

Diocesan Lay Institute

Session I:

**THEOLOGICAL  
FOUNDATIONS**

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September 8, 2007

## SECTION I – WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

Basic Text: *Dei Verbum*

### Excursus: Sources in theology

1. In addition to Sacred Scripture, many written sources are important witnesses to the doctrine of the Faith and sources for further theological reflection.

*Conciliar Texts* – esp. from ecumenical councils, also from particular councils

*Patristic writings* (The Fathers of the Church)

*Doctors of the Church* (universally and perennially valuable)

*Papal documents* – encyclical letters

*Writings of theologians*

All of the above could be considered “primary sources” in the academic sense. “Secondary sources” would be compilations of Catholic doctrine based on the above, such as:

*The Catechism of the Council of Trent, or the Roman Catechism (1566)*

*Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992)*

*Compendium (2005)*

2. Ecumenical Councils have a special importance because they represent the “decision of the Holy Spirit” speaking through the whole Church acting together

There have been 21 Ecumenical Councils thus far in the history of the Church

Nicea (325) . . . Trent (1545-65), Vatican I (1870-71), Vatican II (1962-65)

3. Vatican II produced 16 documents.

Most important category: Constitutions (4) – liturgy, the Church (2), revelation

*Dei Verbum* is the Constitution on Divine Revelation

4. Church documents are typically called by the first couple of words in the Latin text.

*Dei Verbum* = The Word of God

“Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith . . .”

## A. REVELATION AND FAITH

### 1. REVELATION

In order to understand what theology is, we must begin with revelation. What is revelation?

## CHAPTER I – REVELATION ITSELF

2. In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having in inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.

The story begins with revelation: **God's** action.

God discloses Himself in words and deed  
deeds without words would be ambiguous  
words without deeds would give no motive for credibility

In which words and actions has God revealed Himself?

3. God, who through the Word creates all things (see John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (see Rom. 1:19-20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents. Then after their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (see Gen. 3:15) and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation (see Rom. 2:6-7). Then, at the time He had appointed He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation (see Gen. 12:2). Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Savior promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries.

4. Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, "now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). . . To see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.

The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim. 6:14 and Tit. 2:13).

<p>God reveals Himself: in beauty)</p>	<p>in the created order (its existence, and its beauty)</p> <p>in man (his thirst for God and his conscience) to Abraham</p> <p>to the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets</p> <p>fully and finally in the Person of Christ</p>
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## 2. FAITH

What is faith? (And what is it *not*?)

5. "The obedience of faith" (Rom. 13:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) "is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals," and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him.

Faith is my response to God's self-disclosure. It is not my construct. It should certainly not be conceived as the collection of my opinions on matters of a spiritual nature. Faith is my assent to what God reveals (it has very little to do with *dissent*).

Classically, two aspects of faith are distinguished, both of which are highlighted in the passage above:

<p><b><u>fides quae creditur</u></b>          "the faith which is believed"          the objective dimension          the content of faith          achieved by mind/intellect          supported by study/inquiry          others/prayer/religious experience</p>	<p><b><u>fides quā creditur</u></b>          "the faith by which it is believed"          the subjective dimension          the commitment of faith          achieved by heart/will          supported by witness of</p>
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## **B. SACRED SCRIPTURE**

### CHAPTER II – HANDING ON DIVINE REVELATION

7. In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and to impart to them heavenly gifts. This Gospel had been promised in former times through the prophets, and Christ Himself had fulfilled it and promulgated it with His lips. This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those Apostles and apostolic men who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing.

But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place." This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 John 3:2).

#### **1. Scripture in Context**

The role of Scripture understood theologically

The whole first chapter of *Dei Verbum* speaks of "Divine Revelation Itself" as the actions and words of God, and of Christ as the sum total of Revelation, *without once speaking of a written text*. The text of Sacred Scripture is first mentioned in Chapter II, under the title "The Transmission of Divine Revelation."

