

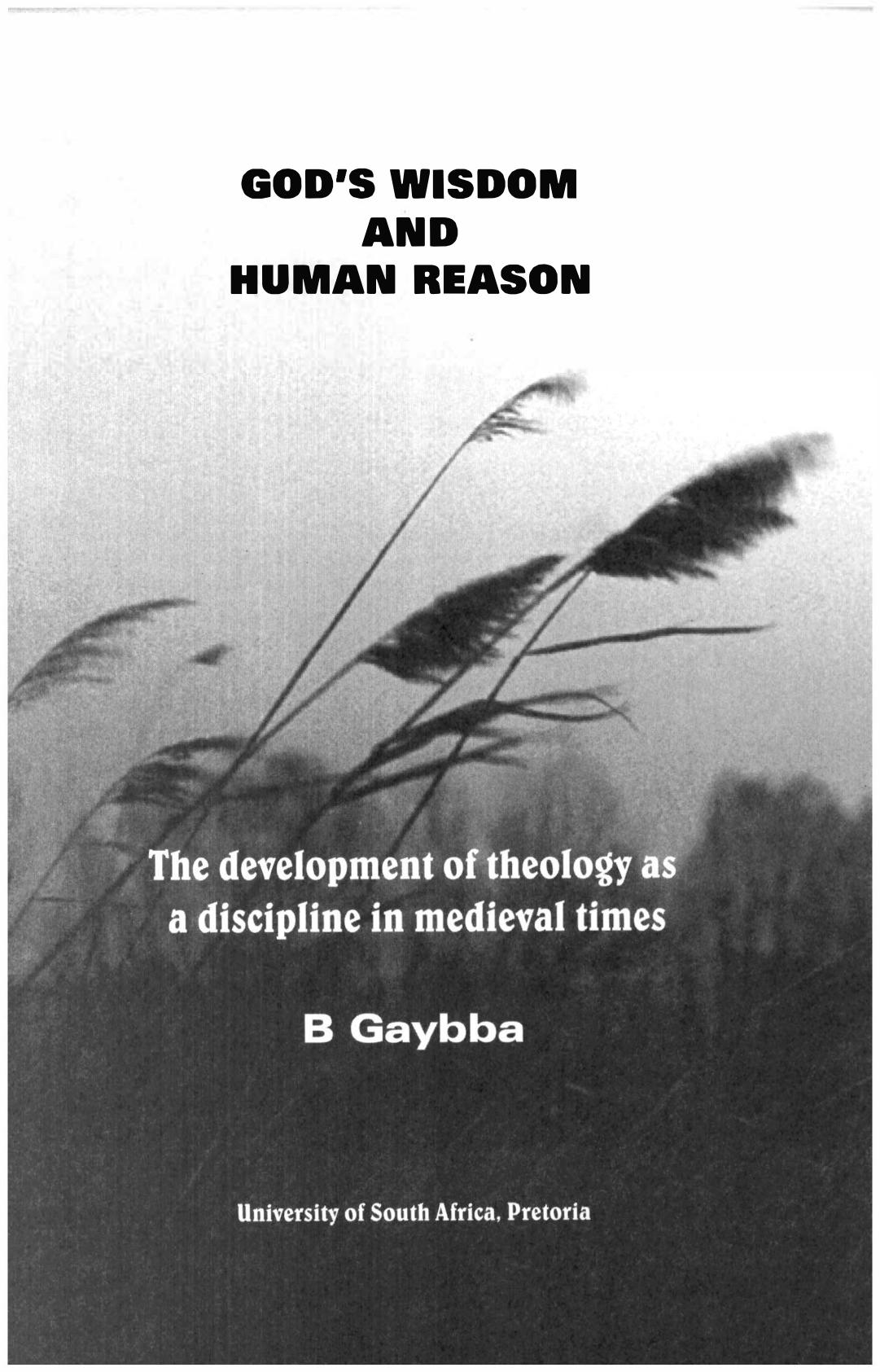
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GOD'S WISDOM AND HUMAN REASON



**The development of theology as
a discipline in medieval times**

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1

Introduction

The present work is intended as an introduction to the main aspects of the development of theology as a discipline in medieval times. Although theology was to become a recognisable academic discipline only in the twelfth century, nevertheless the beginnings of the movement towards its becoming such can be traced back to Carolingian renaissance – which is why our story begins there.

Moreover, in becoming an academic discipline it took on an intellectual objectivity and subjected itself to the rigours of rational discourse that meant abandoning the more traditional patristic approach, one that flowered into what has come to be known as monastic theology and which was doomed to be displaced soon after its zenith by what has come to be known as scholastic theology. The difference between the two was the difference between a way of theologising that put a premium on symbolism, spiritual experience and – above all – love as the route to understanding, over against one that concentrated on the literal, the conceptual and – above all – rational argumentation as the route to understanding. However, it would be wrong to imagine that the rationally oriented scholastic form of theology disregarded the importance of symbolism, spiritual experience and love as routes to understanding. The importance of these factors was recognised – but for the individual believer's own faith life. The factors themselves were regarded by scholastic theology as being too subjective to be appealed to in theological argumentation. Hence the central section of our exposition of the rise of

theology as an academic discipline will be sandwiched in between two sections in which the importance of love for understanding was recognised.

