FIDES ET RATIO: On the Relationship between Faith and Reason

John Paul II
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PROLOGUE

“Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human mind and heart a desire to know the truth--in a word, to know Himself--so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”

INTRODUCTION: "Know Thyself"

1. Human beings journey toward an ever-fuller engagement with the truth of the world and of themselves--the meaning of things and of personal existence. This universal and ever more pressing quest for meaning is already evident in the sacred writings, poetry, and philosophy of the ancient world, both East and West.

2. The Church shares in this struggle to arrive at truth as she exercises her responsibility to serve humanity by proclaiming the ultimate truth about human life as she received it: that Jesus Christ is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." Thus the community of believers moves toward the fullness of truth that will appear with God's final Revelation in eternity.

3. A most noble resource in this pursuit of truth and humanity is philosophy, which elicits questions and provides answers about the meaning of things and of life within the context of the cultural heritage of different peoples, East and West. An example of this interaction of philosophy and culture can be found in national and international legal systems.

4. Philosophy systematizes the fruits of inquiry: The journey toward truth begins in the wonder awakened by contemplation of creation and the destiny common to all human beings; to this, philosophy brings rigorous modes of thought and produces bodies of knowledge which contain a common core of logical, metaphysical, and ethical insights--implicit principles of right reason which are expressed variously by different schools or systems.

5. This encyclical is motivated by a desire to restore the help philosophy can give to the deeper understanding and communication of revealed truth. Modern philosophy’s preoccupations with human subjectivity, pragmatic interpretations of experimental data, and reason’s limitations, have undermined its capacity to investigate the truth of being and caused many people to lose confidence in arriving at definitive answers to the root questions about ultimate meaning. In the prevailing atmosphere of agnosticism, relativism, skepticism, and undifferentiated pluralism (eclecticism), everything is reduced to opinion.

6. Besides the need to remind bishops of their mission to bear witness to the truth, there is a further reason for reflect-
ing on the path that leads to true wisdom (a matter which is also of concern to theologians, philosophers, and all who are searching--especially the younger generation, now deprived of valid points of reference): As a sequel to *Veritatis Splendor*, it is desirable to concentrate on truth itself and its foundation in relation to faith in the hope of rescuing philosophy from its patently inadequate perspectives by recalling it to its original vocation and great responsibility of forming thought and culture at a time when the very possibility of discovering the real meaning of life is cast into doubt. Then humanity can commit itself with renewed courage, on the threshold of the Third Millennium, to implement the plan of salvation.

CHAPTER ONE:
The Revelation of God’s Wisdom

A. Jesus, Revealer of the Father

7. In order to perfect what the human mind can discover about the meaning of life, the Church makes known what she has received in faith from God, Who chose to reveal Himself through Christ, so as to bring all men to salvation.

8. In the Church’s long journey of understanding faith, the First Vatican Council, in *Dei Filius*, stressed the supernatural character of divine Revelation when it asserted, against the widespread rationalist critique of the time, that there is a knowledge peculiar to faith which surpasses the knowledge proper to reason.

9. According to *Dei Filius*, truths attained by philosophy and by Revelation are neither identical nor mutually exclusive: There is a twofold order of knowledge distinct both as to source (natural reason; divine faith assisted by grace, enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit) and as to object (sensible perception and experience; supernatural mysteries hidden in God).

10. The Second Vatican Council, in *Dei Verbum*, stressed the salvific character of Revelation wherein the deepest truth about God and human salvation is manifested to us in Jesus Christ through a dialectic of words spoken in the love of friendship, and historical deeds which manifest and confirm that teaching.

11. According to *Dei Verbum*, the truth about Christ is immersed in time, in history: He is sent as a human being to human beings, passes through life from conception and birth to death and resurrection, and leaves a Church which constantly progresses through the centuries to the fullness of divine truth. It is necessary to restate this forcefully: It is within time that the whole work of creation and salvation comes to light as a foretaste of the fulfillment of time which is to come.

12. God comes to us in the things we know best, the ordinary things of daily life. In the Incarnation we see the Eternal entering time, the Whole lying hidden in the part. The truth of Revelation about the source of life and the goal of history is not confined to a particular place or culture but is offered to everyone; in Christ, all have access to the Father. Seen in any other terms, the mystery of personal existence remains an insoluble riddle.

B. Reason before the Mystery
13. Because of the mysterious character of Revelation, our vision of God is always fragmentary and impaired by limited understanding. Only faith makes possible a coherent understanding of the mystery. This fundamental truth of Christianity shows that assent to the divine testimony—a fundamental decision which engages the whole person, intellect and will—is an obedient response to God which enables us to realize personal freedom to the full. There is no more important act in our lives because in the act of faith freedom reaches the certainty of truth that it presents, especially the sign of the Eucharist (which St. Thomas Aquinas and Pascal spoke of so eloquently).

14. The two Vatican Councils help us to consider the specific field which reason occupies between the mystery of God (which the mind can only receive in faith) and the mystery of human life (which faith helps to illuminate). For revelation impels reasoned inquiry to extend knowledge by ceaseless effort until we realize that we can go no further. As St. Anselm concluded (Proslogion) after years of effort, nothing greater than God can be conceived, but He is greater than all that can be conceived.

