

PART III

POPE JOHN PAUL II'S *FIDES ET RATIO*

**FIDES ET RATIO'S CALL FOR A RENEWAL OF METAPHYSICS AND ST.
THOMAS AQUINAS**

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While Pope John Paul II had some very positive things to say about Aquinas's philosophy in general and his metaphysics in particular in *Fides et Ratio*, he also made it clear that it is not the place of the Church's magisterium to endorse any particular philosophy or any particular metaphysics to the exclusion of all others. Rather, he wanted to indicate the characteristics of the kind of metaphysics which might be pursued by philosophers who are also believing Christians.

Although the Pope did not want to say that the magisterium was imposing Aquinas's philosophy and his metaphysics, one gets the impression that he judged Aquinas's philosophical thought and especially his metaphysics to be particularly well qualified to help meet the need he had in mind. In this paper, therefore, I propose to develop some of these desired characteristics as they are described by Pope John Paul II, and then to turn to the metaphysics of Aquinas in each case for the sake of comparison.

1. A Metaphysics in Harmony with Christian and Catholic Religious Belief

It is hardly surprising that in seeking for a philosophy and a metaphysics that will be of value to Christian thinkers, the Pope would insist that it should not be opposed to orthodox religious belief. As he notes in his introductory remarks, the Church sees in philosophy "the way to come to know fundamental truths about human life" (#5).¹ While recognizing that there have been many different schools of

¹ Unless otherwise indicated I will use this translation: *Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II* (Vatican Translation: Daughters of St. Paul, 1998). I will use the Latin text contained in *Restoring Faith in Reason: A New Translation of the Encyclical Letter 'Faith and Reason' of Pope John Paul II together with a commentary and discussion*, ed. by L.P. Hemming and S. F. Parsons (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2003).

philosophy, he also insists that there is a distinctive “core” of philosophical thinking which may be discerned within the history of human thought including principles such as noncontradiction, causality, finality, the concept of a person as free and intelligent with a capacity to know God, truth, and goodness (#4).

It is his conviction about the ultimate unity of truth that undergirds his defense of the harmony between reason and revelation:

This truth, which God reveals to us in Jesus Christ, is not opposed to the truths which philosophy perceives.... The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reasoning, as the principle of non-contradiction makes clear. Revelation renders this unity certain, showing that the God of creation is also the God of salvation history (#34).

Readers of Aquinas can hardly fail to notice the similarity between the Pope’s remarks on this point, and the thinking of Thomas Aquinas himself. Indeed, somewhat farther on, after briefly sketching the developing thought of earlier Christian thinkers on the relationship between faith and reason, John Paul II speaks in glowing terms about the originality and the contributions of Thomas Aquinas:

Thomas had the great merit of giving pride of place to the harmony which exists between faith and reason. Both the light of reason and the light of faith come from God, he argued; hence there can be no contradiction between them (#43).

Here he cites *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.7 in support, and goes on to remark: “Just as grace builds on nature and brings it to fulfillment, so faith builds upon and perfects reason.” For this he cites *Summa Theologiae* I, 1.8, ad 2.

With reference to this I would note that in a text from his somewhat earlier *Expositio super Boetium De Trinitate*, 2.3, Aquinas brings out both of these points and several others in what I regard as his best discussion of the harmony between faith and reason. This article is explicitly directed to answering this question: “Whether in the science of faith which treats of God it is permissible to use philosophical arguments and authorities.” Thomas begins his response by commenting that the gifts of grace are added to nature in such fashion that they do not destroy nature but rather perfect it. Therefore, he

continues, the light of faith which is infused into us as a grace (*gratis*) does not destroy the light of natural reason, which is also divinely instilled in us.²

He observes that while the natural light of the human intellect is insufficient to discover those things which are manifested to us (solely) through faith, it is nonetheless impossible for those things which are divinely revealed to us through faith to be opposed to those which are instilled in us by nature. Otherwise one or the other would be false. Here, of course, Thomas is appealing to the principle of non-contradiction and hence to the unity of truth. Two contradictory propositions cannot both be true at one and the same time. And so, he continues, both that which is divinely revealed to us and that which we discover by using our naturally given powers and principles ("that which is instilled in us by nature") come to us from one and the same source, God himself. Hence, to admit that they could really contradict one another would make God himself the author of falsity. This, of course, Thomas rejects as impossible.³

Here, then, we find the ultimate foundation both for Thomas's and for John Paul II's defense of the harmony between reason and revelation. As a religious believer, Thomas is convinced that revealed truth has God as its source. As a philosopher, he is convinced that every finite being, including human beings and their divinely given cognitive powers, is efficiently caused by God. This follows from his view that, in all finite beings, their act of being (*esse*) is efficiently caused (see *De ente et essentia*, c. 4; *ST I*, 3.4; *De pot.*, 3.5). But if faith when rightly interpreted could contradict reason when rightly exercised, one or the other would have to be false according to the principle of noncontradiction.⁴

² Ed. Leonina, vol. 50, p. 98, ll. 114-18=Leon. 50.98:114-18: "Responsio. Dicendum, quod dona gratiarum hoc modo naturae adduntur, quod eam non tollunt sed magis perficiunt; unde et lumen fidei, quod nobis gratis infunditur, non destruit lumen naturalis rationis divinitus nobis inditum."

