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Thomistic Themes in Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's Theology

Wątki tomistyczne w teologii Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI

ABSTRACT: Among many other sources, Ratzinger received his formation from the “three great masters” – Augustine, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas. While rejecting an unpersonal and essentialist scholasticism, he recognizes the authority of Aquinas – seen through an “Augustinian Thomism” – in anthropology, the doctrine of grace and creation, as well as in the nature of the act of faith and the method of theology. The German theologian tries to make the ontological perspective compatible with the historical-salvific perspective, the personalist perspective with the metaphysical point of view. In the synthesis between faith and reason, philosophy and theology, Ratzinger finds in Aquinas a good model, which is based not only on the order of grace but also on the order of creation.

KEY WORDS: anthropology, gnoseology, knowledge of God, theological method, relations between faith and reason, act of faith

ABSTRAKT: Spośród wielu autorytetów Ratzinger otrzymał swoją formację od „trzech wielkich mistrzów”: Augustyna, Bonawentury i Tomasza z Akwinu. Odrzucając nieosobową i esencjalistyczną scholastykę, uznaje on autorytet Akwinaty – postrzegany poprzez „tomizm augustiański” – w antropologii, doktrynie o łasce i stworzeniu, a także w naturze aktu wiary i metodzie teologicznej. Niemiecki teolog stara się pogodzić perspektywę ontologiczną z perspektywą historyczno-zbawczą, perspektywę personalistyczną z metafizyczną. Na potrzeby syntezy wiary i rozumu, filozofii i teologii Ratzinger znajduje u Akwinaty dobry model, który opiera się nie tylko na porządku łaski, ale także na porządku stworzenia.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: antropologia, gnoseologia, poznanie Boga, metoda teologiczna, relacje między wiarą i rozumem, akt wiary

Along with the diversity of sources of J. Ratzinger's theology, we can appreciate that love, truth and beauty are in turn linked to the concepts of person

and existence, as can also be found in the best classical theology formulated by the Fathers of the Church and the medieval masters. This is a constant in Ratzinger's thought. In his formative years in Freising he did a lot of readings in those years: the novels of Dostoevsky and Gertrude von Le Fort, the French literature of the time represented by Claudel and Bernanos, while also maintaining a great interest in the scientific theories of Einstein or Heisenberg, to give just a few examples. Moreover, "in the domain of theology and philosophy, the voices that moved us most directly were those of Romano Guardini, Josef Pieper, [or the later Catholics] Theodor Häcker, and Peter Wust."¹ He also approached other philosophers of the time: apart from the "philosophy of dialogue" of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber, "I was very interested in [the existentialism of] Jaspers and Heidegger, and personalism as a whole. [...] This was key for me. And as a counterpart, I was passionate – also from the beginning – about Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine,"² without renouncing the nihilism of Nietzsche, the spiritualism of Bergson or the thought of many other philosophers.³ The fruit of a broad erudition, art, science and philosophy has always remained sources of inspiration for Ratzinger theologian.

The problem of the supernatural

Joseph Ratzinger's theology will always be a "con-theology," a theology in continuous dialogue with the faith of the Church and with other authors, both classical and modern. In his formative years – and not only, as can be seen in his extensive work - what his teacher Gottlieb Söhngen (1892–1971) called the "three great masters" – Augustine, Thomas and Bonaventure, were of special relevance. Söhngen motto was: "with St Thomas, beyond St Thomas; with Augustine, beyond Augustine."⁴ In an interview during his pontificate, when asked how the pope prayed, he responded by alluding to these three masters: "I am

¹ J. Ratzinger, *Milestones. Memoirs (1927–1977)*, San Francisco 1998, pp. 42–43. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are by P.B.-S.

² J. Ratzinger, *La sal de la tierra. Cristianismo e Iglesia católica ante el nuevo milenio*, Madrid 1997, p. 66; cf. A. Läßle, *Benedikt XVI. und seine Wurzeln. Was sein Leben und seinen Glauben prägte*, Augsburg 2006, pp. 45–51.

³ Cf. A. Läßle, *Benedikt XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 28–51. About this topic can be seen the Läßle's article: *Theologie als Krisis und Wagnis des Theologen*, "Die Besinnung" 1–2 (1947), pp. 52–60.

⁴ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe*, Madrid 2004, p. 27; G. Valente, *El profesor Ratzinger (1946-1977). Los años dedicados al estudio y a la docencia en el recuerdo de sus compañeros y alumnos*, Madrid 2011, p. 46.

friends with Augustine, with Bonaventure, with Thomas Aquinas. Those saints are asked: ‘Help me!’⁵ However, with respect to Aquinas he points out elsewhere his initial difficulties with a certain type of scholasticism: “I had difficulties in penetrating the thought of Thomas Aquinas – Ratzinger continued recalling his seminary years – whose crystal-clear logic seemed to me to be too closed in on itself, too impersonal and ready-made.”⁶ According to Rossi, Ratzinger’s theology has “a harmonious architecture of simple lines that, when traced with conceptual rigor, composed a rather complicated design, but clear in its luminosity.”⁷ It would have something of that simple nobility of Gothic cathedrals.

He missed, however, that personal and intimate depth that he saw in the writings of St Augustine. But in spite of a translation of the treatise on love in the Angelic Doctor that left a deep impression on him, he was not able to find it in his writings,⁸ an initial distance between Thomas and Bonaventure constituted a starting point in the thinking of the young Bavarian scholar. His initial reservations towards scholasticism are also well known, when he referred to his teacher, Arnold Wilmsen, who taught them “a rigid, neoscholastic Thomism that was simply far afield from my own questions.”⁹ Ratzinger is usually considered as a follower of the Augustinian-Bonaventurian line – which he really is – but there is also an influence of Thomas Aquinas that could go unnoticed; it really appears in his texts, as we will try to show in these pages, especially in the unity between reflection, spirituality and pastoral purpose.¹⁰ We will do this through four major themes that we have found in his writings: a) the problem of the supernatural, b) the knowledge of God and c) the doctrine of creation and ideas about the nature of the act of faith and d) the method of theological science. A genetic and chronological methodology will also serve to trace this possible influence.

That scholasticism seemed to Ratzinger to be a too essentialist and impersonal approach, we said. However, alluding to *Surnaturel* of De Lubac, he affirmed: “I admired a new interpretation of St Thomas Aquinas, very different from the neo-scholastic philosophy that we had studied up to that moment.” On the

⁵ Benedicto XVI, P. Seewald, *Luz del mundo. El papa, la Iglesia y el signo de los tiempos*, transl. R.H. Bernet, Barcelona 2010, p. 30.

⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Milestones...*, op. cit., p. 44; cf. J. Ratzinger, *La sal de la tierra...*, op. cit., p. 67; T.P. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision*, New York–Mahwah 2009, pp. 47–49.

⁷ M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L’anima tomista di Benedetto XVI. L’impronta di san Tommaso nei temi chiave di Papa Ratzinger: un’eredità per la chiesa del futuro*, Roma 2013, p. 239.

⁸ Cf. A. Läßle, *Benedikt XVI...*, op. cit., p. 55; E. Gaál, *The Theology of Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift*, New York 2010, p. 31.

⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Milestones...*, op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁰ Cf. M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L’anima tomista di Benedetto XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 12–13.

other hand, he affirmed of his *Doktorvater*, his director of the doctoral and habilitation work, Söhngen:

He belonged to that dynamic current in Thomism that took from Thomas the passion for truth and the habit of asking unrelenting questions about the foundation and the goal of the real; but all of this he consciously placed in relation to the questions that the philosophy asks today.¹¹

In fact, the German theologian will find his points of inspiration in the thought of Aquinas. Dorothea Kaes states that

Ratzinger finds confirmation of his position in Thomas insofar as he has emphasized the reference of theology to the faith experience of the saints, without the former losing its relation to reality. In particular, Augustine's and Bonaventure's exposition of the simple seems to him to be related to Thomas' affirmation that love is the eye that lets man see.¹²

It thus combines both perspectives. Tracey Rowland, winner of the 2020 Ratzinger Prize and a connoisseur of 20th century neo-scholasticism, considers that "throughout his work he refers to the position of St Thomas: whenever he finds in it a valuable intuition."¹³

¹¹ J. Ratzinger, *Milestones...*, op. cit., p. 55.

¹² D. Kaes, *Theologie im Anspruch von Geschichte und Wahrheit*, St Ottilien 1997, pp. 187–188; cf. J. Stern, *Le futur Benoît XVI et Henri de Lubac*, "Bulletin de la Association Internationale Cardinal Henri de Lubac" 7/8 (2005), pp. 7–8.

