, theology is not so much an explanation of God as it is a finite attempt to find the right words to describe the faith of the Church, i.e. what one experiences in its liturgical gathering. In other words, the *lex credendi* of the Church that is established by the *lex orandi* of the Church is a feeble attempt to articulate what God’s work has done in the lives of His people within the context of the Church gathered around the eucharistic altar. And second, the *lex orandi*-liturgical texts and rites—cannot merely be plumbed for *lex credendi* as theological doctrine. This is why many did not place much hope in the movement of a “return to the Fathers.” They worried that such a movement would merely be a return to texts instead of an acquisition of the mind of the Fathers. When disconnected from the liturgical and ecclesial experience that is grounded in apostolic tradition, texts can be interpreted in any number of ways to prove any number of biases.

The emergence of Christian dogma is also from liturgy. When early Christians first began developing an intellectual foundation for the one true faith, Driscoll suggests that the need for such an enterprise was initially only recognized intuitively: *there was a massive “something” on which thinking rested, to which efforts at articulation continually referred. This “something” was the absolutely new reality entrusted to and experienced by the Apostles. Indeed, it was a Presence, a Somebody, a Somebody filled with divine glory: Jesus Christ risen from the dead.*

Their descriptions and defenses of the one true faith, then, did not primarily appeal to liturgical texts or biblical sources such as the gospel accounts of Christ or the Pauline epistles, though the scriptures (i.e. the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms) certainly were foundational for them. Instead, they consistently turned to “a Somebody”, the ongoing presence of the crucified and risen Christ. And His presence was particularly perceptible, or rather, based on Christ’s promises, most certainly available in two places: baptism and Eucharist.

Both baptism and Eucharist were commanded by the Lord. And both commands included a promise. When Christ sent His disciples out to all the nations to make disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Trinity, he promised them He would always be with them to the end of the age (Mt. 28:20). When He commanded them to take the cup and the bread, He promised them His presence once again through His body and blood (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). As commands of Christ, baptism and eucharist thus became the two key components of the *lex orandi* from the very beginning. And “On the foundation of what God accomplishes in these celebrations and from the community’s experience of them there developed a history of thought, a history of theology. Some ways of understanding things eventually became normative themselves: *lex credendi.*”
3. Divisions of Theology

In what follows we will discuss the “branches” of (Christian) theology.

**Biblical Theology:** All Christian theology, of course, will seek to be informed by and normed by Holy Scripture. However, Biblical theology seeks to describe and interpret the theological dimensions of the Biblical texts themselves. (This is sometimes divided up further into Old Testament Theology and New Testament Theology.) In the ordinary life of the Church, this is done whenever a believer attempts to summarize the “message” of the canon as a whole, or some section of it. In academic circles, this task is usually done by people who have degrees in biblical studies, but not all biblical scholars are capable of biblical theology. Some biblical scholars are simply historians or archaeologists or literary critics. The biblical theologian will be informed by skill in Hebrew, Greek and cognate languages such as Aramaic, Ugaritic, Akkadian, etc., will consult archaeological findings, historians of ancient Palestine or of 1st C. Greco-Roman society, use linguistic analyses or sociological insights, etc. But the biblical theologian must go beyond all this and seek to encounter these texts on a theological level—the only level in which the Church’s ancient confession that these writings are, in some sense, the “Word of God” makes any sense.

**Historical Theology** studies what the Church (and churches) has taught throughout the ages—or in some particular time and setting. This is done not just for antiquarian interest, but because the historical theologian is convinced that voices from the past, witnesses to the churches’ life and thought else when, may have significance for the church today. Some branches of Christianity are more influenced by certain periods of the past (e.g., Eastern Orthodoxy focuses supremely on the Patristic writings and especially the work of the Ecumenical Councils of the not-yet-divided Church), or by certain theologians more than others (e.g., Roman Catholicism returns constantly to the work of St. Thomas Aquinas; Reformed Christians give special consideration to the thought of Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin; Methodists are especially attentive to the writings of John Wesley and the hymns of Charles Wesley, etc.) It is a rare historical theologian who can convey most of the full sweep of the Church’s life and thought through the ages.

**Philosophical Theology** (called by some traditions “fundamental” or “foundational” theology, though I believe such a designation is a mistake) engages the major thought forms of the day in dialogue, or even debate. A wider theology of culture, engages not only the philosophical currents in one’s context, but the arts (visual, musical, etc.), sciences, political ideologies, other (rival?) religions, and much else. This branch of theology is closely related to the missionary practices of the church—for in all good missions one listens and learns as much as one teaches.

**Pastoral Theology** focuses closely on the pastoral tasks of the church and its members (not just on the tasks of the pastor or pastoral team). This is sometimes called “practical theology,” but, again, I think this is a mistake. Properly understood, all Christian theology is rooted in the practices of the church and serves them and is thereby “practical.” “Impractical theology” would be theology cut off from church life and would, Christianly speaking, be useless.

The most daunting branch of theology is also its most normative: Systematic Theology is its most common name since it tries to bring all these tasks together and state, for this time and place, what the church must teach to be faithfully the church of Jesus Christ, and do so in a fairly orderly fashion. But the term “systematic theology” can give the impression of forcing the Word of God into a systemic straightjacket of human origins, reducing it to an ideology. So, some prefer the term Dogmatic Theology, but in North America “dogmatic” has come to mean “narrow minded,” so this term, too, is not without its problems. A recent term that many use is Constructive Theology.

According to the traditional division of theology the four Great Departments of Theology are:

1. Exegetical theology
2. Historical theology
3. Systematic theology
4. Practical theology
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The four departments can usefully be subdivided in the following way:

1. **Exegetical Theology**:
   - Biblical studies (analysis of the contents of Scripture)
   - Biblical introduction (biblical criticism that studies the origins of the Bible).
   - Canonics (inquiry into how the different books of the Bible came to be collected together)
   - Biblical theology (inquiry into how divine revelation progressed over the course of the Bible).

2. **Historical Theology** (study of how Christian theology develops over time):
   - The Patristic Period (1st through 8th centuries)
   - The Ante-Nicene Fathers (1st to 3rd centuries)
   - The Nicene Fathers (4th century)
   - The Post-Nicene Fathers (5th to 8th centuries)
   - The Middle Ages (8th to 16th centuries)
   - The Reformation and Counter-Reformation (16th to 18th centuries)
   - The Modern Period (18th to 21st centuries)

3. **Systematic Theology**:
   - Prolegomena (first principles)
   - Theology Proper
   - The existence of God
   - The attributes of God
   - The Trinity
   - Creation
   - Divine Providence
   - Doctrine of Man (theological anthropology)
   - Christology
   - Pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit)
   - Ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church)

4. **Practical Theology**:
   - Moral theology (Christian ethics and casuistry)
   - Ecclesiology
   - Pastoral theology
   - Liturgics
   - Homiletics
   - Christian education
   - Christian counseling
   - Missiology

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**Endnotes**

3. Avery Dulles, p. 123.
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Chapter 2

History of Christian Theology

The imposing edifice of Catholic theology has been reared not by individual nations and men, but rather by the combined efforts of all nations and the theologians of every century. Nothing could be more at variance with the essential character of theology than an Endeavour to set upon it the stamp of nationalism: like the Catholic Church itself, theology must ever be international. In the history of dogmatic theology, as in the history of the Church, three periods may be distinguished:

- the patristic
- the medieval
- the modern

The Patristic Period (about A.D. 100-800)

The Great Fathers of the Church and the ecclesiastical writers of the first 800 years rendered important services by their positive demonstration and their speculative treatment of dogmatic truth. It is the Fathers who are honoured by the Church as her principal theologians, excelling as they did in purity of faith, sanctity of life, and fulness of wisdom, virtues which are not always to be found in those who are known simply as ecclesiastical writers. Tertullian (b. about 160), who died a Montanist, and Origen, (d. 254), who showed a marked leaning towards Hellenism, strayed far from the path of truth. But even some of the Fathers, e.g. St. Cyprian (d. 258) and St. Gregory of Nyssa, went astray on individual points; the former in regard to the baptism of heretics, the latter in the matter of apocatastas is. It was not so much in the catechetical schools of Alexandria, Antioch, and Edessa as in the struggle with the great heresies of the age that patristic theology developed. This serves to explain the character of the patristic literature, which is apologetical and polemical, parenetical and ascetic, with a wealth of exegetical wisdom on every page; for the roots of theology are in the Bible, especially in the Gospels and in the Epistles of St. Paul. Although it was not the intention of the Fathers to give a methodical and systematic treatise of theology, nevertheless, so thoroughly did they handle the great dogmas from the positive, speculative, and apologetic standpoint that they laid the permanent foundations for the centuries to follow. Quite justly does Möhler call attention to the fact that all modes of treatment may be found in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers: the apologetic style is represented by the letter of Diognetus and the letters of St. Ignatius; the dogmatic in pseudo-Barnabas; the moral, in the Pastor of Hermas; canon law, in the letter of St. Clement of Rome; church history, in the Acts of the martyrdom of Polycarp and Ignatius. Owing to the unexpected recovery of lost manuscripts we may add: the liturgical style, in the Didache; the catechetical, in the “Proof of the Apostolic Preaching” by St. Irenæus.

Although the different epochs of the patristic age overlap each other, it may be said in general that the apologetic style predominated in the first epoch up to Constantine the Great, while in the second epoch, that is to say up to the time of Charlemagne, dogmatic literature prevailed. We can here only trace in the most general outlines this theological activity, leaving to patrology the discussion of the literary details.

When the Christian writers entered the lists against paganism and Judaism, a double task awaited them: they had to explain the principal
truths of natural religion, such as God, the soul, creation, immortality, and freedom of the will; at the same time they had to defend the chief mysteries of the Christian faith, as the Trinity, Incarnation, etc., and had to prove their sublimity, beauty, and conformity to reason. The band of loyal champions who fought against pagan Polytheism and idolatry is very large: Justin, Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Hermias, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian, Minucius Felix, Commodianus, Arnobius, Lactantius, Prudentius, Firmicus Maternus, Eusebius of Cæsarea, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, Nilus, Theodoret, Orosius, and Augustine. The most eminent writers in the struggle against Judaism were: Justin, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Isidore of Seville. The attacks of the Fathers were not, of course, aimed at the Israelitic religion of the Old Testament, which was a revealed religion, but at the obstinacy of those Jews who, clinging to the dead letter of the Law, refused to recognize the prophetic spirit of the Old Testament.

But far greater profit resulted from conflict with the heresies of the first eight centuries. As the flint, when it is struck by the steel, gives off luminous sparks, so did dogma, in its clash with heretical teaching, shed a new and wonderfully brilliant light. As the errors were legion, it was natural that in the course of the centuries all the principal dogmas were, one by one, treated in monographs which established their truth and provided them with a philosophical basis. The struggle of the Fathers against Gnosticism, Manichæism, and Priscillianism served not only to bring into clearer light the essence of God, creation, the problem of evil; it moreover secured the true principles of faith and the Church’s authority against heretical aberrations. In the mighty struggle against Monarchianism, Sabellianism, and Arianism an opportunity was afforded to the Fathers and the ecumenical councils to establish the true meaning of the dogma of the Trinity, to secure it on all sides and to draw out, by speculation, its genuine import. When the contest with Eunomianism broke out, the fires of theological and philosophical criticism purified the doctrine of God and our knowledge of Him, both earthly and heavenly. Of world-wide interest were the Christological disputes, which, beginning with the rise of Apollinarianism, reached their climax in Nestorianism, Monophysitism, and Monotheletism, and were revived once more in Adoptionism. In this long and bitter strife, the doctrine of Christ’s person, of the Incarnation, and Redemption, and in connection herewith Mariology also, was placed on a sure and permanent foundation, from which the Church has never varied a hair’s breadth in later ages. The following may be mentioned as the Eastern Champions in this scientific dispute on the Trinity and Christology: the great Alexandrines, Clement, Origen, and Didymus the Blind; the heroic Athanasius and the three Cappadocians (Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa); Cyril of Alexandria and Leontius of Byzantium; finally, Maximus the Confessor and John Damascene. In the West the leaders were: Tertullian, Cyprian, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Fulgentius of Ruspe, and the two popes, Leo I and Gregory I. As the contest with Pelagianism and Semi-pelagianism purified the dogmas of grace and liberty, providence and predestination, original sin and the condition of our first parents in Paradise, so in like manner the contests with the Donatists brought out more clearly and strongly the doctrine of the sacraments (baptism), the hierarchical constitution of the Church her magisterium or teaching authority, and her Infallibility.

In all these struggles it was Augustine who ever led with indomitable courage, and next to him came Optatus of Mileve and a long line of devoted disciples. The last contest was decided by the Second Council of Nicaea (787); it was in this struggle that, under the leadership of St. John Damascene, the communion of saints, the invocation of the saints, the veneration of relics and holy images were placed on a scientific basis.

It may be seen from this brief outline that the dogmatic teachings of the Fathers are a collection of monographs rather than a systematic exposition. But the Fathers broke the ground and furnished the material for erecting the system afterwards. In the case of some of them there are evident signs of an attempt to synthesize dogma into a complete and organic whole. Irenæus (Against Heresies III-V) shows traces of this tendency; the well-known trilogy of Clement of Alexandria (d. 217) marks an advance in the same direction; but the most successful effort in Christian antiquity to systematize the principal dogmas of faith was made by Origen in his work “De principiis”, which is unfortunately disfigured by serious errors. His work against Celsus, on the other hand, is a classic in apologetics and of lasting value. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394), skilled in matters philosophical and
of much the same bent of mind as Origen, endeavoured in his “Large Catechetical Treatise” (logos katechetikos ho megas) to correlate in a broad synthetic view the fundamental dogmas of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Sacraments. In the same manner, though somewhat fragmentarily, Hilary (d. 366) developed in his valuable work “De Trinitate” the principal truths of Christianity. The catechetical instructions of St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) especially his five mystagogical treatises, on the Apostles’ Creed and the three Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist, contain an almost complete dogmatic treatise, St. Epiphanius (d. 496), in his two works “Ancoratus” and “Panarium”, aimed at a complete dogmatic treatise, and St. Ambrose (d. 397) in his chief works: “De fide”, “De Spiritu S.”, “De incarnatione”, “De mysteriis”, “De poenitentia”, treated the main points of dogma masterfully and in classic Latinity, though without any attempt at a unifying synthesis. In regard to the Trinity and Christology, St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) is even today a model for dogmatic theologians. Though all the writings of St. Augustine (d. 430) are an inexhaustible mine, yet he has written one or two works, as the “De fide et symbolo” and the “Enchiridium”, which may justly be called compendia of dogmatic and moral theology. Unsurpassed is his speculative work “De Trinitate” His disciple Fulgentius of Ruspe (d. 533) wrote an extensive and thorough confession of faith under the title, “De fide ad Petrum, seu regula rectae fidei”, a veritable treasure for the theologians of his day.

Towards the end of the Patristic Age Isidore of Seville (d. 636) in the West and John Damascene (b. ab. 700) in the East paved the way for a systematic treatment of dogmatic theology. Following closely the teachings of St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great, St. Isidore proposed to collect all the writings of the earlier Fathers and to hand them down as a precious inheritance to posterity. The results of this undertaking were the “Libri III sententiarum seu de summo bono” Tajus of Saragossa (650) had the same end in view in his “Libri V sententiarum”. The work of St. John Damascene (d. after 754) was crowned with still greater success; for not only did he gather the teachings and views of the Greek Fathers, but by reducing them to a systematic whole he deserves to be called the first and the only scholastic among the Greeks. His main work, which is divided into three parts, is entitled: “Fons scientiae” (pege gnoseos), because it was intended to be the source, not merely of theology, but of philosophy and Church history as well. The third or theological part, known as “Expositio fidei orthodoxae” (ekthesis tes orthodoxou pisteos), is an excellent combination of positive and scholastic theology, and aims at thoroughness both in establishing and in elucidating the truth. Greek theology has never gone beyond St. John Damascene, a standpoint caused principally by the Photian schism (869). The only Greek prior to him who had produced a complete system of theology was Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, in the fifth century; but he was more popular in the West, at least from the eighth century on, than in the East. Although he openly wove into the genuine Catholic system neo-Platonic thoughts and phrases, nevertheless he enjoyed an unparalleled reputation among the greatest Scholastics of the Middle Ages because he was supposed to have been a disciple of the Apostles, For all that, Scholasticism did not take its guidance from St. John Damascene or Pseudo-Dionysius, but from St. Augustine, the greatest of the Fathers. Augustinian thought runs like a golden thread through the whole progress of Western philosophy and theology. It was Augustine who led everywhere, who always pointed out the right path, and from whom all schools sought direction. Even the heretics tried to bolster up their errors with the strength of his reputation. Today his greatness is recognized and appreciated more and more, as specialized research goes more deeply into his works and brings to view his genius. As Scheeben remarks, “It would be easy to compile from his writings a rich system of dogmatic theology.” We cannot help admiring the skill with which he ever kept God, as the beginning and end of all things, in the central position, even where he was compelled to depart from earlier opinions which he had found to be untenable. The English-speaking world may well be proud of the Venerable Bede (d. 735), a contemporary of St. John Damascene. Owing to his unusually solid education in theology, his extensive knowledge of the Bible and of the Fathers of the Church, he is the link which joins the patristic with the medieval history of theology.

The Middle Ages (800-1500)

The beginnings of Scholasticism may be traced back to the days of Charlemagne (d. 814). Thence it progressed in ever-quickenning development to the time of Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Peter the Lombard, and onward to its full growth in the Middle
Ages (first epoch, 800-1200). The most brilliant period of Scholasticism embraces about 100 years (second epoch, 1200-1300), and with it are connected the names of Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus. From the beginning of the fourteenth century, owing to the predominance of Nominalism and to the sad condition of the Church, Scholasticism began to decline (third epoch, 1300-1500).

First Epoch: Beginning and Progress of Scholasticism (800-1200)

In the first half of this epoch, up to the time of St. Anselm of Canterbury, the theologians were more concerned with preserving than with developing the treasures stored up in the writings of the Fathers. The sacred science was cultivated nowhere with greater industry than in the cathedral and monastic schools, founded and fostered by Charlemagne. The earliest signs of a new thought appeared in the ninth century during the discussions relative to the Last Supper (Paschasius Radbertus, Ratramnus, Rabanus Maurus). These speculations were carried to a greater depth in the second Eucharistic controversy against Berengarius of Tours (d. 1088), (Lanfranc, Guitmund, Alger, Hugh of Langres, etc.). Unfortunately, the only systematic theologian of this time, Scotus Eriugena (d. after 870), was an avowed Pantheist, so that the name of “Father of Scholasticism” which some would give him, is wholly unmerited. But the one who fully deserves this title is St. Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109). For he was the first to bring a sharp logic to bear upon the principal dogmas of Christianity, the first to unfold and explain their meaning in every detail, and to draw up a scientific plan for the stately edifice of dogmatic theology. Taking the substance of his doctrine from Augustine, St. Anselm, as a philosopher, was not so much a disciple of Aristotle as of Plato, in whose masterly dialogues he had been thoroughly schooled. Another pillar of the Church was St. Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), the “Father of Mysticism”. Though for the most part the author of ascetic works with a mystical tendency, he used the weapons of scientific theology against Abelard’s Rationalism and the exaggerated Realism of Gilbert de La Porée. It is upon the doctrine of Anselm and Bernard that the Scholastics of succeeding generations took their stand, and it was their spirit which lived in the theological efforts of the University of Paris. Less prominent, yet noteworthy, are: Ruprecht of Deutz, William of Thierry, Gaufridus, and others.

The first attempts at a theological system may be seen in the so-called “Books of Sentences”, collections and interpretations of quotations from the Fathers, more especially of St. Augustine. One of the earliest of these books is the “Summa sententiarum” of Hugh of St. Victor (1141). His works are characterized throughout by a close adherence to St. Augustine and, according to the verdict of Scheeben, may even yet serve as guides for beginners in the theology of St. Augustine. Less praise is due to the similar work of Robert Pulley (d. 1146), who is careless in arranging the matter and confuses the various questions of which he treats. Peter the Lombard, called the “Magister Sententiarum” (d. 1164), on the other hand, stands far above them all. What Gratian had done for canon law the Lombard did for dogmatic and moral theology. With untiring industry he sifted and explained and paraphrased the patristic lore in his “Libri IV sententiarum”, and the arrangement which he adopted was, in spite of the lacunae, so excellent that up to the sixteenth century his work was the standard text-book of theology. The work of interpreting this masterpiece began as early as the thirteenth century, and there was no theologian of note in the middle Ages who did not write a commentary on the Sentences of the Lombard. Hundreds of these commentaries are still resting, unprinted, beneath the dust of the libraries. No other work exerted such a powerful influence on the development of scholastic theology. Neither the analogous work of his disciple, Peter of Poitiers (d. 1205), nor the important “Summa aurea” of William of Auxerre (d. after 1230) superseded the Lombard’s “Sentences” Along with Alain of Lille (d. 1203), William of Auvergne (d. 1248), who died as Archbishop of Paris, deserves special mention. Though preferring the free, un scholastic method of an earlier age, he yet shows himself at once an original philosopher and a profound theologian. Inasmuch as in his numerous monographs on the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Sacraments, etc., he took into account the anti-Christian attacks of the Arabian exponents of Aristoteleanism, he is, as it were, the connecting link between this age and the most brilliant epoch of the thirteenth century.
Second Epoch: Scholasticism at its Zenith (1200-1300)

This period of Scholasticism was marked not only by the appearance of the “Theological Summa”, but also by the building of the great Gothic cathedrals, which bear a sort of affinity to the lofty structures of Scholasticism. (Cf. Emil Michael, S.J., “Geschichte des deutschen Volkes vom 13. Jahrh. bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters”, V, Freiburg, 1911, 15 sq.) Another characteristic feature was the fact that in the thirteenth century the champions of Scholasticism were to be found in the great religious orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans, beside whom worked the Augustinians, Carmelites, and Servites. This brilliant period is ushered in by two master-minds: the one a Franciscan, Alexander of Hales (d. about 1245), the other a Dominican, Albert the Great (d. 1280). The “Summa theologiae” of Alexander of Hales, the largest and most comprehensive work of its kind, is distinguished by its deep and mature speculation, though flavoured with Platonism. The arrangement of the subjects treated reminds one of the methods in vogue today. An intellectual giant not merely in matters philosophical and theological but in the natural sciences as well, was Albert the Great. It was he who made the first attempt to present the entire philosophy of Aristotle in its true form and to place it at the service of Catholic theology- an undertaking of far-reaching consequences. The logic of Aristotle had indeed been rendered into Latin by Boethius and had been used in the schools since the end of the sixth century; but the physics and metaphysics of the Stagirite were made known to the Western world only through the Arabian philosophers of the thirteenth century, and then in such a way that Aristotle’s doctrine seemed to clash with the Christian religion. This fact explains why his works were prohibited by the Synod of Paris, in 1210, and again by a Bull of Gregory IX in 1231. But after the Scholastics, led by Albert the Great, had gone over the faulty Latin translation once more, had reconstructed the genuine doctrine of Aristotle and recognized the fundamental soundness of his principles, they no longer hesitated to take, with the approval of the Church, the pagan philosopher as their guide in the speculative study of dogma.

Two other representatives of the great orders are the gigantic figures of Bonaventure (d. 1274) and of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), who mark the highest development of Scholastic theology. St. Bonaventure, the “Seraphic Doctor”, clearly follows in the footsteps of Alexander of Hales, his fellow-religious and predecessor, but surpasses him in depth of mysticism and clearness of diction. Unlike the other Scholastics of this period, he did not write atiological “Summa”, but amply made up for it by his “Commentary on the Sentences”, as well as by his famous “Breviloquium”, a “casket of pearls”, which, brief as a compendium, is nothing less than a condensed Summa. Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure are the real representatives of the old Franciscan Schools, from which the later School of Duns Scotus essentially differed. Yet it is not Bonaventure, but Thomas Aquinas, who has ever been honoured as the “Prince of Scholasticism”. St. Thomas holds the same rank among the theologians as does St. Augustine among the Fathers of the Church. Possessed of angelic rather than human knowledge, the “Doctor angelicus” is distinguished not only for the wealth, depth, and truth of his ideas and for his systematic exposition of them, but also for the versatility of his genius, which embraced all branches of human knowledge. For dogmatic theology his most important work is the “Summa theologica”. Experience has shown that, as faithful adherence to St. Thomas means progress, so a departure from his teachings invariably brings with it a decline of Catholic theology. It seems providential, therefore, that Leo XIII in his Encyclical “Æterni Patris” (1879) restored the study of the Scholastics, especially of St. Thomas, in all higher Catholic schools, a measure which was again emphasized by Pope Pius X. The fears prevalent in some circles that by the restoration of Scholastic studies the results of modern thought would be forced back to the antiquated viewpoint of the thirteenth century are shown to be groundless by the fact that both popes, while insisting on the acquisition of the “wisdom of St. Thomas”, yet emphatically disclaim any intention to revive the unscientific notions of the Middle Ages. It would be folly to ignore the progress of seven centuries, and, moreover, the Reformation, Jansenism, and the philosophies since Kant have originated theological problems which St. Thomas in his time could not foresee. Nevertheless, it is a convincing proof of the logical accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Thomistic system that it contains at least the principles necessary for the refutation of modern errors.

Before the brilliancy of the genius of St. Thomas even great theologians of this period wane into stars of the second and third magnitude. Still, Richard of Middleton (d. 1300), whose clearness of
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thought and lucidity of exposition recall the master mind of Aquinas, is a classical representative of the Franciscan School. Among the Servites, Henry of Ghent (d. 1293), a disciple of Albert the Great, deserves mention; his style is original and rhetorical, his judgments are independent, his treatment of the doctrine on God attests the profound thinker. In the footsteps of St. Thomas followed his pupil Peter of Tarentaise, who later became Pope Innocent V (d. 1276), and Ulric of Strasburg (d. 1277), whose name is little known, though his unprinted “Summa” was held in high esteem in the Middle Ages. The famous General of the Augustinians, Ægidius of Rome (d. 1316), a scion of the noble family of the Colonna, while differing in some details from the teaching of St. Thomas yet in the main adhered to his system. In his own order his writings were considered as classics. But the attempt of the Augustinian Gavardus in the seventeenth century to create a distinctly “Ægidian School” proved a failure. On the other hand, adversaries of St. Thomas sprang up even in his lifetime. The first attack came from England and was led by William de la Mare, of Oxford (d. 1285). Speaking broadly, English scholars, famous for their originality, played no mean part in the intellectual life of the middle ages. Being more of an empirical and practical than of an aprioristic and theoretical bent of mind, they enriched science with a new element. Their predilection for the natural sciences is also the outcome of this practical sense. Like the links of an unbroken chain follow the names of Bede, Alcuin, Alfred (Anglicus), Alexander of Neckham, Alexander of Hales, Robert Grosseteste, Adam of Marsh, John Basingstoke, Robert Kilwardby, John Pecham, Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus, Occam. Kuno Fischer is right when he says: “When travelling along the great highway of history, we may traverse the whole of the Middle Ages down to Bacon of Verulam without leaving England for a moment” (“Francis Bacon”, Heidelberg, 1904p.4).