In the first such section, the recognition of love's ability to illuminate is at the centre of monastic theology's way of doing theology. In the second and closing section it has been relegated to an area of theology known as 'the Gifts of the Holy Spirit'. In this latter section, therefore, it is no longer part of the story of theology as an academic discipline. But it is worth studying, since in our own day the gap between the knowledge of the head and the knowledge of the heart that became characteristic of academic theology is being closed again and in the medieval theology of wisdom as a gift of the Spirit we find the ongoing tradition of an epistemological role that Christian theology has granted to love ever since the time of Augustine – indeed, ever since biblical times (cf, eg, 1 Jn 2:10ff).

Finally, some comments on the sources for the material that follows are in order. Much of it is taken from previous University of South Africa publications of mine. Those, therefore, who wish to find more details on the material in chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6 can consult Gaybba 1984. And those who wish to find more details on the material in chapters 3 and 7 will find them in Gaybba 1988. The material in chapter 8 is based on research published in Gaybba 1994. As regards the final chapter (chapter 9), the hitherto unpublished material is part of the fruits of a research programme funded by the Centre for Science Development in 1995, though it must be stressed that the opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at there are mine and cannot be attributed to the CSD.

2

The revival of learning (eighth to tenth centuries)

The collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century led to a collapse in educational institutions that was nothing less than catastrophic. Schools of learning on any appreciable scale almost disappeared. Indeed, from a lay perspective they did disappear – Boethius was the last well-educated lay-person for centuries. Such centres of learning as did exist were to be found within Church circles, since the Church was the only stable institution during the resultant upheavals. Ecclesiastical administrative structures required at least a modicum of learning to be maintained. Moreover, the clergy had to be able to read the scriptures and carry out the liturgical functions appertaining to their office. Then there had to be at least some who had sufficient skills in astronomy to be able to compute the dates of the feasts that depended on the lunar and solar calendars. Learning did not disappear entirely, therefore, and the older castigation of the period as being one of fairly unrelieved barbarism from an educational point of view has been abandoned by historians. Nevertheless, the decline in educational standards was marked. It is therefore impossible to overestimate the importance of Charlemagne's decision towards the end of the eighth century to enforce the re-establishment of schools of learning in every diocese. With that decision, learning began to revive in western Europe. The syllabus laid down was the old *trivium* (ie 'three subjects', namely grammar, rhetoric and dialectics) and *quadrivium* (ie 'four subjects', namely music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy).

The renaissance itself was short-lived. A steady progress did not follow. In-

stead, further political upheavals after Charlemagne's death led to the breakdown of much that he had achieved. However, it was a regression and not an eclipse. Intellectual activity in fact continued to a far greater extent than used to be believed (Marenbon 1981:139). For example, one fruit of the renaissance was that theological debates arose of a type the West had not seen for a very long time: debates over predestination, over Christ's presence in the Eucharist, etc. However, after a relatively brief flowering of intense intellectual activity the accent fell on preservation rather than innovation (cf Grabmann 1909:179).

The reasons for this basically preservative character of our period are not too difficult to find. First of all, lacking the philosophical stimulation that had marked earlier centuries, the natural reaction was to use the limited intellectual resources of the time to preserve rather than innovate. But there was another, more theological, reason which underpinned the natural conservatism of the times and this was the authority that had come to be ascribed to the past. The basis for this authority was the conviction that the Spirit had been at work in the Church, helping it to remain faithful to the truth committed to it. In particular the Spirit was seen as guiding those who were now revered as 'holy fathers' of the faith, enabling them to explain and illuminate that faith. The teachings of these Fathers came to be increasingly revered and unquestioned and theology became mostly a matter of interpreting the scriptures through their eyes and using the only secular tool that seemed useful for that purpose – grammar.

That theology was seen as being essentially the interpretation of the scriptures was something bequeathed to medieval times by the patristic period (Congar 1968:51). It would remain the basic way in which theology was conceived right into the thirteenth century and indeed the scriptures would remain the most important foundation for theology for most of the medieval period. Hence the favourite term for what we today call theology was *sacra pagina*, 'sacred page' or simply *sacra scriptura*, that is 'sacred scripture'.

Needless to say, the mentality with which theologians of this period approached the scriptures differed radically from that of a modern scientific exegete. As in the patristic period, theologians approached the Bible with the conviction that it was the inspired record of their own faith. They therefore felt perfectly free to see in it what the Church already actually believed. Bible and Church were not opposed to each other, as later came to be so. Moreover,

their exegesis occurred within a Platonist-inspired framework of thought, in which the visible world was the symbol of the invisible one. This had already in patristic times led to a style of exegesis in which the emphasis was on the non-literal meaning of the text, its 'spiritual' meaning, as it would later come to be known. Such a process also made it possible to show the biblical bases for doctrines and practices that had developed over the centuries and for which explicit biblical testimony was lacking.

This stress on commentary was itself a form of pedagogy that they inherited from classical times – interestingly enough from a period (fourth century) when cultural decay led to a stress on preserving and commenting on classical secular texts from the past. As Smalley (1952:26) writes:

Fourth-century men of letters were concentrating on the reading and interpretation of classical literature, yet they were literal rather than literary in their approach to it. Professors expounded the poems of Virgil not as a whole but, after a short introduction, piecemeal, line by line, or even word by word. They dwelt particularly on grammar which was always their main preoccupation, then commented on the historical, mythological, or topographical details mentioned in the passage under review ... These same tendencies reappear inevitably in patristic, and through them in medieval, commentaries on Scripture.