15. The revealed truth about Jesus is the ultimate possibility offered by God to enable all men to embrace the mystery of human life within the divine plan of love which began with creation, and so to take full and harmonious possession of their lives by overcoming the constrictions of a technocratic logic and following the path of truth. The truth about man is not far away; it lies deep within man himself, in his very mouth and heart (St. Augustine; Deuteronomy 30). The first conclusion of these considerations, then, is that both philosophy and theology are concerned with the ultimate purpose of human existence; both anticipate in their diverse but compatible ways the full and lasting joy of the contemplation of the Triune God which is reserved for those who believe in Him and seek Him with a sincere heart.

CHAPTER TWO:  
_Credo ut Intellegam_ [I Believe so that I May Understand]  

A. "Wisdom Knows All and Understands All" (Wis. 9:11)

16. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and the ancient Near Eastern cultures (Israel, but also Mesopotamia and Egypt) which speak through it, has made a distinctive contribution to the theory of knowledge in bringing out the profound and indissoluble unity between the knowledge of reason (observed realities and historical events) and the knowledge of faith (the workings of Providence in those realities and events). Thus does the wise man (Sir. 14:20-27) seek the truth.

17. Proverbs and Psalms show that in the unique relationship of human beings with God, reason and faith contain each other while each retains its own scope of action. Man's nobility lies in exploring the truth about God, the origin of all things, and in penetrating the mystery that is His glory.

18. By means of Revelation, the Chosen People understood that reason must respect three basic rules: the journey toward knowledge never
excises; it requires personal humility; God's transcendence needs to be recognized. Fools--those who reject those rules--fall far short of the full truth about themselves and the world.

19. The Book of Wisdom treats nature as a first stage of Revelation about God.

20. In brief, the Old Testament shows how faith liberates reason by allowing it to attain what it seeks to know: the true meaning of all things, especially of human existence.

B. "Acquire Wisdom, Acquire Understanding" (Prov. 4:5)

21. The man of the Old Testament discovered that the way to true knowledge about himself, other people, the world, and God--of all that is beautiful, true, and good--lies in a continual reaching out, an arduous exploration of God's mysterious designs.

22. St. Paul, in Romans, helps us to appreciate the deep insight of the Wisdom books within the context of the human condition: The ease with which man in the state of original innocence could come to know the power of God the Creator as the primal cause of all perceptible reality by means of rational reflection on all that He has created was thwarted by the original sin--the disobedience of a prideful autonomy which impaired the human capacity to know the truth by wounding reason and inclining us to falsehood. Now reasoning could be redeemed from weakness and distortion only by the saving event of Christ's coming.

23. In the New Testament (especially the Letters of St. Paul) we see how and why the human wisdom of this world is opposed by the radically new wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ, whose "foolish" death on the Cross overcomes the old weakness of reason--the wisdom of words--and "wisely" re-opens the way to universal truth. By reducing to nothing the things that are (I Cor.), the Word of Wisdom provides reason with a new strength to find the ultimate answer it seeks. The preaching of Christ crucified and risen is the reef beyond which faith and philosophy can go forth together upon the boundless ocean of truth.

CHAPTER THREE: Intellego ut Credam [I Understand so that I may Believe]

A. Journeying in the Search for Truth

24. Philosophy, along with literature and all the arts of creative intelligence, has recognized and articulated the universal human desire and urgent quest for God, which begins with reason's capacity to move beyond contingency toward the infinite. The Church has always treasured this intimate nostalgia for the "unknown God" whom St. Paul proclaimed in Athens (Acts 17:22-27); see also the Church's prayer for non-believers in the Liturgy of Good Friday.

25. The proper object of this universal desire is knowledge of real truth, not mere opinions about things: both theoretical truth about the objective reality of things, and practical truth that looks to the good to be performed as the path to happiness and perfection (reference to Veritatis Splendor). Human maturity is attained when a person is able to distin-
guish the true from the false, not by turning inward, but by opening to the transcendent.

26. Doubts occasioned by the experience of suffering and of apparently inexplicable facts, together with the absolute certainty of death as something inevitable, give rise to the most basic and unavoidable of all questions: What is the meaning and destiny of life? The death of Socrates, for example, gave to philosophy one of its most decisive orientations by posing the dramatic question of human immortality: Is there an afterlife or not?

27. Ever since then, philosophers have sought to discover and articulate one ultimate answer, a universal and final explanation, a certitude beyond all doubt, which can serve as a ground of all other partial truths, a supreme value which refers to nothing beyond itself and puts an end to further questioning. One encounters this search in personal "philosophies" of life as well as in the various systems and schools of thought.

B. The Different Faces of Human Truth

28. Man defined as "the one who seeks truth" can never ground his life on doubt, uncertainty, or deception; in spite of the natural limitations of reason, the constancy of the heart, and a tendency to flee from it out of fear of its demands, truth always influences human life, even if it is often obscured, distorted, and evaded.

29. Everyday life confirms the fact that men can arrive at the truth. The search for it is deeply rooted in human nature and presumes an initial confidence in the possibility of completing it: The intuition that an answer awaits us is what leads to asking the first question, both in the persistent quest for scientific explanations of phenomena and with respect to the fundamental or ultimate questions to which many men have attained substantially the same answers.

30. Truth is accessible through evidence and experimentation (both in everyday life and in scientific research), through exercise of the speculative powers of the intellect (in philosophy), and through religious traditions. Together, these modes of knowing enable everyone to develop his own comprehensive view of life as a guide to interpreting its meaning and regulating behavior.