This peculiar English spirit was embodied in the famous Duns Scotus (1266-1308). While in point of ability he belongs to the golden age of scholasticism, yet his bold and virulent criticism of the Thomistic system was to a great extent responsible for its decline. Scotus cannot be linked with the old Franciscan school; he is rather the founder of the new Scotistic School, which deviated from the theology of Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure not so much in matters of faith and morals as in the speculative treatment of dogma. Greater still is his opposition to the fundamental standpoint of Thomas Aquinas. St. Thomas likens the system of theology and philosophy to the animal organism, in which the vivifying soul permeates all the members, holds them together, and shapes them into perfect unity. In Scotus’s own words, on the other hand, the order of things is rather symbolized by the plant, the root shooting forth branches and twigs which have an innate tendency to grow away from the stem. This fundamental difference also sheds light on the peculiarities of Scotus’s system as opposed to Thomism: his formalism in the doctrine of God and the Trinity, his loose conception of the Hypostatic Union, his relaxation of the bonds uniting the sacraments with the humanity of Christ, his explanation of transubstantiation as an adductive substitution, his emphasis on the supremacy of the will, and so on. Though it cannot be denied that Scotism preserved theological studies from a one-sided development and even won a signal victory over Thomism by its doctrine concerning the Immaculate Conception, it is nevertheless evident that the essential service it rendered to Catholic theology in the long run was to bring out, by the clash of arguments, the enduring solidity of the Thomistic structure. No one can fail to admire in St. Thomas the perspicuity of thought and the lucidity of diction, as contrasted with the abstruse and mystifying conceptions of his critic. In later centuries not a few Franciscans of a calmer judgment, among them Constantine Saranus (1589) and John of Rada (1599), set about minimizing or even reconciling the doctrinal differences of the two masters.

Third Epoch: Gradual Decline of Scholasticism (1300-1500)

The death of Duns Scotus (d. 1308) marks the close of the golden era of the Scholastic system. What the following period accomplished in constructive work consisted chiefly in preserving, reproducing, and digesting the results of former ages. But simultaneously with this commendable labour we encounter elements of disintegration, due partly to the Fraticelli’s wrong conception of mysticism, partly to the aberrations and superficiality of Nominalism, partly to the distressing conflict between Church and State (Philip the Fair, Louis of Bavaria, the Exile at Avignon). Apart from the fanatical enthusiasts who were leaning towards heresy, the development and rapid spread of Nominalism must be ascribed to two pupils of Duns Scotus: the Frenchman Peter Aureolus (d. 1321) and the Englishman William Occam (d. 1347), In union with Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun,
Occam used Nominalism for the avowed purpose of undermining the unity of the Church. In this atmosphere flourished regalism and opposition to the primacy of the pope, until it reached its climax in the false principle: “Concilium supra Papam”, which was preached from the housetops up to the time of the Councils of Constance and Basle. It is only fair to state that it was the pressing needs of the times more than anything else which led some great men, as Pierre d’Ailly (d. 1425) and Gerson (d. 1429), to embrace a doctrine which they abandoned as soon as the papal schism was healed. To understand the origin of the errors of Wyclif, Huss, and Luther, the history of Nominalism must be studied. For what Luther knew as Scholasticism was only the degenerated form which Nominalism presents. Even the more prominent Nominalists of the close of the middle Ages, as the general of the Augustinians, Gregory of Rimini (d. 1359), and Gabriel Biel (d. 1495), who has been called the “last Scholastic”, did not escape the misfortune of falling into grievous errors. Nominalistic subtleties, coupled with an austere pseudo-Augustinism of the ultra-rigoristic type, made Gregory of Rimini the precursor of Baianism and Jansenism. Gabriel Biel, though ranking among the better Nominalists and combining solidity of doctrine with a spirit of loyalty to the Church, yet exerted a baneful influence on his contemporaries, both by his unduly enthusiastic praise of Occam and by the manner in which he commented on Occam’s writings.

The order which suffered least damage from Nominalism was that of St. Dominic. For, with the possible exception of Durand of St. Pouçain (d. 1332) and Holkot (d. 1349), its members were as a rule loyal to their great fellow-religious St. Thomas. Most prominent among them during the first half of the fourteenth century were: Hervæus de Nedellec (d. 1323), a valiant opponent of Scotus, John of Paris (d. 1306); Peter of Palude (d. 1342); and especially Raynerius of Pisa (d. 1348), who wrote an alphabetical summary of the doctrine of St. Thomas which even today is useful. A prominent figure in the fifteenth century is St. Antonine of Florence (d. 1459), distinguished by his industry as a compiler and by his versatility as an author; by his “Summa Theologiæ” he did excellent service for positive theology. A powerful champion of Thomism was John Capreolus (d. 1444), the “Prince of Thomists” (princeps Thomistarum). Using the very words of St. Thomas, he refuted, in his adamantine “Clypeus Thomistarum”, the adversaries of Thomism in a masterly and convincing manner. It was only in the early part of the sixteenth century that commentaries on the “Summa Theologica” of St. Thomas began to appear, among the first to undertake this work being Cardinal Cajetan of Vio (d. 1537) and Konrad Köllin (d. 1536). The philosophical “Summa contra Gentes” found a masterly commentator in Francis of Ferrara (d. 1528).

Far less united than the Dominicans were the Franciscans, who partly favoured Nominalism, partly adhered to pure Scotism. Among the latter the following are worthy of note: Francis Mayronis (d. 1327); John of Colonia; Peter of Aquila (d. about 1370), who as abbreviator of Scotus was called Scotellus (little Scotus); Nicolaus de Orbells (ca. 1460), and above all Licchetus (d. 1520), the famous commentator of Scotus. William of Vorrilong (about 1400), Stephen Brulefer (d. 1485), and Nicholas of Niise (d. 1509) belong to a third class which is characterized by the tendency to closer contact with St. Bonaventure. A similar want of harmony and unity is discernible in the schools of the other orders. While the Augustinians James of Viterbo (d. 1308) and Thomas of Strasburg (d. 1357) attached themselves to Ægidius of Rome, thereby approaching closer to St. Thomas, Gregory of Rimini, mentioned above, championed an undisguised Nominalism. Alphonsus Vargas of Toledo (d. 1366), on the other hand, was an advocate of Thomism in its strictest form. Among the Carmelites, also, divergencies of doctrine appeared. Gerard of Bologna (d. 1317) was a staunch Thomist, while his brother in religion John Baconthorp (d. 1346) delighted in trifling controversies against the Thomists. Drifting now with Nominalism, now with Scotism, this original genius endeavoured, though without success, to found a new school in his order. Generally speaking, however, the later Carmelites were enthusiastic followers of St. Thomas. The Order of the Carthusians produced in the fifteenth century a prominent and many-sided theologian in the person of Dionysius Ryckel (d. 1471), surnamed “the Carthusian”, a descendant of the Leevens family, who set up his chair in Roermont (Holland). From his pen we possess valuable commentaries on the Bible, Pseudo-Dionysius, Peter the Lombard, and St. Thomas. He was equally conversant with mysticism and scholasticism. Albert the Great, Henry of Ghent, and Dionysius form a brilliant constellation which shed undying lustre on the German theology of the Middle Ages.
Leaving the monasteries and turning our attention to the secular clergy, we encounter men who, in spite of many defects, are not without merit in dogmatic theology. The first to deserve mention is the Englishman Thomas Bradwardine (d. 1340), the foremost mathematician of his day and Archbishop of Canterbury. His work “De causa Dei contra Pelagianos” evinces a mathematical mind and an unwonted depth of thought. Unfortunately it is marred by an unbending, sombre rigorism and this to such an extent that the Calvinistic Anglicans of a later century published it in defence of their own teachings. The Irish Bishop Richard Radulphus of Armagh (d. 1360), in his controversy with the Armenians, also fell into dogmatic inaccuracies, which paved the way for the errors of Wyclif. We may note in passing that the learned Carmelite Thomas Netter (d. 1430), surnamed Waldensis, must be regarded as the ablest controversialist against the Wyclifites and Hussites. The great Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1404) stands out prominently as the inaugurator of a new speculative system in dogmatic theology; but his doctrine is in many respects open to criticism. A thorough treatise on the Church was written by John Torquemada (d. 1468), and a similar work by St. John Capistran (d. 1456). A marvel of learning, and already acknowledged as such by his contemporaries, was Alphonsus Tostatus (d. 1454), the equal of Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1341) in Scriptural learning. He merits a place in the history of dogmatic theology, inasmuch as he interspersed his excellent commentaries on the Scriptures with dogmatic treatises, and in his work “Quinque paradoxa” gave to the world a fine treatise on Christology and Mariology.

As was to be expected, mysticism went astray in this period and degenerated into sham pietism. A striking example of this is the anonymous “German Theology”, edited by Martin Luther. This work must, however, not be confounded with the “German Theology” of the pious bishop Berthold of Chiemsee (d. 1543), which, directed against the Reformers, is imbued with the genuine spirit of the Catholic Church.

Modern Times (1500-1900)

As during the Patristic period the rise of heresies was the occasion of the development of dogmatic theology in the Church, so the manifold errors of the Renaissance and of the Reformation brought about a more accurate definition of important articles of faith. Along other lines also both these movements produced good effects. While in the period of the Renaissance the revival of classical studies gave new vigour to exegesis and patrology, the Reformation stimulated the universities which had remained Catholic, especially in Spain (Salamanca, Alcalá, Coimbra) and in the Netherlands (Louvain), to put forth an enthusiastic activity in intellectual research. Spain, which had fallen behind during the Middle Ages, now came boldly to the front. The Sorbonne of Paris regained its lost prestige only towards the end of the sixteenth century. Among the religious orders the newly-founded Society of Jesus probably contributed most to the revival and growth of theology. Scheeben distinguishes five epochs in this period.

First Epoch: Preparation (1500-1570)

It was only by a slow process that Catholic theology rose from the depths into which it had fallen. The rise of the Reformation (1517) had inflicted serious wounds on the Church, and the defection of so many priests deprived her of the natural resources on which the study of theology necessarily depends. Nevertheless the list of the loyal contains many brilliant names, and the controversial works of those times include more than one valuable monograph. It was but natural that the whole literature of this period should bear an apologetical and controversial character and should deal with those subjects which had been attacked most bitterly: the rule and sources of faith, the Church, grace, the sacraments, especially the holy Eucharist. Numerous defenders of the faith arose in the very country which had given birth to the Reformation: John Eck (d. 1543), Coelheus (d. 1552), Staphylus (d. 1564), James of Hoogstraet (d. 1527), John Gropper (d. 1559), Albert Pighius (d. 1542), Cardinal Hosius (d. 1579), Martin Cromer (d. 1589), and Peter Canisius (d. 1597). The last-named gave to the Catholics not only his world-renowned catechism, but also a most valuable Mariology. With pride and enthusiasm we look upon England, where the two noble martyrs John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester (d. 1535), and Thomas More (d. 1535) championed the cause of the Catholic faith with their pen, where Cardinal Pole (d. 1558), Stephen Gardiner (d. 1555), and Cardinal William Allen (d. 1594), men who combined refinement with a solid education, placed their learning at the service of the persecuted Church, while the Jesuit Nicholas Saunders wrote one of the best treatises on the Church. In Belgium the professors of the University of Louvain opened new
paths for the study of theology, foremost among them were: Ruardus Tapper (d. 1559), John Driedo (d. 1535), Jodocus Ravesteyn (d. 1570), John Hessels (d. 1566), John Molanus (d. 1585), and Garetius (d. 1571). To the last-named we owe an excellent treatise on the holy Eucharist. In France James Merlin, Christopher Chefontaines (d. 1595), and Gilbert Génébrard (d. 1597) rendered great services to dogmatic theology. Sylvester Pierias (d. 1523), Ambrose Catharinus (d. 1553), and Cardinal Seripandus are the boast of Italy. But, above all other countries, Spain is distinguished by a veritable galaxy of brilliant names: Alphonsus of Castro (d. 1558), Michael de Medina (d. 1578), Peter de Soto (d. 1563). Some of their works have remained classics up to our own times, as “De natura et gratia” (Venice, 1547) of Dominic Soto; “De justificatione libri XV” (Venice, 1546) of Andrew Vega; “De locis theologicis” (Salamanca, 1563) of Melchior Cano.

Second Epoch: Late Scholasticism at its Height (1570-1660)

Even in the preceding epoch the sessions of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) had exerted a beneficial influence on the character and extent of dogmatic literature. After the close of the council there sprang up everywhere a new life and a marvellous activity in theology which recalls the best days of the Patristic Era and of Scholasticism but surpasses both by the wealth and variety of its literary productions. We are not here concerned with the industry displayed in Biblical and exegetical research. But the achievements of controversial, positive, and scholastic theology deserve a passing notice.

(i) Controversial theology was carried to the highest perfection by Cardinal Bellarmine (d. 1621). There is no other theologian who has defended almost the whole of Catholic theology against the attacks of the Reformers with such clearness and convincing force. Other theologians remarkable for their mastery in the attack of the Catholic Faith were the Spanish Jesuit Gregory of Valencia (d. 1603) and his pupil Adam Tanner (d. 1632) and James Gresiter (d. 1625), who taught in the University of Ingolstadt. To the Englishman Thomas Stapleton (d. 1508) we owe a work, unsurpassed even in our days, on the material and formal principle of Protestantism. Cardinal du Perron (d. 1618) of France successfully entered the arena against James I of England and Philip Mornay, and wrote a splendid treatise on the holy Eucharist. The eloquent pulpit orator Bossuet (d. 1627) wielded his pen in refuting Protestantism from the standpoint of history. The “Prescriptiones Catholicæ”, a voluminous work of the Italian Gravina (7 vols., Naples, 1619-39), possesses enduring value. Martin Becanus* (d. 1624), a Belgian Jesuit, published his handy and well-known “Manuale controversiarum”. In Holland the defence of religion was carried on by the two learned brothers Adrian (d. 1669) and Peter de Walemburg (d. 1675), both auxiliary bishops of Cologne and both controversialists, who easily ranked among the best. Even the distant East was represented in the two Greek converts, Peter Arcudius (d. 1640) and Leo Allatius (d. 1669).

(ii) The development of positive theology went hand in hand with the progress of research into the Patristic Era and into the history of dogma. These studies were especially cultivated in France and Belgium. A number of scholars, thoroughly versed in history, published in excellent monographs the results of their investigations into the history of particular dogmas. Morinus (d. 1659) made the Sacrament of Penance the subject of special study; Isaac Habert (d. 1668), the doctrine of the Greek Fathers on grace; Hallier (d. 1659), the Sacrament of Holy orders, Garnier (d. 1681), Pelagianism; De champs (d. 1701), Jansenism; Tricassinus (d. 1681), St. Augustine’s doctrine on grace. Unfortunately, among the highly gifted representatives of this historico-dogmatical school were to be found men who deviated more or less seriously from the unchangeable teachings of the Catholic Church, as Baius, Jansenius the Younger, Launoy, de Marca, Dupin, and others. Though Nicole and Arnauld were Jansenists, yet their monumental work on the Eucharist, “Perpétuité de la foi” (Paris, 1669-74), has not yet lost its value. But there are two men, the Jesuit Petavius (d. 1647) and the Oratorian Louis Thomassin (d. 1695), who by their epoch-making works: “Dogmata theologica”, placed positive theology on a new basis without disregarding the speculative element.

(iii) So great was the enthusiasm with which the religious orders fostered scholastic theology and brought it to perfection that the golden era of the thirteenth century seemed to have once more returned. It was no mere chance that St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure were just then proclaimed Doctors of the Church, the first by Pius V, the other by Sixtus V. By these papal acts the two greatest luminaries of the past were proposed to the theologians as models to be zealously imitated. Thomism, guarded and cherished by the Dominicans, proved...
anew its full vitality. At the head of the Thomistic movement was Bañez (d. 1604), the first and greatest opponent of the Jesuit Molina (d. 1600). He wrote a valuable commentary on the theological “Summa” of St. Thomas, which, combined with a similar work by Bartholomew Medina (d. 1581), forms a harmonious whole. Under the leadership of Bañez a group of scholarly Dominicans took up the defence of the Thomistic doctrine on grace: Alvarez (d. 1635), de Lemos (d. 1629), Ledesma (d. 1616), Massoulié (d. 1706), Reginaldus (d. 1676), Nazarius (d. 1646), John a St. Thoma (d. 1644), Kantes Mariales (d. 1660), Gonet (d. 1681), Goudin (d. 1695), Contenson (d. 1674), and others. However, the most scholarly, profound, and comprehensive work of the Thomistic school did not come from the Dominicans, but from the Carmelites of Salamanca; it is the invaluable “Cursus Salamanticensis” (Salamanca, 1631-1712) in 15 folios, a magnificent commentary on the “Summa” of St. Thomas. The names of the authors of this immortal work have unfortunately not been handed down to posterity. Outside the Dominican Order, also, Thomism had many zealous and learned friends: the Benedictine Alphonsus Curiel (d. 1609), Francis Zumel (d. 1607), John Puteanus (d. 1623), and the Irishman Augustine Gibbon (d. 1676), who laboured in Spain and at Erfurt in Germany. The Catholic universities were active in the interest of Thomism. At Louvain William Estius (d. 1613) wrote an excellent commentary on the “Liber Sententiarius” of Peter the Lombard, which was permeated with the spirit of St. Thomas, while his colleagues Wiggers and Francis Sylvius (d. 1649) explained the theological “Summa” of the master himself. In the Sorbonne Thomism was worthily represented by men like Gammaché (d. 1625), Andrew Duval (d. 1637), and especially by the ingenious Nicholas Ysambert (d. 1624). The University of Salzburg also furnished an able work in the “Theologia scholastica” of Augustine Reding, who held the chair of theology in that university from 1645 to 1658, and died as Abbot of Einsiedeln in 1692.

The Franciscans of this epoch in no way abandoned their doctrinal opposition to the school of St. Thomas, but steadily continued publishing commentaries on Peter the Lombard, which throughout breathe the genuine spirit of Scotism. It was especially Irish Franciscans who promoted the theological activity of their order, as Mauritian Hibernicus (d. 1603), Anthony Hickay (Hiqæus, d. 1641), Hugh Cavellus, and John Ponce (Pontius, d. 1660). The following Italians and Belgians also deserve to be mentioned: Francis de Herrera (about 1590), Angelus Vulpes (d. 1647), Philip Fabri (d. 1630), Bosco (d. 1684), and Cardinal Brancatus de Laurea (d. 1693). Scotistic manuals for use in schools were published about 1580 by Cardinal Sarnanus and by William Herincx, this latter acting under the direction of the Franciscans. The Capuchins, on the other hand, adhered to St. Bonaventure, as, e.g., Peter Trigos (d. 1593), Joseph Zamora (d. 1649), Gaudentius of Brescia, (d. 1672), Marcus a Baudunio (d. 1673), and others.

But there can be no question that Scholastic theology owes most of its classical works to the Society of Jesus, which substantially adhered to the “Summa” of St. Thomas, yet at the same time made use of a certain eclectic freedom which seemed to be warranted by the circumstances of the times. Molina (d. 1600) was the first Jesuitto write a commentary on the theological “Summa” of St. Thomas. He was followed by Cardinal Toletus (d. 1596) and by Gregory of Valencia (d. 1603), mentioned above as a distinguished controversialist. A brilliant group in the Society of Jesus are the Spaniards Francis Francisco Suárez, Gabriel Vasquez, and Didacus Ruiz. Francisco Suárez (d. 1617), the most prominent among them, is also the foremost theologian that the Society of Jesus has produced. His renown is due not only to the fertility and the wealth of his literary productions, but also to his “clearness, moderation, depth, and circumspection” (Scheeben). He truly deserves the title of “Doctor eximius” which Benedict XIV gave him. In his colleague Gabriel Vasquez (d. 1604) Francisco Suárez; found a critic both subtle and severe, who combined positive knowledge with depth of speculation. Didacus Ruiz (d. 1632) wrote masterly works on God and the Trinity, subjects which were also thoroughly treated by Christopher Gilles (d. 1608). Harruabal (d. 1608), Ferdinand Bastida (d. about 1609), Valentine Herice, and others are names which will forever be linked with the history of Molinism. During the succeeding period James Granado (d. 1632), John Praepositus (d. 1634), Caspar Hurtado (d. 1646), and Anthony Perez (d. 1694) won fame by their commentaries on St. Thomas. But, while devoting themselves to scientific research, the Jesuits never forgot the need of instruction. Excellent, often voluminous, manuals were written by Arriaga (d. 1667), Martin Esparza (d. 1670), Francis Amicus (d. 1651),
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Martin Becanus (d. 1625), Adam Tanner (d. 1632), and finally by Sylvester Maurus (d. 1687), who is not only remarkable for clearness, but also distinguished as a philosopher. Hand in hand with this more general and comprehensive literature went important monographs, embodying special studies on certain dogmatic questions. Entering the lists against Baius and his followers, Martínez de Ripalda (d. 1648) wrote the best work on the supernatural order. To Leonard Lessius (d. 1623) we owe some beautiful treatises on God and His attributes. Ægidius Coninck (d. 1633) made the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the sacraments the subject of special studies. Cardinal John de Lugo (d. 1660), noted for his mental acumen and highly esteemed as a moralist, wrote on the virtue of faith and the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Claude Tiphanus (d. 1641) is the author of a classical monograph on the notions of personality and hypostasis. Cardinal Pallavicini* (d. 1667), known as the historiographer of the Council of Trent, won repute as a dogmatic theologian by several of his writings.

Third Epoch: Further Activity and Gradual Decline of Scholasticism (1660-1760)

While the creative and constructive work of the previous epoch still continued, though with languishing vitality, and ushered in a second spring of dogmatic literature, other currents of thought set in which gradually prepared the way for the decline of Catholic theology. Cartesianism in philosophy, Gallicanism, and Jansenism were sapping the strength of the sacred science. There was scarcely a country or nation that was not infected with the false spirit of the age. Italy alone remained immune and preserved its ancient purity and orthodoxy in matters theological.

One might have expected that, if anywhere at all, theology would be securely sheltered within the schools of the old religious orders. Yet even some of these succumbed to the evil influences of the times, losing little by little their pristine firmness and vigour. Nevertheless, it is to them that almost all the theological literature of this period and the revival of Scholasticism are due. A product of the Thomistic school, widely used and well adapted to the needs of the time, was the standard work of the Dominican Billuart (d. 1757), which with exceptional skill and taste explains and defends the Thomistic system in scholastic form. The dogmatic theology of Cardinal Gotti, however, rivals, if it does not surpass, Billuart’s work, both as regards the substance and the soundness of its contents. Other Thomists produced valuable monographs: Drouin on the sacraments and Bernard de Rubeis (d. 1775) on original sin. More eclectic in their adherence to Thomism were the Cardinals Celestine Sfondrato (d. 1696) and Aguirre (d. 1699); the latter’s work “Theology of St. Anselm” in three volumes is replete with deep thought. Among the Franciscans Claudia Frassen (d. 1680) issued his elegant “Scotus academicus”, a counterpart to the Thomistic theology of Billuart. Of the Scotistic School we also mention Gabriel Boyvin, Krisper (d. 1721), and Kick (d. 1769).

Eusebius Amort (d. 1775), the foremost theologian in Germany, also represented a better type, combining sound conservatism with due regard for modern demands. The Society of Jesus still preserved something of its former vigour and activity. Simmonet, Ulloa (d. about 1723), and Marin were the authors of voluminous scholastic works. But now the didactical and pedagogical interests began to assert themselves, and called for numerous textbooks of theology. We mention Platel (d. 1681), Antoine (d. 1743), Pichler (d. 1736), Sardagna (d. 1775), Erber, Monschein (d. 1769), and Gener. But both as regards matter and form all these textbooks were surpassed by the “Theologia Wirceburgensis”, which the Jesuits of Würzburg published in 1766-71. In addition to the old religious orders, we meet during this period the new school of Augustinians, who based their theology on the system of Gregory of Rimini rather than on that of Ægidius of Rome. Because of the stress they laid on the rigoristic element in St. Augustine’s doctrine on grace, they were for a time suspected of Baianism and Jansenism, but were cleared of this suspicion by Benedict XIV. To this school belonged the scholarly Lupus (d. 1681) at Louvain and Cardinal Noris (d. 1704), distinguished for his subtle intellect. But its best work on dogmatic theology came from the pen of Lawrence Berti (d. 1766). His fellow-workers in the same field were Bellelli (d. 1742) and Bertieri. The French Oratory, falling from its lofty eminence, was buried in Jansenism, as the names of Quesnel, Lebrun, and Juenin sufficiently indicate.

The Sorbonne of Paris, developing the germs of Jansenism and Gallicanism, ceased to keep abreast of the time. Abstracting, however, from this fact, theology owes works of great merit to men like Louis Habert (d. 1718), du Hamel (d. 1706), L’Herminier, Witasse (d. 1716). Creditable exceptions were Louis Abelly (d. 1691) and Martin Grandin, who distinguished themselves by their loyalty to the Church. The same
encomium must be said of Honoratus Tournély (d. 1729), whose “Prælectiones dogmaticæ” are numbered among the best theological text-books. A staunch opponent of Jansenism, he would certainly have challenged Gallicanism, had not the law of the realm prevented him. For the rest, the Church depended almost exclusively on Italy for its scientific combat against the pernicious errors of the time. There had gathered a chosen band of scholars who courageously fought for the purity of the faith and the rights of the papacy. In the front rank against Jansenism stood the Jesuits Dominic Viva (d. 1726), La Fontaine (d. 1728), Alticozzi (d. 1777), and Faure (d. 1779). Gallicanism and Josephinism were hard pressed by the theologians of the Society of Jesus, especially by Zaccaria (d. 1795), Muzzarelli (d. 1749), Bolgeni (d. 1811), Roncaglia, and others. The Jesuits were ably seconded by the Dominicans Orsi (d. 1761) and Mamachi (d. 1792). Another champion in this struggle was Cardinal Gerdil (d. 1802). Partly to this epoch belongs the fruitful activity of St. Alphonsus Liguori (d. 1787), whose popular rather than scientific writings energetically opposed the baneful spirit of the time.