¹³ T. Rowland, *La fe de Ratzinger. La teología del papa Benedicto XVI*, Granada 2008, p. 24. See also: G. Bachanek, *Šv. Tomas Akviniets Josepho Ratzingerio (Benedikto XVI) apmąstymuose*, "Logos" 65 (2010), pp. 29–40; and specially M.A. Correas Mazuecos, *Los 'pensadores de la fe' de Joseph Ratzinger. Tradición y diálogos teológicos*, "Excerpta e dissertationibus in sacra theologia. Cuadernos doctorales de la facultad de teología" 67 (2018), pp. 159–217. Rowland maintains that this is a non-Manichaeic Augustinianism, very different from that of other authors, such as Luther himself (cf. T. Rowland, *La fe de Ratzinger...*, op. cit., p. 263). In turn, this Augustinianism would not imply an opposition to Thomism without more, but rather to the "transcendental Thomism of Karl Rahner." We would thus find ourselves before an "Augustinian Thomism" of Henri de Lubac, combined with the theology of history of von Balthasar" (T. Rowland, *La fe de Ratzinger...*, op. cit., p. 265). See also: H. Verweyen, *Joseph Ratzinger – Benedikt XVI. Die Entwicklung seines Denkens*, Darmstadt 2007, pp. 106–107. Kaes is of the same opinion, although with some more nuance about the importance of love: "Bei Thomas findet Ratzinger insofern eine Bestätigung seiner Position, als dieser die bleibende Hinordnung der Theologie auf die Glaubenserfahrung der Heiligen betont habe, ohne die erstere ihren Wirklichkeitsbezug

In his doctoral thesis on Augustinian ecclesiology, there are four mentions to the *Summa theologiae*, in which he appreciates a different relationship between natural and supernatural, as well as in what refers to the proofs of the existence of God: while Augustine proposed an interior way of access to God, Aquinas does it through the sensible things and using the concept of causality in a purely metaphysical sense.¹⁴ Thus, Ratzinger points out that between the two there is a different conception of being and knowledge, although he does not accept the dichotomy proposed by Max Scheler between Augustinian-religious knowledge and Thomistic-metaphysical knowledge. For Augustine, in reality, the two are intimately united.¹⁵ As a point of confluence between the two authors, Thomas Aquinas “sees the *res sacramenti* of the Eucharist in the *unitas corporis mystici*,”¹⁶ the fruit of the sacrament of sacraments.

Also in his writings on St Bonaventure, Ratzinger made some other approaches to the thought of St Thomas. Here the differences are reflected in the gnoseology, which give rise to the ontological orientation of Thomism and the historical-salvific orientation of Bonaventure, respectively. Thus, we will find differences in the doctrine on revelation, in theological anthropology or in the doctrine of grace, which are mainly the three great themes that Ratzinger will take from Thomas Aquinas, according to Schenk.¹⁷ In turn, throughout his 1955 habilitation thesis he insists that both perspectives are complementary, since neither of them exhausts all the richness of Christian truth. Bonaventure also made a synthesis between the Augustinian theory of interior illumination and

verlöre. Insbesondere aber scheint ihm die Heraustellung des Einfachen durch Augustinus und Bonaventura mit jener Aussage des Thomas verwandt, die Liebe sei das Auge, das den Menschen sehen läßt” (D. Kaes, *Theologie im Anspruch...*, op. cit., pp. 187–188).

¹⁴ Cf. P.C. Sicouly, *Fe y razón en la lectura del pensamiento patristico y medieval de Joseph Ratzinger-Benedicto XVI: una mirada a sus primeras obras (1951-1962)*, “Ciencia Tomista” 138 (2011), p. 127.

¹⁵ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 1: *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* (hereafter: JRGS I), Freiburg 2011, pp. 552–560; Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 10 a. 6; A. Bellandi, *Fede cristiana come «Stare e comprendere». La giustificazione dei fondamenti della fede in Joseph Ratzinger*, Roma 1996, p. 138, note 11.

¹⁶ JRGS I, p. 293, note 88; cf. STh III, q. 80 a. 4c; q. 60 s.c.; it can be seen also: J. Ratzinger, *El nuevo pueblo de Dios. Esquemas para una ecclesiología*, Barcelona 1972, pp. 99–100; P. Martuccelli, *Origine e natura della chiesa: la prospettiva storico-dogmatica di Joseph Ratzinger*, Frankfurt am Main 2001, p. 254.

¹⁷ Cf. M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L'anima tomista di Benedetto XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 152–158; R. Schenk, *Bonaventura als Klassiker der analogia fidei. Zur Rezeption der theologischen Programmatik Gottlieb Söhngens im Frühwerk Joseph Ratzingers*, [in:] *Gegenwart der Offenbarung*, M. Schlosser, F.-X. Heibl (Hg.), Serie: *Ratzinger Studien* 2, Regensburg 2011, pp. 37–44.

that of Aristotle's abstraction, while, on the contrary, Aquinas opted unilaterally for the Aristotelian one: "According to him, one can only speak of divine illumination because that light proper to human reason has been created by God and, in that sense, is a participation in the light of God" (1 Cor 2:1).¹⁸ Therefore, also for Thomas, there is no internal revelation, because "like all knowledge, revelation also comes from outside: it is a complete fact, concluded once and for all." He also notes the paradox that "he has granted to the historical event the rank of positive origin in the salvific event."¹⁹ The meaning of *revelatio* will not be for Thomas Aquinas subjective but objective – thus passing to an objectivization of the relational act of revelation – although he clearly distinguishes between faith and revelation, unlike the Seraphic Doctor.²⁰

Both Thomas and Bonaventure participated in the preparation of the Second Unionist Council of Lyons (1274), assisting Urban IV, the true inspirer of that event, and they both held that the *Filioque* was a dogma, although each saw it from his own ontological or salvific-historical perspective, respectively. Thomas defined in STh I q. 36 a. 2 "the right and even the duty [of the Church] to define her faith more precisely." There is then the paradox that heresies contribute to the organic development of dogma, to make it more concrete and explicit, and in this process, papal authority is decisive.²¹ Less concurring, however, will be the developments in anthropology and, more specifically, on the theme of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural. Ratzinger points out that the abstraction of the concept of nature can lead to a certain anthropological dualism, such as could be derived from the Bonaventurian conception.²² In this sense, Aquinas' metaphysical thought had something liberating about it, for

before God every creature is 'nature,' whether it is the spirit, the body or the inanimate things of the world. The metaphysical concept of human nature was

¹⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 2: *Offenbarungsverständnis und Geschichtstheologie Bonaventuras. Habilitationsschrift und Bonaventura-Studien* (hereafter: JRGS II), Freiburg 2009, p. 728; cf. R. Voderholzer, *Offenbarung und Kirche. Ein Grundgedanke von Joseph Ratzingers Habilitationsprojekt (1955/2009) und seine theologische Tragweite*, [in:] *Gegenwart der Offenbarung*, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁹ JRGS II, pp. 141, 108.

²⁰ Cf. JRGS II, pp. 111, 221, there is mentioned STh I q. 1; H. Verweyen, *Ein unbekannter Ratzinger. Die Habilitationsschrift von 1955 als Schlüssel zu seiner Theologie*, Regensburg 2010, p. 46. Ratzinger notes the Copernican shift from allegorical interpretation to literal interpretation (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Teoría de los principios teológicos. Materiales para una teología fundamental*, trad. M.V. Salas, Barcelona 1985, p. 215).

²¹ Cf. JRGS II, pp. 184–185.

²² Cf. JRGS II, pp. 288–289; H. Verweyen, *Ein unbekannter Ratzinger...*, op. cit., pp. 61–66.

necessary to renew the Pauline spirit (cf. Rom 3:23). However, by reducing the concept of grace to the salvific grace obtained in Jesus Christ, the grace of creation fell into oblivion. With this 'nature' is relegated to a certain metaphysical neutrality in which its necessary dependence on grace and its irreducible metaphysical character are no longer sufficiently clear.²³

Moreover, "the separation of nature and spirit can be an expression of a truly Christian reality to which Thomism does not do justice." In any case, Ratzinger once again insists on the complementarity of the Thomistic and Bonaventurian conceptions.²⁴

Thus, the Thomistic concept of *supernaturalis* prevailed in Catholic theology. Ratzinger relates it to the Bonaventurian concept of *desiderium naturalis*, contrary to what was thought at the time: he thus places Bonaventure "in the line of spiritual evolution that had logically led to Thomas Aquinas."²⁵ However, he insists that the Thomistic concept of *supernaturalis* carried the danger of overlooking the immediate openness of the creature to the Creator. In contrast, the Bonaventurian concept of *supernaturalis* reflects better the relational character of grace.²⁶ Similarly, Thomas and Bonaventure did not understand the person seen as *imago Dei* in the same way, according to the respective "dynamic-actual" and "static-substantial" conceptions. While Bonaventure addressed the question in the knowledge of God, Aquinas dealt with it in anthropology. According to Ratzinger, Thomas Aquinas was more concerned with the spiritual nature of the person than with *actualitas*; thus, "in Thomas everything shifts: the question of the act and the object becomes, for the first time, separable."²⁷ The Angelic Doctor based the doctrine of grace on his concept of the supernatural, in order to make it comprehensible to Aristotelian ontology. This was his great achievement, but Aristotelianism had already been replaced by other philosophical systems at the beginning of the twentieth century in theology, so a new theological synthesis was necessary.²⁸ Thomas spoke of supernature as elevated, transformed and divinized nature: he placed special emphasis on the axiom *gratia praesupponit naturam*. At the

²³ JRGS II, pp. 288–289, cf. p. 685; M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L'anima tomista di Benedetto XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 32–33, 207–212, 240, which is in relation with the *prima pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*.

²⁴ JRGS II, p. 289.

²⁵ JRGS II, p. 304; H. Verweyen, *Ein unbekannter Ratzinger...*, op. cit., pp. 66–72.

²⁶ Cf. JRGS II, p. 312.

²⁷ JRGS II, pp. 326, 329, 340.