31. The same human being who constantly seeks and tests truth is also the one who lives by belief: In human life many more truths are simply accepted than are acquired by personal verification. These beliefs result in part from the impossibility of examining every piece of information that comes to our notice, but they come primarily from the traditions into which everyone is born and which survive the normal process of critical inquiry as people grow and mature.

32. Belief is often richer than abstract or empirical knowledge because it involves not only a personal capacity to know, but also the deeper capacity to entrust oneself to others in an intimate, enduring relationship. It is in faithful self-giving that we find full certainty and security—the truth of the person. The martyrs are the most authentic witnesses to this truth which is born of a love that needs no additional arguments in order
to convince; neither suffering nor violent death could make them abandon the truth they discovered in their personal encounter with Christ.

33. In sum, the human search for truth can end only in reaching the Absolute, because it is ultimately the search for a Person to whom we can entrust ourselves in sincere friendship (n. 28: This theme, long developed by the Pope, is succinctly expressed in the General Audience of 19 Oct. 1983). Moving beyond simple belief, Christian Faith offers the possibility of reaching the goal because it immerses us in the order of Grace, wherein we can share in the Mystery of Christ and through it a true and coherent knowledge of the Triune God. All of this is impeded by the contemporary climate of suspicion and distrust, which ignores the ancient wisdom about friendship as the best context for philosophical inquiry.

34. The same God who establishes and guarantees the intelligibility and reasonableness of the natural order reveals Himself as the Father of Jesus Christ (n. 29: Galileo declared that faith and science can never be in contradiction because Sacred Scripture and the natural world proceed equally from the divine Word). This unity of natural and revealed truth is embodied in the Person of Christ (as we see in passages from Paul and John).

35. These broad considerations have prepared us to explore more directly the relationship between the two orders of knowledge, revealed truth and philosophy—first by examining the links between them in the course of history.

CHAPTER FOUR:
The Relationship between Faith and Reason

A. Important Moments in the Encounter of Faith and Reason

36. Because of errors about God which are endemic to cosmic religious myths and mystery cults, *St. Paul* and the first Christian evangelists—and later the Fathers of the Church as well—drew upon the Greek philosophers who had sought to cleanse from the natural knowledge of God the polytheism, idolatry, and superstition found in popular beliefs of the time. By searching for a rational foundation for their belief in the divinity, the ancient philosophers had brought to light for the first time the link between reason and religion.

37. *St. Irenaeus* and *Tertullian*, among early Christian thinkers, were also careful not to confuse authentic philosophy with a presumed higher knowledge reserved for the select few—a subordination of revealed truth to gnostic interpretations (unfortunately still widespread today among believers who lack a proper critical sense).

38. *St. Justin* and *St. Clement of Alexandria* pioneered this cautious discernment of the early Christians’ positive engagement with Greek philosophy for the purpose of defending and deepening faith in the risen Christ and leading their listeners to conversion of heart. Today’s Christian apologists continue to reject, as the Fathers did, a philosophical elitism that would impede equal access to the truth for all men and women, and they continue to embrace any philosophical paths that can prepare for the Revelation of Christ.
39. Another outstanding example of early Christian thinkers who made use of philosophy while distinguishing it from contemporary intellectual currents is Origen, who adopted Platonic arguments in countering attacks and constructing an early form of Christian theology—a term (rational discourse about God) which already signified the summit of philosophy for Aristotle. Now it came to mean reflections that express the true doctrine about God. In the minds of the first Christian theologians, Platonic thought began to undergo significant changes.

40. The Christianizing of neo-Platonic thought was led by the Cappadocian Fathers (St. Basil and the two Gregories), Dionysius the Areopagite, and especially St. Augustine, who found the philosophers he had studied powerless to lead him to the whole truth. After his conversion, he went on to produce the first great synthesis of philosophy and theology that was to sustain the West for many centuries, and to presage future developments in several philosophical currents.

41. Although the Eastern and Western Fathers engaged the philosophical schools differently, they showed the same critical consciousness in confronting the relationship between faith and reason by recognizing both points of convergence and of divergence. Because they were living the Faith intensely, they succeeded in completely disclosing what had been only preliminary and implicit in ancient thought, opening the way out of myth onto the higher ground of transcendent being. Much more than an adversarial meeting of cultures, this was a convergent meeting of culture and Creator in the depths of the human soul whereby reason was enabled to attain the supreme good and ultimate truth in the Person of the Word made flesh.

42. In Scholastic theology, the role of philosophically trained reason became even more conspicuous, and the fundamental harmony between the knowledge of faith and philosophical knowledge was again confirmed. For St. Anselm, the priority of faith does not compete with reason’s function of finding meaning and explanations that enable everyone to reach a certain understanding of the contents of faith. Spurred by the desire for truth, the more the intellect attains it, the more it is fired with love for what it knows and confidence that it can reach the end of its quest.

B. The Enduring Originality of the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas

43. With good reason, the Magisterium of the Church has consistently proposed the Common Doctor as preeminent master of thought and model of the right way to do theology. Recovering the treasures of ancient philosophy—above all, Aristotle—and engaging the leading Arab and Jewish commentators in fruitful dialogue, St. Thomas traced out a new path for philosophy and universal culture in which nature is an ally in penetrating Revelation. As in the harmonious relation between nature and grace, so, for Thomas, faith builds upon and perfects reason, freeing it from the limitations deriving from sin. Plumbing the depths of the reasonableness of faith, he found the way to reconcile the secularity of the world with the inexora-
ble demands of the Gospel (citing Pope Paul VI).

44. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, *St. Thomas* showed how the complementary philosophical wisdom of intellect and theological wisdom of Revelation are brought to maturity by the Gift of Wisdom. By way of co-naturality, this process recognizes the basis in faith of truth’s objectivity and it enabled this passionate apostle of truth to perfect a realist philosophy of “what is” which presupposes faith and arrives at right judgment of divine realities.

C. The Drama of the Separation of Faith and Reason

45. When the first universities brought theology into a more intimate contact with other branches of learning, *St. Albert* and *St. Thomas* recognized both the organic link and the legitimate distinction between theology and the secular disciplines as autonomous but mutually reinforcing fields of research; in the later Middle Ages, however, an increasing separation between them led to a division into exaggerated rationalism independent of faith and meant to replace it altogether, and an exaggerated fideism which mistrusted reason even to the point of denying rationality.

46. In the subsequent development of Western philosophy, strong currents opposed to Christian Revelation arose from these radical positions and reached their apogee in the nineteenth century: *idealism* transformed the contents of faith into dialectical structures fully accessible to reason; *atheistic humanism* replaced faith, which it regarded as alienating to the human spirit, with new socio-political religions and the disastrous totalitarian experiments they engendered; *positivism*, beguiled by technological progress, succumbed to the temptation of a quasi-divine power over nature and man, rejecting at the same time metaphysical and moral criteria; *nihilism*, seeing everything as fleeting and provisional, rejected the possibility of attaining permanent truths and forming lasting commitments, and offered in their place immediate sensual gratification and ephemeral experiences which still attract many of our contemporaries.

47. Recent cultural shifts have tended to marginalize philosophy and reduce it from universal wisdom and learning in quest of life’s meaning and ultimate goal in the contemplation of truth, to one among many fields of knowing directed by subjective and utilitarian motives to the pursuit of pleasure or power. Twenty years ago (in *Redemptor Hominis*) the drama of present-day human existence was shown to contain a danger that the very works of human genius--of intellect and will--would turn against man and burden him with fear of new forms of servitude.

48. While the history of philosophy reveals a growing separation between faith and reason, on closer scrutiny we also find in it seminal insights which can lead to the discovery of truth if pursued by a rightly tuned mind and heart--for example, analyses of personhood, freedom, time, perception and experience, especially the experience of death. When faith and reason are deprived of each other they take futile sidetracks: reason misses the newness and radicality of being; faith risks withering into myth and superstition.
“This is why I make this strong and insistent appeal...that faith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy. The *parrhesia* [bold-ness] of faith must be matched by the boldness of reason.”

CHAPTER FIVE:
The Magisterium’s Interventions in Philosophical Matters

A. The Magisterium’s Discernment as *Diakonia* of the Truth

49. Although history shows that philosophy has taken wrong turns and fallen into error, the Church respects its autonomy because of its natural capacity to arrive at truth and adopts no particular philosophy as her own. She does, however, have a duty to intervene clearly and forcefully when philosophical errors threaten the right understanding of Revelation and confuse the simple faith of God’s people by sowing bad seed.

50. Catholic bishops witness to the truth by fulfilling a humble but tenacious service in favor of *recta ratio* (which every philosopher should appreciate) by: 1) judging whether the tenets of various philosophical schools are compatible with theological inquiry into the word of God; 2) indicating pre-suppositions and conclusions that are incompatible with revealed truth.

51. Keeping in mind the unity of truth and the inherent incapacity of philosophy to achieve it totally, these Magisterial interventions are intended to stimulate philosophical inquiry, which includes self-criticism and correction of errors. Today, as ever more complex philosophical systems proliferate, this discernment in light of faith is a daunting, but urgent task.

52. While the Church has often expressed her mind with regard to particular philosophical teachings, she has found it necessary to do so more frequently since the mid nineteenth century because some Catholic attempts to counter various streams of modern thought themselves became erroneous and required censure: 1) Fideism and radical traditionalism distrusted the natural capacity of reason; 2) Rationalism and ontologism attributed to reason a knowledge which only faith can confer. The positive elements of this debate remain in Vatican I’s dogmatic constitution, *Dei Filius*, as a valuable reference point for correct and coherent Christian thinking.

53. In expressing its concern with the need for philosophical knowledge in understanding the Faith, that Council emphasized both the distinction between the natural and the more transcendent revealed knowledge of God (against rationalism) and their unity and inseparability (against fideism).

54. Twentieth-century popes have fruitfully revisited this theme on a number of occasions: St. Pius X (on the rationalist basis of Modernism); Pius XI (on the need to understand evolutionism, existentialism, and historicism so as to rightly diagnose their errors and discover what truth may be in them); John Paul II (on Marxist elements in liberation theology).
55. Today, the rationalism and fideism of former times reappear in certain philosophical and theological inclinations which are so widespread as to have become the common mind: 1) A deep-seated distrust of reason is evident in a retreat from metaphysics and a reduction of philosophy to the simple interpretation of facts; 2) A poor grounding in philosophy leads some theologians to accept commonplace opinions uncritically (n. 72 cites relevant passages from *Dei Filius*), others (“biblicists”) to exclude Sacred Tradition and the ecclesiastical Magisterium from the study of Revelation, and others to accept hermeneutical approaches to Sacred Scripture without carefully evaluating their philosophical underpinnings; 3) Scant consideration is given to speculative theology; and 4) Disdain for classical philosophy leads to a neglect of the tradition and abandonment of its terminology.