For a Catholic, "revelation" means primarily not the Bible, but the words and acts of God. The Bible is treasured as an authoritative witness to these acts, by which they are transmitted . . . but the words and acts are primary.

(Also in Judaism: the Jews do not understand themselves to be the People of God because they received the Old Testament; but because they were once slaves in Egypt, and God brought them out of slavery with signs and wonders. To have been delivered from slavery is far more important than having been given a story about being delivered from slavery.)

### The role of Scripture understood historically

The Canon of the New Testament as universally acknowledged by Christians contains 27 books. The first list containing all these books and only these books as the writings acknowledged as Scripture comes from a council at Rome in 382.

It took probably at least sixty years after the Resurrection for all the books of the New Testament to be produced. For the 300 years thereafter, these writings (along with others) were being circulated in the Church and nurturing the life of the Church . . . but during this time, there was no consensus on just which writings were divinely inspired. The Church lived for 350 years without such a decision; and when the decision came it was the decision of the Church. It is absolutely evident that the Bible did not produce the Church.

### Excursus: The Classical Protestant position

#### 1. *Sola scriptura* – the Bible alone is the rule of faith

It is important to situation Sacred Scripture with the larger context because one of the central principles of Martin Luther (adopted by all the other leaders of the Protestant movement as well) lost precisely this perspective. The Protestant position is *sola scriptura*: the Bible alone is the rule of faith

This position was a necessary one for the Protestant movement. Denying the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, some other authority had to be identified. Scripture was about the only plausible candidate.

#### 2. Weakness of this position.

As noted above, this position is very weak historically.

It is even weaker in practice: all traditional Protestant denominations claim that the content of their faith comes from "Scripture alone" . . . yet there are thousands of different theological positions that they hold contrary to each other. If Scripture unambiguously laid out the doctrine of the faith, they should all be in agreement about it. (Or, a thought experiment: give each of 100 people with no knowledge of Christianity a copy of the Bible and put them into 100 rooms, and ask them to describe the beliefs and practices of a true Christian – they will describe 100 different religions.)

### Excursus: The extreme ahistorical position

#### 1. The Book of Mormon

The way *Dei Verbum* understands Scripture as a witness to revelation illustrates the difference between Christian Scriptures and the Book of Mormon, which presents itself as revelation-by-text. The Book of Mormon is a text given in a vacuum. Motives for credibility are entirely lacking.

#### 2. Moslems and fundamentalists

Without intending it, fundamentalists and Moslems can get themselves into a similar problem. A clarification by Fr. Joseph Fessio, SJ, about comments made by Pope Benedict XVI: "The most important clarification is that the Holy Father did not say, nor did I, that 'Islam is incapable of reform.' [...] I made a serious error in precision when I said that the Koran 'cannot be adapted or applied' and that there is 'no possibility of adapting or interpreting it.' This is certainly not what the Holy Father said. Of course the Koran can be and has been interpreted and applied. I was making a (too) crude summary of the distinction which the Holy Father did make between the inner dynamism of the Koran as a divine text delivered as such to Mohammed, and that of the Bible which is both the Word of God and the words of men inspired by God, within a community that contains divinely appointed authorized interpreters (the bishops in communion with the pope)."

## **2. Appreciation of Sacred Scripture**

Having made this point, we want to back up and – in accord with the spirit of *Dei Verbum* – reassert the unique dignity and value of Sacred Scripture.

### **CHAPTER III -- SACRED SCRIPTURE, ITS INSPIRATION AND DIVINE INTERPRETATION**

11. Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation. Therefore "all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Greek text).

- Before *Dei Verbum* speaks of the Scriptures, it cites them frequently.
- God did also act to inspire the Sacred Authors who wrote the books of Scripture.
- Sacred Scripture is truly “the speech of the Holy Spirit” – it contains levels of meaning not explicitly intended by the sacred authors (*sensus plenior*)
- Through the devout reading of Sacred Scripture, the Holy Spirit can speak to the heart of the believer.
- And as *Dei Verbum* continues, there is great encouragement of the study of Sacred Scripture.