³ Leon. 50.98:118-99:126.

⁴ Thomas then goes on to note in passing that because in imperfect things there is found some imitation of things that are perfect, in those things

Up until this point in this text, Thomas has concentrated on the relationship between faith and reason. Next he turns to the relationship between theology (*sacra doctrina*) and philosophy. Just as theology is based on the light of faith, so philosophy is based on the natural light of reason. Therefore, Thomas now concludes, it is likewise impossible for those things which are proper to philosophy to be contrary to those which pertain to faith, although the former fall short of the latter.⁵

Having concluded that there can be no real conflict between those things which are proper to philosophy and those which are proper to revealed truth, Thomas identifies two ways in which philosophy can be of assistance to someone who is attempting to understand his faith. Those things which are proper to philosophy contain (1) certain similitudes or likenesses that may be used to illustrate mysteries of faith; and (2) they contain certain preambles for faith (*praeambula fidei*), just as nature itself is a preamble for grace.⁶

But before explaining in more detail what he has in mind by each of these, Thomas introduces a third consideration. He is well aware that, over the course of time, certain conclusions proposed by some philosophers have been contrary to faith. He now explains that in such cases, when something is found in the sayings of a philosopher that is contrary to faith, this is not really something that is proper to philosophy as such. Rather, it is an abuse of philosophy following from a deficiency on the side of reason. In such cases, it is possible by using the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind in one of two ways, either by showing that the alleged philosophical claim is absolutely false (*omnino esse impossibile*), or else by showing that it is not necessarily demonstrated. He introduces the last-mentioned point to allow for the case of revealed mysteries. While truths which can be held solely on the grounds of faith cannot be demonstrated to be true, so too, certain alleged philosophical conclusions which are opposed to

which are known by means of natural reason certain likenesses (*similitudines*) are found of those things which we hold on faith (Leon. 50.99:126-30).

⁵ Leon. 50.99:131-35.

⁶ Leon. 50.99:135-37: "continent tamen aliquas eorum similitudines et quaedam ad ea praeambula, sicut natura praeambula est ad gratiam."

them cannot be demonstrated to be false. Otherwise, one would in effect demonstrate the truth of the revealed mystery. But, says Thomas, even in such cases it can be shown by reasoning philosophically that such claims which are opposed to faith have not themselves been demonstrated (shown to be necessary).⁷

In summing this up, Thomas now concludes that within theology it is permissible for one to use philosophy in three ways. The first way is most important for our purposes here today; namely, that philosophy may be used to demonstrate those truths which Thomas calls *praeambula fidei*, and which he says:

it is necessary to know in one's faith, such as truths which are proved by natural arguments about God, such as the fact that God exists, that God is one, and other things of this kind concerning God or concerning creatures which are proved in philosophy and which faith presupposes.⁸

In this text we can see how closely the teaching in *Fides et Ratio* noted above concerning the harmony between faith and reason corresponds to and depends upon Thomas's position. Thomas calls for a philosophy, and hence a metaphysics, that is not only in harmony with revealed truth, but which can demonstrate preambles for faith, such as God's existence and his unity.

2. Philosophy as a Search for Truth

We are all familiar with the opening words of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "By nature all human beings desire to know" (980a 21). In *Fides et Ratio* Pope John Paul II also cites these very words from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and turns to every day experience to illustrate how concerned we all are to "discover for ourselves, beyond mere opinions, how things really are" (#25). He also remarks that within "visible creation, man is the only creature who not only is capable of knowing

⁷ Leon. 50.99:137-47.

⁸ Leon. 50.99:148-54: "Sic ergo in sacra doctrina philosophia possumus tripliciter uti: primo ad demonstrandum ea quae sunt praeambula fidei, quae necesse est in fide scire, ut ea quae naturalibus rationibus de Deo probantur, ut Deum esse, Deum esse unum, et alia huiusmodi vel de Deo vel de creaturis in philosophia probata, quae fides supponit. . ."

but who knows that he knows, and is therefore interested in the real truth of what he perceives" (ibid). I would note here how this insight was anticipated by Aquinas's insistence that truth, when taken as an adequation between the intellect and reality, not only requires this *adaequatio* but also requires that the thinking person in whose intellect such truth resides be aware of this adequation through judgment (*ST I*, 16.2).⁹

The Pope comments that it is this desire to understand that has driven so many inquiries in the field of theoretical science, as well as much research in the practical arena which looks to the good which ought to be done. And in the practical area, when it comes to ultimate questions concerning the meaning of life and the issue of life after death (immortality), human beings are not satisfied with mere questioning but want to reach an ultimate answer. But, the Pope writes: "The high (*suprema*) point of this investigation will depend upon the answer given to this question: Whether or not we think it possible to attain universal and absolute truth" (#27).¹⁰ He insists that people seek something absolute, something ultimate, a final explanation to give meaning and an answer to their searching, and which refers to nothing beyond itself (ibid). And so, down through the centuries "philosophers have sought to discover and articulate such a truth, giving rise to various systems and schools of thought." It goes without saying that Aquinas's entire career was dedicated to reaching such truth (see, for instance *SCG I*, 1 where Thomas cites Aristotle as holding that first philosophy, i.e., metaphysics, is the science of truth, not any truth whatsoever, but that truth which is the origin of all truth).

