Medieval Church: Roman Catholic Theology

Randy Broberg
Grace Bible Church
2002
Theology: Major Trends of Divergence

Unified Early Church

Eastern Orthodox
- Mystical

Roman Catholic
- Forensic

Reformed
- Heavily Forensic
- Mystical Purged
The Development of Roman Catholic Theology

FOUR SENTENCES
SEVEN SACRAMENTS
MECHANICAL GRACE

1095–1160

PETER LOMBARD

TRANSUBSTANTIATION

1215

FOURTH LATERAN COUNCIL

SUMMA THEOLOGICA
SACRAMENTS AS MEANS OF GRACE

1224–1274

THOMAS AQUINAS

SEVEN SACRAMENTS
MECHANICAL GRACE

1438–1445

COUNCIL OF FLORENCE

MERITED GRACE
DOGMATIZED

1545–1563

COUNCIL OF TRENT
What was scholasticism?

Britannica: "the philosophical systems and speculative tendencies of various medieval Christian thinkers who, working on a background of fixed religious dogma, sought to solve anew general philosophical problems (as of faith and reason, will and intellect, realism and nominalism, and the provability of the existence of God), initially under the influence of the mystical and intuitional tradition of patristic philosophy and especially Augustinianism and later under that of Aristotle."

As a theological method it is associated with organized textbook theology and the thesis method.

The scholastics, although mostly monks, were often based in the new universities which were springing up, such as Paris, Oxford (before 1200), and Cambridge (1209).
The Medieval Rise of Universities

Evolved from medieval schools known as *studia generalia*

- Places of study open to students throughout Europe.
- Efforts to educate clerks and monks beyond the level of the cathedral and monastic schools.

Earliest Western universities:

- **Salerno, Italy** - 9th c. Medical School
- **Bologna, Italy** - 11th c. Law School
- **University of Paris** - mid 12th c. - Theology School
- **Oxford University in England** - end of the 12th century.

University came from Latin term for groups of teachers.
A Master of Theology about 1250

- study the Bible
- study the Fathers of the Church
- study Peter Lombard's Sentences (completed by 1158)
- lecture and produce a commentary on the Sentences

“Liberal Arts” comes from Roman concept that certain topics like philosophy were to be taught only to free citizens, hence “liberated”

University Curricula

Educational Process

Liberal Arts
(philosophy, humanities, and the like)

Bachelor of the Bible

Bachelor of the Sentences

Master (synonymous with doctor)

Academic Exercises

Commentaries on the Bible, commentary on the Sentences, sermons, disputations
The Arabs preserved the scientific works of the Greeks.

Scholars gathered at cities like Damascus, Baghdad, and Cairo, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, and at Cordova and Toledo, in Spain, at the western end by the 11th century.

Beginning in the 12th cent. after the reconquest of Spain, the Arabic versions of Greek works were translated into Latin.

Averroës, an Arabic philosopher whose interpretations of Aristotle were translated into Latin, was one of the first to influence Western philosophical thought away from strict rationalism and spiritualism. He attempted to delimit the separate domains of faith and reason, pointing out that the two need not be reconciled because they did not conflict.
Nor did I think your orders were so strong that you, a mortal man, could over-run the god’s unwritten and unfailing laws.

Do the gods love piety because it is pious, or is it pious because they love it?

Sophocles
In the 12th century his works were translated from Arabic into Latin. Aristotle's philosophy was regarded with some suspicion, largely because his teachings were thought to lead to a materialistic view of the world.

In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas found in Aristotle a philosophical foundation for Christian thought. Thomas Aquinas called Aristotle "the philosopher."

The Schoolmen begin knowing only Plato and fragments of Aristotle.
Basic to all scholastic thought was the conjunction of faith (spiritualism) and reason (rationalism).

Use of reason was essential to deepen the understanding of what is believed on faith, or dogma, and ultimately to give a rational content to faith.

Attempts to reconcile reason and faith, philosophy and revelation.

Developed obscure doctrines: how many angels could dance on the head of a pin, what hour Adam sinned.
Trends in Scholasticism

► Augustinianism and Aristotelianism
  - For Augustinians: priority of faith
  - For Aristotelians: priority of reason

► Thomism and Scotism
  - Thomists: *intellect*, preeminent characteristic of God
  - Scotists: *will*, preeminent characteristic of God
Follow St. Anselm's Argument Point By Point:

1) God is defined as the being in which none greater is possible.
2) It is true that the notion of God exists in the understanding (your mind.)
3) And that God may exist in reality (God is a possible being.)
4) If God only exists in the mind, and may have existed, then God might have been greater than He is.
5) Then, God might have been greater than He is (if He existed in reality.)
6) Therefore, God is a being which a greater is possible.
7) This is not possible, for God is a being in which a greater is impossible.
8) Therefore God exists in reality as well as the mind.
Acquinas and Aristotle

- Christianized Aristotle during the high middle ages
- Synthesized Aristotle and Scripture
  - Begin with Reason
  - Revelation complements and completes Reason
- His time in Paris coincided with the arrival of Aristotelian science, newly discovered in Arabic translation; his great achievement was to integrate into Christian thought the rigors of Aristotle's philosophy, just as the early church fathers had integrated Plato's thought in the early Christian era.
Reason is given full weight, but perhaps not undue weight. It is considered a valid tool, but it cannot discover all the mysteries of the faith. Certainly many things, like the existence of God, can be proved by human reason. Others, like the Trinity, come only through revelation.

He held that reason is capable of operating within faith; while the philosopher relies solely on reason, the theologian accepts faith as his starting point and then proceeds to conclusion through the use of reason.

- Through reason we could know the truth of things... His Proofs of God - "Summa theologica".

I understand, in order that I may believe.
Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*

- His genius was in systematization, and he systematized and buttressed Catholic thinking like no one before or since.
- A prolific writer, he produced more than 80 works, including *Summa contra Gentiles* (1261-64) and *Summa theologica* (1265-73).
- Wrote *Summa Theologiae*, ("Compendium or Totality of Theology")
- Most important theology text to come from the Scholastic period.
- *Summa Theologiae* presents doctrine in the scholastic way, as a series of questions and pro and con answers.
- The *Summa* consists of three parts
  - God as he is in himself
  - God as man’s end (and the way back to God)
  - Christ as man’s way to God
Questions to Consider

- Did Scholastics go too far in the direction of logic and knowledge at the expense of emotions and feeling?
- Do we understand the world through the lenses provided by our faith or do we understand our faith through the lenses of our knowledge and experience?
- Can we prove the existence of God?