## C. SACRED TRADITION

### 1. MAGISTERIUM AND TRADITION

What is the Magisterium?

7. . . . But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place." This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 John 3:2).

10. . . . But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.

The word “Magisterium” comes from the Latin *magister* (master, in the sense of teacher). It is used to refer to the whole teaching authority of the Church, historically and in the present.

As seen above, the teaching authority of the Church preceded the text of the New Testament, and was the vehicle through which the canon of the New Testament was fixed. Furthermore, it is the guarantor of a correct understanding of the text of Sacred Scripture and thereby the vehicle through which the unity of the Church is preserved.

## What is Tradition?

8. And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (see 2 Thess. 2:15), and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all (see Jude 1:3) Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes. . . .

9. Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.

Tradition is not best understood as extraneous traditions, added to the essentials of Christianity as given in the New Testament. On the contrary, Tradition encompasses the fullness of the Faith, as witnessed in Scripture, as it is preached and lived.

## **2. DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE**

8. . . . This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.

The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. Through the same tradition the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (see Col. 3:16).

In our Catholic perspective: the fullness of God's self-revelation was present to the Apostles and disciples in the Person of Jesus Christ, most especially in His Paschal Mystery. But their understanding of all that was present to them was very limited. Their understanding had to grow and deepen over time.

The progress in understanding made by the Apostles during the Public Life of Jesus was remarkably limited (as we see in the Gospels). What changed everything was the Gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Once this Gift has been given, Peter knows what he must say to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem.

But, in fact, all that God has revealed in the person of Jesus Christ is not fully known even at Pentecost. It can't be, because the Lord Jesus is God Himself, and as such is an inexhaustible Mystery. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mysteries of God continue to be unfolded over time in the life of the Church. Many times, this has been prompted by new questions and controversies, which have arisen over time – as is most clear in the history of the early Councils.

This is the perspective of the famous theory of the Development of Doctrine, described by John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-91), a great English convert. This idea explains how we can have the dogma of the Immaculate Conception defined in 1854, e.g. It is not a matter of "adding" a doctrine to the Faith. It is a matter of explicitly stating a truth that was present at the beginning, but which only comes to be "drawn out" over time. What has once been believed is never denied. The development must be organic – i.e., in continuity with what has gone before, and growing out of it.

### **3. THEOLOGY**

It is because the fullness of God's self-revelation is not immediately appreciated in all its depth and for all its implications that theology has an important place in the life of the Church. Theology ("teaching concerning God") has classically been defined as "*fides quaerens intellectum*" – faith seeking understanding.

Theology operates within *fides quae creditur*. It is aimed at understanding, articulating, developing and defending the (deposit of the) Faith.

Although theology operates within one aspect of faith, there is profound interpenetration between the two aspects; so that the greatest theologians are also mystics (St. Thomas Aquinas and his orders to burn the *Summa Theologiae*) and the greatest mystics are also theologians (Ss. John of Cross and Teresa of Avila are Doctors of the Church).

#### **D. THE BEGINNING OF THEOLOGY**

The work of theology – the application of reason to what is already believed by the person of faith and prayer eager to understand more fully all that has been made known in the Person of Jesus Christ – can be seen to be a constant presence in the life of the Church, from the very beginning. The initial stages of the “Development of Doctrine” can be seen in Sacred Scripture itself – in fact, throughout the New Testament.

#### **I Corinthians 15:3-26**

<sup>3</sup> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God (that is) with me. Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

<sup>12</sup> But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty (too) is our preaching; empty, too, your faith. Then we are also false witnesses to God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

<sup>20</sup> For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death

Paul first hands on the received truth of the Resurrection of the Lord (3ff)

**but then adds**

- application of logic to answer a new question: the resurrection of the faithful (12ff)

(with further development, the Particular and General Judgment)

- Christ is presented as the “New Adam,” signaling the development of typology (20ff)

(with further development

Christ is understood as summing up whole Old Covenant

Adam-Eve-Tree become types of Christ-Mary-Cross

Doctrine of Original Sin and baptismal regeneration is elaborated)

### Excursus: Typology

Typology is an approach in theology that interprets persons and events in the Old Testament as pointing toward a fulfillment in the New. This approach is present in the New Testament itself (see Hebrews 7, where Christ is compared to the mysterious Melchizedek). Typology was very popular in the early Church, and flowered especially at Alexandria.