56. Given a widespread distrust of universal and absolute statements—as if truth were born of consensus—"I cannot but encourage philosophers...to trust in the power of human reason and not to set themselves goals that are too modest...: it is necessary not to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search. It is faith that stirs reason...willingly to run risks.... Faith thus becomes the convinced and convincing advocate of reason."

B. The Church’s Interest in Philosophy

57. Besides pointing out philosophical errors, the Church also indicates particular paths to genuine renewal of philosophical inquiry. Still the best example of this is Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris* (1879)—the only papal encyclical devoted entirely to philosophy. Inspired by the teachings of Vatican I, Pope Leo insisted that Thomistic philosophy is the best way to recover the practice of philosophy consistent with the Faith.

58. This revival of Thomistic philosophy opened the riches of medieval thought and brought into existence Thomistic schools which greatly increased knowledge of the Angelic Doctor’s works and introduced them into philosophical and theological discussions of the day. The Second Vatican Council was much indebted to the leading neo-Thomists of the twentieth century.

59. Other Catholic philosophers have also contributed to the great tradition of Christian thought that unites faith and reason by producing influential studies in epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and phenomenological method.

60. One finds in Vatican II a rich and fruitful teaching concerning philosophy: 1) Part I, Chapter 1 of *Gaudium et Spes* offers deep insights into philosophical anthropology by emphasizing the value of the free human person created in the image of God, and identifying the philosophical flaws in atheism. (That chapter has served as the constant reference point of John Paul II’s teaching: “...only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light... Christ, the new Adam, ...fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling”); 2) *Optatam Totius* spoke to the need for solid philosophical formation in seminaries and in Christian education as a whole—a recommendation developed by subse-
quent magisterial documents (listed in n. 84).

61. Magisterial interventions have been needed from time to time because directives have not been followed in many Catholic faculties, with resulting impoverishment of Scholastic philosophy and even of philosophy itself. “I cannot fail to note with surprise and displeasure that this lack of interest in the study of philosophy is shared by not a few theologians.” This disenchantment with philosophy has occurred because: 1) of the same distrust of reason found in contemporary philosophy; 2) greater emphasis has been placed on human sciences than on philosophy; 3) inculcation of the Faith, especially in the young Churches, has neglected integration of local traditions with the universal philosophical tradition in proclaiming the Gospel.

62. Let it be clear once again that the study of philosophy is fundamental and indispensable to theology and priestly formation. The wisdom of this arrangement of studies has been confirmed by the experience of seven centuries, while its dismantling has lately created serious gaps in theological research and priestly formation. “I trust most sincerely that these difficulties will be overcome by an intelligent philosophical and theological formation, which must never be lacking in the Church.”

63. This encyclical’s urgent reminder of the Church’s intense interest in promoting philosophy and its harmonious bond with theology sets forth principles and criteria which are necessary for the restoration of that bond and the discernment of links which theology might suitably forge with different philosophical systems.

CHAPTER SIX: The Interaction between Philosophy and Theology

A. The Knowledge of Faith and the Demands of Philosophical Reason

64. Philosophy is necessary in the performance of certain theological procedures and tasks both in general and with respect to specific matters that call for the attention of theologians today.

65. First, philosophy contributes to the correct *auditus fidei* by explaining the meaning of concepts and terms used in the pursuit of a coherent understanding and interpretation of Scripture, Tradition, the Magisterium, and the teachings of the great masters of theology.

66. Second, philosophy contributes to the correct *intellectus fidei* by grasping the logical and conceptual structure of propositions the Church teaches and by illuminating their salvific meaning. In this way, the believer acquires a natural, consistent, and true knowledge of all the objects of divine Revelation. In particular, philosophy helps *dogmatic theology* articulate truths about the one and triune God, His creative activity and relation to man, and the identity of Jesus Christ.

67. *Fundamental theology* makes use of philosophy (the natural knowledge of God) in pursuing its specific concern to show the credibility of the revealed mysteries and the rational justification for accepting them and making the corresponding act of faith.
68. Similarly, *moral theology* depends upon philosophical concepts and arguments to articulate the moral law, conscience, freedom, responsibility, and guilt, and then to apply the general principles of Christian conduct and corresponding precepts to particular circumstances of individual and social life.

69. To contemporary objections that theology should rely less on philosophy and more on history and social science within particular cultural traditions, one must respond that the helpfulness of these other kinds of human knowledge makes it all the more necessary to have recourse to the Church’s philosophical heritage, which integrates all the different cultures into a universal framework. “What I wish to emphasize is the duty to go beyond the particular and concrete, lest the prime task of demonstrating the universality of faith’s content be abandoned.... It is not an array of human opinions but truth alone which can be of help to theology.”

70. From the beginning, the Church has been bringing her message to all the peoples of the world. Once the Gentiles were transformed by the Faith, the walls separating their different cultures collapsed. God’s promise was extended beyond one People to all the nations called by Christ into the family of God’s children. Thus did the encounter of faith with different cultures create something new.

