

Lecture 28- The Queen of the Sciences: Scholastic Theology

History is the most difficult of all the belles lettres, for it must be true.
Garrett Mattingly

Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true...Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.
Ecclesiastes 12: 9, 12b

Assigned Reading

The Story of Christianity—Chapter 31, pp. 311-323

Key Terms

Scholasticism, dialectical method

Objectives

- Name the important theologians from the scholastic period and identify their most important written works
- Critique the strengths and weaknesses of scholasticism

Class Prayer

“My God, I pray that I may so know you and love you that I may rejoice in you. And if I may not do so fully in this life let me go steadily on to the day when I come to that fullness...Let me receive that which you promised through your truth, that my joy may be full. Amen.”
Anselm

The Queen of the Sciences: Scholastic Theology**I. Scholasticism****A. The role of philosophy**

1. To demonstrate the reasonableness of faith; to organize the Christian doctrines
2. The reappearance of Aristotle

B. Rise of the universities**C. Dialectical method**

Alister McGrath: “Scholasticism is...the medieval movement, flourishing in the period 1200-1500, which placed emphasis upon the rational justification of religious belief, and the systematic presentation of those beliefs.”

Christian Theology, p. 33

II. Anselm (1033-1109)**A. Evidences: “I believe in order to know.” (Proslogion)**

1. Arguments from the creation to the creator (cosmological)
2. Argument from thought to God (ontological)— “That than which nothing greater can be conceived.”

Mortimer Adler, chairman of the board of editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica and author of fifty books: “In 1979 when I wrote *How to Think About God*, I was not yet a Christian. I wrote that book as a pagan for pagans...[For fifty years], I had written lecture after lecture trying to do better [than Aquinas] as a pagan philosophical theologian. In that fifty years, I had finally learned how to turn St. Anselm’s so-called

ontological argument from being an invalid argument for God's existence into an illuminating way of coming to understand what God is like and unlike." Kelly James Clark, ed. *Philosophers Who Believe*, p. 312)

B. Atonement: *Cur Deus Homo?*

B. B. Warfield: Anselm gave the doctrine of the atonement "its first really fruitful treatment, and laid down for all time the general lines on which the atonement must be conceived, if it is thought of as a work of deliverance from the penalty of sin." *Modern Theories of the Atonement*," p. 284

III. Abelard (1079-1142)

A. Abelard and Heloise (*History of Calamities*)

B. Theology: "By doubting we come to questioning, and by questioning we perceive the truth." (*Sic et Non*)

"The first comprehensive exposition of theology as a science rather than as a meditation; it prised theology away from authority and exposed it to the scrutiny of reason."

Leff, quoted in *Volz*, p. 112

IV. Peter Lombard (1100-1160)

A. Four Books of the Sentences: four divisions or books—(1) God, (2) Creation and Old Testament, (3) Salvation through Christ, and (4) Sacraments and Last Things

B. Calvin's view of Peter Lombard: "...when Augustine says anything clearly, Lombard obscures it, and if there was anything slightly contaminated in Augustine, he corrupts it." *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3, 11, 15

V. Bonaventure (1217-74)

A. Franciscan

B. Retracing the Arts to Theology

VI. Thomas Aquinas (1224-74)

VII. Scholasticism: good or bad?

A. Theology became "the queen of the sciences"

"We usually regard [scholasticism] negatively and forget that it achieved a unified summary of all the world's knowledge under a theological perspective."

Aland, p. 335

B. Theology became academic and abstract

Scholasticism is "probably one of the most despised intellectual movements in human history." Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 32

C. Theology was adulterated by Aristotle

William in *The Name of the Rose*: "Why did this one [book, i. e. The Second Book of Aristotle] fill you with such fear?" Answer: "Because it was by the Philosopher [=Aristotle]. Every book by that man has destroyed a part of the learning that Christianity had accumulated over the centuries. The fathers had said everything that needed to be known about the power of the Word, but then Boethius had only to gloss the Philosopher and the divine mystery of the Word was transformed into a human parody of categories and syllogism. The book of Genesis says what has to be known about the composition of the cosmos, but it sufficed to rediscover the Physics of the Philosopher to have the universe reconceived in terms of dull and slimy matter, and the Arab Averroës almost convinced everyone of the eternity of the world. We knew everything about the divine names, and the Dominican buried by Abo—seduced by the philosopher—renamed them, following the proud paths of natural reason. And so the cosmos, which for the Areopagite revealed itself to those who knew how to look up at the luminous cascade of the exemplary first cause, has become a preserve of terrestrial evidence for which they refer to an abstract agent. Before, we used to look to heaven, deigning only a frowning glance at the mire of matter; now we look at the earth, and we

believe in the heavens because of earthly testimony. Every word of the Philosopher, by whom now even saints and prophets swear, has overturned the image of the world. But he had not succeeded in overturning the image of God. If this book were to become...had become an object for open interpretation, we would have crossed the last boundary.” (pp. 72-73)

D. Theology benefited greatly from scholasticism (“*Letter to Sissy: On Scholasticism*” by Andrew Southwell)

For Further Study

The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm

Now a Penguin classic.

Read Andrew Southwell’s “Letter to Sissy: On Scholasticism.” Do you agree? Discuss your answers with your mentor.