To illustrate how developed this became, consider how the Lord Jesus could be understood as:

the New Adam (in Adam all die; in Christ all come to life again)

the New Noah (since He built the New Ark [the Church] by which mankind is saved from death)

the New Abraham (since He is the beginning of the New Covenant)

the New Isaac (the beloved Son sacrificed by the Father)

the New Jacob (since His Twelve followers were the foundation of the New Israel)

the New Joseph (sold for silver)

the New Moses (since He leads his people out of slavery, gives New Law, and feeds with manna)

the New Joshua (his namesake, which name means Savior)

the New David (descended from David, He is King of a universal and eternal Kingdom)

the New Solomon (since He is the Word made Flesh)

## **I Corinthians 11:23-29**

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Paul hands on the Institution Narrative, *plus*

- interpretation connecting the Eucharist to the death of the Lord  
(with further development, Mass is understood as true but unbloody Sacrifice)
- necessity of worthy reception of Holy Communion  
(with further development, more exactly specified)
- necessity of discerning the Eucharist as the Body of Christ  
(with further development, Real Presence and transubstantiation)

## SECTION II – TWO THEMES CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

### A. MYSTERY

#### 1. The Problem

*Fides et Ratio (Faith and Reason, 1998)* is an encyclical of Pope John Paul, written to validate the importance of both faith and reason as ways to ascend to the contemplation of the Truth.

(A *New York Times* editorial in 1998 observed how remarkable it would have seemed to people living at the beginning of the twentieth century that at the end of the century, the Pope of Rome would be one of the strongest voices speaking in defense of reason.)

In all ancient and medieval philosophy, there was a fundamental confidence that we reliably apprehend the real world and can take common human experience as the starting point for philosophy.

The fundamental confidence of classical philosophy was first called into question by Rene Descartes (†1650). Descartes began with the observation that we can sometimes err because appearance deceives or because of an internal problem in the perceiver. He professed a desire to begin from a position of which he could be absolutely and unequivocally sure. The result was his famous dictum, “Cogito ergo sum” (“I think therefore I am”).

This seemingly simple move has altered the direction of philosophy ever since. Philosophers came to analyze not things in themselves, but rather their own ideas. Immanuel Kant (†1804) held that we know only appearances, not things in themselves. He also taught that we may *a priori* judgments to which real things conform.

Most contemporary philosophers treat the possibility of knowing (epistemology) and the operation of our language (linguistic analysis) . . . and never get beyond these issues. They are never able to treat the real world we encounter (which was taken for granted as a starting point by the ancients).

The logical culmination of this approach is found in Friedrich Nietzsche (†1900). According to Nietzsche, there is no true universe, that is, no coherent unified reality to be understood. Instead, I am thrown into a meaningless chaos, and it is up to me to create meaning by the force of my will. To do so is to be the *Übermensch* (the Superman). It is not man's wisdom in discerning the truth that is important, but his will to power by which he can impose his preferred meaning on others and the world. Nietzsche was the intellectual godfather of Nazism.

The influence of Nietzsche is still uncomfortably clear in, for example, contemporary humanities departments. There professors teach that the received texts (of Shakespeare, Tolstoy, whomever) do not really mean anything in themselves. It is perfectly acceptable for us to impose on them from whatever hermeneutic (interpretational approach) we choose – so we get a Marxist reading of Shakespeare, and a radical feminist reading of Shakespeare, and so on.

***The difficulty of the present situation as described in Fides et Ratio***

5. On her part, the Church cannot but set great value upon reason's drive to attain goals which render people's lives ever more worthy. She sees in philosophy the way to come to know fundamental truths about human life. At the same time, the Church considers philosophy an indispensable help for a deeper understanding of faith and for communicating the truth of the Gospel to those who do not yet know it.