During this period the typical form of theological activity was, therefore, reading the biblical text and commenting on it. Hence it literally took the form of a *lectio* ('reading') and the teacher was a *lector* ('reader'), whence our term 'lecturer'.

As noted above, *the* authoritative guide to the interpretation of the scriptures was, for the theologians of this period, the Fathers. This led to the continuation and flowering of an earlier practice, namely the compiling of extracts from the writings of the Fathers. Such compilations became the characteristic written form of theological work during this period. The earlier and especially the less systematic collections were called *florilegia* ('collections of flowers', a sort of 'bouquet' of patristic wisdom). But the name that became the most common one for such collections was *sententiae* ('viewpoints'), a term translated as 'sentences'. These collections would contribute considerably to the full-scale revival of theology and would do so in two ways. First of all, they provided a quarry of information for the researcher. Second, the setting down alongside each other of various patristic opinions

on a particular topic served to highlight discrepancies between these authorities, which in turn would lead to a move away from the idea of theology as being simply a commentary on sacred texts (see below).

Precisely because theology was chiefly a matter of interpreting texts – the Scriptures but also patristic texts (Chenu 1957b:19) – theologians of the time naturally sought whatever tools they could find for interpreting texts. The main tool they had at their disposal was the first of the subjects making up the *trivium*: grammar. As our period progresses, dialectics will also be used and increasingly so, but until the eleventh century its use will be minimal in comparison to that made of grammar (Chenu 1957b:19).

Grammar is the science of how to communicate your meaning in language. It is the science that analyses the structure of sentences (subject, predicate, object, etc), the role played by types of word (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc), the use of figures of speech (similes, metaphors, etc), and so on. The main grammars studied by the medievals were those written by Donatus (fourth century AD) and Priscian (beginning of sixth century). These works were composed as studies of Latin grammar and not as guidelines to theologians. Hence, the conscious, deliberate use of these disciplines by theologians marks the beginnings of the medieval road that theology took to becoming an academic discipline – that is to say, a discipline that had an agreed-upon method of work and tools of analysis that would prevent it from being simply the outpouring of an individual's own views on the faith.

But already there was a reaction to the use of grammar. Some saw it as an alien intrusion into the realm of the sacred. How can the expressions of our sacred faith, some asked, be allowed to be judged by the laws and procedures of human language? Some argued that since God knew more grammar than people like Donatus, one cannot examine the divinely inspired biblical words using such grammarians as guides (Chenu 1957b:18–19). Such debates may seem extraordinary to us nowadays, but they were the struggles of people beginning to grapple for the first time for centuries with the issue of the relationship between reason and faith.

In the eleventh century the use of logical analysis, in the form of dialectics, would increase to the point where it would become a major bone of contention between the older, symbolic, experientially oriented way of doing theology and the newer, logically exact, conceptually focused way of doing it.

It would be a fight to the death, so to speak, since the latter would be the ultimate victor.

In what follows let us first look, then, at the golden age of the older way of doing theology, a way that came to be called 'monastic theology'. After that we will trace the origins and development of the newer way, the way that came to be called 'scholastic theology'.

3 | Older ways: the role of experience and monastic theology (twelfth century)

3.1 Introduction

The term ‘monastic theology’ was coined by Jean Leclercq (see Leclercq 1957) to refer to a type of theology that achieved its golden age in the twelfth century but which represented the more traditional, patristic approach to the way theology should go about its business. It was a theology marked by a stress on symbolism, biblical categories and, above all, on the central role played by love in bringing about an understanding of the Christian faith.

Leclercq called this theology ‘monastic’ because, as he put it, ‘the monks were its most numerous, most consistent, and had within their ranks its most eminent practitioners’ (Leclercq 1964:54). It was a form of theology that meshed perfectly with the sort of contemplative life that was the major pre-occupation of its monastic practitioners.

In contrast to the type of theology favoured by the dialecticians, where logical analysis of ideas occupied pride of place, the most marked characteristic of monastic theology was the pride of place given to spiritual *experience* within

it. This in turn was closely linked to its *symbolic* character, for the ideas analysed by the dialecticians were for the monks symbolic windows through which the soul came into contact with the heavenly world that alone could illuminate the mind. Monastic theology's emphasis on experiencing God raises the issue of the epistemological divide that was opening up between the new, dialectical breed of theologians (whom we will examine in the next few chapters) and the older, monastic type of theology. For the former, understanding the faith was primarily an intellectual process, utilising the tools of logical analysis and the fruits of reason (what we today call secular knowledge). For the latter, understanding the faith was primarily an affective process, the result of the illumination brought by love.

In what follows, therefore, we will examine first of all the experiential and character of monastic theology. Thereafter we will look at the epistemological role played by love. Finally, we will conclude with some remarks on the differences between this older way of doing theology and the newer way being paved by the dialecticians.