3. The Magisterium and Philosophy: Negative Role

In Chapter V Pope John Paul II takes up the issue of the Magisterium's interventions in philosophical matters. Here he makes the point

⁹ For an excellent discussion of Aquinas's view that by nature all men desire to know, see Jan Aertsen, "Thomas von Aquin. Alle Menschen verlangen von Natur nach Wissen," in *Philosophen des Mittelalters. Eine Einführung*, ed. T. Kobusch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 186-201.

¹⁰ Translation mine. "Ex responsis quae iisdem dantur *suprema* pendet investigationis pars: utrum fieri possit ut perveniatur necne ad veritatem universalem et absolutum" (#27, p. 46).

already noted above. "The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others (#49)." His major reason for saying this is to protect the integrity and the legitimate autonomy of philosophy itself. Philosophy, even when engaged within theology, must remain true to its own principles and methods and proceed according to the light of reason (#49). Even so, and here again, as Aquinas had already noted, the Pope observes that history reveals that philosophy—especially modern philosophy, he adds—has "taken wrong turns and fallen into error." The Pope insists that it is the duty of the magisterium to respond clearly and strongly when particular philosophical views threaten or contradict a correct understanding of revealed truth (see #'s 49, 50).

Pope John Paul II remarks that it was not only in recent times that the Magisterium has spoken out about erroneous philosophical theories, but he acknowledges that since the mid-nineteenth century such pronouncements have become more frequent. During this period some Catholic thinkers judged it necessary to develop their own forms of philosophy in order to counter certain currents of modern philosophical thought. The Magisterium then found it necessary to be on guard lest some of these philosophies themselves promote erroneous views. Censures were directed on the one side against *fideism* and against radical *traditionalism* because both of these positions minimized the capacity of natural reason. On the other side, censures were also directed against *rationalism* and *ontologism* because these views assigned to reason knowledge which revelation alone can give. The Pope explains that the valid and the positive points resulting from these interventions were incorporated by Vatican I into its Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, wherein for the first time a general Council solemnly pronounced on the faith-reason relationship (#52).

Thereby the Council showed "how inseparable and at the same time how distinct were natural knowledge of God and revelation, reason and faith" (#53, trans. mine). The Pope states that the Council began "with the basic premise (*ex praecipua postulatione*) which Revelation itself presupposes, that [the fact] that God exists, as the beginning and the end of all things, can be known naturally" and concluded with the

solemn pronouncement “that there are two orders of knowledge, distinct not only in their origin but also in their object” (ibid).¹¹

As for the contemporary situation, John Paul II observes that certain problems of former times have returned today. He mentions a “deep-seated mistrust of reason which has surfaced in the most recent developments of much of philosophical research, to the point that there is talk at times of the end of metaphysics” (#55). In theology, a certain *rationalism* has appeared wherein certain unproven philosophical positions are uncritically accepted by some theologians who are not well versed in philosophy. Finally, he sees signs of a resurgent *fideism* which does not recognize the importance of rational knowledge and of philosophy for understanding faith and even for the possibility of having the capacity to believe in God. Against another kind of latent fideism evident in the small attention given to speculative theology, he recalls that both the understanding of faith and dogmatic formulae have taken their terminology from the concepts (*notiones*) of classical philosophy (#55). He urges philosophers, whether Christian or not, to “trust in the power of human reason and not to set themselves goals that are too modest in their philosophizing.” And he concludes this section by observing that faith thus becomes the “convinced and convincing advocate of reason” (#56).

4. Philosophy and the Magisterium’s Positive Role

Under the heading *Ecclesia philosophiae studiosa* the Pope then turns to a more positive role exercised by the Magisterium with respect to philosophy, noting that it “has sought to stress the basic principles for a genuine renewal of philosophical enquiry” (#57). He refers to Leo XIII’s Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris*, noting that in it Pope Leo recalled and developed the teaching of Vatican Council I on the faith-reason relationship and indicated how philosophy contributes to faith and to theology. More than a century later, he continues, many of Pope Leo’s insights retain their interest, and especially “his insistence upon the

¹¹ “Concilium ex praecipua postulatione sumpsit initium, quam ipsa Revelatio praesumebat, Deum scilicet esse naturaliter cognosci posse, rerum omnium principium et finem, atque sollemni illa iam memorata enuntiatione desiit: ‘Duplicem esse ordinem cognitionis, non solum principio, sed obiecto etiam distinctum’.” See *Restoring Faith in Reason*, 86, #53.

incomparable value of the philosophy of St. Thomas." Leo had judged that the best way to recover "the practice of a philosophy consonant with the demands of faith" was to reemphasize Aquinas's thought (#57). After summarizing the many positive results that followed from "the Thomistic and Neo-Thomistic revival," John Paul II notes that this was not the only indication of a renewal of philosophical thinking within Christian culture. Prior to and then parallel with Pope Leo's intervention, certain other Catholic thinkers drew upon other philosophical approaches to produce important works (#59).