71. Christians proclaim the unchanging truth about God in varied cultural contexts. In the experience of the first Pentecost (Acts 2: 7-11)--which has been repeated over and over--we see that culture itself has an intrinsic capacity to receive the Gospel Revelation—not to be diminished thereby, but to bring out what is implicit in it so that it becomes explicit in the light of the truth. In-deed, since cultures are dynamic, they survive and flourish only if they are open to such development. No one culture can be the ultimate criterion of revealed truth; every culture finds in that truth a message of liberation from the disorders caused by sin.

72. The chief task of inculturation today is to enrich Christian thought by drawing from the ancient heritage of Eastern religious and philosophical traditions those elements that are compatible with the Faith. These traditions include the cultures of Asia and Africa, especially those of India, where a deep spiritual impulse and quest for liberation is present. In this task, three criteria must be employed: 1) the human spirit is universal; 2) the Church cannot abandon what the providential plan of God originally brought to her from Greco-Latin thought; 3) particular cultural traditions do not affirm themselves by opposing other traditions.

73. The Word of God is illuminated and philosophy enriched through a circular relationship between them that begins with the historical revelation of the Word and ends with a constantly increasing understanding of it. As reason is stirred to explore paths it could never have discovered by itself, “what matters most is that the believer’s reason use its powers of reflection in the search for truth which moves from the Word of God towards a better understanding of it.”

74. Significant examples of the fruitfulness of this engagement of philosophi-
cal inquiry with the data of faith include
the great Christian theologian-
philosophers among Church Fathers
(St. Gregory Nazianzus, St. Augustine),
Medieval Doctors (Sts. Anselm,
Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas), and
more recent thinkers in the West (New-
man, Rosmini, Maritain, Gilson, Stein)
and in the East (Solovyov, Florensky,
Chaadaev, Los-sky). Without endorsing
every aspect of their thought, attending
to these masters of the spiritual journey
can give momentum to the search for
truth and application of its results to the
service of humanity. “It is to be hoped
that now and in the future there will
be those who continue to cultivate
this great philosophical and theo-
logical tradition for the good of both
the Church and humanity.”

B. Different Stances of Philosophy

75. First stance: Philosophy as com-
pletely independent of divine Revelation.
As an autonomous but not self-sufficient
enterprise which obeys its own rules
and leads to universally valid truths, phi-
losophy is, on the one hand, handi-
capped by the inherent weakness of
human reason, and, on the other hand,
open to a deeper supernatural knowl-
edge of truth. Since grace does not de-
stroy nature, but brings it to perfection,
were philosophy to reject Revelation, it
would only do itself damage.

76. Second stance: Christian philoso-
phy--a dynamic union of reason and
faith that permits developments in phi-
losophy which could not occur without
the contribution of faith. In the subjec-
tive aspect of Christian philosophy, faith
purifies reason and liberates it from the
presumption that often spoils the work of
philosophers. Its objective aspect con-
tains truths proposed by Revelation that,
although accessible to reason, are very
likely to be undiscovered by it on its
own. For example: God as free, per-
sonal, and creative; sin, and especially
the original sin; the dignity, equality, and
freedom of the human person. Once ac-
cepted, these truths enhance the scope
of reason and extend its research. Even
if many recent thinkers have abandoned
Christian orthodoxy, a good part of
modern philosophy would not exist with-
out the stimulus of Revelation.

77. Third stance: Philosophy as ancil-
lary to theology. As a partner in dia-
logue, philosophy educates theologians
in concept and argument and confirms
the intelligibility and universality of their
conclusions. From the time of the
Church Fathers, the two autonomous
sciences have formed a necessary link,
working together under the discerning
authority of the Magisterium.

78. These reflections make it clear why
the Magisterium has repeatedly ac-
claimed St. Thomas Aquinas as the au-
thentic guide and model for theological
studies and for all who seek the truth.
“In his thinking, the demands of rea-
son and the power of faith found the
most elevated synthesis ever at-
tained by human thought, for he
could defend the radical newness in-
troduced by Revelation without ever
demeaning the venture proper to rea-
son.”

79. Christian Revelation is the true
point of encounter between philosophy
and theology. As truth can only be one,
Revelation cannot debase reason, nor
can reason conflict with Revelation. “It
is to be hoped therefore that theolo-
gians and philosophers will let themselves be guided by the authority of truth alone so that there will emerge a philosophy consonant with the Word of God.” Here may meet Christian faith and human cultures, believers and non-believers. And believers may see that faith grows deeper when wedded to thought. As St. Augustine says, “If faith does not think, it is nothing... If there is no assent,...one does not really believe.” The final chapter will point out some requirements that the Word of God makes of philosophy today because the proliferation and fragmentation of knowledge and the wide array of theories claiming to interpret human life in the world can otherwise lead to ambiguous and even fruitless thinking.

82. A second requirement is analytical: that philosophy help explore the riches found in the Word of God (concerning, in particular, the being of Christ and the judgments of moral conscience) by verifying the human capacity to attain true, even if imperfect, knowledge of objective reality (what the Scholastic Doctors called *adaequatio rei et intellectus*).