3.2 An experiential theology

Monastic theology was through and through a theology built on experiencing, 'tasting' (as they loved to call it) God. Such a knowledge of God was superior to any knowledge one could gain from an academic analysis of biblical or patristic texts or from using one's dialectical skills to analyse a particular doctrine. As Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: 'The touch of experience is necessary for understanding' (*In Cantica* XX:878). And elsewhere: 'Only holiness can bring comprehension, not debates ... Do you ask how? If you were holy, you would comprehend and know. If not, then become holy and you will know through experience' (*De consid* V, xiv:805). The same point is made again and again by other monastic writers of the period. Thus William of St Thierry writes, as regards understanding the Trinity: 'We teach our lips to utter and our hearts to ponder, as often as we may wish, both the Lord's words and our theoretical and practical explanations of them. However, even though we may wish to do so very often, we will never understand them other than through an affective experience and an inner sense of illuminated love' (*Speculum*:396). William is simply repeating the sort of point Augustine made centuries earlier when he linked love of God and neighbour with

coming to a deeper understanding of the processions of the divine persons within the trinity (cf Gaybba 1985:109–110).

That monastic theology should stress the role of experience was, of course, only natural. The very aim of the monastic way of life was a mystical union with God. It was a way of life structured to enable the individual to experience the delights of unity with God. Knowledge *about* God was of lesser importance than knowledge *of* God. But the experiential bent of such theology also had very deep philosophical roots – the neo-Platonist framework that affected so much of the way in which for centuries now Christians had thought about the relationship between the divine and the human and the way in which the former was known by the latter. As I noted elsewhere, ‘it is impossible to understand monastic theology – and the opposition that grew up between it and the Abelardian type of scholasticism that burgeoned in the twelfth century – without having some familiarity with neo-Platonic thought ... The idea that all things issue from a transcendent One in varying, hierarchically ordered, stages; that the One is present in all things and the source of a fundamental conformity between them and it; that aversion from the One reduces one’s unity with and therefore likeness to it; that conversion to and contemplation of it effects the opposite – to the point where one achieves complete unity with it; an epistemology in which the divine is known only by experiencing it through connaturality [that is, becoming similar in nature to it]; the central, illuminating role of love by uniting and conforming one to the divine – all this was part of the air the monks breathed’ (Gaybba 1988:10).

The degree of academic maturity of any theology can be measured by the extent to which it is conscious of and examines its own presuppositions and methodology. It is therefore a sign of the maturity of monastic theology that several of its practitioners pondered the epistemological presuppositions of a theology that places experiencing the divine at the very heart of its methodology. Thus they explored, within the confines of their limited knowledge, the psychological structure of the human soul so as to pinpoint the very faculty that experienced God. This was, in their view, a faculty superior to the imagination as well as to ratiocinatory reason. A favourite term for this faculty was *intelligentia*, which is perhaps best translated as ‘insight’. Its specific way of operating was through experiential contact. Reason, it was said, touches only the outside of things, *intelligentia* their very source: God.

However, experiential knowledge of God did not operate as a source by providing the theologian with a direct vision of God or of ideas about God. The main ideas and the images were provided by scripture. What experiential knowledge did was to enable the theologian to understand the depths of meaning present in those ideas and images – in much the same way as one who has experienced deep love will understand the depths of meaning to the concept ‘love’.

However, clearly the process of understanding the depths of meaning in an idea often involves having new insights into such ideas. And these insights will come to be expressed in further ideas and images. Hence some sort of norm was required whereby one could judge the conformity of those ideas to the apostolic faith. The norm was, of course, simply those very scriptures, the depths of whose meaning were plumbed by their experiences of God. And, of course, an authoritative guide to the scriptures was at hand in the writings of the Fathers. As we saw, it was universally accepted that scripture had a figurative as well as a literal sense, and the figurative sense was the one most appealed to. To our modern minds this is not much of a control. Nevertheless, within the confines of their own outlook a norm was appealed to, and the norm was scripture. Richard of St Victor provides us with an interesting example of all this. He makes a comparison between the experiencing or tasting of God and the Mount Tabor scene, as it was traditionally known (Mt 17:1ff), and notes that Moses and Elias were witnesses to the revelation of Christ to the disciples (*Ben Min* LXXXI:57). So too, he continues, the knowledge obtained from contemplation can be accepted as being from Christ only if ‘Moses’ and ‘Elias’ – that is, scripture in its literal and figurative senses – testify to its veracity.

3.3 A symbolic theology

A symbolist outlook – that is, one that saw the visible, earthly world as a symbolic embodiment of the invisible, heavenly one – was common to all theological thinking up to and including the twelfth century. It was part and parcel of the Platonist framework that formed the common culture of the times. It is an outlook that will be abandoned as an Aristotelian worldview replaces the Platonist one and a new academic type of theology to be known as ‘scholasticism’ replaces completely the older ways. But for monastic

theology such an outlook was so central to its way of reflecting on the faith that the demise of the former would coincide with the demise of the latter.

This symbolist outlook was characterised by the conviction that the world around us and everything in it is a pointer to a more transcendent world that lies beyond it and which makes its presence felt in and through every created reality around us (see Chenu 1957a:161). What is important is that that transcendent world and the way to understand it is not so much through logical argumentation as through developing the ability to see through the symbol, to be able to follow its character as a pointer to what lies beyond it.