Fourth Epoch: Decay of Catholic Theology (1760-1840)

Many circumstances, both from within and from without, contributed towards the further decadence of theology which had already begun in the preceding epoch. In France it was the still powerful influence of Jansenism and Gallicanism, in the German Empire the spread of Josephinism and Febronianism that sapped the vitality of orthodox theology. The suppression of the Society of Jesus by Clement XIV in 1773 deprived theology of its ablest representatives. To these factors must be added the paralyzing influence of the “Enlightenment” which, rising through English Deism, was swelled by French Encyclopedism and finally deluged all European countries. The French Revolution and the military expeditions of Napoleon all through Europe were not without evil consequences. The false philosophy of the time (Kant, Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, Cousin, Comte, etc.), by which even many theologians were misled, engendered not only an undisguised contempt for Scholasticism and even for St. Thomas, but also fostered a shallow conception of Christianity, the supernatural character of which was obscured by Rationalism. True, the spirit of former centuries was still alive in Italy, but the unfavourable circumstances of the times impeded its growth and development. In France the Revolution and the continual campaigns paralyzed or stifled all productive activity. De Lamennais (d. 1854), the beginning of whose career had held out promises of the highest order, turned from the truth and led others astray. The Catholics of England groaned under political oppression and religious intolerance. Spain had become barren. Germany suffered from the mildew of “Enlightenment”. No matter how mildly one may judge the aberrations of Wessenberg (1774-1860), Vicar-General of Constance, who had absorbed the false ideas of his age, it is certain that the movement begun by him marked a decadence in matters both ecclesiastical and scientific. But the poorer the productions of the theologians the greater their pride. They despised the old theologians, whom they could neither read nor understand.

Fifth Epoch: Restoration of Dogmatic Theology (1840-1900)

The reawakening of the Catholic life in the forties naturally brought with it a revival of Catholic theology. Germany especially, where the decline had gone farthest, showed signs of a remarkable regeneration and vigorous health. The external impulse was given by Joseph Görres (d. 1848), the “loud shouter in the fray”. When the Prussian Government imprisoned Archbishop von Droste-Vischering of Cologne on account of the stand he had taken in the question of mixed marriages, the fiery appeals of Görres began to fill the hearts of the Catholics, even outside of Germany, with unwonted courage. The
German theologians heard the call and once more applied themselves to the work which was theirs. Döllinger (d. 1890) developed Church history, and Möhler advanced patrology and symbolism. Both positive and speculative theology received a new lease of life, the former through Klee (d. 1840), the latter through Staudenmeier (d. 1856). At the same time men like Kleutgen (d. 1883), Werner (d. 1888), and Stöckl (d. 1895) earned for the despised Scholasticism a new place of honour by their thorough historical and systematic writings. In France and Belgium the dogmatic theology of Cardinal Gousset (d. 1866) of Reims and the writings of Bishop Malou of Bruges (d. 1865) exerted great influence. In North America the works of Archbishop Kenrick (d. 1863) did untold good. Cardinal Camille Mazzella (d. 1900) is to be ranked among the North American theologians, as he wrote his dogmatic works while occupying the chair of theology at Woodstock College, Maryland. In England the great Cardinals Wiseman (d. 1865), Manning (d. 1892), and Newman (d. 1890) became by their works and deeds powerful agents in the revival of Catholic life and in the advance of Catholic theology.

In Italy, where the better traditions had never been forgotten, far-seeing men like Sanseverino (d. 1865), Liberatore (d. 1892), and Tongiorgi (d. 1865) set to work to restore Scholastic philosophy, because it was found to be the most effective weapon against the errors of the time, i.e. traditionalism and ontologism, which had a numerous following among Catholic scholars in Italy, France, and Belgium. The pioneer work in positive theology fell to the lot of the famous Jesuit Perrone (d. 1876) in Rome. His works on dogmatic theology, scattered throughout the Catholic world, freed theology of the miasmas which had infected it. Under his leadership a brilliant phalanx of theologians, as Passaglia (d. 1887), Schrader (d.1875), Cardinal Franzelin (d. 1886), Palmieri (d. 1909), and others, continued the work so happily begun and reasserted the right of the speculative element in the domain of theology. Eminent among the Dominicans was Cardinal Zigliara, an inspiring teacher and fertile author. Thus from Rome, the centre of Catholicism, where students from all countries foregathered, new life went forth and permeated all nations. Germany, where Baader (d. 1841), Günther, and Frohsshammer (d. 1893) continued to spread their errors, shared in the general uplift and produced a number of prominent theologians, as Kuhn (d. 1887), Berlage (d. 1881), Dieringer (d. 1876), Oswald (d. 1903), Knoll (d. 1863), Denzinger (d. 1883), v. Schätzler (d. 1880), Bernard Jungmann (d. 1895), Heinrich (d. 1891), and others. But Germany’s greatest theologian at this time was Joseph Scheeben (d. 1888), a man of remarkable talent for speculation. In the midst of this universal reawakening the Vatican Council was held (1870), and the Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the value of Scholastic, especially Thomistic, philosophy and theology was issued (1879). Both these events became landmarks in the history of dogmatic theology. An energetic activity was put forth in every branch of sacred science and is still maintained. Even though, consulting the needs of the time and the hostile situation, theologians cultivate most assiduously historical studies, such as Church history, Christian archaeology, history of dogma, and history of religion, yet signs are not wanting that, side by side with positive theology, Scholasticism also will enter upon a new era of progress. History shows that periods of progress in theology always follow in the wake of great ecumenical councils. After the first Council of Nicaea (325) came the great period of the Fathers; after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) the wonderful age of mature Scholasticism; and after the Council of Trent (1545-63) the activity of later Scholasticism. It is not too much to hope that the Vatican Council which had to be adjourned indefinitely after a few general sessions will be followed by a similar period of progress and splendour.
Chapter 3

Dogmatic Theology

Dogmatic theology is that part of theology which treats of the theoretical truths of faith concerning God and His works (dogmata fidei), whereas moral theology has for its subject-matter the practical truths of morality (dogmata morum). At times, apologetics or fundamental theology is called “general dogmatic theology”, dogmatic theology proper being distinguished from it as “special dogmatic theology”. However, according to present-day usage, apologetics is no longer treated as part of dogmatic theology but has attained the rank of an independent science, being generally regarded as the introduction to and foundation of dogmatic theology. The present article shall deal first with those questions which are fundamental to dogmatic theology and then briefly review its historical development due to the acumen and indefatigable industry with which the theologians of every civilized country and of every century have cultivated and promoted this science.

Definition and Nature of Dogmatic Theology

To define dogmatic theology, it will be best to start from the general notion of theology. Considered etymologically, theology (Gr. Theologia, i.e. peri Theou logos) means objectively the science treating of God, subjectively, the scientific knowledge of God and Divine things. If defined as the science concerning God (doctrina de Deo), the name of theology applies as well to the philosophical knowledge of God, which is cast into scientific form in natural theology or theodicy. However, unless theodicy is free from errors, it cannot lay claim to the name of theology. For this reason, pagan mythology and pagan doctrines about the gods, must at once be set aside as false theology. Theology of heretics also, so far as it contains grave errors, must be excluded. In a higher and more perfect sense we call theology that science of God and Divine things which, objectively, is based on supernatural revelation, and subjectively, is viewed in the light of Christian faith. Theology thus broadens out into Christian doctrine (doctrina fidei) and embraces not only the particular doctrines of God’s existence, essence, and triune personality, but all the truths revealed by God. The Patristic era did not, as a rule, take theology in this wide sense. For the earlier Fathers, strictly limiting the term theology to doctrine about God, distinguished it from the doctrine of His external activity, especially from the Incarnation and Redemption, which they included under the name of the “Divine economy”. Now, if God is not only the primary object but also the first principle of Christian theology, then its ultimate end likewise must be God; that is to say it must teach, effect, and promote union with God through religion. Consequently, it lies in the very essence of theology to be the doctrine not only of God and of faith, but also of religion (doctrina religionis). It is this triple function which gave rise to the old adage of the School: Theologia Deum docet, a Deo docetur, ad Deum ducit (Theology teaches of God, is taught by God, and leads to God).

However, neither supernatural theology in general nor dogmatic theology in particular is sufficiently specified by its material object or its end, since natural theology also treats of God and Divine things and shows that union with God is a religious duty. What essentially distinguishes the two sciences is the so-called formal principle or formal object. Supernatural theology considers God and Divine things solely in the supernatural light of external revelation and internal faith,
analyzes them scientifically, proves them and penetrates as far as possible into their meaning. From this it follows that theology comprehends all those and only those doctrines which are to be found in the sources of faith, namely Scripture and Tradition, and which the infallible Church proposes to us. Now, among these revealed truths there are many which reason, by its own natural power, can discover, comprehend, and demonstrate, especially those that pertain to natural theology and ethics. These truths, however accessible to unaided reason, receive a theological colouring only by being at the same time supernaturally revealed and accepted on the ground of God’s infallible authority. The act of faith being nothing else than the unconditional surrender of human reason to the sovereign authority of the self-revealing God, it is plain that Catholic theology is not a purely philosophical science like mathematics or metaphysics; it must rather, of its very nature be an authoritative science, basing its teachings, especially of the mysteries of faith, on the authority of Divine revelation and the infallible Church established by Christ; for it is the Divine mission of the Church to preserve intact the entire deposit of faith (depositum fidei), to preach and explain it authoritatively. There are, it is true, many non-Catholics and even some Catholics who are irritated at seeing Catholic theology bow before an external authority. They take offence at conciliar decrees, papal decisions ex cathedra, the censure of theological opinions, the index of forbidden books, the Syllabus, the oath against Modernism. Yet all these ecclesiastical regulations flow naturally and logically from the formal principle of Christian theology: the existence of Divine revelation and the right of the Church to demand, in the name of Christ, an unswerving belief in certain truths concerning faith and morals. To reject the authority of the Church would be equivalent to abandoning supernatural revelation, and condemning God himself, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, since He is Truth itself, and who speaks through the mouth of the Church. Consequently, theology as a science, if it would avoid the danger of error, must ever remain under the tutelage and guidance of the Church. To a Catholic, theology without the Church is as absurd as theology without God. Dogmatic theology, then, may be defined as the scientific exposition of the entire theoretical doctrine concerning God Himself and His external activity, based on the dogmas of the Church.

**Dogmatic Theology as a Science**

Considering that theology depends essentially on the Church, a serious difficulty arises at once. How, one may ask, can theology claim to be a science in the genuine sense of the word? If the aim and result of theological investigation is settled in advance by an authority that attributes to itself infallibility and will brook no contradiction, if the line of march is, as it were, clearly mapped out and strictly prescribed, how can there be any question of true science or of scientific freedom? Are not the dogmatic proofs, supposed to demonstrate an infallible dogma, after all mere dialectical play, sham science, reasoning made to order? Prejudice against Catholic theology, prevalent in the world at large, is beginning to bear fruit; in many countries the theological faculties, still existing in the state universities, are looked upon as so much useless ballast, and the demand is being made to relegate them to the Episcopal seminaries, where they can no longer injure the intellectual freedom of the people. The downright unfairness of this attitude is obvious when one considers that the universities sprang up and developed in the shadow of the Church and of Catholic theology; and that, moreover, the exaggeration of scientific freedom may prove fatal to the profane sciences as well. Unless it presuppose certain truths, which can no more be demonstrated than many mysteries of faith, science can achieve nothing; and unless it recognize the limits that are set to investigation, the boasted freedom will degenerate into lawless and arbitrary anarchy. As the logician starts from notions, the jurist from legal texts, the historian from facts, the chemist from material substances as things which demand no proof in his case, so the theologian receives his material from the hands of the Church and deals with it according to the rules which the scientist applies in his own branch.

The view, moreover, that scientific research is absolutely free and independent of all authority is fanciful and distorted. To the freedom of science, the authority of the individual conscience, and of human society as well, sets an impassable limit. Even the civil power would have to exercise its authority in the form of punishment if a university professor, presuming on the freedom of scientific thought and research, should teach openly that burglary, murder, adultery, revolution, and anarchy are permissible. We may concede that the Catholic theologian, being subject to ecclesiastical authority, is more closely bound than
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the professor of the secular sciences. Yet the difference is one of degree only, inasmuch as every science and every investigator is bound by the moral and religious duty of subordination. Some Scholastics, it is true, e.g. Durandus and Vasquez, denied to Christian theology a strictly scientific character, on the ground that the content of faith is obscure and incapable of demonstration. But their argument does not carry conviction. At most it proves that dogmatic science is not of the same kind and order as the profane sciences. What is essential to any science is not internal evidence, but merely certainty of its first principles.

There are many profane sciences which borrow unproved from a superior science their highest principles; these are the so-called *lemmata*, subsidiary propositions, which serve as premises for further conclusions. The theologian does the same. He, too, borrows the first principles of his science from the higher knowledge of God without proving them. Every subaltern science supposes of course in the superior discipline the power to give a strict demonstration of the assumed premises. But all scientific axioms rest ultimately on metaphysics, and metaphysics itself is unable to prove strictly all its principles all it can do is to defend them against attack. It is plain then that every science without exception rests on axioms and postulates which, though certain, yet admit of no demonstration. The mathematician is aware that the existence of geometry, the surest and most palpable of all sciences, depends entirely on the soundness of the postulate of parallels. Nevertheless, this very postulate is far from being demonstrable. In fact, since no convincing proof of it was forthcoming, there has arisen since the time of Gauss a more general, non-Euclidean geometry, of which the Euclidean is only a special case. Why, then, should Catholic theology, because of its postulates, *lemmata*, and mysteries, be denied the name of a science? Apart from the domain of dogma proper, the theologian may approach the numerous controversial questions and more intricate problems with the same freedom as is enjoyed by any other scientist. One thing, however, must never be lost sight of. No science is at liberty to upset theorems which have been established once and for all; they must be regarded as unshaken dogmas upon which the entire structure is based. Similarly, the articles of faith must not be looked upon by the theologian as troublesome barriers, but as beacon-lights that warn the mariner, show him the true course, and preserve him from shipwreck.

Methods of Dogmatic Theology

Whereas other sciences, as, for instance, theodicy, begin with proving the existence of God, it lies beyond the scope of theology to discover dogmatic truths. The subject-matter with which the student of theology has to deal is offered to him in the deposit of faith and, reduced to its briefest form, is to be found in the Catechism. If the theologian is content with deriving the dogmas from the sources of faith and with explaining them, he is occupied with “positive” theology. Guided by the doctrinal authority of the Church, he calls history and criticism to his aid to find in Scripture and Tradition the genuine unalloyed truth. If to this positive element is joined a polemic tendency, we have “controversial” theology, which was carried to its highest perfection in the seventeenth century by Cardinal Bellarmine. Positive theology must prove its theses by conclusive arguments drawn from Scripture and Tradition; hence it is closely related to exegesis and history. As exegete, the theologian must first of all accept the inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God. But even when elucidating its meaning, he will always bear in mind the unanimous interpretation of the Fathers, the hermeneutical principles of the Church, if he is to give a true and objective account of tradition, of the history of dogma, and of patrology.

For, just as the Bible, being the Word of God, was written under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, so Tradition was, and is, guided in a special manner by God, Who preserves it from being curtailed, mutilated, or falsified. From this we may conclude how un ecclesiastical and at the same time how unscientific are those historians who...
shall understand their writings and establish the heterodoxy of some passages, as for instance, the Origenistic *apocatastasis* in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. When Pius X, by his *Motu Proprio* of 1 Sept., 1910, solemnly obliged all priests to adhere to these principles, he did more than recall to our minds the time-hallowed rules of Christian faith; he freed history and criticism from those baneful excrescences which impeded the growth of true science.

When the dogmatic material with the help of the historical method has been derived from its sources, another momentous task awaits the theologian: the philosophical appreciation, the speculative examination and elucidation of the material brought to light. This is the purpose of the “scholastic” method from which “scholastic theology” takes its name.

The scope of the scholastic method is fourfold:

- to open up completely the content of dogma and to analyze it by means of dialectics;
- to establish a logical connection between the various dogmas and to unite them in a well-knit system;
- to derive new truths, called “theological conclusions” from the premises by syllogistic reasoning;
- to find reasons, analogies, congruous arguments for the dogmas;

But above all to show that the mysteries of faith, though beyond the reach of reason, are not contrary to its laws but can be made acceptable to our intellect. It is evident that the ultimate purpose of these philosophical speculations cannot be to resolve dogma finally into mere natural truths, or to strip the mysteries of their supernatural character, but to explain the truths of faith, to provide for them a philosophical basis, to bring them nearer to the human mind. Faith must ever remain the solid rock-bottom on which reason builds up, and faith in its turn strives after understanding (*fides quoerens intellectum*). Hence the famous axiom of St. Anselm of Canterbury: *Credo ut intelligam*. However highly one may esteem the results of positive theology, one thing is certain: the scientific character of dogmatic theology does not rest so much on the exactness of its exegetical and historical proofs as on the philosophical grasp of the content of dogma. But in attempting this task, the theologian cannot look for aid to modern philosophy with its endless confusion, but to the glorious past of his own science. What else are the modern systems of philosophy, sceptical criticism, Positivism, Pantheism, Monism, etc., than ancient errors cast into new moulds? Rightly does Catholic theology cling to the only true and eternal philosophy of common sense, which was established by Divine Providence in the Socratic School, carried to its highest perfection by Plato and Aristotle, purified from the minutest traces of error by the Scholastics of the thirteenth century.

This is the Aristotelio-scholastic philosophy, which has gained an ever stronger foothold in ecclesiastical institutions of learning. Guided by sound pedagogical principles, Popes Leo XIII and Pius X officially prescribed this philosophy as a preparation for the study of theology, and recommended it as a model method for the speculative treatment of dogma. While in his famous Encyclical *Pascendi* of 8 Sept., 1907, Pius X praises positive theology and frankly recognizes its necessity, yet he sounds a note of warning not to become so absorbed in it as to neglect scholastic theology, which alone can impart a scientific grasp of dogma. These papal rescripts were probably inspired by the sad experience that any other than Scholastic philosophy, instead of elucidating and clarifying, only falsifies and destroys dogma, as is clearly shown by the history of Nominalism, the philosophy of the Renaissance, Hermesianism, Güntherianism, and Modernism. The development also of Protestant theology, which, entering into close union with modern philosophy swayed to and fro between the extremes of faith and unfaith and did not even recoil from Pantheism, is a warning example for the Catholic theologian. This does not mean that Catholic theology has received no stimulus whatever from modern philosophy since the days of Kant (d. 1804). As a matter of fact, the critical tendency has quickened the critico-historical sense of Catholic theologians in regard to method and demonstration, has given more breadth and depth to their statement of problems, and has shown fully the value of the “theoretical doubt” as the starting-point of every scientific investigation. All these advances, as far as they mark real progress, have exerted a salutary influence on theology also. But they can never repair the material damages caused to sacred science.
when, abandoning St. Thomas Aquinas, it went hand in hand with Kant and other champions of our age. But since the Aristoteloscholastic philosophy also is capable of continual development, there is reason to expect for the future a progressive improvement of speculative theology.

Another method of arriving at the truths of faith is mysticism, which appeals rather to the heart and the feelings than to the intellect, and sensibly imparts a knowledge of Divine things through pious meditation. As long as mysticism keeps in touch with scholasticism and does not exclude the intellect completely, it is entitled to existence for the simple reason that faith lays hold on the whole man, and penetrates his thoughts, desires, and sentiments. The greatest mystics, as Hugh of St. Victor, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bonaventure, were at the same time distinguished Scholastics. A heart that has preserved the faith and simplicity of its childhood, takes delight even now in the writings of Henry Suso (d. 1365). But whenever mysticism emancipates itself from the guidance of reason and makes light of the doctrinal authority of the Church, it readily falls a prey to Pantheism and pseudo-mysticism, which are the bane of all true religion. Meister Eckhart, whose propositions were condemned by Pope John XXII in 1329, is a warning example. There is little in the present trend of thought that would be favourable to mysticism. The scepticism which has poisoned the minds of our generation, the uncontrolled greed for wealth, the feverish haste in commercial enterprises, even the dulling habit of reading the daily papers - all these are only too apt to disturb the serene atmosphere of Divine contemplation, and play havoc with the interior life, the necessary conditions under which alone the tender flower of mystical piety can blossom. Modernism claims to possess in its immediate and immanent sense of God a congenial soil for the growth of mysticism; this soil, however, does not receive its waters from the undefiled fountain-head of Catholic piety, but from the cisterns of Liberal Protestant pseudo-mysticism, which are tainted, either confessedly or secretly, by Pantheism.

Relation of Dogmatic Theology to other Disciplines

At first, it was a thing altogether unknown to have different theological branches as independent sciences. Dogmatic theology was the only discipline, and comprised apologetics, dogmatic and moral theology, and canon law. This internal unity was also marked externally by the comprehensive name of science of faith (scientia fidei), or sacred science (scientia sacra). First to assert its independence was canon law, which, together with dogmatic theology, was the chief study in the medieval universities. But since the underlying principles of canon law, as the Divine constitution of the Church, the hierarchy, the power of ordinations, etc., were at the same time doctrines of faith to be proved in dogmatic theology, there was little danger that the internal connection with and dependence on the principal science would be broken. Far longer did the union between dogmatic and moral theology endure. They were treated in the medieval “Books of Sentences” and theological “Summae” as one science. It was not until the seventeenth century, and then only for practical reasons, that moral theology was separated from the main body of Catholic dogma. Nor did this division degenerate into a formal separation of two strictly coordinated disciplines. Moral theology has always been conscious that the revealed laws of morality are as much articles of faith as the theoretical dogmas, and that the entire Christian life is based on the three theological virtues, which are part of the dogmatic doctrine on justification. Hence the superior rank of dogmatic theology, which is not only the centre around which the other disciplines are grouped, but also the main stem from which they branch out. But the necessity of a further division of labour as well as the example of non-Catholic methods led to the independent development of other disciplines: apologetics, exegesis, church history.

The relation existing between apologetics, or fundamental theology as it has been called of late, and dogmatic theology is not that of a general to a particular science; it is rather the relation of the vestibule to the temple or of the foundation to its superstructure. For both the method and the purpose of demonstration differ totally in the two branches. Whereas apologetics, intent upon laying the foundation of the Christian or Catholic religion, uses historical and philosophical arguments, dogmatic theology on the other hand makes use of Scripture and Tradition to prove the Divine character of the different dogmas. Doubt could only exist as to whether the discussion of the sources of faith, the rule of faith, the Church, the primacy, faith and reason, belongs to apologetics or to dogmatic theology. While a dogmatic treatment of these important questions has its advantages, yet from the practical...
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standpoint and for reasons peculiar to the subject, they should be separated from dogmatic theology and referred to apologetics. The practical reason is that the existing denominational differences demand a more thorough apologetic treatment of these problems; and again, the subject-matter itself contains nothing else than the preliminary and fundamental questions of dogmatic theology properly so called. A branch of the greatest importance, ever since the Reformation, is exegesis with its allied disciplines, because that science establishes the meaning of the texts necessary for the Scriptural argument. As the Biblical sciences necessarily suppose the dogma of the inspiration of the Bible and the Divine institution of the Church, which alone, through the assistance of the Holy Ghost, is the rightful owner and authoritative interpreter of the Bible, it is manifest that exegesis, though enjoying full liberty in all other respects, must never lose its connection with dogmatic theology. Not even church history, though using the same critical methods as profane history, is altogether independent of dogmatic theology. As its object is to set forth the history of God’s kingdom upon earth, it cannot repudiate or slight either the Divinity of Christ or the Divine foundation of the Church without forfeiting its claim to be regarded as a theological science. The same applies to other historic sciences, as the history of dogma, of councils, of heresies, patrology, symbolics, and Christian archaeology. Pastoral theology, which embraces liturgy, homiletics, and catechetics, proceeded from, and bears close relationship to, moral theology; its dependence on dogmatic theology needs, therefore, no further proof.

The relation between dogmatic theology and philosophy deserves special attention. To begin with, even when they treat the same subject, as God and the soul, there is a fundamental difference between the two sciences. For, as was said above, the formal principles of the two are totally different. But, this fundamental difference must not be exaggerated to the point of asserting, with the Renaissance philosophers and the Modernists, that something false in philosophy may be true in theology, and vice versa. The theory of the “twofold truth” in theology and history, which is only a variant of the same false principle, is therefore expressly abjured in the anti-Modernist oath. But no less fatal would be the other extreme of identifying theology with philosophy, as was attempted by the Gnostics, later by Scotus Eriugena (d. about 877), Raymond Lullus (d. 1315), Pico della Mirandola (d. 1463), and by the modern Rationalists. To counteract this bold scheme, the Vatican Council (Sess. III, cap. iv) solemnly declared that the two sciences differ essentially not only in their cognitive principle (faith, reason) and their object (dogma, rational truth), but also in their motive (Divine authority, evidence) and their ultimate end (beatific vision, natural knowledge of God). But what is the precise relation between these sciences? The origin and dignity of revealed theology forbid us to assign to philosophy a superior or even a co-ordinate rank. Already Aristotle and Philo of Alexandria, in determining the relation of philosophy to that part of metaphysics which is directly concerned with God, pronounced philosophy to be the “handmaid” of natural theology. When philosophy came into contact with revelation, this subordination was still more emphasized and was finally crystallized in the principle: Philosophia est ancilla theologiae. But neither the Church nor the theologians who insisted on this axiom, ever intended thereby to encroach on the freedom, independence, and dignity of philosophy, to curtail its rights, or to lower it to the position of a mere slave of theology. Their mutual relations are far more honourable. Philosophy may be conceived as a queen, philosophy as a noble lady of the court who performs for her mistress the most worthy and valuable services, and without whose assistance the queen would be left in a very helpless and embarrassing position. That the Church, in examining the various systems, should select the philosophy which harmonized with her own revealed doctrine and proved itself to be the only true philosophy by acknowledging a personal God, the immortality of the soul, and the moral law, was so natural and obvious that it required no apology. Such a philosophy, however, existed among the pagans of old, and was carried to an eminent degree of perfection by Aristotle.

Division and Content of Dogmatic Theology

Not only for non-Catholics, but also for Catholic laymen it may be of interest to take a brief survey of the questions and problems generally discussed in dogmatic theology.

God (de Deo uno et trino)

As God is the central idea around which all theology turns, dogmatic theology must begin with the doctrine of God, essentially one. Whose existence, essence, and attributes are to be investigated. While the arguments, strictly so called, for the existence of God are given in
exhausted. It enters into every action of the creature, whether necessary or free. What is the nature of God’s universal co-operation with free rational beings? On this question Thomists and Molinists differ widely. The former regard the Divine activity as a previous, the latter as a simultaneous, concursus. According to Molinism, it is only by conceiving the concursus as simultaneous that true freedom in the creature can be secured, and that the essential holiness of the Creator can be maintained, the fact of sin notwithstanding. The crowning achievement of God’s creative activity is His providence and universal government which aims at the realization of the ultimate end of the universe, God’s glory through His creatures.