83. The third and most urgent requirement of philosophy is that it fulfill its metaphysical capacity to transcend empirical data so as to reach the absolute truth. In the case of man, metaphysics makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in the truth of human being. At the end of this millennium, philosophy’s great challenge is to move from phenomenon to foundation. It cannot stop at sense experience. Speculative thinking must penetrate the spiritual core of human being. “Therefore, a philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation in the understanding of Revelation.” A theology without this metaphysical horizon could not move beyond analysis of religious experiences. “If I insist so strongly on the metaphysical element, it is because I am convinced that it is the path to be taken in order to move beyond the crisis pervading large sectors of philosophy at the moment, and thus to correct certain mistaken modes of behavior now widespread in our society.”

CHAPTER SEVEN:
Current Requirements and Tasks

A. The Indispensable Requirements of the Word of God

80. Sacred Scripture contains the essential truth about God, man, and the created world. The “philosophy” found therein presents the meaning of life in the context of the Incarnation: from the moral evil produced by the disordered exercise of human freedom to the perfect realization of human existence in the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

81. As it provides a unifying explanation of everything people do in this world, the Word of God also invites philosophy to search for the natural foundation of meaning. By recovering its sapiential dimension--which is the first requirement of a philosophy consonant with Revelation--philosophy will be stimulated to conform to its proper nature and take its place among the fields of learning as the ultimate framework that unifies human knowledge and action. This search for ultimate meaning is all the more urgent
84. The present crisis of confidence in the powers of reason shows the importance of metaphysics for the hermeneutic and linguistic instruments we use in understanding the Faith. To stop at how reality is expressed conceptually would obscure the contents of faith and even deny their universal validity. The divine Word in human language would be unable to say anything about God; there would be no Revelation, but only human notions about God.

85. These three requirements seem daunting to many, which is precisely why it is necessary to reaffirm so strongly that human beings can achieve knowledge which is unified and organic. Since the current segmentation and fragmentation of knowledge prevents this interior unity, the Church’s pastors are obliged to encourage more philosophers and theologians to proceed on the basis of these postulates and in continuity with the Christian tradition of thought which mankind has inherited since ancient times. Precisely by being rooted in this great cultural heritage can new and constructive modes of thinking be developed in philosophy and theology.

86. This insistence on continuity is intended to avert dangerous currents of thought which are prevalent today: 1) Eclecticism—the rhetorical manipulation of ideas and terms drawn from different philosophical systems and historical contexts without concern for their internal coherence—makes it impossible to distinguish true from erroneous elements of a given doctrine.

87. 2) Historicism (theological Modernism)—the deterministic restriction of truth to its appropriateness in specific historical and cultural contexts—replaces the enduring validity of truth with contemporary relevance as the guiding criterion of thought by relying on the most recent opinions and terms and rejecting earlier ones as outmoded and meaningless.

88. 3) Scientism (Neo-Positivism)—the restriction of valid knowledge to simple facticity—dismisses religious, theological, metaphysical, ethical, and aesthetic knowledge (“values”) as irrational or imaginary fantasies issuing from emotion or subjective preference. This fashionable—even boundless—outlook has been nourished in recent times by scientific and technological triumphs. It leads to the impoverishment of thought and the false conclusion that whatever is technically possible is therefore morally admissible.

89. 4) Pragmatism—the replacement of theoretical principles by practical devices such as majority vote in arriving at choices or judgments—takes the great ethical dilemmas concerning life and death, suffering and sacrifice, away from persons and gives moral decision-making to impersonal institutional agencies.

90. These positions eventually end in: 5) Nihilism—the denial of all foundations and the negation of all objective truth—which shows that rejecting the meaningfulness of being inevitably destroys the intellectual ground of human dignity, erases the human likeness to God, and leads to a destructive will to power or to a solitude without hope. “Once the truth is denied to human beings, it is pure illusion to try to set them free. Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery.” (Redemptor Hominis [12] is cited in a note.)
91. Although the present state of philosophy also includes notable advances in logic as well as philosophy of language, of knowledge, of nature, and of man, our “postmodern” age of irrationalism is chiefly characterized by a principle of immanence that calls into question even the most indisputable claims to truth and demands that reason be absolutely self-grounded. While the emergence of complex new factors has created an ambiguous situation which still lacks consensus, one thing is certain: the claim that certainly is no longer possible, that we must now live with a total absence of meaning in a provisional and ephemeral world, also destroys the certitude of faith. “Now, at the end of this century, one of our greatest threats is the temptation to despair.” Yet, even as the terrible experience of evil that marks our age has ensured the collapse of rationalist optimism, an illusion still persists that technological progress somehow puts us in charge of our own destiny.

B. Current Tasks for Theology

92. The ability to know the universally valid truth permits sincere and authentic dialogue aimed at overcoming divisions among persons. In theology (always assisted by philosophy) this call to unity in the truth proceeds in light of a twofold task: 1) to renew theological methods for a more effective service of evangelization (as called for by Vatican II); 2) to know and express once again the revealed truth about God and His plan of salvation in Jesus Christ (the mysterium Christi), always under the direction of the Holy Spirit (a relevant passage from Dominum et Vivificantem is cited in a note).

93. The chief purpose of theology is to understand God’s self-revelation in selfless love--His kenosis [self-emptying]--so as to better contemplate the mysteries of the Faith set forth in the Creed. This requires (again with the aid of philosophy) a careful analysis of the texts of Scripture and Tradition and the solution of several problems that have recently emerged.