²⁸ Cf. JRGS II, pp. 339–340.

same time, however, “he was relegating to the background the historical-salvific distinctions,” Ratzinger argued, “but at the same time he was relegating to the background the historical-salvific distinctions.”²⁹

The Knowledge of God

This leads us to rethink the relationship between philosophy and theology. For Ratzinger, Thomas represents the line of theology understood as *philosophia supernaturalis*, proper to the objective-metaphysical approach, while Bonaventure sees it as a practical science nearer to a historical-concrete perspective. The Angelic Doctor grounded theology in scientific knowledge and “precisely in this activity by which the intellect draws conclusions [from the articles of faith,] the true essence of theological science is seen.”³⁰ This will be understood above all as thought faith, as *fides quaerens intellectum*. Against the theory of the double truth proposed in the 13th century by Siger of Brabant (1240–1280), Aquinas suggested a subtle formula of reconciliation between faith and reason, much more elaborate than that of Bonaventure. The problem consisted in understanding the unity and difference between philosophy and theology, without separation between the two disciplines. The Seraphic Doctor elaborated from 1267 onwards an anti-Aristotelianism that was not “anti-Thomasian.”³¹ For his part, Ratzinger always denied – with Thomas – the cosistic or essentialist character of theology. In a later conference in 1979, he affirmed that “if I am not mistaken, it was Thomas who was the first to reach, without hesitation, the consequence of the concept of theology: the object of this science – Thomas Aquinas even speaks of ‘subject’ – is God.” And he concluded with the following words: “theology deals with God, but it interrogates in the manner of philosophy.”³²

There is, however, an old text that appeared in 1960, dated on the feast of St Thomas the previous year and dedicated to his father, who had recently passed away. It was one of his first publications. It is the inaugural lecture on the occasion of his taking up the chair of fundamental theology at the

²⁹ Cf. JRGS II, pp. 278, 304; G. Valente, *El profesor Ratzinger...*, op. cit., p. 236. All these considerations were explained and deepened in specific seminars on Thomas in the first half of 1956 in Munich and on Bonaventure in Bonn in the first half of 1962.

³⁰ JRGS II, p. 204, cf. p. 384.

³¹ Cf. JRGS II, pp. 263–264, 614–615, 801–802; P. Hofmann, *Offenbarung und Geschichte. Joseph Ratzingers Kommentar zu Gaudium et spes als angewandte Bonaventura-Rezeption*, [in:] *Gegenwart der Offenbarung*, op. cit., p. 88.

³² J. Ratzinger, *Teoría de los principios...*, op. cit., pp. 381–385.

University of Bonn, entitled *The God of Faith and the God of the Philosophers*.³³ He stated there that the problem is as old as “faith and philosophy being side by side,”³⁴ and then recalled the famous Memorial of Blaise Pascal, sewn into the lining of his jacket and discovered on the night of November 23–24, 1654, at the death of the French scientist and thinker: “Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not the God of philosophers and wise men.” In this regard, the young theologian affirmed:

The mathematician and philosopher Pascal had experienced the living God, the God of faith, and in such a living encounter with the you of God, he understood – with manifestly joyful and startled amazement – how different was the irruption of the reality of God in comparison with what mathematical philosophy (of a Descartes, for example) knew how to say about God.³⁵

If the philosophy of that time – of Descartes, especially – is a philosophy from the *esprit de la géométrie*, Pascal’s *Pensées* seeks to be a philosophy [elaborated] from the *esprit de la finesse*, from the understanding of the whole of reality, which penetrates it more honestly than mathematical abstraction.³⁶ It

³³ It will nevertheless be an important text, as it will be included in the anthology prepared by his disciples in 1997: cfr. J. Ratzinger, *Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Theologia Naturalis*, many editions; V. Pfnür, *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 1997, pp. 40–59. There says Pfnür, pointing to two antagonical views: “Auf der einen Seite das Auseinanderfallen zwischen Weltengrund und verehrten Göttern, auf der anderen Seite das Wagnis, ‘das Absolute selbst als den Absoluten anzusprechen, als Gott, der zugleich das Absolute an sich und des Menschen Gott ist’” (V. Pfnür, *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte*, op. cit., pp. 19–20; the Ratzinger’s quotation is from the page 10 in the original text). However, we have not found reviews and commentaries in the German-language theological journals of the time on this work of his youth: cf. P. Blanco-Sarto, *Joseph Ratzinger: razón y cristianismo. La victoria de la inteligencia en el mundo de las religiones*, Madrid 2005, pp. 58–64.

³⁴ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe y el Dios de los filósofos*, trad. J. Aguirre, Madrid 1962, p. 11.

³⁵ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 12.

³⁶ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 12; here is quoted R. Guardini, *Pascal*, Brescia 1972, where for example is said: “C’è dunque una via logica dal mondo a Dio. Ma perché tal via venga rettamente intesa e porti al senso esatto ci dev’essere l’occhio conveniente. Ad ogni particolare oggetto di conoscenza s’appartiene una particolare vue. La semplice osservazione della natura scopre nel migliore dei casi un Essere metafisico assoluto. Se si deve veder di più, cioè il Dio vivente, [...] Dio deve rivelarsi. [...] È l’antica posizione agostiniana. E come Agostino giunse a vedere chiaramente questo fatto solo quando ebbe trovato la fede e si trovò nella situazione di poter giudicare dal piano conoscitivo dal piano conoscitivo più alto le possibilità del piano inferiore, così fu l’avvenimento del Memoriale a dare a Pascal,

consisted, therefore, in overcoming mere mathematical reason in search of an “open reason,” as our theologian would later repeat time and again.³⁷

To address this controversial question, Ratzinger then developed a historical contrast between Thomas Aquinas and the Swiss evangelical theologian Emil Brunner (1884–1976), an early companion of Karl Barth (1886–1968). He summarized the thought of Aquinas as follows:

for Thomas, the God of religion and the God of the philosophers are perfectly compatible with each other; on the contrary, the God of faith and the God of philosophy are partially distinguished: the God of faith surpasses the God of the philosophers, adds something to him.³⁸

This position went directly against the rejection of the *analogia entis* by the theologian of Basel, who considered philosophy as lesser. Indeed, “outside of Christian faith, philosophy is – according to Thomas – the highest possibility of the human spirit in general.”³⁹ Philosophy thus becomes the queen of the

con l'esperienza dello stato conoscitivo della fede, anche il giudizio sulle capacità e i limiti di quello precedente” (pp. 154–155).

³⁷ About this topic, P. Blanco-Sarto, *Joseph Ratzinger...*, op. cit., passim. However, Ratzinger continues, “Western thought exaggerated this contrast between reason and heart, *esprit de la géometrie* and *esprit de la finesse*. The demolition of speculative metaphysics by Kant, and the transfer of the religious to the sphere of pure sentiment alien to reason and metaphysics, [carried out] by Schleiermacher, brought Pascalian thought into the picture in a definitive way and led, only then, to the aggravation of the problem: for the first time an unbridgeable gulf now opens up between metaphysics and religion. Metaphysics, that is, theoretical reason, has no access to God. Religion has no place in the space of ratio. [...] This has an ultimate consequence: religion, which is not rationalizable, cannot be dogmatic either (if dogma is to be, on the other hand, a rational declaration about religious contents). Thus, the concretely experienced contrast between the God of faith and the God of philosophers is finally generalized as the contrast between the God of religion and the God of philosophers. Religion is experience; philosophy is theory; as a consequence, the God of religion is living and personal; the God of philosophers, empty and rigid” (J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., pp. 13–14; the reference to the critic part comes from G. Söhngen, *Die Neubegründung der Metaphysik und die Gottesserkenntnis*, [in:] G. Söhngen, *Probleme der Gotterkenntnis*, Münster 1928, pp. 1–55).

³⁸ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., pp. 17–18.

³⁹ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 18; it is referred to STh. I, q. 1, a. 1., where it is spoken about the differences between philosophy and theology, Natural and Christian theology. See, for example: STh I q. 1, a. 1, s. c.: “*Sed contra est quod dicitur II ad Tim. III, omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata utilis est ad docendum, ad arguendum, ad corripiendum, ad erudiendum ad iustitiam. Scriptura autem divinitus inspirata non pertinet ad philosophicas disciplinas, quae sunt secundum rationem humanam inventae. Utile igitur est, praeter*

human sciences, above all because of the breadth of its knowledge, although it is true that faith “seeks to give a new image of God, higher than philosophical reason could ever set and think.”⁴⁰ For this reason, faith does not contradict the philosophical doctrine of God either, and in order to illuminate its relationship with it, one would rather let the formula *gratia non destruit, sed elevat et perficit naturam* be applied, and with meaning. Christian faith in God accepts in itself the philosophical doctrine of God and consummates it.

In short: the God of Aristotle and the God of Jesus Christ are one and the same. Aristotle has known the true God, which we can know more deeply and profoundly thanks to faith, just as in the vision of God in the hereafter we will know the divine essence more closely and with greater intimacy.⁴¹

And so he concludes: “these are three degrees of the same path.”⁴² Philosophical knowledge, knowledge by faith and direct vision of God in eternal beatitude are different phases of the same itinerary, which contain and imply each other, as Aquinas also states.⁴³

philosophicas disciplinas, esse aliam scientiam divinitus inspiratam.” “Respondeo dicendum quod necessarium fuit ad humanam salutem, esse doctrinam quandam secundum revelationem divinam, praeter philosophicas disciplinas, quae ratione humana investigantur” (STh I q. 1 a. 1 co). “Ad secundum dicendum quod diversa ratio cognoscibilis diversitatem scientiarum inducit. Eandem enim conclusionem demonstrat astrologus et naturalis, puta quod terra est rotunda, sed astrologus per medium mathematicum, idest a materia abstractum; naturalis autem per medium circa materiam consideratum. Unde nihil prohibet de eisdem rebus, de quibus philosophicae disciplinae tractant secundum quod sunt cognoscibilia lumine naturalis rationis, et aliam scientiam tractare secundum quod cognoscuntur lumine divinae revelationis. Unde theologia quae ad sacram doctrinam pertinet, differt secundum genus ab illa theologia quae pars philosophiae ponitur” (STh I q. 1, a. 1 ad 2). About the Swiss theologian, can be seen: P. Blanco-Sarto, *Analogia entis, analogia fidei. Karl Barth dialoga con teólogos católicos*, “Scripta Theologica” 51/1 (2019), pp. 67–95.