Pope John Paul II then refers back to the teaching of Vatican II concerning philosophy, especially one chapter in *Gaudium et Spes* which, he comments, "amounts to a virtual compendium of the biblical anthropology from which philosophy too can draw inspiration." In particular he notes its emphasis on the value of the human person created in the image of God, human beings' superiority over the rest of creation, and human reason's ability to grasp the transcendent (#60). He cites from the Council's recommendations concerning the study of philosophy required of candidates for the priesthood, along with a number of similar later interventions by the Magisterium concerning the need for a solid philosophical formation for such candidates.¹² John Paul II comments that he himself has found it necessary to repeat on several occasions the value of Aquinas's insights and to insist that his thought be studied because the Magisterium's directives concerning this have not always been carried out as fully as one might expect. He laments the fact that since Vatican II many Catholic faculties have been impoverished by a lessened awareness of the importance not only of Scholastic philosophy, but of philosophy as such (#61). Against such trends Pope John Paul II recalls once more that the study of philosophy is "fundamental and indispensable to the structure of theological studies and to the formation" of future priests (#62). And so he sees it as his task in this Encyclical to "state principles and criteria, which ... are necessary in order to restore a harmonious and creative relationship between theology and philosophy" (#63).

¹² See footnote #84 for a listing of these.

5. Philosophy and Theology

This leads him in Chapter VI to a more detailed examination of the interaction between philosophy and theology. He recalls certain specific tasks of theology which require having recourse to philosophy and distinguishes between two methodological tasks for theology, the “hearing of faith” (*auditus fidei*) and the “understanding of faith” (*intellectus fidei*). Philosophy assists theology in preparing for the “hearing of faith” by its consideration of the structure of human knowledge, of interpersonal communication, and of the forms and functions of speech (*loquelaē*). In addition, philosophy also makes an important contribution by enabling the Church’s tradition, pronouncements of the Magisterium, and the views of eminent theologians to be understood more accurately, and especially so since the last-mentioned often use ideas and forms of thought taken from a particular philosophical tradition (#65).

As for the “understanding of faith,” he recalls that the divine Truth “proposed to us in the Sacred Scriptures understood according to the teaching of the Church” as Thomas puts it in *ST* IIa-IIae, 5.3, ad 2, enjoys an intrinsic intelligibility which is so logically coherent that it may be proposed as a true wisdom.¹³ Hence dogmatic theology should have the ability to arrive at the universal meaning of the one and triune God and of the economy of salvation both as considered under the aspect of narrative and especially through sound reasoning. It must do this by using concepts which themselves are expressed through critical judgment which can be communicated to all.¹⁴ Indeed, states the Pope, without the assistance of philosophy, major theological issues cannot be clarified, such as appropriate speech about God, the personal relations in the Trinity, the action of a creative God in the world, the relationship between God and man, or Christ’s identity as true God and true man. Therefore, the Pope concludes:

¹³ See #66: “Si vero intellectus fidei ponderatur, animadvertendum est apprimē divinam Veritatem ‘propositam nobis in Scripturis Sacris secundum doctrinam Ecclesiae intellectis’ [*ST* II-II, 5.3, ad 2] propria fruerē intellegibilitate tam logice congruenti ut proponatur veluti germana sapientia.”

¹⁴ #66: “Id efficere debet, profecto, intellectivis adhibitis notionibus quae critico iudicio effinguntur cum omnibus communicabili.”

It is therefore necessary that believing reason have a natural, true and consistent knowledge of created realities, of the world and of man, about which things divine revelation also treats. Moreover it should have the ability to control this knowledge by using understanding and argumentation. Consequently speculative dogmatic theology presupposes and embraces a philosophy of man and of the world, and more profoundly, a philosophy of *esse* itself, which philosophy is based on objective truth (#66).¹⁵

The Pope's reference to a philosophy of *esse*—that is, a metaphysics of *esse*—makes one think of both the language and thought of Thomas Aquinas and his special emphasis on the role of the *actus essendi* in accounting for the ontological structure and the actual existence of any particular being. This point, which is blurred by the translation of *esse* as “being” in the two English translations I have consulted and cited here, will recur below.¹⁶