94. An initial problem is the relation between the meaning of the texts (God’s language embodied within the limits of human discourse) and the truth they communicate: The events narrated have a meaning in and for the history of salvation which has been fully elaborated in the Church’s age-old reading of these texts.

95. A second problem is how to reconcile the unchanging and universal truth of revealed and dogmatic formulas with their historical and cultural contexts so as to move beyond the contingent circumstances in which the texts developed to the truth they express which transcends those circumstances: The truth is known in history, but it reaches beyond history. Here the snares of historicism can be avoided by a hermeneutic open to metaphysics.

96. A third problem, also hermeneutical, concerns the enduring value of the conceptual language used in Conciliar definitions (a note cites a passage from Pius XII’s Humani Generis). The history of thought (both theological and philosophical) shows that certain basic concepts that were developed across a range of cultures do retain universal
epistemological value and thus the truth of the propositions they express.

97. The demanding task of understanding the Faith (intellectus fidei) proceeds within the Christian metaphysical tradition, which is strong and enduring, capable of resisting the temptation of understanding revealed truths in purely functional terms. In dogmatic theology, for example, the philosophy of being withstands a reductive, superficial approach (a Christology “from below;” an ecclesiology modeled on civil society).

98. The fundamental role of truth also demands in moral theology careful inquiry rooted in the Word of God and linked organically to the struggle for Christian holiness and practice of the virtues. This is the way to overcome the contemporary disorientation of conscience previously treated in Veritatis Splendor, when an individualist ethic makes the judgment of conscience independent of the universal good.

99. The reciprocal relation between theological and philosophical disciplines is especially important in catechesis, which proclaims the Faith and forms persons in its practice according to the mind of the Church. Unless the mystery of the living God is communicated by Christian doctrine in all its integrity, the unique bond between teaching the Faith and living it is unattainable.

CONCLUSION

100. In this systematic study of the ways faith and reason interact, the emphasis has been on the importance of philosophy (both for general cultural development and for understanding the Faith), its influence on theology, and its baneful consequences when it neglects or rejects Revelation.

101. The encounter between philosophy and theology will contribute even more to human progress than it has in the past if each discipline recovers its true relationship to the other. By opening itself to the communal or ecclesial tradition of the People of God within the unity of faith, theology can show radically new vistas to reason when it opens itself to divine Revelation.

102. The Church defends human dignity and proclaims the Gospel while insisting on the importance and the true range of philosophical thought. “There is today no more urgent preparation for the performance of these tasks than this: to lead people to discover both their capacity to know the truth and their yearning for the ultimate and definitive meaning of life.... Through the mediation of a philosophy which is also true wisdom, people today will come to realize that their humanity is all the more affirmed the more they entrust themselves to the Gospel and open themselves to Christ.”

103. When philosophy is in harmony with faith it also contributes to the evangelization of culture--so urgent now in the face of challenges that lie ahead in the new millennium. “I have unstintingly recalled the pressing need for a new evangelization; and I appeal now to philosophers to explore more comprehensively the dimensions of the true, the good, and the beautiful to which the Word of God gives access.”
104. Collaborating with other Christians, non-Christians, and all who hold dear the renewal of humanity, the Church seeks through dialogue to move the world closer to the truth of Christ, the definitive answer to the pressing issues facing humanity today. This goal requires the attentive and competent commitment of believing philosophers who can help to make divine Revelation more comprehensible and appealing to non-believers.

105. In conclusion, theologians are thanked for their service of the Church and urged to pay more attention to the philosophical implications of the Word of God, especially its metaphysical dimension, so as to engage more fully the philosophical tradition and contemporary thought while at the same time (following the advice of St. Bonaventure) cultivating the virtues essential to interior life. Those who form future priests are encouraged to prepare themselves well to discharge their grave obligation to provide those who will communicate the truths of the Faith with the necessary philosophical preparation and to observe the Council’s directives and subsequent legislation.

106. Philosophers and teachers of philosophy, mindful of the Church’s appreciation and respect for their work, are asked to be courageous in recovering the authentic wisdom proper to philosophical inquiry, ever striving for truth and goodness in the service of humanity and allowing the Word of God to frame their thought and discussion. Scientists are encouraged to conduct their ongoing research and its technological applications without abandoning the sapiental horizon within which admirable scientific achievements are wedded to the permanent metaphysical and ethical truths that point beyond the finite world.

107. Finally, everyone needs to consider more fully the human search for truth and meaning that can be found only by choosing to dwell in the shadow of Wisdom. In this way the temptation to assume absolute mastery of one’s destiny will be overcome, and the freedom to realize one’s true self-interest will be understood as a response to the call to know and love God.

108. The life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Seat of Wisdom, is a true parable that illuminates all of these reflections. She invites philosophers to contemplate the deep harmony between their vocation and hers—to enable the Word of God to come among us for a fruitful and creative understanding of the Faith. To philosophari in Maria [philosophize with Mary], who is the lucid image of true philosophy, “the table at which faith sits in thought,” is the way to enable all philosophical inquiries to rise to their highest expression. “May Mary, Seat of Wisdom, be a sure haven for all who devote their lives to the search for wisdom. May their journey into wisdom, sure and final goal of all true knowing, be freed of every hindrance by the intercession of the one who, in giving birth to the Truth and treasuring it in her heart, has shared it forever with all the world.”

[paraphrase by John A. Gueguen]