⁴⁰ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 18.

⁴¹ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 19; the quotation is from STh q. 2, a. 2 ad 1.

⁴² J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 19.

⁴³ When addressing Emil Brunner’s thesis – although it is “a desire of Reformed theology in general” – Ratzinger recalls that the Swiss theologian “ties his doctrine of God to the surprising fact that God in the Bible has a name” (J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., pp. 19–20; he refers above all to *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, in the first volume of the *Dogmatik*, Zürich 1953). Indeed, that which bears a name is particular: next to it there are equals; but philosophy goes in search of the concept which, as a designation of the universal, is the exact opposite of the name. “But the biblical God has a name,” Brunner concludes, “and it is a particular one, a determinate one, and not ‘the Absolute’” (J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 20). Further on he interpreted these words: “What does it mean, then,

In the face of Brunner's criticism, which is harsh and categorical, Ratzinger then tried to get to the heart of the matter, to the basic issues at stake: "Here it becomes a question about the essence of Christianity in general; a question about the legitimacy of the concrete synthesis between Greek and biblical thought that gives form to Christianity."⁴⁴ It is the question about the legitimacy of the coexistence of faith and philosophy, and about the validity of the *analogia entis* as a positive relationship between knowledge by reason and knowledge by faith, between natural and supernatural being. In short, he puts us in the position of "deciding between the Catholic and Protestant understanding of Christianity." Here then is the heart of the matter at hand: "whether there is *analogia entis* and the possibility of a meeting (or, on the contrary, an abyss) between faith and reason, the natural and the supernatural, God and man in short."⁴⁵

that God has a name? The name is not an expression of the knowledge of the essence, but something that makes it appealable [capable of being called...]. If God gives himself a name among men, he does not thereby properly express his being, but – rather – establishes appealability: he makes himself accessible to man" (p. 21). This would be the personalistic but anti-philosophical position of Brunner and of a large part of Reformed theology: God has a name, is particular and therefore cannot be universalizable, with which philosophy thus remains out of place. Ratzinger later developed this idea a bit further, summarizing Brunner's thought. "God is appealable only if He allows Himself to be appealed to; His name is known only if He Himself makes it known" (p. 22). In all this there is a clear contrast with the God of Greek philosophy: in philosophy it is man who – from himself – seeks God; in biblical faith it is God himself, and God alone, who establishes with full creative freedom the God-man relationship. Thus, "the opposition between the name of God and the concept of God, the God of faith and the God of philosophers, becomes clearer and more determined. The 'God of the philosophers' is the God to whom one does not pray: with whom one achieves a unity [...], but not a community that is founded by God himself" (ibid.). While the philosopher seeks God, the believer allows himself to be found by Him, one could say in a somewhat summary way. From these premises, the conclusion seems clear: "The God of revelation is cognizable only in revelation. The God thought outside of revelation is another; he is someone thought; therefore, he is not the personal [God]: he is not the one whose essence is to communicate" (ibid.).

⁴⁴ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 26.

⁴⁵ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 26; there is a reference to Ratzinger's master, G. Söhngen, *Die Einheit in der Theologie*, München 1952. On this, see also: G.L. Prestige, *Dios en el pensamiento de los Padres*, Salamanca 1975, pp. 18–19. After the exposition, Ratzinger proposes an "attempt at a solution." "The problem is serious and grave," he affirms. "One can approach it only if one investigates – in an exact and profound way – both concepts of God, in order to know what is essential to them" (J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 27). The newly appointed professor in Bonn then turns to the concept of natural theology as understood by the Stoics, in which – after a detailed analysis – he comes to the conclusion that the contrast between the God of faith and the God of the philosophers is already apparent there (cf. p. 27). "Ultimately, the whole distinction is

It is therefore an old problem that predates Pascal and the modern age, and Ratzinger concludes as follows:

the fearful risk of monotheism is to call the Absolute – the “God of philosophers” and the God of man – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, [to confuse] one with the other. From the point of view of monotheism, the link that Augustine established between “neoplatonic ontology and biblical knowledge of God” – as Brunner affirmed – is perfectly legitimate, the concrete way in which for him the link between the God of the philosophers and the God of faith must be presented. “Moreover, with the realization that the mute and unappealable God of the philosophers has become – in Jesus Christ – a God who speaks and listens, he has fully realized the inner demand of biblical faith.”⁴⁶

reduced to theological metaphysics on the one hand, and cultic religion on the other. Civil theology has, after all, no God, but only ‘religion;’ natural theology has no religion at all, but only divinity” (p. 31; there is a reference to his doctoral dissertation *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustinus Lehre von der Kirche*, München 1954, p. 270).

⁴⁶ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., pp. 33–34. He then continues along these lines in search of the meeting point between faith and reason. “The extraordinary scope of such a statement sheds much light.” Therefore, if this is correct, it means that the synthesis made by the Fathers of the Church between biblical faith and the Hellenic spirit (as representative at that time of the philosophical spirit in general) was not only legitimate, but necessary to fully attain the interior requirement and the complete seriousness of biblical faith. This requirement is supported by the fact that there is a nexus of union with the philosophical concept of God. Which in turn means that philosophical truth, in a certain sense, belongs constitutively to the Christian faith, and this in turn indicates that the *analogia entis* is a necessary dimension of the Christian faith, and to eliminate it would mean to suppress a requirement proper to Christianity” (pp. 34–35). The final affirmation would be categorical and problematic in terms of relations with renewed evangelical thought (remember that Karl Barth refused to become Catholic precisely because of the *analogia entis*...). After having faced a new exegetical excursus (this time from Is 40:12–18), the professor of Bonn concluded: “If Israel designates its God before the pagans as the God of heaven, this means that it does not know any God of the peoples in the usual sense of the term, but that its God is the only lord of the world – ‘the Absolute’ – by whom it knows it is called and to whom in truth all peoples are subject” (p. 36). It is thus a confession of monotheism, of the existence of a single God. Something similar happens with the divine attributes: “Concepts such as eternity, omnipotence, unity, truth, goodness and holiness of God do not, of course, indicate the same thing in the Bible and in philosophy; but neither can we ignore certain approximations and approximations between the two [which are] worthy of consideration. The intention to refer to the original power that moves the world, above all intramundane powers, is common to both” (p. 38; there is a mention of the article W. Pannenberg, *Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs als dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie*, “Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte” 70 (1959), pp. 1–45). It can be seen also: M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L’anima tomista di Benedetto XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 228–237.

Therefore, the abyss between faith and philosophy should not be as deep as some had suggested. The attempted solution offered by Ratzinger will be the following, even though it might sound like a real provocation in the theological environment to which we alluded earlier. “The appropriation of philosophy, as carried out by the apologists, was nothing other than the necessary interior function that complements the external process of the missionary preaching of the gospel to the peoples of the world.” If it is essential to the Christian message not to be an esoteric and secret doctrine, addressed exclusively to a small group of initiates, but a message from God to all, then it is also essential to Christianity to interpret it outwardly, within the general language of human reason. “The true requirement of the Christian faith cannot become visible in its magnitude and seriousness except through this link of union with what man has grasped – in some way already beforehand – as absolute.”⁴⁷ If Christianity rejects Gnosticism and Hermetic thought, then it clearly opts for reason and universality, just as the Angelic Doctor had done in his time.

In this way, the relations between faith and philosophy will choose the path of ultimate harmony, despite their evident differences and divergences, and in this he will recall the harmony between the two that Thomas Aquinas had proposed.

For it is clear: if faith grasps the philosophical concept of God and says: “the Absolute – of which you knew something in some way – is the Absolute of which Jesus Christ speaks (who is the ‘Word’) and to whom it is possible to speak,” nevertheless this does not simply abolish the difference between faith and philosophy, much less transform into faith what was hitherto philosophy.⁴⁸

Philosophy remains rather something else with its own entity, to which faith refers “in order to express itself in it as that other thing and thus to be able to make itself comprehensible.”⁴⁹ Distinction and harmony between both, therefore. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be an appealable God, at the same time that can be accessed – perhaps in a more distant but real way – through reason and knowledge. There is thus no abyss, but a bridge (perhaps quite long and somewhat risky to cross, but a bridge nonetheless). The divine

⁴⁷ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 39; new references to the mentioned article of Pannenberg.

⁴⁸ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 40.

⁴⁹ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 40.

Logos wants to reckon with the human *logos*. However, the young professor from Bonn also proceeded to a timid approach to Brunner's position:

In any case, it can and must be said here: although the appropriation of the philosophical concept of God by the apologists and the Fathers was undoubtedly legitimate (indeed, essentially necessary), it should also not be argued that this appropriation has not always been carried out with sufficient criticism.⁵⁰

The critique therefore moves from personalist instances, for

the knowledge that God is person – a self that goes out to meet a you – demands a revision of philosophical statements, a rethinking of them in a way that has not yet been conveniently realized. In this task of appropriating a deeper concept of God, Catholic and Protestant theology – coming from different places – can meet again.⁵¹

He then proposes to take into account the Augustinian principle of *quaerite faciem eius semper*,⁵² perfectly compatible with the aforementioned *crede ut intelligas, intellige ut credas*.⁵³ “The task of theology remains unfinished at this precise moment in the world. It consists in always asking for the face of God “until He comes” and He Himself is the answer to every question.”⁵⁴ The personalist tone of Ratzinger's theology has been recalled by Tura, Krieg, and Bellandi⁵⁵ and, in fact, Ratzinger further attempts to realize this philosophical synthesis between personalism and metaphysical thought.