The work produced by creation is divided into three kingdoms, rising in tiers one above another: world; man; angel. To this triad correspond dogmatic cosmology, anthropology, and angelology. In discussing the first of these, the theologian must be satisfied with general outlines, e.g. of the Creator’s activity described in the hexaemeron. Anthropology is more thoroughly treated, because man, the microcosm, is the centre of creation. Revelation tells us many things about man’s nature, his origin and the unity of the human race, the spirituality and immortality of the soul, the relation of soul and body, the origin of individual souls. Above all, it tells us of supernatural grace with which man was adorned and which was intended to be a permanent possession of the human race. The discussion of man’s original state must be preceded by a theory of the supernatural order without which the nature of original sin could not be understood. But original sin, the willful repudiation of the supernatural state, is one of the most important chapters. Its existence must be carefully proved from the sources of faith; its nature, the mode of its transmission, its effects, must be subjected to a thorough discussion. The fate of the angels runs in many respects parallel to that of mankind: the angels also were endowed with both sanctifying grace and high natural excellences; some of them rose in rebellion against God, and were thrust into hell as demons. While the devil and his angels are inimical to the human race, the faithful angels have been appointed to exercise the office of guardians over mankind.

Redemption (de Deo Redemptore)

As the fall of man was followed by redemption, so the chapter on creation is immediately followed by that on redemption. Its three main
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divisions: Christology, Soteriology, Mariology, must ever remain in the closest connection.

1. Soteriology

Soteriology is the doctrine of the work of the Redeemer. As in Christology the leading idea is the Hypostatic Union, so here the main idea is the natural mediator ship of Christ. After having disposed of the preliminary questions concerning the possibility, opportuneness, and necessity of redemption, as well as of those regarding the predestination of Christ, the next subject to occupy our attention is the work of redemption itself. This work reaches its climax in the vicarious satisfaction of Christ on the cross, and is crowned by His descent into limbo and His ascension into heaven. From a speculative standpoint, a thorough and comprehensive theory of satisfaction remains still a pious desideratum, though promising attempts have often been made from the days of Anselm down to the present time. It will be necessary to blend into one noble whole the hidden elements of truth contained in the old patristic theory of ransom, the juridical conception of St. Anselm, and the ethical theory of atonement. The Redeemer’s activity as Mediator stands out most prominently in His triple office of high priest, prophet, and king, which is continued, after the ascension of Christ, in the priesthood and the teaching and pastoral office of the Church. The central position is occupied by the high-priesthood of Christ, which manifests the death on the cross as the true sacrifice of propitiation, and proves the Redeemer to be a true priest.

2. Mariology

Mariology, the doctrine of the Mother of God, cannot be separated either from the person or from the work of the Redeemer and therefore has the deepest connection with both Christology and Soteriology. Here the central idea is the Divine Maternity, since this is at once the source of Mary’s unspeakable dignity and of her surpassing fullness of grace. Just as the Hypostatic Union of the Divinity and humanity of Christ stands or falls with the truth of the Divine Maternity, so too is this same maternity the foundation of all special privileges which were accorded to Mary on account of Christ’s dignity. These singular privileges are four: her Immaculate Conception, personal freedom from sin, perpetual virginity, and her bodily Assumption into heaven.

For the three former we have doctrinal decisions of the Church, which are final. However, though Mary’s bodily Assumption has not yet been solemnly declared an article of faith, nevertheless the Church has practically demonstrated such to be her belief by celebrating from the earliest times the feast of the Assumption of the Mother of God. Two more privileges are connected with Mary’s dignity: her special mediator ship between the Redeemer and the redeemed and her exclusive right to hyperdulia. Of course, it is clear that the mediator ship of Mary is entirely subordinate to that of Her Divine Son and derives its whole efficacy and power there from. In order the better to understand the value and importance of Mary’s peculiar right to such veneration, it will be well to consider, by way of contrast, the dulia paid to the saints and, again, the doctrine concerning the veneration paid to relics and images. For the most part, dogmatic theologians prefer to treat these latter subjects under eschatology, together with the Communion of Saints.

3. Grace (De gratia)

The Christian idea of grace is based entirely upon the supernatural order. A distinction is made between actual and sanctifying grace, according as there is question of a supernatural activity or merely the state of sanctification. But the crucial point in the whole doctrine of grace lies in the justification of the sinner, because, after all, the aim and object of actual grace is either to lay the foundation for the grace of justification when the latter is absent, or to preserve the grace of justification in the soul that already possesses it. The three qualities of actual grace are of the utmost importance: its necessity, its gratuitousness, and its universality. Although on the one hand we must avoid the exaggeration of the Reformers, and of the followers of Baus and Jansenius, who denied the capability of unaided nature altogether in moral action, yet, on the other hand, theologians agree that fallen man is quite incapable, without the help of God’s grace, of either fulfilling the whole natural law or of resisting all strong temptations. But actual grace is absolutely necessary for each and every salutary act, since all such acts bear a causal relation towards the supernatural end of man. The heretical doctrines of Pelagianism and Semi pelagianism are refuted by the Church’s doctrinal decisions based upon Holy Scripture and Tradition. From the supernatural character of grace flows its second quality: gratuitousness. So entirely
gratuitous is grace that no natural merit, no positive capability or preparation for it on the part of nature, nor even any purely natural petition, is able to move God to give us actual grace. The universality of grace rests fundamentally upon the absolute universality of God’s salvific will, which, in regard to adults, simply means His antecedent will to distribute sufficient grace to each and every person, whether he be already justified or in the state of sin, whether he be Christian or heathen, believer or infidel. But the salvific will, in as far as it is consequent and deals out just retribution, is no longer universal, but particular, for the reason that only those who persevere in justice, enter heaven, whereas the wicked are condemned to hell. The question of the predestination of the blessed and the reprobation of the damned is admittedly one of the most difficult problems with which theology has to deal, and its solution is wrapped in impenetrable mystery. The same may be said of the relation existing between grace and the liberty of the human will. It would be cutting the Gordian knot rather than losing it, were one to deny the efficacy of grace, as did Pelagianism, or again, following the error of Jansenism, deny the liberty of the will. The difficulty is rather in determining just how the acknowledged efficacy of grace is to be reconciled with human freedom. For centuries Thomists and Molinists, Augustinians and Congruists have been toiling to clear up the matter. And while the system of grace known as syncretic has endeavoured to harmonize the principles of Thomism and Molinism, it has served but to double the difficulties instead of eliminating them.

The second part of the doctrine on grace has to do with sanctifying grace, which produces the state of habitual holiness and justice. Preparatory to receiving this grace, the soul undergoes a certain preliminary process, which is begun by theological faith, the “beginning, root and foundation of all justification”, and is completed and perfected by other supernatural dispositions, such as contrition, hope, love. The Protestant conception of justifying faith as a mere fiducial faith is quite as much at variance with revelation as is the sola fides doctrine. Catholics also differ from Protestants in explaining the essence of justification itself, while Catholic dogma declares that justification consists in a true blotting-out of sin and in an interior sanctification of the soul, Protestantism would have it to be merely an external cloaking of sins which still remain, and a mere imputation to the sinner of God’s or Christ’s justice. According to Catholic teaching, the forgiveness of sin and the sanctification of the soul are but two moments of one and the same act of justification, since the blotting-out of original and mortal sin is accomplished by the very fact of the infusion of sanctifying grace. Although we may, to a certain extent, understand the nature of grace in itself, and may define it philosophically as a permanent quality of the soul, an infused habit, an accidental and analogous participation of the Divine nature, yet its true nature may be more easily understood from a consideration of its so-called formal effects produced in the soul. These are: sanctity, purity, beauty, friendship with God, adopted sonship. Sanctifying grace is accompanied by additional gifts, viz., the three theological virtues, the infused moral virtues, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, and the personal indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the soul of the justified. This latter it is that crowns and completes the whole process of justification. We must also mention three qualities special to justification or sanctifying grace: its uncertainty, its inequality, and the possibility of its being lost. All of them are diametrically opposed to the Protestant conception, which asserts the absolute certainty of justification, its complete equality, and the impossibility of its being lost. Finally, the fruits of justification are treated. These ripen under the beneficent influence of sanctifying grace, which enables man to acquire merit through his good works, that is to say, supernatural merit for heaven.

The doctrine on grace is concluded with the proof of the existence, the conditions, and the objects of merit.

4. Sacraments (De sacramentis)

This section is divided into two parts: the treatise on the sacraments in general and that on the sacraments in particular. After having defined exactly what is meant by the Christian sacraments, and what is meant by the sacrament of nature and the Jewish rite of circumcision as it prevailed in pre-Christian times, the next important step is to prove the existence of the seven sacraments as instituted by Christ. The essence of a sacrament requires three things: an outward, visible sign, i.e. the matter and form of the sacrament; interior grace; and institution by Christ. In the difficult problem as to whether Christ himself determined the matter and form of each sacrament specifically or only generically the solution must be sought through dogmatic and historical investigations. Special importance attaches to the causality
of the sacraments, and an efficacy \textit{ex opere operato} is attributed to them. Theologians dispute as to the nature of this causality, i.e. whether it is physical or merely moral. In the case of each sacrament, regard must be had to two persons, the recipient and the minister. The objective efficacy of a sacrament is wholly independent of the personal sanctity or the individual faith of the minister. The only requisite is that he who confers the sacrament intends to do what the Church does. As regards the recipient of a sacrament, a distinction must be made between valid and worthy reception; the conditions differ with the various sacraments. But since the free will is required for validity, it is evident that no one can be forced to receive a sacrament.

Furthermore, as regards the sacraments in particular, the conclusions reached with reference to the sacraments in general of course hold good. Thus in the case of the first two sacraments, baptism and confirmation, we must prove in detail the existence of the three requisites mentioned above, as well as the disposition of both the minister and the recipient. The question whether their reception is absolutely necessary or only of precept must also be examined. More than ordinary care is called for in the discussion of the Eucharist, which is not only a sacrament, but also the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Everything centers of course around the dogma of the Real Presence of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. His presence there is effected by means of the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements and lasts as long as the accidents of bread and wine remain incorrupt. The dogma of the totality of the Real Presence means that in each individual species the whole Christ, flesh and blood, body and soul Divinity and humanity, is really present.

The Sacrament of Penance presupposes the Church’s power to forgive sins, a power clearly indicated in the Bible in the words with which Christ instituted this sacrament (John 20:23). Moreover, this power is abundantly attested both by the patristic belief in the Church’s power of the Keys and by the history of the ancient penitential system. As at the time of Montanism and Novatianism it was a question of vindicating the universality of this power, so nowadays it is a matter of defending its absolute necessity and its judicial form against the attacks of Protestantism. These three qualities manifest at the same time the intrinsic nature and the essence of the Sacrament of Penance.

Extreme Unction may be considered as the complement of the Sacrament of Penance, inasmuch as it can take the place of the latter in case sacramental confession is impossible to one who is unconscious and dangerously ill.

While the five sacraments of which we have treated so far were instituted for the welfare of the individual, the last two Holy Orders and Matrimony, aim rather at the well-being of human society in general. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is composed of various grades, of which those of bishop, priest, and deacon are certainly of a sacramental nature, whereas that of sub deacon and the four minor orders are most probably due to ecclesiastical institution. The decision depends on whether or not the presentation of the instruments is essential for the validity of ordination. In the case of the sub diaconate and the minor orders this presentation indeed occurs, but without the simultaneous imposition of hands. The common opinion prevalent today holds that the imposition of hands, together with the invocation of the Holy Ghost, is the sole matter and form of this sacrament. And since this latter obtains only in the case of the consecration of a bishop, priest, or deacon, the conclusion is drawn that only the three hierarchical grades or orders confer \textit{ex opere operato} the sacramental grace, the sacramental character, and the corresponding powers. The ordinary minister of all orders, even those of a non-sacramental character, is the bishop. But the pope may delegate an ordinary priest to ordain a sub deacon, lector, exorcist, acolyte, or ostiarius. Beginning with the sub diaconate, which was not raised to the rank of a major order until the Middle Ages, celibacy and the recitation of the Breviary are of obligation.

Three disciplines treat the Sacrament of Matrimony: dogmatic theology, moral theology, and canon law. Dogmatic theology leads the way, and proves from the sources of faith not merely the sacramental nature of Christian marriage, but also its essential unity and indissolubility. In the case of a consummated marriage between Christians the marriage bond is absolutely indissoluble; but where there is question of a consummated marriage between pagans the bond may be dissolved if one of the parties is converted to the Faith, and if the other conditions of what is known as the “Pauline Privilege” are fulfilled. The bond of a non-consummated marriage between Christians may be dissolved in two cases: when one of the parties concerned
makes the solemn profession of religious vows, or when the pope, for
weighty reasons, dissolves such a marriage. Finally, the grounds of
the Church’s power to establish diriment impediments are discussed
and thoroughly proved.

5. Eschatology (De novissimis)

The final treatise of dogmatic theology has to do with the four last
things. According as we consider either the individual or mankind in
general, there is seen to be a double consummation of all things. For
the individual the last things are death and the particular judgment, to
which corresponds, as his final state and condition, either heaven or
hell. The consummation of the human race on doomsday will be
preceded by certain indications of the impending disaster, right after
which will occur the resurrection of the dead and the general judgment.
As for the opinion that there will be a glorious reign of Christ upon
earth for a thousand years previous to the final end of all things, suffice
it to remark that there is not the slightest foundation for it in revelation,
and even a moderate form of Chiliasm must be rejected as untenable.

We say that we have a “Trinitarian theology.” However, most churches accept the doctrine of the
Trinity, and their theology is at least some-what
Trinitarian, but we emphasize the Trinity more than most
churches do. Sometimes we say that we have an
Incarnational Trinitarian theo-
logy, or a Trinitarian Christ-
centered theology. None of these are completely
distinctive terms, but they do mention some of the
emphases that we have.

We call our theology Trinitarian because the doctrine
of the Trinity is not a side point, or just one of many
other doctrines. We are trying to be more consistent
with it, to let it be the organizing principle for other
doctrines. Whether we are talking about sin or salvation
or the church, we want to ask, how does the doctrine of
the Trinity help us understand this particular doctrine?
How is it connected with the nature of God, and of who
God is in his innermost being?
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We are trying to understand a little better some points about God’s relationship with humanity: his purpose in creating humanity, the way in which he saves us, and how we should respond to him. We believe that our theology is true to the Bible, and that it helps make sense of what we are doing on the earth and in the church. It helps tie different doctrines together.

1. Not Trying to Criticize Others

In the process of explaining our theology, we find that our beliefs are sometimes a little different from other theological traditions, and in some points of doctrine, we conclude that those other Christians are mistaken. This does not mean that we think they are non-Christian, or that those people won’t be saved. We all make mistakes, and we have no doubt made a few of our own.

We all believe that we are saved through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – and it is good for us to have that in common with many other Christians around the world.

Thankfully, we are saved not by having absolutely perfect theology, but we are saved by Christ, by grace, by trusting in Jesus to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Other Christians are doing the best they can, and we are doing the best that we can, to understand the Bible, and to understand the meaning of life and how it all fits together. Our purpose here is not to criticize other people and other theologies, but simply to do the best that we can in explaining what we believe and how we think it is true to the Bible, and how we think it helps us understand what our life is all about.

A. A Desire to Understand as much as we can

This is what the early church called “faith seeking understanding.” We already understand some things about God, and we believe them, but we are convinced that this is something we’d like to know more about, and so we try to understand as much as we can. We have fallen in love with Jesus, and we’d like to learn more about who he is, and the relationship he has with us, and what he has in mind for our future.

We could also describe our goal as an act of worship: we want to praise God for who he is and what he has promised to do in the future – and in order to praise God for these things, we need to understand what they are. The goal is to explain things as best as we can, based on the Bible and the way that God has revealed himself to us ultimately and personally in Jesus Christ.

B. Practical Significance

We will not try to cover all the biblical or historical evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity. We have published other articles about that. What we would like to focus on here is the practical significance of the doctrine.

At first, it seems like the doctrine of the Trinity is just information about God: God is three Persons in one being. It’s about him. But what does that have to do with us? Does it make any difference to us here on earth?

Yes. That is because persons have relationships with one another, and relationships are important for all of us. God created us to have relationships similar to the relationships that exist for all eternity within the Triune God. The divine Persons in the Godhead have relationships, and persons here on earth have relationships, too, and there is supposed to be some similarity in the kind of relationships we have.

The Bible tells us that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Not that he has love, but that he IS love. That is descriptive of who he is and how he lives in eternity, how he interacts with other persons. Even before God created the universe, even before God created angelic beings, he was love. When God was the only thing there is, God was love - love among the triune Persons.

Before God created anything, what would God be like? If there is only one person in God, there would be no one to love, because love means caring for and caring about someone else. But if God were somehow loving but alone, that would mean that God would be unable to fully be or express some of his internal nature. God would be deficient. The statement that “God is love” would be meaningless before creation, if God were only one Person, because the love could not be expressed.

The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that even before God created anything, he could be love, because the Father loved the Son, and the Son loved the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father, and so forth. There was love within the Triune God, even before anything had been
much bigger than our minds are capable of comprehends - but we are able to have an accurate understanding of at least some things about God, because Jesus embodies all that any human being can know of God, and he came to reveal God to us. He does not reveal everything, but what he does reveal is accurate. John 1:18 says, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”

B. Jesus is fully human

All orthodox Christian theology includes the teaching that Jesus is fully human. That might seem obvious to many people - he was born as a baby, grew as a boy, and he died. As the Bible says: in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” He didn’t just put on a costume that made him look human - no, he was a real human being. He ate ordinary food, breathed air like an ordinary person, his fingernails grew and he got thirsty and tired. When he scraped his knee, he bled, and when they crucified him, he died just like other people would have.

He was fully God and fully human - both at the same time. We have never seen that combination before, but with God, all things are possible, and so if that’s what he did, then we have to make room in our theology for it. God can do one-of-a-kind things that aren’t comparable to anything else. He is able to be in his own creation. The Incarnation of the Son of God is that unique kind of thing.

There are a number of reasons as to why a divine Person might want to become a human being. He came to communicate to us on a level we could understand; he came to die for us; he came ... as a human so that we could know for sure that he understood what it’s like for us to be human. But just as Jesus shows us what God is like, he also shows us what humanity is really like. He is the perfect human.

C. Connecting human beings to God

Jesus has a unique role. He has been part of the circle of God’s trine life, and he’s been part of the human circle of life, and because of that, he provides a unique connection between humanity and God. In a sense, he is a bridge between the two, a bridge God uses to bring us into the divine fellowship. Not that we are part of the Trinity, but in and through his humanity, we do share in God’s life.
2 Peter 1:4 says, “He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.” So in some way we participate in what God is. We are in the family of God, or the kingdom of God. We are in fellowship with God, in a relationship with God - and this is all made possible by Jesus.

I Timothy 2:5 says, “There is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.” A mediator is a person in the middle - in this case, a person serving to connect humanity with God. God initiated this; he is the one who sent Jesus to earth to become a human being, and to be resurrected back into heaven to make this connection work. Jesus is the key link or connector between humanity and God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is important for this understanding. For our connection with God, for our future with God, it is essential that our mediator be fully God in his own right. No human being is good enough to earn a connection with God, who is infinitely far above us in power, glory, wisdom and righteousness. No created human being could rise up to God’s level as Creator, but God is able to put himself at our level.

Jesus is perfect in righteousness and holiness, and yet one of us. He is the pathway by which other human beings are brought into the presence of the holy and perfect God. The doctrine of the Trinity says that Jesus is fully God, and the doctrine of the Incarnation says that Jesus became fully human, and he continues to be both divine and human, and with that combination, now we are ready to talk about a relationship between God and humanity.

3. Humanity in the Image of God

A. Created in his Image

Jesus shows us what God is like, and he also shows us what humanity is supposed to be like, and this implies that there is some important similarity between God and humans. This is not because humans are good enough to rise up to the level of God. No, it all comes from God as a gift given to us. He is the one who created us this way in the first place. We find it stated in the first chapter of the Bible: God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

God did it, and he said it was good. Humanity was created “in the image of God,” to somehow look like God and to represent God here on earth. Again, we are not supposed to think of skin color, hair color or the number of fingers on our hands. Those things are incidentals that only apply to creatures. What is important is that humanity should be like God in a spiritual sense, and we see that emphasis in Galatians 5:22, where the apostle Paul describes the results of the working of the Holy Spirit in us: “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Humans are supposed to be like God in these ways.

Now we can ask the Trinitarian question: In what way does the doctrine of the Trinity help us understand what humanity is? The answer is, that just as the Persons in the Trinity interact with one another in love, so also we as persons ought to interact with all other human persons in love. That’s the first fruit of the Spirit, and the way that we were made to be like God. Love should be the basis for our lives and our societies.

Just as the Triune God is essentially relational, with the Persons defined in reference to one another, so humans are also essentially relational, and our identity as persons depends on our relationships with other people. “Who we are” depends on the relationships we have with others. No one is a solitary individual; the meaning of life is not in self-existence, but it is to be found in our relationships with each other, in the way we live and think about other people. We were created to be in right relationship with the Triune God and also to be in right relationship with each other in a way that mirrors Jesus’ relationship with the Father and the Spirit.

B. Sin Defaces the Image

Genesis tells us that humans didn’t want life on the terms that God had given them. They wanted to define their own life, doing their own thing, instead of having to do God’s things. So instead of love, joy and peace, they choose selfishness, and they got strife and unhappiness.
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What does the doctrine of the Trinity reveal about the nature of sin? How does it help us better understand what sin is? If good is defined as humanity being in the image of God, then sin is doing things that are unlike God. If God is a relational being, and humans were created to be in relationships of love, then sin is a disruption in our relationships - problems in our relationships with God, and problems in our relationships with one another.

As a practical matter, we have rules that describe what a good relationship is. In a good relationship, we don’t lie to each other, we don’t steal from one another, we don’t dishonor or disrespect the other, and so forth. Avoiding these problems doesn’t necessarily create a good relationship, but breaking these rules hurts our relationships. Rules do not exist for their own sake, but in order to serve something more important, and that is relationships based on love.

When humanity rejected God, we also rejected him as the source of the love that we need. We were created to be like God in that respect, but we went in a wrong direction.

C. God Restores the Image - in himself

The Old Testament doesn’t say much more about the image of God, but the New Testament picks up the phrase “image of God” and applies it to Jesus Christ. We have already looked at Colossians 1:15: “He is the image of the invisible God.” He is the image that Adam failed to be. He shows us in a visible way what God is like in the invisible, spiritual world.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us something similar: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” When we see Jesus, we see what the Father is like in relationship to Jesus. So we expect God to be like Jesus, in his compassion and mercy and love.

D. We are in the Image of Christ

This concept becomes directly relevant to us when we see that the Bible talks about us being formed in the image of Christ. We can see this in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” That is, we look more and more like him - and again, that’s not talking about his physical shape, size and color - it’s talking about the way he is spiritually, in relationship to the Father and the Spirit from all eternity.

- Galatians 4:19 talks about how “Christ is formed in you.”
- Ephesians 4:13 talks about how “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”
- Colossians 3:10 says we “have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” - and that is Jesus Christ.

Since Christ is the image of God, when we become more like Christ, we are being brought back toward the image of God that we are supposed to be. Right now, it is a spiritual transformation, a mental and ethical or relational transformation, and eventually, it will be a physical transformation as well, all based on God’s original plan.

This concept is seen in a different way in Romans 5. In that chapter, Paul is comparing Adam with Jesus Christ. Verse 14 says that Adam was a type, or a model, “a pattern of the one to come.” Just as the first Adam brought in sin and death, the second Adam brought in righteousness and life. Just as we shared in the results of the first Adam, so also we share in the benefits of the second Adam. Paul summarizes it in verses 18-19:

Just as one trespass [Adam’s sin] resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act [that of Jesus] resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous.

All humanity was included in the results of the first Adam, and all humanity is included in the results of the second Adam, Jesus. It’s not just a few people that God chose ahead of time, and it’s not just one particular nation, or one particular social class - God’s plan is for everyone he has created. Jesus is Lord of all.

Adam messed it up, but Jesus did it right - and in Christ; all humanity has a fresh start on being “the image of God.” Jesus is the key to our transformation - not only is he the model that we copy, but he is also the engine that drives the whole process. He supplies the power and the direction.
4. The Covenant Relationship

A. The covenant formula

Even though the Old Testament does not use the phrase “image of God” very often, it does talk about the relationship we have with God, and the term it uses for that most of the time is covenant. We can see the basic idea in Exodus 6:7: “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.” And we see it in:

- Leviticus 26:12: “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.”
- Jeremiah 7:23: “I will be your God and you will be my people.”
- Ezekiel 36:28: “You will be my people, and I will be your God.”

Old Testament scholars call this the “covenant formula.” It’s found more than 20 times in the Bible. It is an adaptation of words that people in the ancient Middle East used for marriages, and adoptions, and for political treaties. In a marriage, it would go something like this: “I will be your husband, and you will be my wife.” In an adoption, it would be “I will be your father, and you will be my son.” In a political treaty, it would be adapted: “I will be your king and you will be my people.” It is declaring a relationship that the people intend to be permanent, a relationship that now defines who they are in relation to the other.

In the Law and in the Prophets, God repeatedly talks about covenants between God and humanity. He made covenants with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron and David. In each covenant, he says, in effect, I have made with you a covenant relationship, and as you live according to it, then our relationship will be a good one. The goal is to have an ongoing relationship.

B. A New Covenant Promised

The people of Israel broke the covenant time and time again. Eventually through the prophets God promised that there would be a new covenant, made in the hearts of the people, and God’s Spirit would be in them. This is not something that the people could achieve for themselves - it would be something that God would have to do for them. He would give them a new heart, a new Spirit.

- Jeremiah 31:33: “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”
- Ezekiel 36:26-27: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

In Isaiah 42:6, God promises to make his servant “to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.” The covenant relationship between God and humanity would be focused and embodied in one person - who we now know as Jesus Christ. The covenant that we have with God is found in him; he is the covenant for all the people; our connection to God depends 100 percent on him.

C. Relationship terms in the New Testament

The New Testament says that we have this new covenant in Christ. The Lord’s Supper reminds us that we have a new covenant in the blood of Christ. But this is not the only relationship term in the New Testament. For example, it calls us children of God; we are adopted into the family of God.

- Romans 8:15 says, “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption toson ship.”
- Ephesians 1:5 says, “He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ.”

This means we become part of God’s family, with rights and privileges that are part of being in the royal family. We are in a new social class.

Paul uses a different relationship term in 2 Corinthians 11:2: “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” This marriage concept is used in the book of Revelation, too: “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).
I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” (Revelation 21:2-3)

Here the covenant formula is used again, this time in the context of a wedding. God will live with us, and we will live with him. We will be his children, adopted as siblings of Jesus Christ, part of the royal family forever. Through Jesus, we are brought into fellowship with the Triune God, sharing in his status as Son.

Another way to describe this is “the kingdom of God.” That biblical phrase means being part of the universe in which life is lived in the way that God lives. We become part of the ruling family, with the privileges and responsibilities of that.

It means that eternal life is not just living for a really long time - it means that we live with each other, and with God, forever and ever. It is social, not solitary, because that is the way that God made us to be. We were made in his image, and he is social, and not solitary. The doctrine of the Trinity helps us understand who we are, what life is all about, and how God is bringing it about for us. The Triune God who began a good work in us is sure to finish the job, creating humanity to be a reflection of what God is: Persons in perfect community and harmony.