Such an outlook has its remote roots in Plato's philosophy, more specifically the neo-Platonist form given it by Plotinus and Christianised by thinkers such as Augustine and, above all, Pseudo-Denys. Within this philosophical framework, the only true realities are eternal ones. All else is but a reflection – in varying degrees – of these eternal entities. For Augustine, this meant that any created reality could and should remind one of some or other aspect of God's world. For Pseudo-Denys it also meant that within any created reality the believer's mind should be able to see the presence of that world. While there is an unbridgeable gulf for the Christian believer between God and creation, nevertheless there is some continuity too. 'The created world was hierarchically ordered into various degrees of reality, each of which was distinguished according to the extent of its conformity to God. Angels were therefore at the top, matter at the bottom of the ladder. Moreover, each degree was a theophany, a symbol of the one superior to it, while the latter made itself known to the degree below it symbolically. Reality was therefore basically symbolical in structure. And this was true of God too. The Word was the symbol – that is to say, the real expression – of the Father. The Spirit was the symbol (that is, the expression) of their mutuality' (Gaybba 1985:19).

Because some symbols point us to the divine more aptly than others, the theologian is obviously expected to concentrate on the former rather than the latter. And as regards the former, those that have been chosen by God for God's self-manifestation to humanity would occupy pride of place. These are the events of salvation history as narrated in the scriptures; the church and its structures, the sacraments, especially the liturgy of the eucharist. These symbols are not necessarily any clearer than purely natural symbols, such as a field or a sunset. But they are symbols used by God and therefore the places where we can expect to find God. There is a foreshadowing here of Karl

Barth's idea of an 'analogy of faith' and of his insistence that having experienced God's presence in the preaching of the Word it is to the testimony to that Word (that is, the scriptures) that we must look again and again for hearing and understanding what God wishes to communicate to us.

Among the above symbols there are two that were of particular importance to the monks. Both existed because of God's grace-filled presence in the believer. The first was the believer's own soul, transformed by the indwelling presence of Father, Son and Spirit. The second was the love that this grace created within the believer. Hence the importance placed on getting to know oneself—that is, getting to know what God has created within one. 'Where, I ask, can traces of the knowledge of God be more clearly found than stamped on God's own image?' (Anonymous, *De interior* VI:513; cf Gaybba 1988:13.) Since the soul is by nature God's image and by grace God's very likeness, one knows the best image there is of God on this earth. The likeness deepens when the soul loves and the more one loves, the greater the likeness—since God is love.

The knowledge—and the experience (since the two go together for monastic theology)—of God gained in this way is fleshed out through one's meditation on the scriptures and the church's beliefs and one's prayer-filled participation in the celebration of the sacred rites, above all the eucharist.

As can be seen, a symbolist theology is essentially a contemplative one. That is to say, its main aim is to achieve as deep an understanding as possible of divine realities. The world is of no real interest to a symbolist theologian, except to the extent that it mediates a knowledge of the divine. Within this framework of thought, the world lacks any meaning in itself. One cannot expect to find anything of lasting value there. The world's usefulness begins and ends by being a window to the divine. Concentrate too much on the world and your spiritual vision becomes blurred, ending up in spiritual blindness. For it is only by concentrating one's mind on God that one will be able to see how God is revealed through the symbolic structure of creation. The world has no ability in itself to reveal the divine to us. It is the divine that reveals itself to us through the world. If the world has no ability to reveal the divine to us, this means that the ideas and images found in the world cannot of themselves give us a proper insight into the things of God. The most they can do is to point to the divine, of which they are a mere symbol. Only once

one has experienced the divine can one then begin to see the depths of meaning in the symbol.

Anyone, therefore, who thinks that he or she can illuminate the divine adequately simply by analysing concepts and texts is making a fundamental epistemological mistake. And this in turn meant that a symbolist theology took a quite different approach to theological method from that which was being adopted by the dialecticians and which would become characteristic of scholastic theology. Whereas for the latter one worked through a process of logical reasoning, ensuring that one clarified as precisely as possible the ideas one was working with, for monastic theology one worked through a process of association of ideas, a process of seeing the various levels of meaning that one can find in a symbol. It was, moreover, a process that had to go hand in hand with a life of love for God, so that the divine can be 'tasted', experienced, and in that way illuminate the symbols one is working with. Whereas for scholasticism precise definition of one's ideas was essential, for monastic theology the more flexible the symbol the more useful it was for their purposes. Whereas for scholasticism the proper approach was to show the *logical* connection between one idea and another, for monastic theology the proper approach was to show the *symbolic* connection between them. Logical reasoning demands abandoning the flexibility of a symbol, so as to reduce it to a precisely defined concept. This was one of the reasons for monastic theology's dislike of dialectics as a theological tool. It attempted to destroy the ultimate mysteriousness of the divine, a mysteriousness that can only manifest itself in symbols. As mentioned above, the scholastic approach seemed to the monks to be based on a fundamental epistemological error – the assumption that a logical analysis of ideas about God will give us a deeper understanding of God.

It was typical of this symbolist approach that the non-literal meanings of scripture were valued as the most important. This was the age of the dominance of scripture's 'spiritual meaning'. Such a meaning is not necessarily tied to a Platonist epistemology of the type that underpinned monastic theology – non-literal interpretations are essential for any community whose sacred texts remain unchanged over the course of centuries. But a whole structure of 'spiritual meanings' was inherited from patristic times that fitted perfectly a symbolist approach – and which would come under increasing pressure as a more scholastic method came to dominate theology. Built onto the 'natural' or 'literal sense', there was the tropological sense, which was the

moral significance of a particular biblical text; the allegorical sense, which was the understanding it gave of a particular Christian belief or set of beliefs; and then the anagogical sense, which was the understanding it gave of God. These spiritual senses were themselves arranged hierarchically – beginning with the tropological, moving through the allegorical, so as to reach the summit of meaning – the insight offered into the divine itself. Moving from one sense to another, the monastic theologian was therefore engaged in an exercise whereby his mind moved from the inferior to the superior until it was focused on its true object – God.