⁵⁰ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 41; cf. M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L'anima tomista di Benedetto XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 27, 207–212, 241, related with the *tertia pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*.

⁵¹ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 42.

⁵² Cf. Aurelius Augustinus, *Enarrationes in psalmos* 104, 3: serie: *Corpus christianorum Series Latina* 40, Turnhout 1956, 1537.

⁵³ Cf. *Sermones* XLIII, 9: PL 38, 257–258.

⁵⁴ J. Ratzinger, *El Dios de la fe...*, op. cit., pp. 42–43.

⁵⁵ About the importance of the phenomenological and personalist thought in Ratzinger, Krieg remembers “*die vorgefaßte Meinung vom Begriff der Person und von Jesus als der vollkommenen Person*” (R.A. Krieg, *Kardinal Ratzinger, Max Scheler und eine Grundfrage der Christologie*, “Theologische Quartalschrift” 160 [1980], p. 111). According to Bellandi, this personalism comes from the doctrine of incarnation: “*L'insistenza di Ratzinger sulla dimensione personale-cristologica del credere si fonda essenzialmente sulla centralità dell'evento dell'incarnazione, che costituisce infatti il segno distintivo e paradossale dell'annuncio cristiano di tutti i tempi*” (A. Bellandi, *Fede cristiana...*, op. cit., p. 188). The dual nature of Christ as God and man, Logos and flesh, would find its correlate in the Christian concept

“Thomas of the Creator”

Together with this, Ratzinger will make a brief approach to spirituality, to the spiritual and sapiential dimension of theology. In *The Church in the Piety of St Augustine* (1961), Ratzinger shows that the usual contrast between the active and contemplative life, represented in the figures of Martha and Mary, which Thomas supposedly takes from Augustine, is not so. This doctrine will influence the theology of the ministry, which Aquinas interprets in accordance with the order of the estates of the Middle Ages. The Bavarian professor was critical and distant this time about the Thomistic interpretation: on the contrary, and following the interpretation of Gregory the Great (540–604), Ratzinger concludes that “such facts prevent an excessive devaluation of the active life. The great pope insists that no one can be perfect in contemplation if he does not come from the work of the active life.”⁵⁶ However, in 1975 Ratzinger referred again to the actuality and complementarity between Thomas and Bonaventure, since “they were esteemed as much in their differences as in the aspects in which they coincided. The debate proper to scholasticism must be kept alive.” Indeed, “it is worth discussing some aspects. All the differences of approaches and temperaments unite to form a single unity, which unites and redirects the present questions to the questions raised already in the thirteenth century.”⁵⁷ The complementarity of the two perspectives can serve to enrich each other, while at the same time revealing facets perhaps unknown to the other.

During his years in Münster, the young professor of theology became good friends with his admired Josef Pieper (1904–1997), a well-known and atypical

of person. It can also be seen: R. Tura, *La teologia di J. Ratzinger. Saggio introduttivo*, “Studia Patavina” 1974, pp. 154, 158–161. There he concludes: “L’essenza del Cristianesimo è e rimane la persona di Cristo, il Dio fatto uomo, cioè il fatto di un ‘Tu’ vissuto in Palestina che era Dio” (R. Tura, *La teologia...*, op. cit., pp. 160–161).

⁵⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Obras completas* (hereafter: JROC), vol. 1: *Pueblo y casa de Dios en la doctrina de san Agustín sobre la Iglesia*, Madrid 2014, p. 427; cf. p. 425. Already in a 1957 review, Ratzinger had detected – with respect to the doctrine of evolution in St Augustine – that, without wishing to contradict the *doctor gratiae*, he had assimilated his doctrine of evolution to Aristotle’s doctrine of generation (cf. idem, p. 616).

⁵⁷ *Vorwort*, [in:] *Aktualität der Scholastik?*, J. Ratzinger (Hg.), Regensburg 1975, p. 5. The complementarity and necessity of both perspectives were part of the same theological pluralism present also in the Middle Ages. The Dominican Aidan Nichols establishes the following verdict in this regard: “Ratzinger’s sympathy for Bonaventure and the Franciscan school should not be regarded as anti-Thomistic. Indeed, Ratzinger has expressed himself on the subject of Thomas with a good deal more warmth than a formal ceremony requires” (A. Nichols, *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger: An Introductory Study*, Edinburgh 1988, p. 62).

Thomist: “he met – says a chronicler of those years – every Saturday afternoon with Bishop Volk, Lausberg the Romanist, and Beckmann, the Latinist, and I also became a member of the club.”⁵⁸ To which Benedict XVI himself adds a personal assessment: “Then Pieper, like me, considered himself a progressive. Someone who was looking for something new, for example, with an interpretation of Thomas Aquinas. In his lectures he captivated the audience. He was in Münster what Guardini was in Munich.”⁵⁹ Indeed, his lectures were attended by crowds of students and professionals, laymen and experts, believers and non-believers. Pieper made good friends with Ratzinger and they collaborated together in the Ecumenical Working Circle, which is linked to the Johann Adam Möhler Institute in Paderborn. In a 2009 letter, the German pope recalled that “Josef Pieper’s books on the cardinal virtues were my first philosophical readings when I began my studies in 1946. They awakened in me a taste for philosophical thought, the joy of a rational search on the great questions of our life.”⁶⁰ The scholar of Thomas Aquinas knew how to season philosophical problems and questions with topical elements and with an approachable style. Ratzinger also recalls how in those years he got to know him personally, and that since then he has always enjoyed his friendship, “for which I can only be grateful.”⁶¹

Later on, a new Thomistic theme would come up: in a lecture delivered in Salzburg, also on the occasion of the feast of St Thomas and entitled *Consequences of the Doctrine of Creation* (1979), he started from the Thomistic doctrine on the origin of the world. There he spoke of the title *Thomas a Creatore*, given to the *Doctor communis* by the English writer Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936), because “Creator and creation constitute the core of his theological thought,” which indicates that “Christian reflection, on the ancient heritage only

⁵⁸ P. Seewald, *Benedikt XVI. Ein Leben*, München 2020, p. 457.

⁵⁹ J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Ultime conversazioni*, trad. C. Galli, Milano 2016, p. 138.

⁶⁰ J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Ultime conversazioni*, op. cit., p. 138.

⁶¹ Benedikt XVI, *Zur Gründung der Josef Pieper Arbeitsstelle an der Theologischen Fakultät Paderborn* (25.04.2009), “Theologie und Glaube Testament” 100 (2010), pp. 377–378. On Saturday afternoons, together with the Latinist Franz Beckmann and the Romanist Heinrich Lausberg, they would take long walks and hold philosophical conversations. Later, in 1989, Ratzinger dedicated to him his book entitled *To Look on Christ*, in which the theologian traces faith, hope and charity, closely following the philosopher’s views on the theological virtues. In those years, the young professor also befriended Hilde Schürk-Frisch (1915–2008), a slightly older sculptor with a deep Christian spirituality, who also made religious art. Occasionally he and Pieper would visit her studio to see what new works she was making (cf. M. Schögl, *Joseph Ratzinger in Münster (1963-1966)*, Regensburg 2014, pp. 116–119).

reached its goal with the full intellectual understanding of faith in creation.”⁶² Also in a homily on the occasion of the feast of January 28, 1987, delivered at the Angelicum University in Rome,⁶³ Cardinal Ratzinger referred to what he considered to be the core of Aquinas’ thought: “Consecrate them to the truth. St Thomas summed up his whole life in these words of the Lord. His was a life in the truth, for the truth. The humble and constant service of the truth was his mission, his priestly ministry.”⁶⁴ Once again the “question of truth” reappeared, to which the theme of creation is joined, and he alluded there again to the Chestertonian qualification when he called St Thomas “of the Creator,” for presenting the correlate between God and *logos*, that is, the inner truth of creatures. As a consequence, “Philosophy thus becomes a necessity for theology: respect for autonomy is implied in faith, because truth consecrates. The courage of truth is the consequence of faith in God the Creator.”⁶⁵

The Faith and the Theology

But in addition to the themes of truth and creation, Ratzinger turned to Thomas to address theological methodology. In a 1993 text delivered on the occasion of a congress in Rome on the teachings of the then Blessed Josemaría Escrivá (1902–1975), Ratzinger recalled the scientific and sapiential character of

⁶² J. Ratzinger, *En el principio creó Dios. Consecuencias de la fe en la creación. Cuatro sermones de cuaresma sobre la creación y el pecado*, Valencia 2001, p. 101; cf. J. Rodríguez Mas, *La Doctrina sobre la creación y el pecado original en la teología de Joseph Ratzinger. El valor de la categoría de relación*, Roma 2013, pp. 72–76.

⁶³ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Omelia in occasione della festa di S. Tommaso d’Aquino*, “Angelicum” 64 (1987), pp. 189–192.

⁶⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Omelia in occasione...*, op. cit., p. 189.

