

- 1 Scholasticism is a way, a method, a set of procedures, for thinking about God, Jesus Christ, the world, and of thinking about ourselves, as related to all of these. For almost 800 years, in most places, it was the way Catholic theology was done, and its strengths and weaknesses have left a profound imprint on Catholic thought and life.
- 2 Where scholasticism came from: three currents joined to bring it about.
 - 2.1 Scripture and patristic theology (which claimed to be inspired by scripture, but which got much of its inspiration from Neo-Platonic philosophy).
 - 2.1.1 Although Plato later yielded to Aristotle, Platonic influence remained strong in scholasticism.
 - 2.2 The monastic schools, which contributed two insights:
 - 2.2.1 First, we understand by asking questions.
 - 2.2.1.1 We can ask questions about everything, including our power to raise questions.
 - 2.2.1.2 No limits can be imposed on our questioning, and there is nothing which, in principle, cannot be questioned (e.g. the existence of God).
 - 2.2.1.3 We are always asking about what we don't yet fully know, and trying to link the unknown with what we already know.
 - 2.2.2 Second, our answers must be critically evaluated, by comparing them with the answers which others have given.
 - 2.3 Aristotle (late fourth century B.C.)
 - 2.3.1 He took material things, and the physical world seriously, and this made his philosophy much more suitable for Christianity than that of Plato.
 - 2.3.2 He used the difference of actual and potential to deal with change, and with the relationship of material and spiritual components of life.
 - 2.3.3 But his philosophy could not deal with *living* God. He could posit the existence of an «unmoved mover,» changeless from all eternity, but the living God

of the OT and NT was beyond the reach of his philosophy.

- 3 Some problems with the use of philosophy in theology.
 - 3.1 It can lead to imposing the structure of a philosophy or a philosophical system onto theology.
 - 3.2 Such an approach identifies theology with as the process of systematizing the data provided by faith (that is, putting the data in order and showing how these data depend on each other). For this reason, it can lead to thinking of theology as the process of fitting the data provided by faith into a matrix outline provided by philosophy.
 - 3.2.1 For example, in the scholastic model, real presence has often been identified with transubstantiation - a concept derived ultimately from the act/potency and substance/accident categories of Aristotelian philosophy.
 - 3.2.2 This makes acceptance of the real presence of Jesus when Eucharist and Lord's Supper are celebrated very difficult for those not drawn to Aristotelian philosophy.
 - 3.2.3 The Augustinian, Calvinist, Jansenist concept of predestination (the view that, before the creation of the world, God had decided that some would glorify him by going to heaven and others by spending eternity in hell) is also rooted in a definition of freedom which goes back to Greek thought – the notion that freedom is basically indifference, the absence of constraints, so that the free person is one who has «the power to act or not act, to act in this or that way.»
 - 3.2.4 Among some of its less gifted practitioners, admiration for Aristotelian logic led to reducing theology to a technique for drawing new conclusions from the data provided by faith.
 - 3.2.5 Note that the problem is not in the desire of the theologian to proceed in an orderly and logical way; the problem is in the *reduction* of theology to these techniques and methods.

- 4 Scholasticism's understanding of the nature of theology is problematic. It is true that theology aims at understanding, but understanding, the act of using intelligence, is not an exercise in applied logic (the technique of drawing conclusions from premisses), nor is it the technique of ordering and organizing data, and then processing it.
 - 4.1 Understanding is not the creation of a system (a way of organizing data so that it can be used efficiently).
 - 4.2 Understanding is the conscious presence of reality to itself., with all of its complexity.
 - 4.3 Theology, and the understanding which is at its heart, have often been misunderstood in precisely these reductionist ways, but theology, so defined, could be done just as well by an atheist as by a Christian.
- 5 Some reflections on faith.
 - 5.1 God wants us to accept his gift of himself, and to allow that gift to transform us. This acceptance and this «allowing» constitute faith. Here, as always, faith is letting God be the one he wants to be, letting God define himself in his own way and his own good time, letting God accept us unconditionally.
 - 5.1.1 Faith is the awareness of God as unconditional love and it includes the acceptance of this love..
 - 5.1.2 That is, it is the awareness of God as the one who identifies his life in and for himself with his life for us.
 - 5.1.3 Faith is initiated by the presence of God (that is, by the Spirit), as that presence strives to make us aware of itself.
 - 5.1.3.1 This happens particularly in the scriptural word, and this is what it means to call scripture inspired.
 - 5.1.4 Faith is reliance on God's word about who he is and what he has done for us.
 - 5.1.5 Faith comes about when we understand God's word about who he is and what he has done for us, and this is already theology.
 - 5.1.6 Faith is essentially related to Jesus Christ, because

God is the one who accepts and loves us by becoming one of us, in his son Jesus.

5.1.7 In this event, he shares his very self with us by turning a completely human face towards us.

- 6 Theology is the attempt to know the one who loves us so that we may love the one who knows us
 - 6.1 Theology is the extension and prolongation of faith.
 - 6.2 We are called to be aware of the presence of God (this is faith) and to deepen this awareness (this is theology).
 - 6.3 Theology is faith, thinking more deeply into its own ground and source.
 - 6.4 Faith reflects on itself, its motives, and its content, and on the meaning of the words it uses, and this is theology.
- 7 Theology and mystery.
 - 7.1 Theology, like faith from which it springs, deals with mystery, but this does not mean that theology should throw up its hands because of its inability to reduce the mystery to ordered and manageable facts or principles.
 - 7.2 This reduction of theology to a list of ordered and manageable facts or principles is not what the theological enterprise is about, not what it should be doing.
 - 7.3 Mysteries are not there to frustrate our minds, or to impress us with the inadequacy of human intelligence.
 - 7.4 Theology is called to understand mysteries, ever more deeply, sometimes by a filled silence when thought has said all it can.
 - 7.5 Theology uses words, often in the form of narrative, but this is not a sign that it is reducing the infinite mystery of God's life to human terms and the finitude of human language.
 - 7.5.1 Words and narratives always point beyond themselves they are limitations of the infinite.
 - 7.5.2 Human words are never merely human; they always breathe the mystery of God.
- 8 When I answer God's word addressed to me with my own word addressed to God, this is prayer. When theology is true to its nature and mission, it issues in prayer. – even better, it turns into prayer.