5. Salvation is more than a Verdict

Understanding where we started, and where we will end up, can help us understand a little more about what salvation is. Some people think that salvation is just a matter of going to heaven when you die. But when it comes to salvation, there’s a lot more to it than just a change in location.

Some people think that salvation is just a matter of getting a favorable verdict on the Day of Judgment. There’s going to be a day of judgment, they warn, and everybody is guilty and deserves to be thrown into hell. But if you believe in Jesus, that guilty verdict will be changed to “innocent.” It is true that there will be a day of judgment, and that everyone is guilty of sin and that Jesus allows us to escape the verdict we deserve, and he allows us to enter a heavenly paradise.

But doesn’t salvation have anything to do with life right now? Yes, it does. There’s more to salvation than just a change in our future verdict.

A. Restoring us to God’s Image

Salvation means that we are rescued from sin, not just guilt, and we are rescued from the results of sin. It means that God’s original plan gets back on track - and the original plan is that we were made in the image of God and we were to live in that covenant relationship. It is a spiritual likeness that God wants us to have, and that can be summed up in the word love. We are to love God with everything we have, and we love other people in the way that we love ourselves.

Just changing our location isn’t going to restore us to being like God. Just changing the final verdict isn’t going to make us the people we were meant to be. The goal in salvation is to change us - so that we are spiritually like God, so that we are his children in a way that mirrors Jesus’ own sonship. That’s the original plan, and God hasn’t given up on it. He sent Jesus to show us the way and to be the way, for all humanity to be brought back into fellowship with the Triune God. The Father initiated the plan, the Son of God carried out key steps in the plan, and the Holy Spirit also has an ongoing role in the transformation, the change that we all need. We will briefly look at each of those.

B. The role of the Father

Some people describe the gospel as the Father setting the rules, and getting angry at us because we have broken the rules. He says that we deserve to die, but then the Son has compassion on us and volunteers to pay the penalty for us. So the Father pours out his anger on his Son, and then he says, “Justice has been done. Those sinners can come into my kingdom, because the penalty has been paid.” We have an angry Father and a compassionate Son who is able to get his Father to change his mind.

Maybe that’s the way it works in some human families, but that’s not the way it works in the Triune God. It’s not true to the Bible, and not true in any system of theology, whether it’s Trinitarian or Calvinist or Catholic or Eastern Orthodox.
he had a perfect relationship with the Father and the Spirit and, as much as could be done from his side, with all humans. Since he is our Creator, he represented us, and we are allowed to share in his righteousness.

3. Third, Jesus had to die for us. The wages of sin is death, the Bible says, and death is the result we would expect, if we try to live independent from the creator and sustainer of the universe. Jesus, as a mortal human being, experienced death, the result of our sins. He took our sins upon himself, so that we might share in his righteousness. Since the Creator of all humanity became a human, he had an essential unity with all of us. As our Creator, he was able to accept responsibility and the consequences for all of our sins, and to die for the sins of all humanity.

4. Fourth, Jesus had to be resurrected. Romans 5:10 says that we are “saved by his life.” Jesus is able to save us from death because he has overcome death. He has been there, done that, and now he can do it for us, too.

5. Last, Jesus had to ascend into heaven as one of us, fully human, and be restored to complete fellowship with the Father and Spirit. The Bible says he ascended bodily into heaven, as a glorified human being, and he is now at the Father’s right hand, which is a figure of speech meaning the most honored position. His is eternally, even now, our mediator, our intercessor, praying for us, and transforming us to become more like he is. By the Spirit he is sharing with us his regenerated and perfected humanity.

Our salvation is not complete with just the forgiveness of sins. We need that, but if that’s all we got, we’d still have a big problem, because we all have a tendency to sin again, and we want to be freed from that tendency. Paul calls it a slavery to sin, and we want to be liberated from that slavery. So, by sending us his Spirit, all that Jesus had done for us on earth and completed for us in heaven is now being worked out in us. Jesus by his Spirit is continuing to work for our transformation.

We can rightly say that we are saved by the death of Jesus, but that is only part of the picture. A more complete statement is that we are saved by the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension

Trinitarian theology reminds us that Jesus is fully God. He is just like God the Father. He is just as angry as the Father is, and just as loving as the Father is. He didn’t change the Father’s mind about anything. Rather, he reveals the Father’s mind - the Father wants us to be saved just as much as Jesus does. Let’s look at a couple of scriptures that show that.

- John 3:16 says it well: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” God the Father loves humanity and he wants us to be saved, not to be condemned or punished.

- Romans 5:8: “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God did not demonstrate his love for us by sending somebody else to die. It is only because Christ is God, that his death could demonstrate the love of God. They have equal love for us, equal compassion for us. The Triune God is in full agreement on our salvation. Father, Son and Spirit created us for a purpose, and they are working together to bring us to completion.

C. The role of the Son

Even though the Father initiated the plan, we often forget that, and usually think of Jesus as the Savior, the one who carried it out. He has the more visible role. How did Christ save us? Christians usually think that we were saved by Jesus’ death on the cross. That is an important part of the picture, but it is only part of the picture.

1. The first step in our salvation was the Incarnation, when Jesus was made a flesh-and-blood human being. He took our nature as his own. That is when he became the second Adam, the new leader of all humanity. Just as we were all guilty because of the sin of Adam, so also we are made righteous in the righteousness of Jesus, because Jesus came to give all humanity a new beginning (Romans 5). This is not a matter of genetics - it is a spiritual reality that the Incarnation includes all of us in the salvation that Jesus brings. In himself, Jesus reconnects all humanity to God.

2. The next step in our salvation is that Jesus had to live a righteous life, without any sin - because if he sinned, then he would simply be like one of us, needing to be saved. He would not even be able to save himself, and not anyone else. He lived without sin -
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of Jesus. If that’s too much to say at one time, then just say that we are saved by Jesus. We are saved by who he is, and what he has done.

How did Jesus save us?

Let’s focus on the death of Jesus for a few minutes, because it is an important part of the picture, and perhaps the most distinctive part of Christian theology. How can the death of Jesus do anything for our salvation?

One common explanation is that our sin requires a penalty, and Jesus serves as a substitute to pay the penalty on our behalf. This is called the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement, and it is so common that some people think that it’s the only explanation. But there is a danger in this theory, and the Bible gives us other ways to explain it, as well.

1) Danger: a focus on Punishment

First, the danger: A problem can arise if we focus on the “penalty” part of the theory, by suggesting that God had to punish Jesus for all the sins that we committed. This suggests that one Person in the Godhead is inflicting pain on another Person in the Godhead; this suggests separation rather than unity in the Triune God. This does not seem like a very righteous thing for God to do; we do not allow substitutions in our penal codes and systems of justice.

This theory acts as if the primary problem with sin is the punishment, as if the primary problem with crime is that our prisons are full. But this is focusing on the results, not the real problem. It focuses on the verdict, and it still leaves people with a problem: we all have a tendency to sin, and the death of Jesus does not address that problem. The problem is not just in the things that we do, but in the kind of people that we are.

What has happened here is that people have let a legal metaphor, a figure of speech, become the controlling description of what God is doing. All our words are based on human experiences, and the meaning of our words depends on how they are used in human affairs. But our experiences are not the measure of what such words mean in the divine realm. When God uses courtroom terminology to describe sin and salvation, we should not let our concepts of legal procedure to be the final description of what God is doing. When we say that the penalty of sin is death, we should not think that “penalty” is an exact description of what is going on, as if God is obligated to inflict punishment for every transgression of his law.

“Consequence” would probably be a more appropriate term. The result of sin is death, even without God having to step in to inflict it. When Jesus died for us, he experienced the consequence of our sin, the result of the way of life human beings chose, but God did not have to perform additional pain and suffering so that Jesus could pay the penalty we deserved. No, he suffered and died without any need for extra punishments coming from God.

God does pronounce a judgment on sin. He says, “If you sin, you’re going to die.” He does not say, “If you sin, I’m going to kill you.” Death is a natural result of us turning our backs on the One who gave us life. God doesn’t have to do anything extra to us in order for us to suffer from the results of sin and to die from the results of sin. We experience the judgment, the result he warned us about, without him having to do anything extra to punish us. Similarly, he didn’t have to do anything extra to Jesus for Jesus to die for our sins. When God did intervene, he gave Jesus life instead of death.

That’s what he does for us, too. God is angry about sin, but as Ezekiel says, he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (18:23, 32). Death does not serve his purpose. His goal is salvation, not punishment. The reason that he sent Jesus to us is so that we could escape the consequences of sin. He wants to rescue us, not punish us. We should not force God into our legal metaphor.

Trinitarian theologians accept the idea that Jesus’ death was substitutionary, that Jesus died as a substitute for us. But we generally avoid the word “penal,” because that word suggests that God the Father punished his one and only Son, and did something to increase his pain. It puts legal requirements and demands as putting requirements on what God has to do, as if law and punishment is the most important description of what good relationships ought to be. When we bring the doctrine of the Trinity into the picture, it helps us see that punishment is not the best way to think about it.
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2) Biblical Descriptions of Salvation

If the Bible does not describe the death of Jesus as a punishment required by some law that God had to obey, how does it describe it? In several ways: Articles could be written about each one, but here we will give only a summary:

1. Jesus said that he would die as a ransom: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The word “ransom” suggests a payment that we might give to a kidnapper. Some people in the early church made elaborate theories of how Jesus paid a price to Satan, as if Satan had some legitimate claims over us. But they were making the mistake of letting a figure of speech turn into an exact description of what was going on.

2. We see a similar figure of speech in the word “redemption.” That word describes people getting friends and relatives out of slavery. They bought them back; that is the original meaning of “redeem.” Jesus bought us with a price, Paul says, but we should not think that anyone actually received that payment. It is a figure of speech. The Old Testament says that God redeemed the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, but he did not pay anyone in order to do it. We should not let the figure of speech dictate to us what happened in spiritual reality.

3. The Bible describes Jesus as a sacrificial lamb. John the Baptist called him the “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). The apostle Paul says that “Christ our Passover has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). But again, the picture is not exact. Passover lambs were not designed as payments for sin, but they were associated with escaping slavery and death.

4. Jesus is called “an offering and a sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). In the Old Testament, there were a wide variety of sacrifices - some of animals, some of flour and oil, some for sin, some for purity rituals, some for thanksgiving, and so forth, and Jesus fulfilled the symbolism of all of them.

5. Jesus is our place of atonement. Romans 3:25 says, “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement.” Some translations say propitiation, and some say expiation, and scholars have argued about that for a long time. The Greek word meant one thing in a pagan context, and another thing in a Jewish context, but the Greek word is also the word used for the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant, the place where the high priest sprinkled blood on the Day of Atonement. So the NIV quoted above calls it the “sacrifice of atonement.” But the sacrifice was never done at the mercy seat; a better translation might be “the place of atonement,” without trying to be more precise than the word actually is. Jesus is the place, or the way that our sins are atoned, so there is nothing between us and God, so that we are restored to fellowship with God.

6. Reconciliation is a similar term; it refers to people who were once enemies or alienated, but are now on good terms with each other. Romans 5:10 says, “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” Colossians 1:20 says that “God was pleased…to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through [the Son’s] blood, shed on the cross.”

7. Justification is another important term. Some say it is the most important term of all, the one that makes sense out of all the others. Romans 5:9 says that we are “justified by his blood,” or by his death on the cross. Justification means to make something right. The word could be used for making a relationship right or it could be used for making something legally right. In a trial, a person could either be found guilty - condemned - or found righteous (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:9). When the judge declared a person to be in the right, this was justification. This can be a helpful way of looking at salvation, but it misses out on the fact that God wants more from us than to be declared legally innocent - he also wants us to be in fellowship with him forever. Yes, we are guilty of a crime, but the solution is not just to let us out of jail, but it is to transform who we are, so that we are more like Christ.

8. In Colossians, Paul gives us another interesting way to look at the death of Jesus: “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (2:15). By his death on the cross, Jesus won a victory! He defeated spiritual powers that were fighting against us. Paul does not explain the logic in how that works, but he says that it does.

The Bible uses a few additional figures of speech, but the point is clear, that there are several ways to look at it, and we should use all of these ways.
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Trinitarian theology says that the meaning of human life is to be found in relationships, and relationships cannot be put into precise formulas. But we can state some basic facts about it. First, Jesus became a real human, and he was mortal. Even if the Jews and the Romans didn’t kill him, he had a mortal body that would eventually get old and he would die. He was part of the Godhead, but he became part of humanity, and he accepted all of the negative consequences of that. Why did he do it? Out of love: God loved us so much that he sent his only Son to die for us, and the Son loved us so much that he did it.

So Jesus has connected the world of heaven and earth, divine and human. In his death, Jesus demonstrated that he was a real human, completely in union with humanity. He completed his identification with us, sharing in everything that it means to be human. By doing that, he reversed the curse that was against us (Genesis 3:19; Galatians 3:13). He was able, on behalf of all humanity, to suffer the consequences of sin, and yet since he was personally without any sin, death did not have a legitimate claim on him. He had to be resurrected, and as the new Adam, the new head of humanity, he sets the pattern for what will happen to all of us, and that’s resurrection - not just a life that lasts forever, but a life that is in fellowship with the Triune God.

D. Role of the Spirit in our Salvation

The Father sent the Son to save us, and the Son did his work. Does that mean that there’s nothing left to do until the Last Judgment? Certainly not! Trinitarian theology reminds us that we should expect the Spirit to have an important role in our salvation.

Shortly before Jesus died, he told his disciples: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you…. When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth…. He will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16:7, 13-14)

So, even though Jesus completed his earthly job, part of the work must be completed after Jesus goes away - and that work is done by the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, and the Comforter, who is sent by Jesus. What does the Holy Spirit do in our salvation? We don’t need to present a complete theology of the Spirit here, but let’s mention a few points:

1. The Spirit gives us new birth. In John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus, “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit…. You must be born again” (verses 5, 7). We need a new start in life, and in one sense, Jesus gave all humanity that when he became “the second Adam.” But for individuals, this is done by the Holy Spirit.

2. The Spirit helps us realize that we are born again, that we are children of God. Romans 8:15 says, “The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’

3. The Spirit also enables us to understand the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul writes, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God … through the Spirit.” Unbelievers might understand what the words of Scripture mean, but people don’t accept those words as true without the Spirit leading them. The Spirit helps us see truth about God and truth about ourselves, and helps us continue growing in the truth. As John 16 says, the Spirit teaches us and guides into the truth. No one has all the truth yet, so this is still a work in progress.

4. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us, or sets us apart for God’s use. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 supports this: “God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”

5. The Spirit gives us power over sin. “If you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). As the Spirit leads us, helps us understand, and gives us strength, we are to stop doing bad things and start doing more godly things. This does not mean that we stop all sin (even though we wish we could), but that our basic orientation in life is now toward the good. Christian life and good behavior are part of the process of sanctification. The Spirit sets us apart for God’s use, and God wants to use us for good.

6. The Spirit produces results in our lives: love, joy, peace, and other good qualities. These are the results God wants to see in us. This is a transformation in our attitudes as well as our actions - we are being changed from the inside out.
More could be said on each of these points — and more points could be added. Our main purpose here is just to make the larger point that the Spirit has a vital role in our salvation — we cannot be saved without the work of the Spirit in our lives. Salvation is a Trinitarian work, involving the Father, Son, and Spirit working in harmony to bring us to the kind of persons we are supposed to be.

6. How do we Respond?

We have seen some of the ways that God is working in our lives: He is restoring in us the divine image, so that we are living representatives of who he is and what he is like. It is a spiritual image, started when God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.” We were made to be like God, and since Jesus is the perfect image of God, we are being conformed into his image, changed so that we are more like he is. The Spirit is doing that work in us, producing in us the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, and other attitudes and actions that help us have better relationships. This is part of the ongoing work of salvation that God is doing within us.

But a time is coming when we will be transformed into God’s image in additional ways, too. Romans 6:5 says, “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Our physical nature will be changed, and we will share in the glory of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul describes the resurrection, and he says in verse 49, “just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man [Adam], so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven [Jesus].” We will have the image of Christ in a more glorious way.

1 John 3:1-2 gives us a similar picture:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

We will be like he is; we will be even more fully made in his image.

All humanity has been created in the image of God, made for this purpose. We are already his children, already “in his image” in one sense, but there is more to come. As we are transformed into his image in this life in the way we live and think, we will be transformed more completely into his image when we are resurrected into glory and given immortality and incorruption. This is the wonderful future God has prepared for us.

What conclusion does John draw from this wonderful promise? He says it in the very next verse: “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (verse 3). When we want to be like God is, then we want to be like him in our thoughts and actions. The glory that God has designed for us is that we should be like he is.

There’s a lot more to eternal life than just living forever. A never-ending life of suffering would not be good, and that is not what God wants us to have. Rather, he wants us to have a never-ending life of love and joy, of good relationships — relationships with millions and billions of other people who help one another and love one another. The good news of the gospel, the good news of the Bible, the good news of salvation, is that not only do we live forever, but those we will live with God. That’s the best part: God wants us to live with him. We can see this in the last book of the Bible, Revelation 21:1-4:

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away…. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

God will live with us, and we will live with him. We will be his children, adopted as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, part of the royal family forever. We are already his children. We already have a relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit.

How can our vision of future life affect the way we live now? Here’s another thought that many Christians struggle with: If salvation is by grace, why does the New Testament have so many commands about what we are supposed to do? Is it grace for how we get in, but works after we get in? No.
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It is because God is not just giving us existence that lasts forever - he is giving us life of a certain quality, life that is based on love rather than selfishness and competition. That’s the kind of life we will enjoy in eternity, and that’s the kind of life that is good, not just in the future but also right now. When the New Testament gives us commands, it is describing for us the kind of life that God is giving us, the life of the age to come. Grace says: I am giving you a never-ending life of joy. The commands say: This is what it looks like. This is the way that will help you have joy and express love.

In a parable, we might say that God is at the gateway to his kingdom, and he invites us in. You are welcome to come in, he says, where there is no more pain or sorrow, or lying or cheating or selfishness. Some people may say, “I would like to have ‘no more pain,’” but can’t I keep my selfishness?” God replies, “No, they are two sides of the same coin. Selfishness causes pain. If you go through this gate, I will scrub all the selfishness out of you, so that you don’t cause pain either for yourself or for anyone else.” It’s possible that some people will be so in love with their selfishness that they will refuse to go in.

We do not want to be in love with our selfishness. Rather, we need to see selfishness as one of our enemies, an attitude that can rob us of joy and peace. It is part of the sin that so easily besets us - it is an enemy that keeps us in slavery - it is an enemy we need to be liberated from. It is an enemy that Christ has already defeated on the cross, and he wants us to share in that victory, and it is done though the Holy Spirit living in us.

A Trinitarian understanding of our purpose in life helps us see the purpose of salvation, and the purpose of the commands we see in the Bible. Once we see where we are going, it is easier to see how God is bringing us there. Love is central to the whole picture, because love is the life of the Father, Son and Spirit, and we are participating in the divine nature, sharing in the life and love of the Triune God.

As images of God, we want our life to be characteristic of the age to come, patterned after the life that God himself has. We are images of God and representatives of God, and we should want to live in the way that he does, the way that we will all live in eternity. This life is representative of God himself, a fulfillment of the image that we are supposed to be. In the age to come, we will forever be images of God, children of God, completely and perfectly.

The doctrine of the Trinity has enriched our understanding of many other doctrines, and we will continue to learn more about it as we grow in grace and knowledge. It makes sense that God’s nature is reflected in everything that God does, and that means it affects all other doctrines, because our doctrines are based on what God is doing in the people he has created.

We see God’s love throughout the story, from before creation and in the cross of Christ, and on into eternity in the future. We see the Father, Son and Spirit in creation, in salvation, and in eternity. God wants to live with us, and us to live with him, in love, forever and ever. In his love and grace, he has given this to us - and in our love for him, we enjoy learning about it. But we know that this is only the beginning of our understanding.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the apostle Paul says that now, “we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” We have knowledge, but our knowledge is partial, and we look forward to learning more. We rejoice that God knows us fully, and we can be confident that he will continue to draw us toward himself, so that on some future day, we will see him face to face and know him fully, sharing in his life and love forever and ever.
What I have just described has been the Churches classical method of proving that she is the true Church of Christ. It is known as the science of Apologetics.

Vatican II received an analytical critique only gradually. As Vatican II happened, nearly all Catholics gave to it the benefit of the doubt, but at the same time sensed, unmistakably, that there was something deeply, deeply wrong in the Church during and after Vatican II. By analogy, you tend to believe your doctor when he tells you that you will not have any bad side effects from a new medication. But when the severe side effects come, the reality which you experience overcomes whatever faith you had in your doctor’s word. So when the hierarchy which engendered Vatican II told us that nothing essential changed, we tended to believe it. But as the changes gradually unfolded, and the evidence mounted more and more that Vatican II was a pill of deadly poison, we gradually took a longer look at Vatican II and its causes. In fact, this work is far from done. Much more needs to be written about Vatican II, particularly about those who organized it and directed its content and outcome.

Because the Mass is the face of the Catholic Faith, the contrast of the traditional Mass with the new has received the most attention over the years. In fact, there are many who desire to see only the retention of the traditional Mass as the solution to the Church’s problems. They see no problem with Vatican II, or are willing to accept it in a traditional interpretation, in order to save it. The Mass, they say, is the unique problem and therefore the unique solution.

But what gave us the New Mass is Vatican II and the heretical underlying theology of the council. Ecumenism is the spirit of Vatican II, which is the abandonment of the very notion of dogma, the very notion of absolute, unchanging revealed truths. Ecumenism detests the rigid dogmas of the pre-Vatican II Church. Instead, these dogmas must have their lines blurred, and become negotiable, at least in their meaning and import, with the contradicting doctrines of false religions.

It is ecumenism that is at the root of all the problems after Vatican II. Ecumenism could not tolerate a Church that said that it alone was the one true Church of Christ, and that outside of it there is no salvation. It demanded a new ecclesiology, one in which the Church would be seen as a communion to which you can partially belong and partially not belong. Salvation could not be restricted to the Catholic Church;
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you cannot do ecumenism with those whose religions are leading them to hell. Rather all religions lead to God some more directly, some less directly. All religions have value.

Since the papacy is the greatest obstacle to ecumenism, as Montini (Paul VI) himself said, it was clear that it, too, had to go. As a result, collegiality was taught by Vatican II, the doctrine that the supreme authority of the Church is vested in the college or body of bishops.

Likewise in the moral sphere, ecumenism could not tolerate a Church which insisted that civil society recognize it as the one true Church of Christ, to the exclusion of others. Ecumenism could not tolerate that those who profess false religions be told by the state that they had no right to profess or practice these false religions, since to do so would be an insult to God. As a result, the council taught the doctrine of religious liberty.

We say, therefore, that there are four major heresies in Vatican II: (1) ecumenism itself, the basis of the rest of them; (2) the new ecclesiology; (3) collegiality; (4) religious liberty.

The New Mass is but a by-product of ecumenism in the domain of liturgy. There would be no New Mass if the ecumenism had not been triumphant in the minds of the Vatican II clergy.

Besides the heresy of ecumenism itself postasy is a better term it is religious liberty which has occupied the attention of most, as the point in which Vatican II makes its departure from tradition. It is true that it does make a departure, and it does so with striking contradiction to the teachings of recent popes on this issue.

The implication is, however, that there is nothing else wrong with Vatican II, except ecumenism and religious liberty. There are two other very important heresies, heresies which open the door to ecumenical abominations: the new ecclesiology and collegiality.

Here we concern ourselves only with the new ecclesiology.

1. The Traditional Ecclesiology

There is but one Church of Christ, and it is the Roman Catholic Church. It is the one true Church outside of which there is no salvation.

They are members of the Roman Catholic Church who are validly baptized, and who have not been alienated from it by (a) the sin of heresy, (2) the sin of schism, (3) the censure of excommunication. Those who are validly baptized in non-Catholic sects are presumed by Church law to participate in and assent to the sins of heresy and/or schism of their respective sects. Privately, however, they may be not guilty of these sins, owing to invincible ignorance of the true Faith, in which case they may belong to the Catholic Church by desire, provided they fulfill other conditions. In these cases, their adherence to the Roman Catholic Church by desire is sufficient for salvation.

The Roman Catholic Church is absolutely and exclusively identified with the Mystical Body of Christ. They are one and the same thing. There is no distinction to make. The Mystical Body is the Roman Catholic Church considered as a comparison to Christ’s physical body, where He is the Head and we the members.

Absolute requirements for belonging to the Roman Catholic Church and the Mystical Body of Christ are (1) that one professes all the truths which are taught by the Church as pertaining to faith, and (2) that one is submitted to the Roman Pontiff as the visible head of the Church. If either of these conditions is failing, one cannot be a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

Because the Roman Catholic Church is the unique Church of Christ, it is the unique means of salvation. No other church has the means to bring people to heaven. While it is true that they may have certain elements of the truth, both natural and supernatural, and in some cases valid sacraments, these elements are insufficient to lead people to heaven. For they are mixed with poisonous false doctrines which, if they are believed with pride and stubbornness, will necessarily lead to hell. All of the elements of truth in the world a true religion do not make, nor a means of salvation. By analogy, to have many elements of an automobile does not make a working vehicle which will bring you to your destination. An aircraft which has only certain elements of what an aircraft should have will necessarily crash and burn at the end of the runway, together with all of the people in it. The only way in which people who adhere to these false religions can avoid the inevitable result of being on a ship which is going to the bottom, is if they adhere to the true Faith by desire, at least implicit, and adhere to the false religion through no fault of their own. But they must fulfill many other conditions in order to achieve the justification of their souls and persevere in grace.
2. The New Ecclesiology

In contrast to this simple and logical doctrine concerning the nature of the Catholic Church, and the obligation to belong to it, the Modernists have concocted a new doctrine, a novelty, a heresy.

The new ecclesiology is, as I have said, a product of ecumenism. You cannot do ecumenism with the ecclesiology I have just described, in which all non-Catholic religions are perceived as death-ships, Titans bound for the mud below. The mania for ecumenism drove the progressive theologians even in the 1930s toward a theology whereby all religions had a certain value, to the extent that they all possessed some religious truth.

A pioneer in this thinking was Dom Beauduin, Benedictine. Most prominent however, was Henri de Lubac, whose theology was condemned under Pius XII, but which later became the very teaching of the Council under Montini. De Lubac was later made a cardinal by Wojtyla. Yves Congar, a Dominican, was also influential. Ratzinger has become the most notable of all of the promoters of the new ecclesiology, writing two major documents which describe it, his 1992 Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion, and his 2000 Dominus Jesus. Both of these were approved and signed by Wojtyla. Both contain explicit heresies concerning the Church.