⁶⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Omelia in occasione...*, op. cit., pp. 189–190. To which he added the following words: “The creature is like a powerful horn that speaks to us of God, says St Gregory of Nyssa. St Thomas was an attentive listener to this horn and his philosophy is a permanent invitation to open the ears of our spirit, to go beyond the pure use of things to the point where they are not just things, but creatures of God; to the point where things offer us the sacred bath of truth.” It is a matter of arriving at that inner truth of things, already present from the very moment of creation. Overcoming beforehand the criticism formulated against a supposed essentialist approach, scholastic theology recalled that truth is person, the very Person of Christ, as well as the unity existing between love and truth. “Love of truth and love of Jesus are one and the same thing in the spiritual figure of St Thomas. In loving Christ, one loves the truth; in seeking an ever deeper relationship with Christ, one receives the strength that consecrates truth itself” (p. 191). On this topic, see: M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L’anima tomista di Benedetto XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 101–104.

theology: “Theology, science in the full sense of the word, is in fact the exercise of scientific reason.”⁶⁶ However, it was also opportune to speak of the “reality of heaven;” indeed, it is necessary, for only in this way can theology be understood. “Thomas Aquinas repeated it in a famous and widely repeated formula: theology is the science subordinate to the science of God and the blessed.”⁶⁷ The theologian must be a man of science, but also – as a theologian – a “man of prayer”: he must be attentive to the succession of history and the progress of science, but also – even more so – to the testimony of those who, having traveled to the end the path of prayer, “have reached – already on earth – the high summits of divine intimacy; to the testimony, in short, of those whom we are accustomed to call saints.”⁶⁸ This is not a pious recommendation but a methodological requirement; after a long and arduous journey, science culminates in the vision that others already possess in a more direct way, as a gift received directly from God. Wisdom and holiness are thus at the very heart of theology, which is conceived as a science subordinate to the wisdom of God and of the saints. This “also implies a reference to the vital union with God,” which is already possible on earth for those who, opening themselves in faith to the divine word, embrace it not only with their intelligence, but also with their whole heart. “For God is at once and inseparably truth, goodness and beauty, and the unitive power of love leads not only to allowing oneself to be transfixed by his goodness, but also to a deepening of his truth.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Messaggio inaugurale*, [in:] M. Belda, J. Escudero, J.L. Illanes, P. O’Callaghan, *Santità e mondo. Atti del Convegno teologico di studio sugli insegnamenti del beato Josemaria Escrivá*, Roma 1994, p. 19.

⁶⁷ *Messaggio inaugurale*, op. cit., p. 19.

⁶⁸ *Messaggio inaugurale*, op. cit., p. 20.

⁶⁹ *Messaggio inaugurale*, op. cit., p. 21. The scientific, sapiential and spiritual dimensions of theology will thus be presented as intimately united, as was foreseeable in the integrating perspective of our author. The German cardinal then makes an inevitable historical reference: “Overcoming the split between ‘theologians’ and ‘spirituals’ produced at the beginning of the modern age and – in a more radical way – the intellectualism that constitutes one of the limits of the Enlightenment position, contemporary theology proclaims the intimate union between theology and spirituality, thus introducing itself into the great Christian tradition” (*Messaggio inaugurale*, p. 20). The consequence is clear: “It is opportune – and even necessary – that as theologians we listen to the words of the saints in order to discover their message: a multiform message (since the saints are many and each one has received his particular charisma) and at the same time unitary, since the saints refer to the one Christ, to whom they are united and in whose richness they help us to penetrate. In this multiple and unitary melody [...], as Möhler would say, consists the Christian tradition” (*Messaggio inaugurale*, p. 22). The symphony of truth is manifested in a privileged way among the saints

Similarly, on the occasion of the awarding of an honorary doctorate in 2000 at the University of Wrocław/Breslau, in present-day Poland, the theologian-prefect made a new approach to the question of faith as rational knowledge, which could well serve as a summary of the present section. He started from the usual language when one says, for example: “I believe that tomorrow the weather will be fine;” or: “I believe that this or that news does not tell the truth,” when the word “belief” here is equivalent to think, to give an opinion: “it expresses an imperfect form of knowledge.” We speak here of faith where it has not attained the status of certain and rigorous knowledge. In fact, “many people think that this meaning of faith is also valid in the religious sphere and that, therefore, the contents of Christian faith are a prior [and] imperfect level of knowledge.”⁷⁰ However, this is not the usual meaning of the main word we repeat in the creed:

In reality, for Christian believers, the expression ‘I believe’ indicates an absolutely peculiar certainty, in some respects greater than that of science; but, of course, it also carries within itself a moment of ‘shadow and image,’ a moment of ‘not yet.’⁷¹

and the different charisms they have received. The theologian must listen to this privileged melody. On this topic, see also: P. Blanco-Sarto, *Joseph Ratzinger...*, op. cit., pp. 95–97.

⁷⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 18.

⁷¹ J. Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 18. That is to say, is faith a certainty or is it only a promise, a maybe? Is faith outside of scientific knowledge? Ratzinger answers these questions, trying to go beyond experimental science. “Just as man comes to be certain of the love of another, without being able to submit it to the verification of the methods of the natural sciences, in the same way there is a certainty of the relationship between man and God, in a way totally distinct from the evidence of objectifying thought.” We do not live faith as a mere hypothesis, but as a certainty that sustains our life, for if two people consider their love only as a hypothesis that can always be verified, they eliminate love. “God cannot be objectified in any way, as if he were something in our midst, which we can manipulate with our own hands and include in our objects of use; but, as St Bonaventure says, his light is capable of ‘consolidating our affection and enlightening our intellect’” (p. 20; the quotation is from St Bonaventure, *Sententiarum*, 1.III d.23 a.1 q.5, [in:] Collegium S. Bonaventurae, *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, vol. 3, Paris 1887, p. 484; cf. also: J. Ratzinger, *Fede e teologia*, “Sacra Doctrina” 38 [1993], where the same text of St Bonaventure seems to be quoted). Faith is a light, not a thing to be possessed and known; and that light is received only by those who give and receive at the same time a certain trust, thus avoiding the danger of an objectifying and depersonalized knowledge. About this topic, see: M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L’anima tomista di Benedetto XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 53–57, 96–99, 105–118. Moreover, faith unites thought with assent. He quotes on this occasion Thomas Aquinas, who holds that in faith reflection and will, assent and thought are united *ex aequo*, at the same time. “What does this mean,” he asks. “First of all, that in the act of faith assent arises in a different way from what happens

Thought and assent at the same time, intelligence and will, knowledge and freedom duly integrated, in short, as Aquinas maintained.

Assent is caused by the will, not by the direct understanding of the understanding: in this consists the particular form of free will in the decision by faith. *Cetera potest homo nolens, credere non nisi volens*, St Thomas quotes St Augustine for this: everything else man can do without willing it, [but] faith can only attain it voluntarily.⁷²

This statement now shows the particular spiritual structure of faith, which is not only an act of the intellect, but in which all the spiritual powers of the person converge. “Moreover: man carries out faith in his own self, and never outside of it; it has a dialogical character by nature,” thus emphasizing the relational character of the act of faith. It is only because the foundation of the soul, the heart, is touched by God that the whole structure of the spiritual powers is set in motion and converges in the “yes” of faith. “When the heart comes into contact with the Logos of God, with the incarnate Word, it touches that intimate point of its existence.” The theology of the Logos that Ratzinger develops makes its appearance here once again. Knowledge by faith thus proceeds from the prior trust that one places in the one who can make him worthy of a higher knowledge. That is, a relationship that increases my knowledge: if one accepts and trusts in the Logos, one’s own logos will be profoundly enriched.⁷³

in the act of knowledge: not by evidence (in which the reflective dynamism concludes), but by an act of the will, in which the reflective movement remains open and on the way.” Evidence does not achieve that thinking becomes assent, but that the will commands assent, even if thinking remains still on the way. “In this sense, the ‘will’ [in the broad sense, as he has explained] always precedes knowledge in some way: it is its condition, all the more so the greater and more extensive the reality to be known. We can arrive at the assent of faith because the will, the heart, is touched by God, ‘made’ by him. By this touch our heart knows that what is not evident to the understanding is true in the same way” (J. Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe...*, op. cit., pp. 22–23; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, co.: “*In scientia enim motus rationis incipit ab intellectu principiorum, et ad eundem terminatur per viam resolutionis; et sic non habet assensum et cogitationem quasi ex aequo: sed cogitatio inducit ad assensum, et assensus cogitationem quietat. Sed in fide est assensus et cogitatio quasi ex aequo*”). Believing also comes from willing: freedom precedes knowledge, without substituting or suppressing it.

⁷² J. Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 18.

⁷³ Cf. P. Blanco-Sarto, *Logos. Joseph Ratzinger y la historia de una palabra*, “Límite” 14/1 (2006), pp. 57–86.

After assent it comes the inescapable task of thought, we said.

The 'will' (the heart), therefore, first enlightens the understanding and introduces it with it into assent. This is how thought also begins to see, through love; this is why faith does not arise from understanding but from hearing (*fides ex auditu*: Rom 10:17). Thinking has not yet reached its end, nor has it yet found its stillness. Contemplation always comes at the end of a strenuous effort. Here it is shown in a totally peculiar way that faith is a pilgrimage of thought that is still on the way.

From this, St Thomas also concludes that, in faith, despite the firmness of assent

a contrary movement *motus e contrario* can arise: it remains a thought that struggles and questions, that has to seek its light again and again from the essential light that shines in the heart through the word of God. Assent and reflective movement are 'somehow' *quasi* balanced, *ex aequo*.⁷⁴

Assent and reflection, trust and knowledge remain on equal footing in the act of faith, which is at once firm and uncertain. At no time does the will override the understanding, but rather poses new challenges to it. Hence this continuous character of pilgrimage in faith, which will succeed in overcoming doubt and lead the believer to the faith given by Jesus Christ and guarded in the Church.