To us such an approach may seem so vulnerable to subjective considerations as to be useless as a serious way of going about doing theology. However, such a judgement would be too harsh, since there were some controls. One has to recall that the faith being explored by the monastic theologians had a reasonably well-defined content and therefore constituted its own sort of control. Moreover, there was an attempt at providing some sort of objective assessment of the meanings of the more frequently used symbols. In the second half of the twelfth century the accepted meanings of particular symbols were collected into alphabetically arranged lists called *distinctions*. One could then look up a word such as 'field' and discover the various things it could symbolise – for example the world, a good work, scripture, preaching, the Jewish people, the church, etc, etc (Anonymous, *Allegoriae* 854–855; cf Gaybba 1988:29). But there nevertheless remained a great deal of room for fanciful flights of imagination and Hugh of St Victory saw the need to stress the importance of the literal sense as the basis on which to build all other interpretations (Chenu 1957a:201). It is significant that Hugh stands as a twelfth-century example of a more balanced approach between the contending extremes of dialecticians and anti-dialecticians (see Gaybba 1984:125ff).

3.4 The epistemological role of love

For monastic theology it is impossible to understand God and the things of God without love – more precisely without that graced love that is God's gift to the believer and which is known as *caritas* (the English translation 'charity' no longer conveys its proper meaning). Love is one of the two 'eyes' that the soul possesses. It is the 'right-hand' eye, the superior one, the one whereby we contemplate heavenly realities. The other eye is ratiocinatory reason,

whereby we investigate the created world. 'The soul has two eyes, one with which it understands [has insight], the other with which it investigates things ... Of these two the right-handed eye is love ... Take away ... love, the right-handed eye, and the intellect (the left-hand eye) is left to itself, good for nothing but error' (Anonymous *De charitate*, III:592).

The two 'eyes' idea has its roots in Augustine's distinction between a superior and an inferior faculty of knowledge, of which the former is turned towards heavenly eternal realities, the latter towards earthly transitory ones. The idea that love illuminates and that it is essential to the process of understanding God and the things of God was also developed by Augustine. Moreover, all the key ideas of Augustine's own views on the subject are to be found in monastic theology (on Augustine's views see Gaybba 1985). In this matter too we are in the presence of a thoroughly traditional approach to theology.

The twelfth-century theologian who dealt most explicitly and frequently with this topic was William of St Thierry (cf Gaybba 1988:34–35). Love for him is the soul's 'natural light for seeing God, one created by the author of nature' (*De natura amoris*, VIII:393). 'Love loves because it sees. For it is the eye that beholds God' (*De natura amoris* VI:390). Reason and love must work together. Reason provides love with its conceptual knowledge of God. But it is love that provides the full understanding of the reality being expressed in that conceptual knowledge. In this sense 'reason teaches love, and love illuminates reason' (*De natura amoris*, VIII:393). But of the two it is love that is the more important 'eye', the one that brings true insight into the things of God, 'since even if reason is left behind, pious love becomes its own understanding' and in that way 'the piety of the simplest lover ... excels the sagacity of the most erudite reasoner' (*Super Cantica* II:525).

Love is crucial, then, for knowing God. Without it, one will inevitably fall into hopeless error. With it one is protected from such error. The most extraordinary expression of this latter conviction that I came across was the following remark by Rupert of Deutz: 'I love the blessed Trinity and therefore know for certain that when speaking of it I will never stray beyond the truth' (*In Cantica*). But love is essential for a true understanding of earthly realities as well. For one cannot understand such realities properly without seeing the connection between them and the God who created them. Recall the point made by the anonymous author quoted above: 'Take away ... love, the right-handed eye, and the intellect (the left-hand eye) is left to itself, good for

nothing but error? The root error is not so much about factual mistakes but rather about the importance and the basic character of created reality. Thus, having Romans 1:19 in mind, William of St Thierry comments: 'Those who lose theology [that is, wisdom, the knowledge of God] make appalling errors even about physics [that is, the things of this world], since they confuse the glory of the incorruptible God with the image of corruptible humanity' (*De natura amoris* XIV:404).

What sort of knowledge does love bring about? It is not a greater increase in factual knowledge about God but rather a deeper grasp of the factual knowledge one already has. It is often compared to the knowledge one has of a friend or a beloved spouse (see William of St Thierry, *Speculum*:392; for more references cf Gaybba 1988:36). It is really the experiential colouring of a conceptual knowledge that one already has. I have already quoted the more obvious example that it is only through experience that we come to understand the depths of meaning in the concept 'love'.

Nevertheless, such an experiential colouring of our conceptual knowledge of God must have some effect on the conceptual level. If it does not – for example by enabling one to see connections between concepts not noticed before – then it is difficult to understand what is meant here by 'knowledge'.