In turning to fundamental theology (#67), the Pope assigns to it the role of justifying and expounding “the relationship between faith and philosophical thought.” He harks back to the teaching of Vatican I, itself based on Romans 1.19-20, to the effect that there are some “truths which can be known naturally, and therefore, philosophically. Knowledge of these is necessarily presupposed for accepting God's revelation.”¹⁷ Here one is reminded of Aquinas's remarks in his *In De Trinitate* 2.3 about certain *praeambula fidei* which are presupposed for faith, even though the Pope does not here use the expression

¹⁵ Translation mine (#66): “Necesse est ideo ut fidelis ratio naturalem habeat, veram congruentemque cognitionem de rebus creatis, de mundo et de homine, quas res etiam revelatio divina tractat; magis etiam, ipsa facultatem habere debet moderandi hanc cognitionem per modum intellectionis et argumentationis. Quapropter theologia dogmatica speculativa praesumit et complectitur philosophiam hominis, mundi atque, altius, ipsius ‘esse’, quae quidem in obiectiva veritate innititur.”

¹⁶ See Pauline translation, 85, #66; *Restoring Faith in Reason*, 107, #66.

¹⁷ Translation mine (#67): “Concilium iam Vaticanum I, doctrinam resumens Pauli (cfr Rom 1.19-20), in id iam animos converterat, quasdam scilicet exstare veritates quae naturaliter, ideoque philosophice, cognosci possunt. Earum cognitio necessario anteponebatur ad Dei revelationem suscipiendam.”

praeambula fidei. Like Thomas, the Pope first mentions a natural knowledge of God (#67). Thomas himself frequently cites Romans 1.20 in support of his view.¹⁸

The Pope then quotes from his 1995 *Letter to Participants in the International Congress of Fundamental Theology on the 125th Anniversary of "Dei Filius"*: "Although faith, a gift of God, is not based on reason, it can certainly not dispense with it. At the same time, it becomes apparent that reason needs to be reinforced by faith in order to discover horizons it cannot reach on its own" (#67). Somewhat farther on the Pope comments that the relationship between theology and philosophy is best "construed as a circle." Theology begins with the word of God revealed in history, and its goal is to understand that word. Philosophy, when pursued according to its own principles, can help one better understand God's word. And reason is moved by revealed truth to explore "new and unsuspected horizons" (#73).

The Pope's presentation of the benefits resulting from this close interrelationship between philosophy and theology might raise some concerns about the autonomy of philosophy when it is involved in such a relationship. Perhaps with this concern in mind, the Pope next distinguishes three different stances (*status*) philosophy may take with respect to Christian faith. The first is that of philosophy viewed as completely independent of revelation. This is the position taken by philosophy as it first existed before the coming of Christ and even later in regions not yet reached by the Gospel. The Pope takes a positive attitude toward this stance on the part of philosophy, and recognizes in it a realization of philosophy's legitimate desire to be an autonomous discipline operating according to its own principles and natural powers. He also recognizes the limitations of human reason that follow from human weakness but observes that insofar as the pursuit of philosophy leads to the discovery of truth in the natural order, it is at least implicitly open to the supernatural (#75).

¹⁸ For Thomas's text see n. 7 above. For other references to this see In *De Trin.*, 1.2, *sed contra* (Leon. 50.84:36-37), which merely quotes the text's opening words; 1.3 (Leon. 50.88:145-47); 5.4 (Leon. 50.154:154-57); 6.2, obj. 4 (Leon. 50:164:23-24); 6.3, *sed contra* (Leon. 50.166:32-35). Also see *ST I*, 2.2, *sed contra*, and the full discussion in *Super Epistolam ad Romanos Lectura, in Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, vol. 1 (Marietti, 1953), nn. 114-22.

A second possible stance for philosophy is often referred to as "Christian Philosophy." The Pope views this terminology as acceptable provided that it is freed from ambiguity. It must not be taken to imply that the Church has its own official (*publicam*) philosophy since the faith as such is not a philosophy. Rather, the Pope understands by this the "art of philosophizing in a Christian way, namely, a philosophical reflection which is vitally conjoined with faith."¹⁹ Therefore it does not refer simply to those who are Christians who philosophize and who merely want to say nothing in their philosophizing that is contrary to faith. More than this, the Pope has in mind those advances within the field of philosophy which would never have occurred without the direct or indirect assistance of Christian revelation.²⁰

The Pope distinguishes two forms (*species*) of "Christian Philosophy," one subjective and one objective. In its subjective form, faith as a theological virtue liberates reason from excessive self-confidence. The virtue of humility in turn may give a philosopher the courage to take up issues which are difficult to resolve unless the data of Revelation are taken into account: issues such as the problem of evil, the personal nature of God, the question of the meaning of life, or the radical metaphysical question: "Why is there anything at all?" (#76).