Theologians find a very useful reference in the common faith of the Church. The German cardinal proposed to unite this with theology, also in its interior analogy: "The essence of theology," he continued in 2000 in Breslau, "can only be understood from the essence of faith."⁷⁵ The faith of the whole Church predisposes us to theology and "anticipates what we cannot yet see or have. This

⁷⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 25; the quotation remains from Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 14 a.1 co., that makes reference to 2 Co 10:5: "*Et inde est quod intellectus credentis dicitur esse captivatus, quia tenetur terminis alienis, et non propriis. II Corinth. X, 5: in captivitate redigentes omnem intellectum et cetera. Inde est etiam quod in credente potest insurgere motus de contrario eius quod firmissime tenet, quamvis non in intelligente vel sciente. Sic igitur per assensum separatur credere ab operatione qua intellectus inspicit formas simplices quidditates, et a dubitatione, et opinione; per cogitationem vero ab intellectu; sed per hoc quod habet assensum et cogitationem quasi ex aequo et simul a scientia.*" About the rationality of the faith and the moral, see: J. Ratzinger, *Una mirada a Europa*, Madrid 1993, pp. 58–63, 136–145. There it is said, for example: "Christian faith [...] does not mean a paralysis of reason. On the contrary, it creates around reason itself a vital space in which it can develop all its potentialities" (p. 61).

⁷⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 21.

pre-vision sets us in motion, for we must go after it. As assent and trust go before it, thought must try to reach it, and it must also overcome the contrary movement, the *motus de contrario*.⁷⁶ This is the situation of faith, since man finds himself in history. “That is why all history must give rise to theology; the task of theology in history remains unfinished. Thought remains on pilgrimage, as we ourselves are on pilgrimage. And we do not really go on pilgrimage if our thought does not go on pilgrimage.”⁷⁷ Faith is the goal toward which theology journeys. It starts from faith, but it is up to it to continue this whole rational and historical itinerary, which must always lead it back to the faith of the Church. Together with the inalienable personal dimension of faith, Ratzinger recalls the ecclesial dimension. In this way, reason, history and theology will also find themselves intimately united in the Church. Häring, on the other hand, does not seem to agree with the proposed balance between Church and theology, and accuses our author of lacking an understanding of the historical-critical background of all theology.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 22.

⁷⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe...*, op. cit., p. 26.

⁷⁸ “Für Ratzinger reflektiert und interpretiert der Theologe letztlich das hier und jetzt unfehlbar gültige Dogma der Kirche. Wenn aber das Dogma die letzte Norm der Theologie ist, kann den Ergebnissen der historisch-kritischen Forschung nur noch der Rang von ‘Vorgewißheiten’ eingeräumt werden. Die Quellen sind von der Gewißheit des Dogmas her zu lesen; konkreter gesagt: der kirchlich verbindliche Glaube sammt seiner Auslegung bleibt gegenüber historisch-kritischen Aussagen prinzipiell inmund. [...] Die Frage an Ratzinger dagegen muß lauten: Warum weicht er dem von Küng gestellten Problem auf unsachgemäße Weise aus?” (H. Häring, *Theologie und Ideologie bei Joseph Ratzinger*, Düsseldorf 2001, p. 301). See also: M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L’anima tomista di Benedetto XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 57–67. In an opposite point of view is A. Bellandi, *Considerazioni sullo statuto epistemologico della teologia*, “Vivens homo” 6 (1995) pp. 56–62. There, for example, it can be read: “Il legame della teologia alla Chiesa –puntualizza ancora una volta Ratzinger– non costituisce assolutamente, quindi, un ultimo retaggio della sorpassata mentalità medievale, né un rifiuto pregiudiziale della forza di convinzione basata sugli argomenti; esso sprime, altresì, la profonda convinzione che solamente nel contesto del ‘noi’ dei credenti, nel noi della Chiesa, la fede sviluppa la sua logica, la sua forma organica. È all’interno di questo ‘noi’ vivente che la riflessione teologica può adeguatamente sorgere e svilupparsi” (A. Bellandi, *Considerazioni...*, op. cit., p. 57). “Occorre anzitutto riaffermare sempre la ‘precedenza’ della verità su ogni pensiero e agire dell’uomo, verità che viene sì donata da Dio alla sua Chiesa, ma che non può mai totalmente essere da quest’ultima posseduta, al punto da identificarsi tout court con essa. [...] Attualmente, però, il rischio più frequente sembra essere – secondo l’Autore – quello di esaltare una concezione ‘individualistica’ della teologia, che riconosce nel valore probativo degli argomenti l’unica istanza autorevole cui obediare, mostrandosi, in tal modo, ‘pienamente alla altezza dell’imperativo della ragione positivista” (p. 59). Cf. also: B. Forte, *Una teologia ecclesiale*, [in:] *Alla ricerca della verità: i settanta anni di Joseph Ratzinger*, J. Clemens, A. Tarzia (eds.), San Paolo 1997, p. 66.

The practical repercussions of these affirmations for theology will be great. Theology deals with God, but interrogates in the manner of philosophy, we said. “In this metaphysical (ontological) commitment of theology there is not – contrary to what we have been fearing for a long time – a betrayal of salvation history;” quite the contrary: if theology wants to be faithful to its historical starting point (to the salvific event in Christ witnessed in the Bible) it must go beyond history and dedicate itself, in the last analysis, to God. If it wants to prove its fidelity to the practical content of the Gospel—the salvation of man—it must first of all be *scientia speculativa* and cannot be directly a *scientia practica*. “It must postulate the primacy of truth, of a truth that rests on itself and for whose very being it must first ask itself, before [even] assessing its practical usefulness for human endeavors.”⁷⁹ Theology must recover the primacy of *logos* over *ethos*, of orthodoxy over orthopraxis, and this position, he concludes, is found in Thomas Aquinas as well as in Bonaventure.⁸⁰

Conclusions

As successor of Peter, Benedict XVI dedicated three catecheses to Aquinas in his general audiences. These will serve as a synthesis and summary of some of the ideas presented so far. In the first of these, on June 2, 2010, and after an

⁷⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Teoría de los principios...*, op. cit., p. 385.

⁸⁰ Ratzinger goes deeper into the concept of reason and theology of St Bonaventure, who “fully shares the central thesis of Aquinas. Bonaventure also expressly declares that the subject of theology, to which all other things refer, is God himself. But he linked this idea – the enormous importance of which Thomas more than anyone else realized – to a very nuanced theory of human reason. Bonaventure knows a *violencia rationis* that is not adequate to personal reality. [...] From the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (that is, from the year 1259), we can perceive a slow shift in the significance of the concept of theology, because, at that time, he began to read the works of Pseudo-Dionysius. [...] Consequently, in the late Bonaventure we find that synthesis that Bonaventure of the first period had been seeking, when he affirmed the ontological character of theology (and, therefore, the very rank of the theoretical); but, at the same time, he called for the necessary self-overcoming of contemplation to be inserted in the practice of the faith” (J. Ratzinger, *Teoría de los principios...*, op. cit., pp. 385–387). Finally, we find another allusion to St Thomas in the presentation of a liturgy conference in 2001: “I believe that St Thomas Aquinas is both a theologian who opens the door to a new vision of theology, with the integration of Aristotelianism, and a perfectly patristic theologian.” The continuity between Augustine, Bonaventure – the object of his research – and Thomas Aquinas seems to be a constant in his thought; thus we find references to Aquinas in his writings on St Augustine (J. Ratzinger, *Obras completas*, vol. 11: *Teología de la liturgia*, Madrid 2012, p. 500.

initial biographical sketch, he recalled the harmony between faith and reason, based on the assumption of Aristotelian philosophy:

Thomas Aquinas showed that a natural harmony exists between Christian faith and reason. And this was the great achievement of Thomas who, at that time of clashes between two cultures that time when it seemed that faith would have to give in to reason showed that they go hand in hand, that insofar as reason appeared incompatible with faith it was not reason, and so what appeared to be faith was not faith, since it was in opposition to true rationality; thus he created a new synthesis which formed the culture of the centuries to come.⁸¹

The catechesis of June 16 returned to the dynamics of the act of faith, the method of theology and its new synthesis and distinction between philosophy and theology, and explained how the Fathers of the Church confronted Platonism and elaborated a complete vision of reality, starting from faith and using elements of this philosophy. And he followed on June 19: "For St Thomas the encounter with the pre-Christian philosophy of Aristotle (who died in about 322 B.C.) opened up a new perspective."⁸² Aristotelian philosophy was, obviously, an explanation of the world without revelation, by reason alone, catechetically explicit. The relationship between faith and reason, philosophy and theology leads to mutual collaboration and legitimate autonomy.⁸³

⁸¹ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, Saint Peter's Square Wednesday, 2 June 2010.

⁸² Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit.