What is the new ecclesiology? Here it is in summary:

- The Church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are not one and the same thing, since non-Catholic churches belong to the Church of Christ, but not to the Catholic Church.
- The Church of Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church, inasmuch as the Roman Catholic Church has the fullness of all of the elements of the Church of Christ.
- The Church of Christ, although it does not subsist in non-Catholic churches, because they lack the fullness, is nevertheless found in these non-Catholic churches in an imperfect way.
- Non-Catholic churches are therefore truly particular churches which make up, together with the Roman Catholic Church, the one Church of Christ.
- The Roman Catholic Church is in partial communion with these non-Catholic churches, to the extent that they have elements of the Church of Christ, such as valid sacraments and true doctrines.
- Non-Catholic churches are means of salvation to the extent that they preserve the genuine elements of the Church of Christ.
- In those non-Catholic churches that have a valid Eucharist (e.g., Greek Orthodox), the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church becomes present every time they offer a valid Eucharist.
- Non-Catholic churches which are not subject to the Roman Pontiff (which means all of them) are wounded because of this lack of subjection. Yet they continue, despite their repudiation of the Roman primacy, to be particular Churches, i.e., member-churches of the big Church of Christ.

3. Analysis and Critique

The new ecclesiology is, as I have said, a product of ecumenism. You cannot do ecumenism with the ecclesiology I have just described, in which all non-Catholic religions are perceived as death-ships, Titans bound for the mud below. The mania for ecumenism drove the progressive theologians even in the 1930s toward a theology whereby all religions had a certain value, to the extent that they all possessed some religious truth.

It is something like bingo. If your card has all the numbers, you have the fullness you have bingo. But even if you miss bingo, your card could be half filled or a quarter filled. While you do not have bingo, your card nevertheless has value, since you have an imperfect collection of what makes up bingo.

Everything in this new ecclesiology is partial and full. You are partially Church of Christ if you are non-Catholic, but fully if you are Catholic. Catholics are in partial communion with non-Catholics, but wait for the day when they can be in full communion, i.e., when Modernism erodes the faith enough that people will not care anymore if they are Protestant, Orthodox, or Catholic. Likewise these non-Catholic churches are means of salvation to the extent that they possess valid sacraments and true doctrines. This is as silly as saying that an aircraft has the capacity to take you to Europe to the extent that it has a half a tank of fuel. The fact that it is lacking the other half of the fuel means that you and your fellow passengers are going to be
food for the eyeless aquatic creatures that inhabit the dark depths of the Atlantic Ocean.

In other words, the true Church of Christ is not a collection of true elements, like a pile of rocks, but is a unified essence, a single thing, just as Christ, its head, is one Person. What is outside of Christ cannot be partially Christ. You cannot be partially a member of Christ, and partially not, any more than you could be partially someone’s son, and partially not. Essence does not admit of degrees or separable parts. Either the whole essence (nature) is there, or none of it is there. Imagine a gas station that advertised that it sold a product with elements of true gasoline. Imagine an airline that boasted of a fleet of aircraft which possessed elements of true airplanes, or bragged that its pilots had elements of true pilot training. Imagine if a waiter put a steak in front of you, and said that it came from an animal that had elements of true cow. I think the point is made.

Elements of the true Church of Christ do not constitute any false sect as a partial member of the Church of Christ. The elements are stolen, like so much booty, from the Catholic Church. They are false churches, sects, and their use of Catholic doctrine and Catholic sacraments is under false pretense and sacrilegious. They are involved in a shameful lie when they present themselves as true Christianity, and their lie should be exposed and condemned.

But let the popes speak. I have prepared a triple-column comparison of the new ecclesiology and the traditional ecclesiology. In the third column, I draw the conclusion from the comparison.

I have reduced the comparison of the two systems to four questions:

• Whether schismatic and/or heretical churches are part of the Church of Christ?
• Whether it is possible to be part of the Church of Christ without being submitted to the Roman Pontiff?
• Whether it is true that in every valid celebration of the Eucharist, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church becomes present?
• Whether the Holy Ghost uses schismatic and/or heretical sects as means of salvation?

There is sharp difference between Catholic Church and the reformed churches regarding the notion of the means of revelation. Catholics conceive both Scripture and tradition as means of revelation. Protestants claim the Bible is the only rule of faith, meaning that it contains all of the material one needs for theology and that this material is sufficiently clear that one does not need apostolic tradition or the Church’s magisterium (teaching authority) to help one understand it. In the Protestant view, the whole of Christian truth is found within the Bible’s pages. Anything extraneous to the Bible is simply non-authoritative, unnecessary, or wrong—and may well hinder one in coming to God.

Catholics, on the other hand, recognize that the Bible does not endorse this view and that, in fact, it is repudiated in Scripture. The true “rule of faith” - as expressed in the Bible itself - is Scripture plus apostolic tradition, as manifested in the living teaching authority of the Catholic Church, to which were entrusted the moral teachings of Jesus and the apostles, along with the authority to interpret Scripture correctly.
In the Second Vatican Council’s document on divine revelation, Dei Verbum (Latin: “The Word of God”), the relationship between Tradition and Scripture is explained: “Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For sacred Scripture is the word of God in as much as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit. To the successors of the apostles, sacred Tradition hands on in its full purity God’s word, which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit.

“Thus, by the light of the Spirit of truth, these successors can in their preaching preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same devotion and reverence.”

But Evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestants, who place their confidence in Martin Luther’s theory of sola scriptura (Latin: “Scripture alone”), will usually argue for their position by citing a couple of key verses. The first is this: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). The other is this: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be equipped, prepared for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). According to these Protestants, these verses demonstrate the reality of sola scriptura (the “Bible only” theory).

Not so, reply Catholics. First, the verse from John refers to the things written in that book (read it with John 20:30, the verse immediately before it to see the context of the statement in question). If this verse proved anything, it would not prove the theory of sola scriptura but that the Gospel of John is sufficient.

Second, the verse from John’s Gospel tells us only that the Bible was composed so we can be helped to believe Jesus is the Messiah. It does not say the Bible is all we need for salvation, much less that the Bible is all we need for theology; nor does it say the Bible is even necessary to believe in Christ. After all, the earliest Christians had no New Testament to which they could appeal; they learned from oral, rather than written, instruction. Until relatively recent times, the Bible was inaccessible to most people, either because they could not read or because the printing press had not been invented. All these people learned from oral instruction, passed down, generation to generation, by the Church.

Much the same can be said about 2 Timothy 3:16-17. To say that all inspired writing “has their use” is one thing; to say that only inspired writing need be followed is something else. Besides, there is a telling argument against claims of Evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestants. John Henry Newman explained it in an 1884 essay entitled “Inspiration in its Relation to Revelation.”

Newman’s Argument

He wrote: “It is quite evident that this passage furnishes no argument whatever that the sacred Scripture, without Tradition, is the sole rule of faith; for, although sacred Scripture is profitable for these four ends, still it is not said to be sufficient. The Apostle [Paul] requires the aid of Tradition (2 Thess. 2:15). Moreover, the Apostle here refers to the scriptures which Timothy was taught in his infancy.

“Now, a good part of the New Testament was not written in his boyhood: Some of the Catholic Epistles were not written even when Paul wrote this, and none of the books of the New Testament were then placed on the canon of the Scripture books. He refers, then, to the scriptures of the Old Testament, and, if the argument from this passage proved anything, it would prove too much, viz., that the scriptures of the New Testament were not necessary for a rule of faith.”

Furthermore, Protestants typically read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 out of context. When read in the context of the surrounding passages, one discovers that Paul’s reference to Scripture is only part of his exhortation that Timothy takes as his guide Tradition and Scripture. The two verses immediately before it state: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14 -15).
Paul tells Timothy to continue in what he has learned for two reasons: first, because he knows from whom he has learned it—Paul himself—and second, because he has been educated in the scriptures. The first of these is a direct appeal to apostolic tradition, the oral teaching which the apostle Paul had given Timothy. So Protestants must take 2 Timothy 3:16-17 out of context to arrive at the theory of sola scriptura. But when the passage is read in context, it becomes clear that it is teaching the importance of apostolic tradition!

The Bible denies that it is sufficient as the complete rule of faith. Paul says that much Christian teaching is to be found in the tradition which is handed down by word of mouth (2 Tim. 2:2). He instructs us to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thess. 2:15).

This oral teaching was accepted by Christians, just as they accepted the written teaching that came to them later. Jesus told his disciples: “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me” (Luke 10:16). The Church, in the persons of the apostles, was given the authority to teach by Christ; the Church would be his representative. He commissioned them, saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19).

And how was this to be done? By preaching, by oral instruction: “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). The Church would always be the living teacher. It is a mistake to limit “Christ’s word” to the written word only or to suggest that all his teachings were reduced to writing. The Bible nowhere supports either notion.

Further, it is clear that the oral teaching of Christ would last until the end of time. “‘But the word of the Lord abides forever.’ That word is the good news which was preached to you” (1 Pet. 1:25). Note that the word has been “preached” — that is, communicated orally. This would endure. It would not be supplanted by a written record like the Bible (supplemented, yes, but not supplanted), and would continue to have its own authority.

This is made clear when the apostle Paul tells Timothy: “What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Here we see the first few links in the chain of apostolic tradition that has been passed down intact from the apostles to our own day. Paul instructed Timothy to pass on the moral teachings (traditions) that he had received from the apostle. He was to give these two men who would be able to teach others, thus perpetuating the chain. Paul gave this instruction not long before his death (2 Tim. 4:6-8), as a reminder to Timothy of how he should conduct his ministry.

What is Tradition?

In this discussion it is important to keep in mind what the Catholic Church means by tradition. The term does not refer to legends or mythological accounts, nor does it encompass transitory customs or practices which may change, as circumstances warrant, such as styles of priestly dress, particular forms of devotion to saints, or even liturgical rubrics. Sacred or apostolic tradition consists of the teachings that the apostles passed on orally through their preaching. These teachings largely (perhaps entirely) overlap with those contained in Scripture, but the mode of their transmission is different.

They have been handed down and entrusted to the Churches. It is necessary that Christians believe in and follow this tradition as well as the Bible (Luke 10:16). The truth of the faith has been given primarily to the leaders of the Church (Eph. 3:5), who, with Christ, form the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20). The Church has been guided by the Holy Spirit, who protects this teaching from corruption (John 14:25-26, 16:13).

Handing on the Faith

Paul illustrated what tradition is: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures... Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Cor. 15:3, 11). The apostle praised those who followed Tradition: “I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:2).

The first Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42) long before there was a New Testament. From the very beginning, the fullness of Christian teaching was found in the Church as the living embodiment of Christ, not in a book. The teaching Church, with its oral, apostolic tradition, was authoritative. Paul himself gives
a quotation from Jesus that was handed down orally to him: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

This saying is not recorded in the Gospels and must have been passed on to Paul. Indeed, even the Gospels themselves are oral tradition which has been written down (Luke 1:1-4). What’s more, Paul does not quote Jesus only. He also quotes from early Christian hymns, as in Ephesians 5:14. These and other things have been given to Christians “through the Lord Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:2).

Fundamentalists say Jesus condemned tradition. They note that Jesus said, “And why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (Matt. 15:3). Paul warned, “See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). But these verses merely condemn erroneous human traditions, not truths which were handed down orally and entrusted to the Church by the apostles. These latter truths are part of what is known as apostolic tradition, which is to be distinguished from human traditions or customs.

“Commandments of Men”

Consider Matthew 15:6-9, which Fundamentalists and Evangelicals often use to defend their position: “So by these traditions of yours you have made God’s laws ineffectual. You hypocrites, it was a true prophecy that Isaiah made of you, when he said, ‘this people does me honor with its lips, but its heart is far from me. Their worship is in vain, for the doctrines they teach are the commandments of men.’” Look closely at what Jesus said.

He was not condemning all traditions. He condemned only those that made God’s word void. In this case, it was a matter of the Pharisees feigning the dedication of their goods to the Temple so they could avoid using them to support their aged parents. By doing this, they dodged the commandment to “Honor your father and your mother” (Ex. 20:12).

Elsewhere, Jesus instructed his followers to abide by traditions that are not contrary to God’s commandments. “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice” (Matt. 23:2-3).

The Relationship between Tradition and Sacred Scripture (CCC 80-90)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that both tradition and Scripture originate from one common source and are two modes of transmission:

- “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal.” Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own “always, to the close of the age” (CCC. 80).
- “Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.” (CCC.81)
- “And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching.”
- “As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.” (CCC. 82)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church delineates between the apostolic Tradition and ecclesial traditions.
Christianity is based upon the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture. The starting point of all doctrinal discussion must be the Bible. Upon the foundation of the Divine inspiration of the Bible stands or falls the entire edifice of Christian truth.” If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3). Surrender the dogma of verbal inspiration and you are left like a rudderless ship on a stormy sea—at the mercy of every wind that blows. Deny that the Bible is, without any qualifications, the very Word of God, and you are left without any ultimate standard of measurement and without any supreme authority. It is useless to discuss any doctrine taught by the Bible until you are prepared to acknowledge, unreservedly, that the Bible is the final court of appeal. Grant that the Bible is a Divine revelation and communication of God’s own mind and will to men, and you have a fixed starting point from which advance can be made into the domain of truth. Grant that the Bible is (in its original manuscripts) invariant...
and infallible and you reach the place where study of its contents is both practicable and profitable.

It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of the doctrine of the Divine inspiration of Scripture. This is the strategic center of Christian theology, and must be defended at all costs. It is the point at which our satanic enemy is constantly hurling his hellish battalions. Here it was he made his first attack. In Eden he asked, “Yea, hath God said?” and today he is pursuing the same tactics. Throughout the ages the Bible has been the central object of his assaults. Every available weapon in the devil’s arsenal has been employed in his determined and ceaseless efforts to destroy the temple of God’s truth. In the first days of the Christian era the attack of the enemy was made openly - the bonfire being the chief instrument of destruction - but, in these “last days” the assault is made in a more subtle manner and comes from a more unexpected quarter. The Divine origin of the Scriptures is now disputed in the name of “Scholarship” and “Science,” and that, too, by those who profess to be friends and champions of the Bible. Much of the learning and theological activity of the hour, are concentrated in the attempt to discredit and destroy the authenticity and authority of God’s Word, the result being that thousands of nominal Christians are plunged into a sea of doubt. Many of those who are paid to stand in our pulpits and defend the Truth of God are now the very ones who are engaged in sowing the seeds of unbelief and destroying the faith of those to whom they minister. But these modern methods will prove no more successful in their efforts to destroy the Bible than did those employed in the opening centuries of the Christian era. As well might the birds attempt to demolish the granite rock of Gibraltar by pecking at it with their beaks - “Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89).

Now the Bible does not fear investigation. Instead of fearing it, the Bible courts and challenges consideration and examination. The more widely it is known, the more closely it is read, the more carefully it is studied, the more unreservedly will it be received as the Word of God. Christians are not a company of enthusiastic fanatics. They are not lovers of myths. They are not anxious to believe a delusion. They do not desire their lives to be molded by an empty superstition. They do not wish to mistake hallucination for inspiration. If they are wrong, they wish to be set right. If they are deceived, they want to be disillusioned. If they are mistaken, they desire to be corrected.

The first question which the thoughtful reader of the Bible has to answer is, what importance and value am I to attach to the contents of the Scriptures? Were the writers of the Bible so many fanatics moved by oracular frenzy? Were they merely poetically inspired and intellectually elevated? Or, were they, as they claimed to be, and as the Scriptures affirm they were, moved by the Holy Spirit to act as the voice of God to a sinful world? Were the writers of the Bible inspired by God in a manner no other men were in any other age of the world? Were they invested and endowed with the power to disclose mysteries and point men upward and onward to that which otherwise would have been an impenetrable future? One can readily appreciate the fact that the answer to these questions is of supreme importance. If the Bible is not inspired in the strictest sense of the word then it is worthless, for it claims to be God’s Word, and if its claims are spurious then its statements are unreliable and its contents are untrustworthy. If, on the other hand, it can be shown to the satisfaction of every impartial inquirer that the Bible is the Word of God, inerrant and infallible, then we have a starting point from which we can advance to the conquest of all truth.

A book that claims to be a Divine revelation - a claim which, as we shall see, is substantiated by the most convincing credentials - cannot be rejected or even neglected without grave peril to the soul. True wisdom cannot refuse to examine it with care and impartiality. If the claims of the Bible be well founded then the prayerful and diligent study of the Scriptures becomes of paramount importance: they have a claim upon our notice and time which nothing else has, and beside them everything in this world loses its luster and sinks into utter insignificance. If the Bible be the Word of God then it infinitely transcends in value all the writings of men, and in exact ratio to its immeasurable superiority to human productions such is our responsibility and duty to give it the most reverent and serious consideration. As a Divine revelation the Bible ought to be studied, yet, this is the only subject on which human curiosity does not desire information. Into every other sphere man pushes his investigations, but the Book of books is neglected, and this, not only by the ignorant, and illiterate, but by the wise of this world as well. The cultured
dilettante will boast of his acquaintance with the sages of Greece and Rome, yet, will know little or nothing of Moses and the prophets, Christ and His Apostles. But the general neglect of the Bible verifies the Scriptures and affords additional proof of their authenticity. The contempt with which the Bible is treated demonstrates that human nature is exactly what God’s Word represents it to be - fallen and depraved - and is unmistakable evidence that the carnal mind is enmity against God.

If the Bible is the Word of God; if it stands on an infinitely exalted plane, all alone; if it immeasurable transcends all the greatest productions of human genius; then, we should naturally expect to find that it has unique credentials, that there are internal marks which prove it to be the handiwork of God, that there is conclusive evidence to show that its Author is superhuman, Divine. That these expectations are realized we shall now endeavor to show; that there is no reason whatever for anyone to doubt the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures the purpose of this book to demonstrate is. As we examine the natural world we find innumerable proofs of the existence of a Personal Creator, and the same God who has manifested Himself thro’ His works has also revealed His wisdom and will throw’ His Word. The God of creation and the God of written revelation are one, and there are irrefutable arguments to show that the Almighty who made the heavens and the earth is also the Author of the Bible.

We shall now submit to the critical attention of the reader a few of the lines of demonstration which argue for the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

There is a Presumption in Favor of the Bible

This argument may be simply and tersely stated thus - Man needed a Divine revelation couched in human language. God had previously given man a revelation of Himself in His created works - which men please to term “nature” - but bears unmistakable testimony to the existence of its Creator, and though sufficient is revealed of God thro’ it to render all men “without excuse,” yet creation does not present a complete unveiling of God’s character. Creation reveals God’s wisdom and power, but it gives us a very imperfect presentation of His mercy and love. Creation is now under the curse; it is imperfect, because it has been marred by sin; therefore, an imperfect creation cannot be a perfect medium for revealing God; and hence, also, the testimony of creation is contradictory.

In the spring of the year, when nature puts on her loveliest robes and we see the beautiful foliage of the countryside and listen to the happy songs of the birds, we have no difficulty in inferring that a gracious God is ruling over our world. But what of the winter-time, when the countryside is desolate and the trees are leafless and forlorn, when a pall of death seems to be resting on everything? When we stood by the seashore and watched the setting sun crimsoning the placid waters on a quiet eve, we had no hesitation in ascribing the picture to the hand of the Divine Artist. But when we stand upon the same seashore on a stormy night, hear the roaring of the breakers and the howling wind, see the boats battling with the angry waves and listen to the heart-rending cries of the seamen as they go down into a watery grave, then, we are tempted to wonder if, after all, a merciful God is at the helm. As one walks thro’ the Grand Canyon or stands before the Niagara Falls, the hand and power of God seem very evident; but, as one witnesses the desolations of the San Francisco earthquake or the death-dealing effects of the volcanic eruptions of Mount Vesuvius, he is again perplexed and puzzled. In a word then, the testimony of nature is conflicting, and, as we have said, this is due to the fact that sin has come in and marred God’s handiwork. Creation displays God’s natural attributes but it tells us little or nothing of His moral perfections. Nature knows no forgiveness and shows no mercy, and if we had no other source of information we should never discover the fact that God pardons sinners. Man then needs a written revelation from God.

Our limitations and our ignorance reveal our need. Man is in darkness concerning God. Blot the Bible out of existence and what should we know about His character, His moral attributes His attitude toward us, or His demands upon us? As we have seen, nature is but an imperfect medium for revealing God. The ancients had the same nature before them as we have, but what did they discover of His character? Unto what knowledge of the one true God did they attain? The seventeenth chapter of the Acts answers that question. When the Apostle Paul was in the famous city of Athens, famous for its learning and philosophical culture, he discovered an altar, on which were inscribed the words, “To the unknown God”. The same condition
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prevails today. Visit those lands which have not been illumined by the light of the Holy Scriptures and it will be found that their peoples know no more about the character of the living God than did the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians.

Man is in darkness concerning himself. From whence am I? What am I? Am I anything more than a reasoning animal? Have I an immortal soul, or, am I nothing more than a sentient being? What is the purpose of my existence? Why am I here in this world at all? What is the end and aim of life? How shall I employ my time and talents? Shall I live only for today, eat, drink, and be merry? What after death? Do I perish like the beasts of the field, or is the grave the portal into another world? If so, whither am I bound? Do these questions appear senseless and irrelevant? Annihilate the Scriptures; eliminate all the lights they have shed upon these problems, and whither shall we turn for a solution? If the Bible had never been written how many of these questions could have been satisfactorily answered? A very striking testimony to man’s need of a Divine revelation was given by the celebrated but skeptical historian Gibbon. He remarked - “Since, therefore, the most sublime efforts of philosophy can extend no farther than feebly to point out the desire, the hope, or, at most, the probability, of a future state, there is nothing except a Divine revelation that can ascertain the existence and describe the condition of the invisible country which is destined to receive the souls of men after their separation from the body.”

Our experiences reveal our need. There are problems to be faced which our wisdom is incapable of solving; there are obstacles in our path which we have no means of surmounting; there are enemies to be met which we are unable to vanquish. We are in dire need of counsel, strength, and courage. There are trials and tribulations which come to us, testing the hearts of the bravest and stoutest, and we need comfort and cheer. There are sorrows and bereavements which crush our spirits and we need the hope of immortality and resurrection.

Our corporate life reveals our need. What is to govern and regulate our dealings one with the other? Shall each do that which is right in his own eyes? That would destroy all law and order. Shall we draw up some moral code, some ethical standard? But who shall fix it? Opinions vary. We need some final court of appeal: if we had no Bible, where should we find it?

Man then needs a Divine revelation; God is able to supply that need; therefore, is it not reasonable to suppose He will do so? Surely God will not mock our ignorance and leave us to grope in the dark! If it is harder to believe that the universe had no creator, than it is to believe that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;” if it is a greater tax upon our faith to suppose that Christianity with all its glorious triumphs is without a Divine Founder, than it is to believe that it rests upon the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ; then, does it not also make a greater demand upon human credulity to imagine that God would leave mankind without an intelligible communication from Himself, than it does to believe that the Bible is a revelation from the Creator to His fallen and erring creatures?

If there is a personal God (and none but a “fool” will deny His existence), and if we are the works of His hands He surely would not leave us in doubt concerning the great problems which have to do with our temporal, spiritual, and eternal welfare. If an earthly parent advises his sons and daughters in their problems and perplexities, warns them of the perils and pitfalls of life which menace their well-being; counsels them with regard to their daily welfare and makes known to them his plans and purposes concerning their future, surely it is incredible to suppose that our Heavenly Father would do less for His children!

We are often uncertain as to which is the right course to pursue; we are frequently in doubt as to the real path of duty; we are constantly surrounded by the hosts of wickedness which seek to accomplish our downfall; and, we are daily confronted with experiences which make us sad and sorrowful. The wisest among us need guidance which our own wisdom fails to supply; the best of humanity need grace which the human heart is powerless to bestow; the most refined among the sons of men need deliverance from temptations which they cannot overcome. Will God mock us then in our need? Will God leave us alone in the hour of our weakness? Will God refuse to provide for us a Refuge from our enemies? Man needs a Counselor, a Comforter, a Deliverer. The very fact that God has a Father’s regard for His children necessitates that He should give them a written revelation which communicates His mind and will concerning them and which points them to the One who is willing and able to supply all their need.
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To sum up this argument: Man needs a Divine revelation; God is able to supply one; is it not, therefore, reasonable to suppose He will do so? There is then, a presumption in favor of the Bible. Is it not more reasonable to believe that He whose name and nature is Love shall provide us with a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, than to leave us to grope our way amid the darkness of a fallen and ruined world?

The Perennial Freshness of the Bible Bears Witness to Its Divine Inspirer

The full force of the present argument will appeal only to those who are intimately acquainted with the Bible, and the more familiar the reader is with the Sacred Canon the more heartily will he endorse the following statements. Just as a knowledge of Latin is necessary in order to understand the technique of a treatise on pathology or physiology, or just as a certain amount of culture and academic learning is an indispensable adjunct to intelligently follow the arguments and apprehend the illustrations in a dissertation on philosophy or psychology, so a first-hand acquaintance with the Bible is necessary to appreciate the fact that its contents never become commonplace.

One of the first facts which arrest the attention of the student of God’s Word is that, like the widow’s oil and meal which nourished Elijah, the contents of the Bible are never exhausted. Unlike all other books, the Bible never acquires sameness, and never diminishes in its power of response to the needy soul which comes to it. Just as a fresh supply of manna was given each day to the Israelites in the wilderness, so the Spirit of God ever breaks anew the Bread of Life to them who hunger after righteousness; or, just as the loaves and fishes in the hands of our Lord were more than enough to feed the famished multitude - a surplus still remaining - so the honey and milk of the Word are more than sufficient to satisfy the hunger of every human soul - the supply still remaining undiminished for new generations.

Although one may know, word for word, the entire contents of some chapter of Scripture, and although he may have taken the time to ponder thoughtfully every sentence therein, yet, on every subsequent occasion, provided one comes to it again in the spirit of humble inquiry, each fresh reading will reveal new gems never seen there before and new delights will be experienced never met with previously. The most familiar passages will yield as much refreshment at the thousandth perusal as they did at the first. The Bible has been likened to a fountain of living water: the fountain is ever the same, but the water is always fresh.

Herein the Bible differs from all other books, sacred or secular. What man has to say can be gathered from his writings at the first reading: failure to do so indicates that the writer has not succeeded in expressing himself clearly, or else the reader has failed to apprehend his meaning. Man is only able to deal with surface things, hence he cares only about surface appearances; consequently, whatever man has to say lies upon the surface of his writings, and the capable reader can exhaust them by a single perusal. Not so with the Bible. Although the Bible has been studied more microscopically than any other book (even its very letters have been counted and registered) by many of the keenest intellects for the past two thousand years, although whole libraries of works have been written as commentaries upon its teachings, and although literally millions of sermons have been preached and printed in the attempt to expound every part of Holy Writ, yet its contents have not been exhausted, and in this twentieth century new discoveries are being made in it every day!

The Bible is an inexhaustible mine of wealth: it is the El Dorado of heavenly treasure. It has veins of ore which never “give out” and pockets of gold which no pick can empty; yet, like earthly treasures, the gems of God must be diligently sought if they are to be found. Potatoes lie near the surface of the ground, but diamonds require much laborious digging, so also the precious things of the Word are only revealed to the prayerful, patient and diligent student.