What is it about love that gives it this privileged epistemological role in knowing the divine? What is it about love that enables it to illuminate? Here too the essential answers were already given by Augustine: love can win from God, as a reward, a deeper insight into the things of God; love can evoke the desire to know the beloved more fully and in that way focus the mind more sharply on the beloved; love purifies the mind's 'eye'; love unites lover and beloved; love conforms the lover to the beloved (cf Gaybba 1988:36ff). Of these four ways in which love brings about greater understanding, the first two are really extrinsic to the process of knowing. For the knowledge that comes is not itself part of the act of loving and could – in principle – be achieved without loving. With love's ability to unite and conform, however, these characteristics of love are intrinsic to the very act of knowing that is proper to love. It is therefore these latter two aspects of love that the monastic theologians concentrate on, when they reflect on how love brings about a deeper knowledge of the divine.

Precisely because love unites the believer to God, it enables an experiential knowledge of God to occur. Just as seeing a tree or tasting some food gives

one an experiential knowledge of trees and food that is far superior to any conceptual knowledge of them, so too experiencing God through the unity with God forged by love is far superior to any conceptual knowledge of God. This experience of God's presence typically manifests itself in what mystics repeatedly called 'tasting' God, the *gustus* that signalled the presence of God. Such a taste or *gustus* was not simply a pleasure derived from loving and being loved but rather a sign of the presence of God within one, of the unity that love had forged between the believer and God. Truth is also Goodness and Goodness is also Truth. Hence the Truth to which love unites the believer is pleasurable and the source of the *gustus* that signals God's presence. 'Rational minds can perceive internal and eternal realities by means of love alone. They perceive such realities by love so that, by tasting them, they may understand them and, by following them, make them their own' (Hugh of St Victor, *In Hierarchiam*, IV:1001).

The way in which God's presence was conceived was in line with the traditional Christian belief about the indwelling of Father, Son and Spirit in the believer. William of St Thierry analysed the relationship between that belief and the epistemological role of love in a way that is astonishing in its richness and the depths it can give to a theology of the economic trinity. For William, the believer's love is purified and transformed into the Spirit's likeness. That Spirit was for Augustine the Love binding Father and Son to each other. Having transformed the believer's love into its own likeness, that love now becomes part of the very love binding Father and Son to each other. As a result the believer now knows Father and the Son the way they know each other – that is, through the experiential contact created by love. 'The knowledge that Father and Son have reciprocally is nothing other than their unity, namely the Holy Spirit.' Since the believer shares in that unity when his or her love has been transformed by the Spirit into the image of the Spirit, the believer is able to know Father and Son in the same way that they know each other (William of St Thierry, *Speculum*:393).

As can be seen, William links the unifying and conforming powers of love. Although conceptually distinct they were seen as being two sides of a single coin. Unity and conformity were seen as correlative concepts – the closer the unity, the greater the conformity, and vice versa. The idea that love transforms the lover into the image of that which it loves was a very old idea – going right back to Augustine and beyond. 'Such is the power of love that it is necessary for you to become like that which you love. The fellowship of love

somehow or other transforms you into the likeness of the one to whom you are bound by bonds of affection' (Hugh of St Victor, *Soliloquium*:954). William of St Thierry theorised that love is like a sense-faculty that knows by moulding itself onto the reality sensed. 'When the soul or sentient faculty reaches out to sense something, in the act of sensation it is changed into the reality sensed ... Now as regards the things of God, the mind's sense faculty is love' (*Speculum*:390–391). William is here using the explanations of sensation offered by the physics of his time. But the essential point is that the act of loving God conforms one ever deeper to the God who is loved.

Here we are at the heart of love's epistemological power: for, according to the ancient Greeks, like can only be known by like. The more we love the more godlike we become, since God is love. The more godlike we become, the more we understand the things of God. Even on a natural level this would be true. Transposed into a situation where God's grace brings the believer into the heart of God's own triune life the principle came to be seen as almost self-evident in monastic theology.

Love's power to illuminate the things of God derives therefore from the fact that it unites the believer with God and simultaneously forges a greater likeness between the believer and God. Unity and conformity increase and decrease proportionately and both do so to the degree that one loves.

3.5 The old and the new

The approach of monastic theology to theological reflection differed radically from that which was developing among those for whom the use of secular disciplines such as dialectics was seen as a major way of achieving a deeper understanding of the faith. 'Although no one at the time realized it, two world views and two epistemologies were clashing. The one, neo-Platonic, saw the world as but a symbol of a transcendent reality that could be known through immediate experience, and from which light streamed into our minds to understand the symbol. The other, more Aristotelian in spirit, saw the world as valuable in itself, worth understanding in and for itself and, indeed, capable of being understood without any reference to a transcendent reality or need of a transcendent illumination of the mind. This divide became clearer in the thirteenth century. But in the twelfth the monastic theologians experienced it above all at the one point where their epistemol-

ogy and spirituality met: love. To do theology their way, love was essential. To do it the dialecticians' way, it was not. That was the rub' (Gaybba 1988:47).

Of course, the emerging scholastic and the older monastic ways of doing theology were not irreconcilable. One finds the two ways combined not only in the twelfth century Victorine, Hugh of St Victor, but also in the thirteenth-century contemporary of Aquinas, Bonaventure.