In its objective form "Christian Philosophy" has to do with content. Revelation manifests clearly certain truths which reason can discover in principle, but in fact might never have done so if it were left to its own devices.²¹ As examples, the Pope mentions the notion of a personal God who is free and a Creator, (a notion which he remarks, has contributed much to the development of philosophical thinking especially with respect to the philosophy of *esse*), as well as the reality of sin, the notion of a person considered as a spiritual being, the

¹⁹ Translation mine: "Hac locutione ars designatur christiane philosophandi, meditatio scilicet philosophica quae vitaliter cum fide coniungitur" (122, #76).

²⁰ "Cum de philosophia christiana sermo fit, omnes comprehendi debent praesentantes illi progressus philosophicae disciplinae, qui numquam contigissent nisi opem directe vel oblique christiana fides attulisset" (122, #76).

²¹ "Lucide quasdam exhibet veritates Revelatio, quas tametsi attingere potest ratio, nunquam tamen easdem reperisset si suis unis viribus innixa esset" (122, #76).

Christian proclamation of human dignity, equality and freedom, and the recognition of the importance for philosophy of history as event (#76).

The Pope points out that in exploring such questions philosophers have not become theologians since they have not tried to understand the truths of faith by relying on revelation. They have remained within their own field and worked with reason alone, even though they have extended their investigations into new areas. Here, I would note, he is attempting to maintain a delicate balance and draw a very fine line between his repeated defense of philosophy's autonomy, and the legitimacy of its being moved by revealed truth to take up new issues for investigation.

In order to assist us in maintaining this difficult balance, I would mention in passing a distinction I have developed elsewhere when considering the much disputed issue of "Christian Philosophy," even though this distinction is not original with me. I have found it helpful to apply to this discussion the distinction between the moment of discovery and the moment of proof in one's recognition of a particular truth. In the moment of discovery, it may well be that a believing person who is also a philosopher first came to recognize a particular truth such as God's existence or God's unity solely on the grounds of his or her religious belief. But if such a person is also a philosopher or perhaps later becomes one, that person may be encouraged by the fact that he or she already believes in such a truth to examine it now from the standpoint of reason by asking whether natural reason can demonstrate this truth as well. If subsequent investigation shows that it can, one will then be engaged in philosophy in the moment of proof. But because one initially discovered such a truth as a result of one's religious faith and only subsequently examined the philosophical evidence for it, one may refer to this as "Christian Philosophy" in the moment of discovery, although not in the moment of proof.²²

A third possible stance arises for philosophy when theology calls upon it. As the Pope has already explained and as he repeats in this context, theology has always needed the assistance of philosophy and

²² See Wipfel, "The Possibility of a Christian Philosophy: A Christian Perspective," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 272-90.

continues to do so. He comments that it was not by accident that the Fathers of the Church and the medieval theologians turned to non-Christian philosophies in their theologizing. And this historical fact, the Pope observes, in turn points to and confirms the autonomy of philosophy which it preserves even in this third situation. However, he also acknowledges that when philosophy is so employed, it then undergoes certain necessary and important changes and, together with theology, falls under the authority of the Magisterium (#77).

In light of these reflections the Pope returns to Aquinas and explains why the Magisterium has always praised his philosophy and has regarded him as a guide and exemplar for theological study. This was not and is not done in order to canonize any particular philosophical positions nor to impose them, the Pope points out, but to show how St. Thomas is an authentic model for those who seek after truth. As Pope John Paul II puts it:

In his thinking, the demands of reason and the power of faith found the most elevated synthesis ever attained by human thought, for he could fully defend the distinctiveness of revelation without ever demeaning the venture proper to reason.²³

The Pope indicates that in the final section of his Encyclical he will identify certain requirements which theology—and even more fundamentally the word of God itself—makes today on philosophical thinking and on today's philosophers. His remarks there cast more light on his views about metaphysics.

6. Metaphysics

Accordingly, in Chapter VII he refers to a current "crisis of meaning." "Perspectives on life and the world, often of a scientific nature," have multiplied to such an extent that we are faced with a fragmentation of knowledge. This in its turn renders the search for

²³ Translation slightly modified: "Eius enim in meditatione rationis postulata et fidei vis altissimam invenerunt summam ex iis quae humana cogitatio unquam attigit, quippe qui Revelationis proprietatem radicitus tuitus sit, proprium rationis cursum numquam deprimendo (#78)."

meaning even more difficult and leads to doubt, skepticism, indifference, or even to different forms of nihilism (#81).

In light of this situation the Pope counters that, as a first requirement for a philosophy to be "consonant with the word of God," it must recover its "*sapiential dimension as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of human life.*" This is especially needed today because the great advances in technology require a renewed appreciation of ultimate values, lest technology be pursued solely for utilitarian purposes, and, he adds, perhaps finally lead to the destruction of the human race (#81).

This in turn leads to a second requirement for such a philosophy, the Pope continues, and one which he has already mentioned, namely that it support the human intellect's ability to *know the truth* of things themselves, that is, to arrive at objective truth or, as the Pope also puts it, at the very essence of objects of knowledge (*ad essentiam ipsam obiectorum cognitionis*) "by means of that *adaequatio rei et intellectus* to which Scholastic Doctors referred" (#82). In a note, the Pope explicitly refers to Thomas's *ST I*, 16.1, and to Bonaventure's *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, *Collatio III*.²⁴ Here, therefore, the Pope is calling for a robust philosophical realism.