Therefore, following upon similar initiatives by my Predecessors, I wish to reflect upon this special activity of human reason. I judge it necessary to do so because, at the present time in particular, the search for ultimate truth seems often to be neglected. Modern philosophy clearly has the great merit of focusing attention upon man. From this starting-point, human reason with its many questions has developed further its yearning to know more and to know it ever more deeply.

Complex systems of thought have thus been built, yielding results in the different fields of knowledge and fostering the development of culture and history. Anthropology, logic, the natural sciences, history, linguistics and so forth—the whole universe of knowledge has been involved in one way or another. Yet the positive results achieved must not obscure the fact that reason, in its one-sided concern to investigate human subjectivity, seems to have forgotten that men and women are always called to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them. Sundered from that truth, individuals are at the mercy of caprice, and their state as person ends up being judged by pragmatic criteria based essentially upon experimental data, in the mistaken belief that technology must dominate all.

It has happened therefore that reason, rather than voicing the human orientation towards truth, has wilted under the weight of so much knowledge and little by little has lost the capacity to lift its gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being. Abandoning the investigation of being, modern philosophical research has concentrated instead upon human knowing. Rather than make use of the human capacity to know the truth, modern philosophy has preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited and conditioned.

. . . While, on the one hand, philosophical thinking has succeeded in coming closer to the reality of human life and its forms of expression, it has also tended to pursue issues—existential, hermeneutical or linguistic—which ignore the radical question of the truth about personal existence, about being and about God. Hence we see among the men and women of our time, and not just in some philosophers, attitudes of widespread distrust of the human being's great capacity for knowledge. With a false modesty, people rest content with partial and provisional truths, no longer seeking to ask radical questions about the meaning and ultimate foundation of human, personal and social existence. In short, the hope that philosophy might be able to provide definitive answers to these questions has dwindled.

## **2. Phenomenology**

As a scholar, Karol Wojtyła was deeply impressed by a contemporary philosophical school called phenomenology. This philosophy takes seriously the difficulty of knowing, but affirms that we really do apprehend real things reliably.

Phenomenology speaks about real things “disclosing” themselves in appearances (sounding a little like Kant). But unlike for Kant, these appearances are trusted. No single disclosure gives us exhaustive knowledge of something, but each disclosure really does give us a glimpse of some true aspect of the thing. The more complicated something is, the richer it is in disclosing itself “from many angles.”

This approach gives full weight to the complexity of reality, and recognizes that even physical and human reality is full of mystery.

Phenomenology is not so much a philosophical system as it is a method – a method that respects complexity (and even mystery) and is open to contributions from many sources.

In *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul does not impose (nor even mention) phenomenology, but many passages are very much in accord with a phenomenological approach.

## **3. Respect for Mystery**

The goal of *Fides et Ratio* is to vindicate the claims of both faith and reason.

The phenomenological method has great value:  
addresses the crisis of modern philosophy (the difficulty of knowing)  
assimilates the insights of historical theology  
invites dialogue with other cultures.

But the greatest strength of the method is its profound appreciation of mystery – the Mystery of God, the mysteries of the Faith, and the mystery of the human person, and even the mysteries of the created world. The encyclical is shot through with references to mystery

### ***Reason before the mystery***

13. It should nonetheless be kept in mind that Revelation remains charged with mystery. It is true that Jesus, with his entire life, revealed the countenance of the Father, for he came to teach the secret things of God. But our vision of the face of God is always fragmentary and impaired by the limits of our understanding. Faith alone makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently.

In short, the knowledge proper to faith does not destroy the mystery; it only reveals it the more, showing how necessary it is for people's lives: Christ the Lord “in revealing the mystery of the Father and his love fully reveals man to himself and makes clear his supreme calling”, which is to share in the divine mystery of the life of the Trinity.