The Bible is like a spring of water which never runs dry. No matter how many may drink from its life-giving stream, and no matter how often they may quench their thirst at its refreshing waters, its flow continues and never fails to satisfy the needs of all who come and take of its perennial springs. The Bible has a whole continent of Truth yet to be explored. A learned scholar who died during the present year of grace had read through the Bible no fewer than five hundred times! What other book, ancient or modern, Oriental or Occidental, would repay even a fiftieth reading?
The Unmistakable Honesty of the Sacred Writers Attest to Its Heavenly Origin

The title of this chapter suggests a wide field of study the limits of which we can now only skirt here and there. To begin with the writers of the Old Testament.

Had the historical parts of the Old Testament been a forgery, or the production of uninspired men, their contents would have been very different to what they are. Each of its Books was written by a descendant of Abraham, yet nowhere do we find the bravery of the Israelites extolled and never once are their victories regarded as the outcome of their courage or military genius; on the contrary, success is attributed to the presence of Jehovah the God of Israel. To this it might be replied, Heathen writers have often ascribed the victories of their peoples to the intervention of their gods. This is true, yet there is no parallel at all between the two cases. Comparison is impossible. Heathen writers invariably represent their gods as being blindly partial to their friends and whenever their favorites failed to come out victorious their defeat is attributed to the opposition of other gods or to a blind and unyielding fate. In contradistinction to this, the defeats of Israel, as much as their victories, are regarded as coming from Jehovah. Their successes were not due to mere partiality in God, but are uniformly viewed as connected with a careful observance of His commands; and, in like manner, their defeats are portrayed as the outcome of their disobedience and waywardness. If they transgressed His laws they were defeated and put to shame, even though their God was the Almighty. But we have digressed somewhat. That which we desire to direct attention is the fact that men who were their own countrymen have chronicled the history of the Israelites, and therein have faithfully recorded their defeats not to an inexorable fate, nor to bad generalship and military failures, but to the sins of the people and their wickedness against God. Such a God is not the creation of the human mind, and such historians were not actuated by the common principles of human nature.

Not only have the Jewish historians recounted the military defeats of their people, but they have also faithfully recorded their many moral backslidings and spiritual declinations. One of the outstanding truths of the Old Testament is that the Unity of God, that God is one, that beside Him there is none else, that all other gods are false gods and that to pay them homage is to be guilty of the sin of idolatry. Against the sin of idolatry these Jewish writers cry out repeatedly. They uniformly declare that it is a sin most abhorrent in the sight of heaven. Yet, these same Jewish writers record how again and again their ancestors (contrary to the universal leaning towards ancestral adoration and worship), and their contemporaries, were guilty of this great wickedness. Not only so, but they have pointed out how some of their most famous heroes sinned in this very particular. Aaron and the golden calf, Solomon and the later kings being notable examples - “Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, ... hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods” (Kings 11:7, 8). Moreover, there is no attempt made to excuse their wrongdoing; instead, their acts are openly censured and uncompromisingly condemned. As is well known, human historians are inclined to conceal or extenuate the faults of their favorites. A forged history would have clothed friends with every virtue, and would not have ventured to mar the effect designed to be produced by uncovering the vices of its most distinguished personages. Here then, is displayed the uniqueness of Scripture history. Its characters are painted in the colors of truth and nature. But such characters were never sketched by a human pencil. Moses and the other writers must have written by Divine inspiration.

The sin of idolatry, while it is the worst of which Israel was guilty, is not the only evil recorded against them - their whole history is one
long story of repeated apostasy from Jehovah their God. After they
had been emancipated from the bondage of Egypt and had been
miraculously delivered from their cruel masters at the Red Sea, they
commenced their journey towards the Promised Land. Between them
and their goal lay a march across the wilderness, and here the depravity
of their hearts was fully manifested. In spite of the fact that Jehovah,
by overthrowing their enemies, had plainly demonstrated that He was
their God, yet no sooner was the faith of the Israelites put to the test
than their hearts failed them. First, their stores of food began to give
out and they feared they would perish from hunger. Trying
circumstances had banished the Living God from their thoughts. They
complained of their lot and murmured against Moses. Yet God did not
deal with them after their sins nor reward them according to their
iniquities: in mercy, He gave them bread from heaven and furnished
them a daily supply of manna. But they soon became dissatisfied with
the manna and lusted after the flesh pots of Egypt. Still God dealt
with them in grace.

Shortly after God’s intervention in giving the Israelites food to eat,
which ought for ever to have closed their murmuring mouths, they
pitched in Rephidim where “there was no water for the people to
drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, give us
water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, why chide ye
with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord? And the people thirsted
there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said,
Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us
and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the
Lord, saying, what shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready
to stone me.” What was God’s response? Did His anger consume
them? Did He refuse to bear longer with such a stiff-necked people?
No: “The Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take
with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smonest
the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee
there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there
shall come water out of it, that the people may drink” (Exod. 17).

The above incidents were but sadly typical and illustrative of Israel’s
general conduct. When the spies were sent out to view the Promised
Land and returned and reported, ten of them magnified the difficulties
which confronted them and advised the people not to attempt an
occupation of Canaan; and though the remaining two faithfully
reminded the Israelites that the mighty Jehovah could easily overcome
all their difficulties, nevertheless, the nation listened not but heeded
the word of their skeptical advisers. Time after time they provoked
Jehovah, and in consequence the whole of that generation perished in
the wilderness. When the succeeding generation was grown, under
the leadership of Joshua they entered the Promised Land and by the
aid of God overthrew many of their enemies and occupied much of
their territory. But after the death of Joshua we read, “There arose
another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the
works which He had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did
evil in the sight of the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them
out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the
people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them,
and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and
served Baal and Ashtaroth” (Judge. 2:10-13). There is no need for us
to follow further the fluctuating fortunes of Israel: as is well known,under the period of the judges their history was a series of returns to
the Lord and subsequent departures from Him; repeated deliverances
from the hands of their enemies, and then returning unfaithfulness on
their part, followed by being again delivered unto their foes. Under
the kings it was no better. The very first of their kings perished thorough
his willful disobedience and apostasy; the third king, Solomon, violated
God’s law and married heathen women who turned his heart unto
false gods. Solomon, in turn, was followed by a number of idolatrous
rulers, and the path of Israel ran farther and farther away from the
Lord, until He delivered them over unto Nebuchadnezzar who captured
their beloved Jerusalem, destroyed their Temple, and carried away
the people into captivity.

In the repeated mention which we have in the Old Testament of
Israel’s sins, we discover, in light as clear as day, the absolute honesty
and candor of those who recorded Israel’s history. No attempt whatever
is made to conceal their folly, their unbelief, and their wickedness;
instead, the corrupt condition of their hearts is made fully manifest,
and this, by writers who belonged to, and were born in the same
realm of literature there is no parallel. The record of Israel’s history is absolutely unique. The careful reader would at
first conclude that Israel as a nation was more depraved than any
invented the character of John the Baptist, and the faithfulness of his biographers is another proof that the writers of the Bible were actuated by something more and something higher than the principles of human nature.

Another striking illustration of our chapter heading - one which many writers have pointed out - is the treatment the Son of God received while He tabernacle among men. For two thousand years Israel’s hopes had all centered in the advent of their Messiah. The height of every Jewish woman’s ambition was that she might be selected of God to have the honor of being the mother of the promised Seed. For centuries, every pious Hebrew had looked and longed for the day when He should appear who was to occupy David’s throne and rule and reign in righteousness. Yet, when He did appear how was the Promised One received? “He was despised and rejected of men.” “He came unto His own and His own received Him ... in infinite grace and blessing demanded that He should be crucified. The startling thing which we desire to particularly emphasize is that the narrators of this awful tragedy are fellow countrymen of those upon whose heads rested the guilt of ... It was Jewish writers who recorded the fearful crime of the Jewish nation against their Messiah! And, we say again, that in the recording of that crime no attempt whatever is made to palliate or extenuate their wickedness; instead, it is ... having taken and with “wicked hands” slain the “Lord of Glory.” Such an honest and impartial recital of Israel’s crowning sin can only be explained on the ground that what these men wrote was inspired of God.

One more illustration must suffice. After our Lord’s death and resurrection, He commissioned His disciples to go forth carrying from Him a message first to His own nation and later to ... in His name to all men. How then would human wisdom suppose such a message will be received? It is further to be observed
that those who were thus commissioned to carry the Gospel to the
lost were vested with power to heal the sick and to cast out demons.
Surely such a beneficent ministry will meet with a universal welcome!
Yet, incredible as it may appear, the Apostles of Christ met with no
more appreciation than did their Master. They, too, were despised
and rejected. They, too, were hated and persecuted. They, too, were
ill treated, imprisoned, and put to a shameful death and this, not merely
from the hands of the bigoted Jews, but from the cultured Greeks and
from the democratic and freedom loving Romans as well. Though
these Apostles brought blessing, they themselves were cursed; though
they sought to emancipate men from the thralldom of sin and Satan,
yet they were themselves captured and thrown into prison; though
they healed the sick and raised the dead, they suffered martyrdom.
Surely it is apparent to every impartial mind that the New Testament
is no mere human invention; and surely it is evident from the honesty
of its writers in so faithfully portraying the enmity of the carnal mind
against God, that their productions can only be accounted for on the
ground that they spoke and wrote “not of themselves,” but “as they
were moved by the Holy Spirit” (II Peter 1:21).

Dei Verbum on Inspiration (nos. 11-13)

Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented
in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the
inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the
belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20,
3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in
their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because
written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their
author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. The
following 12 things are involved in the understanding of inspiration by
the Second Vatican Council:

1. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed
by Him
2. They made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him
acting in them and through them,
3. They, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only
those things which He wanted.

4. Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or
sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it
follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as
teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God
wanted put into sacred writings.

5. Scripture is given for the sake of salvation. Therefore “all Scripture
is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting
error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so
that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped
for good work of every kind” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Greek text).

6. However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in
human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see
clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully
investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and
what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

7. To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should
be given, among other things, to “literary forms.” For truth is set
forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously
historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The
interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer
intended to express and actually expressed in particular
circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance
with the situation of his own time and culture.

8. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted
to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and
characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which
prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men
normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with
one another.

9. But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred
spirit in which it was written,

10. No less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of
the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be
correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church
must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists
between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work
according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.

11. In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous “condescension” of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, “that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature.”

12. For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.

Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture (CCC 105-114)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains the idea of divine inspiration in the following words (CCC. 105-108):

- God is the author of Sacred Scripture. “The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”

- “For Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.”

- God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. “To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.”

- The inspired books teach the truth. “Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.”

- Still, the Christian faith is not a “religion of the book.” Christianity is the religion of the “Word” of God, a word which is “not a written and mute word, but the Word is incarnate and living”. If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, “open [our] minds to understand the Scriptures.”

- The Universal Catechism also argues that not only in writing the scripture but also in its interpretation Holy Spirit is the active agent (CCC. 109-113):

- In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to man in a human way. To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm, and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words.

- In order to discover the sacred authors’ intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current. “For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetical and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression.”

- But since Sacred Scripture is inspired, there is another and no less important principle of correct interpretation, without which Scripture would remain a dead letter. “Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.”

- The Second Vatican Council indicates three criteria for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Spirit who inspired it.

- Be especially attentive “to the content and unity of the whole Scripture”. Different as the books which compose it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God’s plan, of which
Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover. The phrase “heart of Christ” can refer to Sacred Scripture, which makes known his heart, closed before the Passion, as the Scripture was obscure. But the Scripture has been opened since the Passion; since those who from then on have understood it, consider and discern in what way the prophecies must be interpreted.

- Read the Scripture within “the living Tradition of the whole Church”. According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church’s heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God’s Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture (“... according to the spiritual meaning which the Spirit grants to the Church”).
- Be attentive to the analogy of faith. By “analogy of faith” we mean the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation.

So, how many books are in your Bible? Did you ever notice that a Catholic Bible is slightly longer than Bibles used by most Protestants? The question of how the canon of Scripture is formulated is an extremely important question of fundamental theology. This article will look at the criterion for a book’s inclusion in the canon as well as some of the more significant historical moments in the development (and rejection) of the canon of Scripture by Christians. The Greek word “canon” simply means a rule or a standard. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that the formation of the canon was discerned by the apostolic Tradition.

The New Testament

One of the earliest witnesses to that apostolic Tradition is Saint Irenaeus of Lyons. Writing in southern Gaul at the end of the second century, Irenaeus sought to refute the false teachings and writings of the Gnostic heresy by invoking the authority of the writings of the apostles:
We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.

Saint Athanasius of Alexandria was the first to use the phrase “canonized books” in his Easter Letter of 367, in which he lists the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. It was at the Council of Hippo (393) and the Councils of Carthage (397 and 419) that the assembled bishops defined the canon as including the 46 books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. The definition of these local African councils was sent to “the Church across the sea,” that is, Rome, to be ratified. In this way, the bishops of the Church in union with the bishop of Rome recognized that these books are in fact inspired by the Holy Spirit. Up until this time, there was not a settled canon. This historical fact may make some non-Catholics uncomfortable, but it illustrates the truth that Scripture comes from the Church, not the other way around (Tweet this).

The Old Testament

So what about the Old Testament canon? Most Protestants count only thirty-nine books in the Old Testament, whereas the Catholic Church counts forty-six. Seven books were contested in the sixteenth century by Martin Luther: Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Sirach or Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, First and Second Maccabees, and also certain additions to Esther and Daniel. He referred to them as the “deutero-canonical” books (the “second canon”) because they were not in the original Hebrew collection of Scriptures but was included in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. However, the term “deutero-canonical” was unknown prior to the time of Luther. Protestants also refer to these books as the “Apocrypha” but do not include them in their reckoning of Scripture.

The Jews did not have a fixed canon of their Scriptures, which they called the Law and the Prophets. At Alexandria during the 3rd century B.C. Jewish scribes translated the Scriptures into Greek, which translation came to be known as the Septuagint. The Septuagint included all forty-six books, and thus the Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora accepted them as part of Scripture. Because Greek was the predominant language of the Eastern Roman Empire the first Christians accepted the Septuagint as the definitive version of the Old Testament. When the New Testament quotes the Old Testament,
the majority of these quotations are in agreement with the Greek of the Septuagint. The seven books were also included in the canon by the Councils of Hippo and Carthage. Thus for the entire first 1,500 years of Christianity, all forty-six books of the Old Testament were accepted by the universal Church as being inspired.

Martin Luther and other early Protestant leaders questioned the canonicity of several New Testament books, including Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. Luther sought to remove these books (which he called “Antilegomena” meaning “disputed” or “spoken against”) from the Bible because he felt they went against his doctrine of sola gratia and sola fide. In his preface to the New Testament, Luther made a doctrinal evaluation of the various books of the New Testament: St. John’s Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul’s Epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and St. Peter’s Epistle - these are the books which show to thee Christ, and teach everything that is necessary and blessed for thee to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book of doctrine. Therefore, St. James’ Epistle is a perfect straw-epistle compared with them, for it has in it nothing of an evangelic kind.

Clearly, Luther’s attempt to amend the canon was not based in historical study of the canon but in his own doctrinal evaluation of the various books of the Bible. However, he encountered resistance from other theologians among the Protestants who could not deny that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament canon had never been seriously contested, and Luther ultimately kept all twenty-seven books in his German translation of the Bible. However, to this day Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation are placed last in German-language Lutheran Bibles.

As for the Old Testament, however, Luther successfully swayed other Protestant theologians to join him in rejecting the deuto-canonical books. His main objection to Catholic abuses was of course the practice of indulgences by which the faithful were asked to make offerings for the dead. The Second Book of Maccabees clearly praises the action of Judas Maccabaeus in providing for an expiatory sacrifice for the fallen soldiers: “Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin” (2 Maccabees 12:46). Because Luther rejected this practice, he found it necessary to remove this book from the canon of the Old Testament. The rejection of all seven of the deuto-canonical books gave him a more sophisticated theological basis for his effort to remove 2 Maccabees from the canon.

At the Council of Trent in 1546, the council fathers, in refutation of Luther, gave a formal definition of the “Canon of the Bible” and accepted the same list which had been proclaimed by the Councils of Hippo and Carthage and which had always been accepted: And it has thought it meet that a list of the sacred books be inserted in this decree, lest a doubt may arise in any one’s mind, which are the books that are received by this Synod. They are as set down here below: of the Old Testament: the five books of Moses, to wit, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Josue, Judges, Ruth, four books of Kings, two of Paralipomenon, the first book of Esdras, and the second which is entitled Nehemias; Tobias, Judith, Esther, Job, the Dauidical Psalter, consisting of a hundred and fifty psalms; the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of Canticles, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaias, Jeremias, with Baruch; Ezechiel, Daniel; the twelve minor prophets, to wit, Osee, Joel, Amos, Abdias, Jonas, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggaeus, Zacharias, Malachias; two books of the Machabees, the first and the second.

Of the New Testament: the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke the Evangelist; fourteen epistles of Paul the apostle, (one) to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, (one) to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, (one) to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two of Peter the apostle, three of John the apostle, one of the apostle James, one of Jude the apostle, and the Apocalypse of John the apostle. But if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema.

This formal dogmatic definition by the Council of Trent, prompted in response to the efforts of Luther and the other Protestants to change what had always been believed, remains the definitive statement of the Catholic Church on the Canon of Scripture. Some Protestants continued to include the “Apocrypha” in their editions of the Bible, and the Church of England included readings from the “Apocrypha”
There are a couple of things wrong with this line of reasoning. First of all, both Old Testament canons were received from the Jews. Thus neither one is eliminated by this verse. Secondly, the Jews didn’t settle on the Palestinian canon until 90 AD at the Council of Jamnia. This was well after Jesus established His Church. At this point the Jews were no longer in charge. Ironically it was at the Council of Jamnia that the Jews also rejected the New Testament. Logically speaking, anyone who would consider Jamnia as being authoritative would also have to reject the New Testament. And I am not aware of any Protestants who have done that.

Some raise objections to what we might call, “apparent contradictions” in the seven deuteron canonical books. An apparent contradiction is something that appears to be a contradiction. However, upon closer examination we find that there is no real issue. Passages can be misunderstood for a variety of reasons. All of the books of the Bible were written centuries ago in different cultural settings and in languages that were structured differently than our own. Aside from the problems associated with translation they had many customs that were alien to our way of thinking, customs that were ... that the Bible is comprised of different types of literature. We have history, poetry, apocalyptic writing, prophecy etc… When reading any one of them we need to consider the genre in order to get an accurate understanding of what is being said. That is why we have biblical commentaries and the various books that address the various biblical difficulties.

At the birth of Christianity, the Old Testament was the sum total of Scripture. As time went on an authorized list of Christian writings was needed. Rather than take their cues from those no longer in authority, the early Christians looked to their own Church for guidance. When the Councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD) set the canon of the New Testament they also confirmed the Septuagint as the Old Testament. Both the Septuagint and the New Testament were written in Koine Greek. Koine Greek was the language of commerce and every day communication during the time of Jesus.

Some critics attempt to dismiss the Church’s role in putting together the New Testament. They would have you think that the final list was
the noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen.

He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he was not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been ... it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead that they might be delivered from their sin.

Martin Luther had a problem. He was the man who had championed the idea of Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone). Now he was facing a verse of Scripture that refuted one of his new doctrines. His solution; throw out the book of 2 Maccabees. And as previously mentioned, he threw out six others for the same reason. He also wanted to throw out Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. He famously referred to the book of James as an “epistle of straw.” Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed and the New Testament was left untouched.

In Revelation 22:19 the apostle John proclaims, “If any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.” It’s true that this verse refers to the book of Revelation. However, common sense tells us that the same principal would apply to all of Scripture. I think it’s a pretty safe bet that God would never be pleased with us throwing out any part of His word.
immortal soul and through the gifts of intelligence and reason enables us to understand the order of things established in his creation. God has also given us a free will to seek and love what is true, good, and beautiful. Sadly, because of the fall, we also suffer the impact of Original Sin, which darkens our minds, weakens our wills, and inclines us to sin. Baptism delivers us from Original Sin but not from its effects especially the inclination to sin, concupiscence. Within us, then, is both the powerful surge toward the good because we are made in the image of God, and the darker impulses toward evil because of the effects of Original Sin.

But we should always remember that Christ’s dying and rising offers us new life in the Spirit, whose saving grace delivers us from sin and heals sin’s damage within us. Thus we speak of the value, dignity, and goal of human life, even with its imperfections and struggles. Human life, as a profound unity of physical and spiritual dimensions, is sacred. It is distinct from all other forms of life, since it alone is imprinted with the very image of its Creator.

The Responsible Practice of Freedom

The second element of life in Christ is the responsible practice of freedom. Without freedom, we cannot speak meaningfully about morality or moral responsibility. Human freedom is more than a capacity to choose between this and that. It is the God-given power to become who he created us to be and so to share eternal union with him. This happens when we consistently choose ways that are in harmony with God’s plan. Christian morality and God’s law are not arbitrary, but specifically given to us for our happiness. God gave us intelligence and the capacity to act freely. Ultimately, human freedom lies in our free decision to say “yes” to God. In contrast, many people today understand human freedom merely as the ability to make a choice, with no objective norm or good as the goal.

The Understanding of Moral Acts

Another important foundation of Christian morality is the understanding of moral acts. Every moral act consists of three elements: the objective act (what we do), the subjective goal or intention (why we do the act), and the concrete situation or circumstances in which we perform the act (where, when, how, with whom, the consequences, etc.).
For an individual act to be morally good, the object, or what we are doing, must be objectively good. Some acts, apart from the intention or reason for doing them, are always wrong because they go against a fundamental or basic human good that ought never to be compromised. Direct killing of the innocent, torture, and rape are examples of acts that are always wrong. Such acts are referred to as intrinsically evil acts, meaning that they are wrong in themselves, apart from the reason they are done or the circumstances surrounding them.

The goal, end, or intention is the part of the moral act that lies within the person. For this reason, we say that the intention is the subjective element of the moral act. For an act to be morally good, one’s intention must be good. If we are motivated to do something by a bad intention—even something that is objectively good—our action is morally evil. It must also be recognized that a good intention cannot make a bad action (something intrinsically evil) good. We can never do something wrong or evil in order to bring about a good. This is the meaning of the saying, “the end does not justify the means” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1749-1761).

The Excellence of Virtues

The Christian moral life is one that seeks to cultivate and practice virtue. “A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1803). An effective moral life demands the practice of both human and theological virtues.

Human virtues form the soul with the habits of mind and will that support moral behavior, control passions, and avoid sin. Virtues guide our conduct according to the dictates of faith and reason, leading us toward freedom based on self-control and toward joy in living a good moral life. Compassion, responsibility, a sense of duty, self-discipline and restraint, honesty, loyalty, friendship, courage, and persistence are examples of desirable virtues for sustaining a moral life. Historically, we group the human virtues around what are called the Cardinal Virtues. This term comes from the Latin word cardo meaning “hinge.” All the virtues are related to or hinged to one of the Cardinal Virtues. The four Cardinal Virtues are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

There are a number of ways in which we acquire human virtues. They are acquired by frequent repetition of virtuous acts that establish a pattern of virtuous behavior. There is a reciprocal relationship between virtue and acts because virtue, as an internal reality, disposes us to act externally in morally good ways. Yet it is through doing good acts in the concrete that the virtue within us is strengthened and grows.
Love alone, set adrift from moral direction, can easily descend into sentimentality that puts us at the mercy of our feelings. Popular entertainment romanticizes love and tends to omit the difficult demands of the moral order.

In our permissive culture, love is sometimes so romanticized that it is separated from sacrifice. Because of this, tough moral choices cannot be faced. The absence of sacrificial love dooms the possibility of an authentic moral life.

Scripturally and theologically, the Christian moral life begins with a loving relationship with God, a covenant love made possible by the sacrifice of Christ. The Commandments and other moral rules are given to us as ways of protecting the values that foster love of God and others. They provide us with ways to express love, sometimes by forbidding whatever contradicts love.

The moral life requires grace. The Catechism speaks of this in terms of life in Christ and the inner presence of the Holy Spirit, actively enlightening our moral compass and supplying... to us from Christ in the Spirit is as essential as love and rules and, in fact, makes love and keeping the rules possible.

Principles of Moral Thought

Catholics believe that acting morally means acting in accordance with the eternal laws of God, which are written into the human heart so deeply that even those who know nothing of God can follow the path of morality. Natural law, as this interior marking is called, comes to humans through their capacity to reason, which sparks the conscience to respond to the eternal law. This means that people of other faiths and no faith at all have the capacity to act as morally as Catholic Christians, although they will struggle more since they will not have the benefit of the sacraments that open them to the grace to resist sin.

When it comes to matters of faith and morals, the Church teaches that the pope and the bishops have great authority to instruct believers, an authority that becomes infallible in the very few instances where
they are dogmatically defining a doctrine. Catholics are required to accept such teachings, but this does not mean that they check their individual consciences at the door of the church. A believer may not simply dismiss a Church teaching with which he or she disagrees; rather, the Catholic is called upon to study the teaching, pray for guidance and hopefully come to see the wisdom and power of the Church’s teaching office, even if he or she does not immediately see the wisdom of the teaching itself. But in the end, other than in instances of dogmatically defined doctrine, the individual conscience holds sway.

Like all Christians, Catholics see the Ten Commandments found in the Hebrew Scriptures as the basic groundwork for moral action, which together with the life of Jesus provide a deep and abiding understanding for how to act with love and justice in the world. The Gospel of Matthew relates that upon being asked which commandment was most important, Jesus replied that all of the law is contained in the commandments to love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). Catholics see this as going beyond the injunctions of moral law by drawing believers into a relationship with others as well as with God, and it is the foundation of the Church’s teaching on issues of social justice.

From the earliest days of the Church, Catholics have performed works of mercy to help those who most need it, but the Church’s current involvement in social justice issues really took form in 1891 with the promulgation of the papal encyclical Rerum novarum. In it, Pope Leo XIII called for workers to be treated with dignity and respect, protected by the state from exploitation, and allowed to form unions. It touched off a flowering of social encyclicals that have become central to the Church’s work in the world. Catholic social teaching focuses on the dignity of the person as the linchpin for all discussions of ethics, politics, and justice. It is central to Catholic calls for the fair treatment of workers, for political systems that recognize individual rights, for responsible scientific research, for an end to attacks on human life in the form of abortion and the death penalty, and many other teachings as well.

This focus on human dignity has produced a series of related principles around which modern Catholic social teaching is organized: the importance of family and community, and the need for individuals to participate in them; the call to solidarity with all people everywhere; the dignity of work; the recognition that humans have both rights and responsibilities; the commitment to stand with the poor; and the necessity of caring for God’s creation. Each of these principles engenders a whole host of individual social teachings and practical actions, and in the Catholic view all stand in contrast to what Pope John Paul II defined as the western world’s current “culture of death” that idolizes pleasure and affluence while ignoring the dignity of the person. As an organization, the Church works in the world to further these principles; as the teacher of the faithful, it calls on Catholics to carry these principles with them into their daily lives as their grounding for moral action in the home, the workplace, and the community.
Chapter 10

Sacraments

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines the sacraments as “efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament.