These first two requirements imply still a third, the need for a philosophy of a "genuinely metaphysical nature,"²⁵ which can go beyond empirical data in order to reach something absolute, ultimate and foundational (#83). He notes that here he is not speaking of metaphysics as that of some particular school or historical tradition. He simply wants to emphasize that both reality and truth transcend particular facts and empirical data and to defend human beings' ability to grasp "this transcendent and metaphysical dimension in a way that

²⁴ In *Restoring Faith in Reason*, 133, #99, reference is given to Bonaventure's text as found in Rega Wood, "A Transcription of the *Collatio III* of the *Hexameron*," *Franciscan Studies* 53 (1993), *Collatio III*, q. 8, a. 1.

²⁵ Translation mine. Note the unfortunate mistranslation of this in *Restoring Faith in Reason*, 135, #83, of the Latin "*opus est philosophia naturae vere metaphysicae*" as "need of a truly metaphysical philosophy of nature," which would obliterate Aquinas's carefully worked out distinction between metaphysics and the philosophy of nature.

is true and certain, albeit imperfect and analogical" (*refert etiam defendere hominis potestatem cuius vi hanc rationem transcendentem ac metaphysicam percipiat modo vero certoque, licet imperfecto et analogico*).²⁶ The Pope adds that metaphysics should not be seen as opposed to (philosophical) anthropology since it is metaphysics itself which can solidly establish the dignity of the person by reasoning from the person's spiritual nature. The person itself serves as the special place for an encounter with the *actus essendi* and hence with metaphysical thinking itself.²⁷

Continuing to emphasize the importance of metaphysics, the Pope writes that "[w]herever men and women discover a call to the absolute and transcendent, the metaphysical dimension of reality opens up before them: in truth, in beauty, in moral values, in other persons, in being itself (*esse*), and in God." He stresses the great challenge facing us today to move from phenomenon to foundation (*a phaenomeno ad fundamentum*). He comments that any philosophy which rejects any place for metaphysics (*omne metaphysicum spatium*) thereby renders itself radically unsuited for the task of mediating in the understanding of Revelation. And so, too, a theology without a metaphysical perspective (*prospectus*) would be woefully inadequate. It could not go beyond investigating religious experience nor reach a real *intellectus fidei* (#83).

The Pope explains that if he is insisting so much on the importance of metaphysics, this is because it is the path that must be taken in order to move beyond the crisis pervading various areas of philosophy today (#83-86). He maintains that philosophers who want to respond to "the demands which the word of God makes on human thinking" should do so along the lines he has mentioned and in continuity with the great tradition which began with the ancient Greeks, passed down through

²⁶ For the Latin see *Restoring Faith in Reason*, 134, #83.

²⁷ "Persona, nominatim, locum constituit praecipuum ut quis congregiatur cum actu essendi ac, propterea, cum meditatione metaphysica" (*ibid.*, 134-36, #83). Note the unfortunate translations of *actus essendi* both in *Restoring Faith in Reason*, p. 135 ("the very activity of being") and in the Pauline Books version, p. 105 ("being"). On the special role of the understanding of *esse* as *actus essendi* in the metaphysics of Aquinas, which is simply missed by these two translations, see below.

the Fathers and the medieval Scholastics, and includes positive contributions made by more recent and contemporary thought (#85).

In the next section of this Chapter, while setting forth a number of “current tasks for theology,” John Paul II returns to the “understanding of revealed truth”—the *intellectus fidei*. He recalls that he has already noted that this requires the contribution of a *philosophia essendi*, which enables dogmatic theology to perform its functions properly. So too, if the “understanding of faith” wishes to include the treasures of the theological tradition, again it must have recourse to a *philosophia essendi* which should be able to raise once again the question of being in accord with the demands of the entire philosophical tradition. When placed within the Christian metaphysical tradition, he comments that the *philosophia essendi* is an active and dynamic philosophy “which ... finds its impetus and enduring force in the fact that it is grounded on the “act of being itself:” “*actu ipso ‘essendi’ sustentatur*” (#97).²⁸

If I may conclude by returning to the three requirements for a philosophy consonant with revelation which the Pope has just singled out, I would first recall that he has not identified them with the metaphysics of any one figure, not even with that of Thomas Aquinas. But when we compare these requirements with Thomas’s own metaphysics, we find therein all three of them strongly emphasized.

First of all, according to the Pope, for a philosophy to be consonant with revelation and to perform the kind of service to it which he has in mind, it should have a sapiential dimension. It should be interested in ultimate questions and aim at developing a general or universal view of reality. For Aquinas, of course, metaphysics is indeed a form of wisdom; i.e., philosophical wisdom. It has as its subject being as being, or being in general (*ens commune*), and is directed at arriving at a knowledge of things, of beings, in terms of their first principles and ultimate causes. Knowledge of God, the First Principle and Ultimate Cause of all other being, is proposed by Thomas as the very goal of metaphysics.²⁹ And

²⁸ “Impetum suum ac perennem impulsum in eo reperit quod actu ipso ‘essendi’ sustentatur” (*Restoring Faith in Reason*, 156).