### ***Current tasks for theology***

93. The chief purpose of theology is to *provide an understanding of Revelation and the content of faith*. The very heart of theological enquiry will thus be the contemplation of the mystery of the Triune God. The approach to this mystery begins with reflection upon the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God: his coming as man, his going to his Passion and Death . . .

97. . . . The dogmatic pragmatism of the early years of this century, which viewed the truths of faith as nothing more than rules of conduct, has already been refuted and rejected; but the temptation always remains of understanding these truths in purely functional terms. This leads only to an approach which is inadequate, reductive and superficial at the level of speculation. A Christology, for example, which proceeded solely “from below”, as is said nowadays, or an ecclesiology developed solely on the model of civil society, would be hard pressed to avoid the danger of such reductionism.

If the *intellectus fidei* wishes to integrate all the wealth of the theological tradition, it must turn to the philosophy of being, which should be able to propose anew the problem of being—and this in harmony with the demands and insights of the entire philosophical tradition, including philosophy of more recent times, without lapsing into sterile repetition of antiquated formulas . . .

• In Western theology, Mystery was always acknowledged in principle (of course), but presentations of systematic theology did not seem to take it very seriously – if there was something we had not figured out, it was a pretty insignificant detail. Mystery is always been central to the theology and liturgy of the East. Therefore, the approach offered here is very promising as an element in ecumenical understanding.

This approach to theology is very consistent with the spirit of our opening discussion about revelation, faith and theology.

- God discloses Himself.
- He does so fully and perfectly in the Person of His Divine Son.
- But the fullness of the mystery present in Christ is not fully comprehended.
- In the life of the Church and in faithful theology, we see the Mystery coming to be more deeply appreciated.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* likewise acknowledges the profound mystery of God, expressing confidence in the formulations of the Faith but simultaneously recognizing the limitations of our knowledge and language.

#### **IV. How Can We Speak about God?**

39 In defending the ability of human reason to know God, the Church is expressing her confidence in the possibility of speaking about him to all men and with all men, and therefore of dialogue with other religions, with philosophy and science, as well as with unbelievers and atheists.

40 Since our knowledge of God is limited, our language about him is equally so. We can name God only by taking creatures as our starting point, and in accordance with our limited human ways of knowing and thinking.

41 All creatures bear a certain resemblance to God, most especially man, created in the image and likeness of God. the manifold perfections of creatures - their truth, their goodness, their beauty all reflect the infinite perfection of God. Consequently we can name God by taking his creatures' perfections as our starting point, "for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator".

42 God transcends all creatures. We must therefore continually purify our language of everything in it that is limited, imagebound or imperfect, if we are not to confuse our image of God --"the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the invisible, the ungraspable"-- with our human representations. Our human words always fall short of the mystery of God.

## B. COMMUNION

### 1. The Doctrine of the Trinity

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts that the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the central doctrine of the Faith.

234. The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the "hierarchy of the truths of faith".<sup>56</sup> The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men "and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin".

This would not come as a surprise to any Catholic – consider the baptismal formula and the Sign of the Cross. But at the same time, a “Trinitarian perspective” has not seemed to inform our theology very thoroughly – consider, e.g., homilies for Trinity Sunday.

### 2. Trinity and Communion

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* not only asserts the importance of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but also emphasizes the notion of communion – founded in the Trinity – as a central perspective for understanding the whole story of salvation.

The dramatic increase in the practical importance of this perspective can be seen by making a comparison of the treatment of certain important issues in two catechisms.

#### The Trinity as Communion of Love

<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	<i>Roman Catechism</i>
221 But St. John goes even further when he affirms that "God is love". God's very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret:	Let him, however, who by the divine bounty believes these truths, constantly beseech and implore God and the Father, who made all things out of nothing, and ordereth an things sweetly, who gave us power to become the sons of God, and who

<p>God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.</p>	<p>made known to the human mind the mystery of the Trinity -- let him, I say, pray unceasingly that, admitted one day into the eternal tabernacles, he may be worthy to see how great is the fecundity of the Father, who contemplating and understanding Himself, begot the Son like and equal to Himself, how a love of charity in both, entirely the same and equal, which is the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, connects the begetter and the begotten by an eternal and indissoluble bond; and that thus the Essence of the Trinity is one and the distinction of the Three Persons perfect.</p>
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In the *Roman Catechism*, the bulk of the treatment of the Trinity is taken up with nature/substance and person, and the notion of “processions” by which the Persons are distinguished. The above section is only a kind of pious conclusion for the treatment.