⁸³ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit. He thus returned to one of his favorite themes on the occasion of Thomas, in which this rationality was convincing and left behind the old form of "philosophy" elaborated by the Fathers: "It was necessary to rethink the relationship between philosophy and theology, between faith and reason," Benedict XVI concluded. "Elements that affirmed the incompatibility of these two worlds were not lacking, but St Thomas was firmly convinced of their compatibility indeed that philosophy worked out without the knowledge of Christ was awaiting, as it were, the light of Jesus to be complete." That was the big "surprise" of St Thomas, that compromised his way as thinker: "Showing this independence of philosophy and theology and, at the same time, their reciprocal relationality was the historic mission of the great teacher," concluded accordingly with the developments before his pontificate. "Faith consolidates, integrates and illumines the heritage of truth that human reason acquires. The trust with which St Thomas endows these two instruments of knowledge faith and reason may be traced back to the conviction that both stem from the one source of all truth, the divine Logos, which is active in both contexts, that of Creation and that of redemption." "Together with the agreement between reason and faith, we must recognize on the other hand that they avail themselves of different cognitive procedures. Reason receives a truth by virtue of its intrinsic evidence, mediated or unmediated; faith, on the contrary, accepts a truth on the

This distinction guarantees the autonomy of both the human sciences and the theological sciences, “it is not equivalent to separation but, rather, implies a reciprocal and advantageous collaboration.” In fact, faith protects reason from

any temptation to distrust its own abilities, stimulates it to be open to ever broader horizons, keeps alive in it the search for foundations and, when reason itself is applied to the supernatural sphere of the relationship between God and man, faith enriches his work.⁸⁴

According to Thomas, for example, human reason can arrive at the affirmation of the existence of one God, but “only faith, which receives the divine Revelation, is able to draw from the mystery of the Love of the Triune God.” On the other hand, it is not only faith that helps reason, for reason can also render a triple service that Thomas summarizes in the prologue of his commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*:

demonstrating those truths that are preambles of the faith; giving a clearer notion, by certain similitudes, of the truths of the faith; resisting those who speak against the faith, either by showing that their statements are false, or by showing that they are not necessarily true (q. 2, a. 2).⁸⁵

The whole history of theology is, at bottom, “the exercise of this endeavor of the intelligence,” which shows the intelligibility of the faith, its internal articulation and harmony, its reasonableness and its capacity to promote the good of the person. Theology is faith thought. “The correctness of theological reasoning and its real cognitive meaning is based on the value of theological language which, in St Thomas’ opinion, is principally an analogical language,”⁸⁶ based on the analogy of being. The distance between God the Creator and the being of his creatures is infinite, while the dissimilarity is always greater than

basis of the authority of the Word of God that is revealed.” And he quoted this text: “We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of sciences. There are some which proceed from a principle known by the natural light of the intelligence, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like. There are some which proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of perspective proceeds from principles established by geometry, and music from principles established by arithmetic. So it is that sacred doctrine is a science, because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed” (STh I, q. 1, a. 2).

⁸⁴ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit.

⁸⁵ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit.

the similarity.⁸⁷ “Nevertheless in the whole difference between Creator and creatures an analogy exists between the created being and the being of the Creator, which enables us to speak about God with human words.”⁸⁸

In the light of this teaching of Thomas, theology affirms that, although limited, religious language is “endowed with sense because we touch being like an arrow aimed at the reality it signifies.” This harmony between human reason and Christian faith can be seen in another fundamental principle of Aquinas’ thought: “divine Grace does not annihilate but presupposes and perfects human nature.”⁸⁹ After having analyzed the relationship between faith and reason and the possibilities of Christian theology, he then tackles the question of the supernatural, as he had done before. In fact, human nature, even after sin, is not completely corrupted, but wounded and weakened:

Grace, lavished upon us by God and communicated through the Mystery of the Incarnate Word, is an absolutely free gift with which nature is healed, strengthened and assisted in pursuing the innate desire for happiness in the heart of every man and of every woman.

All the faculties of the human being are thus purified, transformed and elevated by grace: “An important application of this relationship between nature and Grace is recognized in the moral theology of St Thomas Aquinas, which proves to be of great timeliness.” With a profoundly evangelical outlook, he insists that this law is the grace of the Spirit granted to all who believe in

⁸⁷ Cf. H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum. Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2009, no. 806.

⁸⁸ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit. Thomas Aquinas not only founded the doctrine of analogy on his exquisitely philosophical arguments, but also on the fact that with revelation God himself has spoken to us and, therefore, has authorized us to speak of him. “I consider it important to recall this doctrine. In fact, it helps us get the better of certain objections of contemporary atheism which denies that religious language is provided with an objective meaning and instead maintains that it has solely a subjective or merely emotional value.” This objection results from positivism, which is convinced that man does not know being but only phenomena and appearances. “With St Thomas and with the great philosophical tradition we are convinced that, in reality, man does not only know the functions, the object of the natural sciences, but also knows something of being itself for example, he knows the person, the You of the other, and not only the physical and biological aspect of his being” (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit.). On the language and style of Pope Ratzinger and his attunement with Thomas Aquinas, see also: M. Rossi, T. Rossi, T.F. Rossi, *L’anima tomista di Benedetto XVI...*, op. cit., pp. 29–37.

⁸⁹ STh I, 1, 8 ad 2.

Christ. Thomas, underlining the fundamental role, in the moral life, of the action of the Spirit, of grace, from which the theological and moral virtues spring, makes it clear that every Christian can reach the lofty goals of the Sermon on the Mount “if they live an authentic relationship of faith in Christ, if they are open to the action of his Holy Spirit.”⁹⁰

“To conclude, Thomas presents to us a broad and confident concept of human reason”: “broad” because it is not limited to the achievements of the so-called mathematical or calculating, “empirical-scientific” reason, but is “open” to the whole being and therefore also to the fundamental and unrenounceable questions of human living; and “confident” because human reason, especially if it welcomes the inspirations of the Christian faith, promotes a civilization that recognizes “the dignity of the person, the intangibility of his rights and the cogency of his or her duties.” It thus recognizes that the doctrine on the dignity of the person, fundamental for the recognition of the inviolability of human rights, has matured in environments of thought that took up the legacy of Thomas Aquinas, who had a very high concept of the human creature. He defined it, with his rigorously philosophical language, as “what is most perfect to be found in all nature – that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature.”⁹¹ And he ended with a consideration on piety, necessary for the theologian:

The depth of St Thomas Aquinas’ thought let us never forget it flows from his living faith and fervent piety, which he expressed in inspired prayers such as this one in which he asks God: ‘Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you.’⁹²

⁹⁰ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit. But, Aquinas adds, “although Grace is more efficacious than nature, yet nature is more essential to man, and therefore more enduring” (STh I-II, q. 94, a. 6, ad 2), so that, in the Christian moral perspective, there is a place for reason, which is capable of discerning the natural moral law. Reason can recognize it by considering what is to be done and what is to be avoided in order to attain that happiness which each one seeks, and which also imposes a responsibility towards others, and thus the pursuit of the common good. “In other words, the human, theological and moral virtues are rooted in human nature. Divine Grace accompanies, sustains and impels ethical commitment but, according to St Thomas, all human beings, believers and non-believers alike, are called to recognize the needs of human nature expressed in natural law and to draw inspiration from it in the formulation of positive laws, namely those issued by the civil and political authorities to regulate human coexistence.”

⁹¹ STh I, q. 29, a. 3.

⁹² Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit. Faith and reason, the unity between theology and prayer, as well as the nature and method of theology reappear in these interventions

Finally, in the address that in the end did not take place at La Sapienza University in Rome – due to a *boycott* by those who demanded tolerance – Benedict XVI once again quoted Aquinas with the following words: “theology and philosophy in this regard form a strange pair of twins, in which neither of the two can be totally separated from the other, and yet each must preserve its own task and its own identity.”⁹³ And he sought to do historical justice by drawing a parallel:

I would say that St Thomas’ idea of the relationship between philosophy and theology could be expressed in the formula found by the Council of Chalcedon for Christology: philosophy and theology must relate to each other “without confusion and without separation. ‘Without confusion’ means that each of the two must preserve its own identity.”

The comparison with the Christological faith of Chalcedon is not without its audacity, while at the same time offering profound suggestions to the philosopher and theologian. Philosophy must truly remain a search for reason; theology “Theology must continue to draw upon a treasury of knowledge that it did not invent.” But along with “without confusion” he advocated “without separation”: “philosophy does not start again from zero with every thinking subject in total isolation, but takes its place within the great dialogue of historical wisdom, which it continually accepts and develops in a manner both critical and docile.” Theology can be mistaken but, at the same time, “the history of the saints, the history of the humanism that has grown out of the

on the Common Doctor. Finally, in the Audience of June 23, 2010, Benedict XVI made an overview of the three parts of the *Summa Theologiae*, with its three parts dedicated to God, man and Christ, while recalling the unity between theology and preaching: “All that St Thomas described with scientific rigour in his major theological works, such as, precisely, the *Summa Theologiae*, and the *Summa contra gentiles*, was also explained in his preaching, both to his students and to the faithful.” And he concluded by returning to the rationality of faith: “It is thus reasonable to believe in God, who reveals himself, and to the testimony of the Apostles: they were few, simple and poor, grief-stricken by the Crucifixion of their Teacher.” He thus ended this catechesis on Aquinas by considering the person of Jesus Christ, in his incarnation and in his paschal mystery.” charity is revived because there is no more obvious sign of God’s love for us than the sight of the Creator of the universe making himself a creature, one of us.” And he adds a simple and effective comparison of Aquinas: “If the brother of a king were to be far away, he would certainly long to live beside him. Well, Christ is a brother to us; we must therefore long for his company and become of one heart with him” (J. Ratzinger, *Opuscoli teologico-spirituali*, Rome 1976, p. 64).

⁹³ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, op. cit.

Christian faith, demonstrates the truth of this faith in its essential nucleus, thereby giving it a claim upon public reason.”⁹⁴ Finally, he quoted the comprehensive religious doctrine of John Rawls (1921–2002), but going beyond these approaches, he appealed to “a purifying force for reason, helping it to be more fully itself.” The Christian message, by virtue of its origin, should always be a stimulus to truth and, thus, a refuge against totalitarian power. The teachings of Aquinas thus became useful again today. The Thomasian themes of creation, and the relationship between natural and supernatural, faith and reason, theology and prayer had reappeared in his pontifical magisterium.⁹⁵

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⁹⁴ *Lecture by the Holy Father Benedict XVI at the University of Rome La Sapienza*, January 17, 2008.

⁹⁵ *Lecture by the Holy Father...*, op. cit.

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