²⁹ See *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio, Prooemium* (Marietti ed., 1950), 2: “Nam cognitio causarum alicuius generis, est finis ad quem consideratio scientiae pertingit.” Cf. *Expositio Super Boetium De Trinitate*, 5.4

this is the nature of wisdom, to investigate things in terms of first principles and ultimate causes. This sapiential dimension of philosophy is not original with or unique to Aquinas, of course, but is deeply indebted to the ancient Greeks, and especially to Plato and to Aristotle. But it certainly applies to Aquinas's metaphysics.

Second, this sapiential dimension presupposes that the philosophy or metaphysics in question will defend the intellect's ability to arrive at objective truth, at a knowledge of things as they really are. Again, while not original with Aquinas, and while also shared by most of his contemporaries, it is well known that he defended such a theory of truth. Indeed, Pope John Paul II has explicitly commended him for this, along with St. Bonaventure.

Third, the Pope also strongly emphasizes the importance of the metaphysical dimension. This we have just seen. Obviously metaphysics is of central importance to the philosophical thought of Aquinas himself, and 20th century research has pointed out just how original many of his contributions were to this discipline. If the Pope has not restricted his remarks about the indispensable role of metaphysics to Aquinas's thought, he has frequently referred to it as dealing with *esse*, and has emphasized the importance of *esse* in the metaphysician's understanding and explanation of reality. Indeed, he has, near the end of this discussion, explicitly twice referred to the *actus essendi*. Students of Aquinas's metaphysics can hardly fail to recognize how central this notion is to his metaphysics and how original in the thirteenth-century was his understanding of the *actus essendi* as the actuality of all acts and the perfection of all perfections (*De potentia*, 7.2, ad 9).³⁰ And so I would submit that while there were indeed many, and still are, other philosophies of being or metaphysics which might meet John Paul II's call for a return to this discipline, none

(Leon. 50.153:82-86): "Sciendum siquidem est quod quaecumque scientia considerat aliquod genus subiectum, oportet quod consideret principia illius generis, cum scientia non perficiatur nisi per cognitionem principiorum. . ."

³⁰ On this see my work, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2000), 173-75, and the references given there to C. Fabro and F. O'Rourke.

of them has so heavily emphasized the importance of the *actus essendi* as has that of Aquinas.

I would also note that the Pope does not mention in *Fides et Ratio* Aquinas's view that every finite being is composed of an essence principle and a distinct *actus essendi*. But this is absolutely central to Aquinas's metaphysics and must be retained by anyone who would put his particular metaphysics at the service of theology. And, in light of major discoveries made in the mid-twentieth century and subsequently, I would say the same about his metaphysics of participation according to which every finite being participates in *esse*, whether in *esse subsistens*, or in *esse commune*, or in its own intrinsic *actus essendi*, since Thomas allows for all three usages.³¹ The Pope, of course, could not have included these points in his discussion of the kind of metaphysics he had in mind without positively excluding non-Thomistic versions of metaphysics. But today's follower of Thomas's metaphysics can and should do so, whether he is simply studying it for its own sake, or whether he also wishes to put it at the service of theology in the latter's effort to arrive at a deeper understanding of revealed truth (*intellectus fidei*).

In conclusion, of all the kinds of metaphysics developed by human thought until this point in time, it seems to me that Aquinas's best meets the various requirements set forth in *Fides et Ratio* for one that is

³¹ See, for instance, In *De Hebdomadibus*, lect. 2 (Leon. 50.273:234-51), where Thomas refers to Platonic forms (if they could exist) and to Aristotelian separate substances as participating in *esse commune*); In *De divinis nominibus*, c. 5, Pera ed. (Marietti, 1950), nn. 658-60) where he again refers to created existents as participating in *esse commune* and then to *esse creatum* or *esse commune* as participating in God; and In *De Heb.*, lect. 2, where after defining and dividing participation into different kinds, he refers to a kind of participation whereby an effect participates in its cause, especially if the cause is of a higher order (Leon. 50. 271:80-85). Participating in the First Cause would be the best example of this. See *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1, where he refers to participation *per assimilationem* in the First Act, i.e., God, which ultimately accounts for the presence of participated *esse* in a created being (Leon. 24.2.13-14:379-85). Cf. my *The Metaphysical Thought*, 110-21. For the third usage see In *I Sent*, 19.5.2 (Mandonnet ed., vol. 1, 491): "...quaelibet res participat suum esse creatum, quo formaliter est, et unusquisque intellectus participat lumen per quod recte de re iudicat."

“consonant with the Word of God” and also most satisfying for the human intellect in its unending thirst for truth.