The traditional definition of a sacrament is this: “A sacrament is a visible sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace.” Within this definition there are three important statements:

- A visible sign: An action is performed by a minister (usually a priest). For example, when a baby is baptized in the church the priest pours water over its head and at the same time says the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” That is a visible sign.

- Instituted by Christ: The Lord Jesus Christ instructed His church to offer the seven sacraments to His followers. For example, His directive to His disciples in Matthew’s Gospel (28:19), “Go then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

- To give grace: Grace is God’s free gift of Himself as the controlling influence in our life and the decisions we make once we have committed ourselves to Him in faith.

Christ sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to inspire his Apostles and his Church to shepherd his flock after his Ascension into heaven. “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 17:18, 20:21). Jesus is the Head of his Body the Church (Colossians 1:18). The Church itself is a sacrament instituted by Christ to give grace. Jesus gave us his Body the Church to continue the works he performed during his earthly life. Grace given to us through the sacraments will help us lead a good life in this world and help save us for the Kingdom of Heaven. The sacraments were instituted by Christ and were part of the Liturgical Tradition of the early Christian Church. The Church celebrates in her liturgy the Paschal mystery of Christ, his Sacrifice on the Cross, Death and Resurrection. The Greek word mystery in the Greek New Testament is translated into sacramentum in the Latin Vulgate Bible, from which we derive our English word sacrament (examples: Ephesians 1:9, Ephesians 3:9, Colossians 1:27). The saving effects of Christ’s Redemption on the Cross are communicated through the sacraments, especially in the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist. The sacraments to this day are called mysteries in the Eastern Churches.

Roman Catholic, Eastern Catholic, as well as Eastern Orthodox Churches all recognize the seven sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The three sacraments of Christian Initiation are Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. The two sacraments of Healing are Penance and the Anointing of the Sick.
and the two sacraments of Vocation are Holy Orders and Marriage. Three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, are given once, as they render a permanent seal or character upon one’s soul (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 4:30, Revelations 7:3).

The Gospel of Mark 5:25-34 describes a woman afflicted with hemorrhage who touched the cloak of Jesus and was immediately healed. There is a fourth century fresco painting in the catacomb of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter depicting this event, which serves as an apt symbol of sacrament - the power that flows out from the body of Jesus, in order to effect both remission of sin and new life in Christ. The fresco image frames Part II of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Liturgy and the Sacraments, The Celebration of the Christian Mystery. St. Thomas Aquinas, in the Summa Theologica, has written the standard exposition on the Seven Sacraments.

Each sacrament consists of a visible external rite, which is composed of matter and form, the matter being the action, such as the pouring of water in baptism, and the form being the words spoken by the minister. Each sacramental rite confers a special ecclesial effect and sacramental grace appropriate for each sacrament. The sacraments occur at pivotal events and give meaning to a person’s life.

The sacraments act ex opere operato, by the very fact of the action being performed, independent of the minister. The effect on the person receiving the sacrament is called ex opere operantis, and depends on the interior disposition of the receiver. Grace is a favor, the free and undeserved gift from God through Christ Jesus, to help us respond to his call to become children of God, to become partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is a participation in the life of God and is necessary for salvation.
Baptism

Baptism marks the entry of the believer into the Christian community. Along with Confirmation and Eucharist, it is one of the Sacraments of Initiation, giving access to the full sacramental life of the Church. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and joined with Christ, sharing in His divinity and destined for eternal life. Baptism leaves us permanently changed, no longer the person we once were, but a new person, dying to death and sin, and rising to new life in Christ. In the words of St. Paul, “We were buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so too may we live a new life.” (Romans 6:4).

The rite consists of pouring water over the head while saying the Trinitarian formula. Anyone can baptize in an emergency, although the usual minister of the sacrament is a priest or deacon. Usually the rite includes anointing the forehead with holy oil to indicate that, even as Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so does the candidate now share in His everlasting life, participating in His glory as a member of His body. The newly baptized then receives a white garment and a candle lit from the paschal candle. Like Christ, who is the light of the world, the newly baptized Christian carries the light of Christ out into the world.

Confirmation

Before Jesus was put to death, He promised His followers that He would send His Spirit to comfort and strengthen them. True to His promise, the Holy Spirit was poured out on them on Pentecost, forty days after His resurrection from the dead. The Sacrament of Confirmation is our own Pentecost. When we are confirmed, we receive the Holy Spirit, through the anointing with oil and the laying on of hands by the bishop or a priest appointed by him.

When we receive this sacred seal we show that we belong to God. By their anointing, the prophets, kings and priests of the Old Testament were elevated to a special position in their service of God. So it is with us when we receive the holy oil on our foreheads; we become part of the priesthood of all believers, witnesses to Christ and heirs to His throne.

Eucharist

The Eucharist is the sacrament in which we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church teaches that Christ is really present in the bread and wine that have been consecrated by the priest at Mass. Although the bread and wine still look and taste like bread and wine, the substance, what is actually there, has changed.

The roots of the Eucharist are in the Jewish Passover meal. This is the meal which commemorates Israel’s delivery from oppression and slavery in Egypt. As Jesus celebrated the Passover at his last supper with the apostles, He blessed, broke and shared with them bread and wine, declaring that it was His body and blood. He promised that He would truly be with them when they did likewise and shared bread and wine together in memory of Him.

The Mass is the new Passover, with Jesus offering His own body and blood so that we, His present-day followers, might go free. For this reason, as well as being a sacred meal, the Eucharist is also a link with Jesus’ death. When we participate in the Mass together with our fellow believers and receive Him in the Eucharist we take part in the Passover meal which He celebrates now, shedding His blood so that we may be saved.

Reconciliation or Penance

Many of us regret things we have done or fail to do, words we have said or thoughts we have harbored, things we are too embarrassed or ashamed to admit. Sometimes these hidden secrets take on much more importance than they deserve, simply because we keep them bottled up and are unable to speak about them. The Sacrament of Reconciliation gives us the opportunity to express our sorrow for things we have done wrong, to heal broken relationships, to forgive ourselves and others, and to open up the channels of communication between ourselves and God.

Confession is above all a place of healing, not a place of judgment or punishment. When we make our confession to a priest in the
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confidentiality of the confessional or reconciliation room, we experience healing and liberation, discovering again and again how much we are loved by God, how precious we are to Him, and how great is our dignity as His children. Once he has heard our confession, the priest says the words of absolution for our sins:

*God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

What the penitent makes known to the priest remains “sealed” because the confidentiality of confession is absolute. Nothing said by the penitent in confession will ever be repeated. This is an experience of mercy and reconciliation, where we can lay down the burdens of guilt and shame that we carry with us. No matter what we think of ourselves or of God, we can still be certain that God forgives us, loves us and wants only to heal us.

**Anointing of the Sick**

“Are any among you sick? Let them call for the elders of the Church to pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick ones, and the Lord will raise them up; and if they have committed any sins, they will be forgiven.” (James 5:14-15)

Part of Jesus’ ministry was to heal the sick, and He went about curing those who were ill or disabled, showing that suffering and death have no place in the Kingdom of God. By His sacrifice of Himself, He took hold of suffering and death and eliminated their power to separate us from each other or from God. Our faith tells us that, indeed, God suffers with us. Through Jesus’ suffering and death, God joins His suffering to the suffering of human beings. And by doing this, He transforms and gives it a new meaning.

Through the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick we are assured that God will raise us up, like Jesus, from our bed of pain and sickness and lead us to eternal life:

*Through this holy anointing may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up. Amen.*

**Holy Orders**

As people of God, we all share in the priesthood of Christ, and so the Church speaks meaningfully of “the priesthood of all believers.” Each of us is to exercise our priesthood by strengthening and serving one another. Within the Church there are many means of service. One way of service stands out as a sacrament, namely Holy Orders, which ordain the recipient to the office of bishop, priest or deacon.

The priest’s special calling is first and foremost to preach the Good News of God’s love and humanity. In offering himself as a candidate for the priesthood, he must give evidence of wisdom and spiritual maturity, as he is called to lead the Christian community with patience and kindness. The priest celebrates Mass and administers the Sacraments, taking an active role in offering Christ’s gift of Himself.

From earliest times, deacons have had a special place in the pastoral work of the Church, preaching, ministering at baptisms and weddings, and caring for the poor and hungry on behalf of the whole Church. Nowadays, married men are more and more frequently ordained to the diaconate, where they have a strong role in assisting priests and bishops and serving the people.

Finally, bishops are chosen and ordained to supervise and lead priests and deacons, to unify, bless and teach the people and act as a sign of Christ in the local church and community.

**Matrimony**

All love comes from God, and all love reflects the love that God has for His creation. The Sacrament of Marriage is, first and foremost, a sign and symbol of this love. Marriage is a sacrament of the self-giving love which two people offer to each other. The love which a couple has for each other mirrors the love God has for men and women.
The branch of systematic theology which deals with the doctrines of the last things (ta eschata). The Greek title is of comparatively recent introduction, but in modern usage it has largely supplanted its Latin equivalent De Novissimis. As the numerous doctrinal subjects belonging to this section of theology will be treated ex professo under their several proper titles, it is proposed in this article merely to take such a view of the whole field as will serve to indicate the place of eschatology in the general framework of religion, explain its subject-matter and the outlines of its content in the various religions of mankind, and illustrate by comparison the superiority of Christian eschatological teaching.

1. Second Coming of Christ

In certain Protestant circles (not all), especially among the Evangelicals there is a strong and often vivid
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preoccupation with signs of the Second Coming of Christ. Many of the notions that get expressed are either erroneous, or extreme. Some of these erroneous notions are rooted in a misunderstanding of the various Scriptural genres. Some are rooted in reading certain Scriptures in isolation from the wider context of the whole of Scripture. And some are rooted in reading one text, and disregarding other texts that balance it.

The Catholic approach to the end times (aka Eschatology) is perhaps less thrilling and provocative. It does not generate “Left Behind” movie series or cause people to sell their houses and gather on hillsides waiting for the announced end. It is more methodical and seeks to balance a lot of notions that often hold certain truths in tension.

I thought it perhaps a worthy goal to set forth certain principles of Eschatology from a Catholic point of view, since this topic often comes up in discussions with Evangelicals and others. Most of these insights are drawn straight from the Catechism and the Scriptures. What I offer here I do not propose to call a complete eschatology, only a sketch of basic principles rooted right in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

While we cannot know the exact time of his Coming, nevertheless there are things that both remind us and signal us as to his approach, if we have eyes to see them. These signs give indications only. The presence of such texts cannot be seen to over-rule that He will come “on a sudden” and that many will be caught unawares.

Here are some notes from Catechism (The Blue and Red texts are my own). I have made the Scripture quotes live by way of hyper text so you can click right over and read them.

1. “Soon + Sudden” – Since the Ascension Christ’s coming in glory has been imminent (Rev 22:20), even though “it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.” (Acts 1:7) This eschatological coming could be accomplished at any moment, even if both it and the final trial that will precede it are “delayed” (Mat 24:44; 1 Thes 5:2; 2 Thes 2:3-12) (CCC. 673).

2. Suspended – The glorious Messiah’s coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by “all Israel” (Romans 11:20-26; Mat 23:39), for “a hardening has come upon part of Israel” in their “unbelief” (Romans 11:20-26) toward Jesus. St. Peter says to the Jews of Jerusalem after Pentecost: “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. (Acts 3:19-21)” St. Paul echoes him: “For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” (Rom 11:15) The “full inclusion” of the Jews in the Messiah’s salvation, in the wake of “the full number of the Gentiles” (Rom 11:12), will enable the People of God to achieve “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”, in which “God may be all in all” (Eph 4:13; 1 Cor 15:27-28) (CCC. 674)

- Of all the points the Catechism makes, this one sets the tone of balance that must, most surely, be maintained. So, on the one hand Christ says, “I am coming soon” and that his coming could be both sudden and without warning.
- Yet this truth must be held in tension with other truths that set forth certain things and signs that must be accomplished first. And these things are not easily or quickly accomplished. And this point is developed in point.

- This going forth of the Gospel to all the nations and the acceptance of the Jews to Christ would seem to be matters that would take some time.
- Has the Gospel really reached all the nations? Have the full number of Gentiles come in and are they serving God and repenting in sufficient numbers? Perhaps so, one may argue. And yet, on a planet of six billion, less than one third are Christian. And yet, there are very few places in the world where there is no Christian presence.
- And what is meant by the “full number” of Gentiles? That number is hidden from us and surely is debated.
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- Many repressive regimes and movements (often typified by powerful or charismatic leaders) of the last Century claimed the power to usher in such a utopia. The sad legacy of the 20th Century shows how tragic, bloody and repressive such attempts have been.

- The Church also rejects religious forms of this which hold that prior to the Second Coming of Christ a period of 1000 years is set aside in which Christ will reign on earth or in which the Church will somehow attain a total victory prior to Christ’s Second Coming. This will be developed more in the next point.

3. Suffering and Sedition – Before Christ’s second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers (Luke 18:8; Mt 24:12). The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the “mystery of iniquity” in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glories himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh. (2 Thess 2:4-12; 1 Thess 5:2-3; 1 Jn 2:18-22) (CCC # 675)

- Clearly, many of these troubles have afflicted the Church in every age. There has always been persecution. Many have fallen away, sometimes in large numbers, most into schism, some into unbelief. There have been times too where it can be argued that the love of many has grown cold.

- And yet, clearly too, in the times in which we live, these are very severe problems and they have grown to envelope most of the planet. But God only knows when these signs will be present in a definitive rather than merely present pre-figuratively.

4. Secular Utopianism Rejected – The Antichrist’s deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the “intrinsically perverse” political form of a secular messianism. (CCC # 676)

- Yes, many in human history, but especially in modern times, have advanced the notion that a secular utopia could be ushered in by human effort, and by submitting oneself to a government or worldly power or charismatic figure to do so.
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- The key point is holding all five principles about in balance, and to accept the tension of knowing signs, but not the definitive time or fulfillment of them.

- Most errors in eschatology proceed from a lack of balance and a failure to appreciate that the final age in which we live is steeped in mysteries and meanings known fully only by God. Time itself is mysterious, as are the deeper meanings of events and human history. The Lord, while giving us a framework that reminds of us his coming, and signals us in a merciful way to remember, has insisted that it is not for us to know the times or the seasons fixed by the Father, let alone the day and hour.

- Humility, prayerful vigilance, readiness through obedience and the gift of holiness, along with an eager longing heart for the Kingdom in all its glory are our best posture.

- Avoid doing lots of mathematical calculations here. The Catholic approach may not be the stuff of movies and bestsellers, but it is the balanced and trusting faith to which we are summoned. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen. (Rev 22:20-21)

2. Purgatory

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines purgatory as a "purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven," which is experienced by those "who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified" (CCC 1030). It notes that "this final purification of the elect . . . is entirely different from the punishment of the damned" (CCC 1031).

The purification is necessary because, as Scripture teaches, nothing unclean will enter the presence of God in heaven (Rev. 21:27) and, while we may die with our mortal sins forgiven, there can still be many impurities in us, specifically venial sins and the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven.

Two Judgments

When we die, we undergo what is called the particular, or individual, judgment. Scripture says that “it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). We are judged instantly and receive our reward, for good or ill. We know at once what our final destiny will be. At the end of time, when Jesus returns, there will come the general judgment to which the Bible refers, for example, in Matthew 25:31-32: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” In this general judgment all our sins will be publicly revealed (Luke 12:25).

Augustine said, in The City of God, that “temporary punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by others after death, by others both now and then; but all of them before that last and strictest judgment” (21:13). It is between the particular and general judgments, then, that the soul is purified of the remaining consequences of sin: “I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper” (Luke 12:59).

One argument anti-Catholics often use to attack purgatory is the idea that the Catholic Church makes money from promulgating the doctrine. Without purgatory, the claim asserts, the Church would go broke. Any number of anti-Catholic books claim the Church owes the majority of its wealth to this doctrine. But the numbers just don’t add up.

When a Catholic requests a memorial Mass for the dead - that is, a Mass said for the benefit of someone in purgatory - it is customary to give the parish priest a stipend, on the principle that the laborer is worth his hire (Luke 10:7) and that those who preside at the altar share the altar’s offerings (1 Cor. 9:13-14). In the United States, a stipend is commonly around five dollars; but the indigent do not have to pay anything. A few people, of course, freely offer more. A parish
might have four or five or six Masses on a Sunday. The total from the Sunday collections far surpasses the paltry amount received from the memorial Masses.

A Catholic"Invention"?

Fundamentalists may be fond of saying the Catholic Church "invented" the doctrine of purgatory to make money, but they have difficulty saying just when. Most professional anti-Catholics-the ones who make their living attacking "Romanism" - seem to place the blame on Pope Gregory the Great, who reigned from A.D. 590-604.

But that hardly accounts for the request of Monica, mother of Augustine, who asked her son, in the fourth century, to remember her soul in his Masses. This would make no sense if she thought her soul would not benefit from prayers, as would be the case if she were in hell or in the full glory of heaven.

Nor does ascribing the doctrine to Gregory explain the graffiti in the catacombs, where Christians during the persecutions of the first three centuries recorded prayers for the dead. Indeed, some of the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament, like the Acts of Paul and Thecla and the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity (both written during the second century), refer to the Christian practice of praying for the dead. Such prayers would have been offered only if Christians believed in purgatory, even if they did not use that name for it. (See Catholic Answers’ Fathers Know Best tract The Existence of Purgatory for quotations from these and other early Christian sources.)

Why No Protests?

Whenever a date is set for the “invention” of purgatory, you can point to historical evidence to show the doctrine was in existence before that date. Besides, if at some point the doctrine was pulled out of a clerical hat, why does ecclesiastical history record no protest against it?

A study of the history of doctrines indicates that Christians in the first centuries were up in arms (sometimes quite literally) if anyone suggested the least change in beliefs. They were extremely conservative people who tested a doctrine’s truth by asking, was this believed by our ancestors? Was it handed on from the apostles? Surely belief in purgatory would be considered a great change, if it had not been believed from the first - so where are the records of protests?

They don’t exist. There is no hint at all, in the oldest writings available to us (or in later ones, for that matter), that “true believers” in the immediate post-apostolic years spoke of purgatory as a novel doctrine. They must have understood that the oral teaching of the apostles, what Catholics call tradition and the Bible not only failed to contradict the doctrine, but, in fact, confirmed it.

It is no wonder, then, that those who deny the existence of purgatory tend to touch upon only briefly the history of the belief. They prefer to claim that the Bible speaks only of heaven and hell. Wrong. It speaks plainly of a third condition, commonly called the limbo of the Fathers, where the just who had died before the redemption were waiting for heaven to be opened to them. After his death and before his resurrection, Christ visited those experiencing the limbo of the Fathers and preached to them the good news that heaven would now be opened to them (1 Pet. 3:19). These people thus were not in heaven, but neither were they experiencing the torments of hell.

Some have speculated that the limbo of the Fathers is the same as purgatory. This may or may not be the case. However, even if the limbo of the Fathers is not purgatory, its existence shows that a temporary, intermediate state is not contrary to Scripture. Look at it this way. If the limbo of the Fathers was purgatory, then this one verse directly teaches the existence of purgatory. If the limbo of the Fathers was a different temporary state, then the Bible at least says such a state can exist. It proves there can be more than just heaven and hell.

“Purgatory in Scripture”

Some Fundamentalists also charge, as though it actually proved something, “The word purgatory is nowhere found in Scripture.” This is true, and yet it does not disprove the existence of purgatory or the fact that belief in it has always been part of Church teaching. The words Trinity and Incarnation aren’t in Scripture either, yet those
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Why to Purgatory?

Why would anyone go to purgatory? To be cleansed, for “nothing unclean shall enter heaven” (Rev. 21:27). Anyone who has not been completely freed of sin and its effects is, to some extent, “unclean.” Through repentance he may have gained the grace needed to be worthy of heaven, which is to say, he has been forgiven and his soul is spiritually alive. But that’s not sufficient for gaining entrance into heaven. He needs to be cleansed completely.

Fundamentalists claim, as an article in Jimmy Swaggart’s magazine, The Evangelist, put it, that “Scripture clearly reveals that all the demands of divine justice on the sinner ... that which was lost. The advocates of a purgatory (and the necessity of prayer for the dead) say, in effect, that the redemption of Christ was incomplete ... It has all been done for us by Jesus Christ, there is nothing to be added or done by man.”

It is entirely correct to say that Christ accomplished all of our salvation for us on the cross. But that does not settle the question of how this redemption is applied to us. Scripture ... the course of time through, among other things, the process of sanctification through which the Christian is made holy.

Sanctification involves suffering (Rom. 5:3-5), and purgatory is the final stage of sanctification that some of us need to undergo before we enter heaven. Purgatory is the final phase of Christ’s applying to us the purifying redemption that he accomplished for us by his death on the cross.

No Contradiction

The Fundamentalist resistance to the biblical doctrine of purgatory presumes there is a contradiction between Christ’s redeeming us on the cross and the process by which we are sanctified. There isn’t. And a Fundamentalist cannot say that suffering in the final stage of sanctification conflicts with the sufficiency of Christ’s atonement without saying that suffering in the early stages of sanctification also presents a similar conflict. The Fundamentalist has it backward: Our suffering in sanctification does not take away from the cross. Rather, the cross produces our sanctification, which
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Because, as Paul tells us, the Christian faith cannot exist without this doctrine, it has been infallibly defined by the Church. It is included in the three infallible professions of faith—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—and has been solemnly, infallibly taught by ecumenical councils.

The Fourth Lateran Council (1215), infallibly defined that at the second coming Jesus “will judge the living and the dead, to render to every person according to his works, both to the reprobate and to the elect. All of them will rise with their own bodies, which they now wear, so as to receive according to their deserts, whether these be good or bad [Rom. 2:6-11]” (constitution 1).

Most recently, the Catechism of the Catholic Church reiterated this long-defined teaching, stating, “we believe in the true resurrection of this flesh that we now possess’ (Council of Lyons II). We sow a corruptible body in the tomb, but he rises up an incorruptible body, a ‘spiritual body’ (cf. 1 Cor 15:42-44)” (CCC 1017).

4. The Antichrist

The claim that the pope is the Antichrist has been part of anti-Catholic rhetoric since the Reformation, when it was needed to justify the Protestant Reformers’ desire to leave the Catholic Church.

Thus the Lutheran Book of Concord states, “[T]he pope is the real Antichrist who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ . . . Accordingly, just as we cannot adore the devil himself as our lord or God, so we cannot suffer his apostle, the pope or Antichrist, to govern us as our head or lord” (Smalcald Articles 2:4:10, 14).

The Presbyterian and Anglican Westminster Confession states, “There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the pope of Rome in any sense be the head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and that son of perdition, that exalted himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God” (25:6).

To make the prophecies of the Antichrist fit the pope, some even claimed that “the temple of God” in which the Antichrist pretends to be God (2 Thess. 2:4) is the Vatican.

results in our suffering, because “[f]or the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11).

Nothing Unclean

Purgatory makes sense because there is a requirement that a soul not just be declared to be clean, but actually be clean, before a man may enter into eternal life. After all, if a guilty soul is merely “covered,” if its sinful state still exists but is officially ignored, then it is still a guilty soul. It is still unclean.

Catholic theology takes seriously the notion that “nothing unclean shall enter heaven.” From this it is inferred that a less than cleansed soul, even if “covered,” remains a dirty soul and isn’t fit for heaven. It needs to be cleansed or “purged” of its remaining imperfections. The cleansing occurs in purgatory. Indeed, the necessity of the purging is taught in other passages of Scripture, such as 2 Thessalonians 2:13, which declares that God chose us “to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit.” Sanctification is thus not an option, something that may or may not happen before one gets into heaven. It is an absolute requirement, as Hebrews 12:14 states that we must strive “for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

3. Resurrection of the Body

The Bible tells us that when Jesus returns to earth, he will physically raise all those who have died, giving them back the bodies they lost at death.

These will be the same bodies people had in earthly life—but our resurrection bodies will not die and, for the righteous, they will be transformed into a glorified state, freed from suffering and pain, and enabled to do many of the amazing things Jesus could do with his glorified body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-44, 1 John 3:2).

The resurrection of the body is an essential Christian doctrine, as the apostle Paul declares: “[I]f the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Cor. 15:13-18).
Although the Fathers of the Church speculated on the Antichrist in various ways, they would never have agreed. They showed the temple to be the Jewish temple, rebuilt by Antichrist in Jerusalem. Rather than the bishop of Rome, the early Fathers identified the Antichrist as a government official—a king coming to power in the ruins of the Roman Empire. He would probably be Jewish, possibly from the tribe of Dan. And most importantly, rather than claiming like the pope to be the vicar or emissary of Jesus Christ, he would claim that Jesus was not the Christ but that he was instead. He would then seduce many of the Jewish people by attempting to fulfill the political aspirations they held for the Messiah. The quotes that follow illustrate both the different ideas they had about the Antichrist and how different their conception was from the anti-papal idea that arose in later centuries.

“The whole time of your faith will not profit you unless you are made complete in the last time. For in the last days false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and sheep shall be turned into wolves . . . and then shall the deceiver of the world appear, pretending to be the Son of God, and [he] shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands” (Didache16:3-4 [A.D. 70]).

5. Is heaven a place or only a state of mind?

The statement that heaven is “in our minds” is misleading, however. Heaven is within us, in the sense that each Christian is a temple of the indwelling Trinity. But it is no more accurate to say that heaven is only within us than it is to say that, by virtue of our receiving the sacraments, Jesus exists only within us. God and heaven live within us—but they also have an objective life beyond us as well.

God, in a sense, is heaven. In 1 Maccabees 3:18, for example, the author uses “Heaven” as a name for God (to avoid using the name it was forbidden to pronounce). Heaven exists wherever God is. Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17), meaning that, since God took on flesh, heaven itself is here, among us. After death, our experience of heaven will be to enter fully into the intimate love of the Holy Trinity, to our everlasting and perfect joy. To the extent that we participate in that love while on earth, we begin to share the joy of heaven now. Catherine of Siena said, “All the way to heaven is heaven.”

It is right that the Bible refers to “heavenly places.” We must keep in mind that time and space are finite concepts; God is not bound by them, nor could God live in one physical place, as we think of it, because the physical universe is his creation and cannot contain him. Heaven is a place, but not a particular space.

We must understand the symbolic language of the Bible and the saints as an attempt to communicate the ineffable. We do not understand literally terms such as seeing God “face to face.” We rejoice in their meaning: that we will be with God, intimate with him, unhindered by our mortal limitations.

As the Catechism says (section 1024), “This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity - this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed - is called ‘heaven.’ Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.” We leave up to God “where” and “how” he fulfills his promise.