### **Man as created in the Image of God**

<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	<i>Roman Catechism</i>
<p>357 Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself</p>	<p><i>Production Of Man</i>          Lastly, He formed man from the slime of the earth, so created and constituted in body as to be immortal and impassible, not, however, by the strength of nature, but by the bounty of God. Man's soul He created to His own image and</p>

<p>and entering into communion with other persons. and he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.</p>	<p>likeness; gifted him with free will, and tempered all his motions and appetites so as to subject them, at all times, to the dictates of reason. He then added the admirable gift of original righteousness, and next gave him dominion over all other animals. By referring to the sacred history of Genesis the pastor will easily make himself familiar with these things for the instruction of the faithful.</p>
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To the traditional powers of intellect and will is added the capacity for communion. And this is entirely in accord with our experience – the person who is as learned/wise and as rich/powerful as can be imagined is not to be envied if he is solitary.

**Sin as destructive of communion**

<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	<i>Roman Catechism</i>
<p>1849 Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law." 1850 Sin is an offense against God: "Against you, you</p>	<p><i>The Consequences Of Sin</i> And for what? Only for this, that separating ourselves from God our Father, who is the supreme Good, and lured by the most base rewards of sin, we may devote ourselves to the devil, to become his most wretched slaves. Language is inadequate to depict the cruel tyranny which the devil exercises over those who, having shaken off the sweet yoke of God, and broken the most lovely bond of charity by which our spirit is bound to God</p>

<p>alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight." Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it.</p>	<p>our Father, have gone over to their relentless enemy, who is therefore called in Scripture, the prince and ruler of the world, the prince of darkness, and king over all the children of pride.</p>
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The *Roman Catechism* is very clear on the effects of sin on our relationship/communion with God; but there is not much attention to the effects of sin on our communion with others.

### The Christian Life as union with Jesus Christ

<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	<i>Roman Catechism</i>
<p>521 Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us. "By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man." We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model:</p>	<p><i>Justifying Grace</i> But the grace of justification, which signs us with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance,' transcends all His other most ample gifts. It unites us to God in the closest bonds of love, lights up within us the sacred flame of piety, forms us to newness of life, renders us partakers of the divine nature, and enables us to be called and really to be the sons of God.</p>

All the traditional understandings are preserved: sin merits eternal death; Christ gives us a share in His divine life without end. But the perspective of communion can give a new appreciation of why/how this is so. Christ has always lived in a perfect and full communion of life with the Father; he did so in His human nature, persevering in perfect obedience to the Father and charity toward others until the end; now He opens the way for us to be united with His life – in partaking of His divine life (sanctifying grace) and in living a life like His in this world; united to Him, we do (on this earth) and will (in heaven) live in communion with the Father.

### Heaven as entering the Communion of Love

<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>	<i>Roman Catechism</i>
<p>1721 God put us in the world to know, to love, and to serve him, and so to come to paradise. Beatitude makes us "partakers of the divine nature" and of eternal life. With beatitude, man enters into the glory of Christ. and into the joy of the Trinitarian life.</p>	<p>Finally, by His Ascension He has prepared for us a place, as He had promised, and has entered, as our head, in the name of us all, into the possession of the glory of heaven." Ascending into heaven, He threw open its gates, which had been closed by the sin of Adam; and, as He foretold to His disciples at His Last Supper, secured to us a way by which we may arrive at eternal happiness. In order to give an open proof of this by its fulfilment, He introduced with Himself into the mansions of eternal bliss the souls of the just whom He had liberated from hell.</p>

Notice the explicit mention of the Trinity in the description of the life of heaven.