No scholastic would have denied that, all other things being equal, the theologian who loves God and his or her neighbour is likely to have a deeper insight into the things of God and therefore be a better theologian than one who does not. But their way of doing theology demanded precision in one's concepts, the analysis of issues, debating the pros and cons of a particular point of view, including posing and attempting to respond to objections that can be made against every Christian belief. 'Scholasticism's insights have to stand on their own arguments. In a typical case of such argumentation, the points pro and contra a case are put, the matter resolved, and the objections answered. All the reasons for the positions taken are there to see, to be analysed. There is no hidden factor appealed to, such as experience or love. Logically, therefore, the scholastic system could operate quite well without appealing to love' (Gaybba 1988:56)

Moreover, monastic theologians in general recognised that secular learning and even the use of disciplines such as dialectics could have their value for the faith – even if a Rupert of Deutz was the ultimate triumphalist in insisting that the proper way to learn how to use the secular arts is to study the way scripture uses them (cf Gaybba 1988:48ff). But they saw the disputes that excited the dialecticians as a sign of pride and disrespect for the Word of God, since what appeared to interest the dialecticians were ideas and winning arguments, rather than contemplating and coming to a deeper unity with the God who is love. For monastic theology, love was crucial. A monastic theologian's arguments were – in contrast to those of the scholastic – not meant to illuminate by themselves. To see their force, one needed to love. Unlike the scholastic, who did not need to appeal to love in order that the force of the argument might be clear, the monastic theologian had constantly to recall to mind Bernard of Clairvaux's observation that 'only holiness and not debates can bring comprehension' (*De Consideratione*, V, xiv:805).

But the general approach of the two ways of doing theology was very different and the central epistemological role given to love by the monks in

contrast to the central epistemological role given to logical analysis by the dialecticians would in the end lead to very different theologies. For all practical purposes monastic theology disappeared from the scene in the thirteenth century, yielding to the new scholastic form of theology that was to dominate western Christendom up to the time of the Reformation. Its heart – the importance of experiencing God and the epistemological role of love – continued to beat in the mystical movements of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. This would be its major home, where it would be rather isolated from the mainstream of theological discussion. Nevertheless, it would find a niche in mainstream theology and that niche would be in discussions on wisdom as a gift of the Spirit. For it will be there that the idea of a knowledge of God gained through unity with God in love will be found.

4 | New emphasis: the role of reason and the beginnings of scholastic theology (eleventh to twelfth centuries)

4.1 General comments

Although a positive attitude to reason in theology was part of the patristic heritage bequeathed to the medieval church, for a variety of reasons it became submerged to a large extent. As we have seen, the early medieval period saw theology's main function as being simply to preserve and comment on the scriptures and patristic writings handed down to it. All the stress came to fall on the revelation contained in those writings, particularly in the scriptures. Theology was all about God's revelation and to the early medievals reason appeared to have little role to play in studying it. After all, it is God's word that illuminates the human mind – and not the other way around.

Moreover, with the breakdown of the school system following on the breakdown of the Roman Empire, the only centres of education were the monasteries. And there all the stress fell on the mystical unity with God that each individual monk sought to experience. Hence, meditation on the

scriptures (and writings of the Fathers) was stressed so that the Word itself would speak to them.

However, the eleventh century witnessed a resurgence of the use of logical analysis in probing that Word. The secular discipline used for making such an analysis was dialectics. Dialectics was the art of clear and logical thinking, enabling one to prove or disprove something. Whereas grammar examined the ways in which words and sentences operated in a text, dialectics focused on the logical interrelationship of ideas, whether embedded in a text or not. Grammar was linked to the study of a text, dialectics to the probing of ideas.

We saw earlier on how even the use of a tool like grammar was frowned on by some. However, while grammar evoked only a relatively minor protest, dialectics called forth all the wrath of the traditionalists, the monastic theologians of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The reason for such wrath should be clear after all that we have seen about monastic theology. In the eyes of the traditionalists, using dialectics when studying the faith that the Church proclaimed and practised could only too easily lead to the subjection of God's Word to the demands of human logic. And this was to invert the right order of things. The traditionalists held fast to the Augustinian doctrine that it was heavenly realities that illuminated earthly ones – and not the other way around.

What triggered off the renewed interest in the use of dialectics as an analytical tool was the burgeoning of canonical studies caused by the struggle between Church and State known as the 'Investiture Controversy'. Such studies involved examining earlier legislation, the 'canons' governing the issues that were at stake. The lists of past authorities that had been drawn up did not always resolve those issues, since the authorities themselves often enough appeared to conflict with each other. Mere textual analysis, therefore, was insufficient. What was necessary was to probe the ideas involved in the issues. And the tool that they naturally turned to was the one that best equipped a medieval thinker for such a task: dialectics.

In those days canonical issues were less clearly distinct from theological issues than they are today. It is not surprising, then, that the atmosphere of debate and the use of dialectics should spill over into the theological arena. When it did so it provoked a debate over the validity of its use that ranged over the whole of Europe (Ghelinck 1948:69–70). This is why the eleventh century has been described by historians of theology as the century of the

debate between the dialecticians and the anti-dialecticians. The dialecticians defended, with varying degrees of vehemence, the legitimacy of the use of reason in theology, especially in the form of dialectics. The anti-dialecticians saw it as an intrusion into a sphere where it did not belong. The faith, they argued, is something to be accepted in humility and lived, not dissected and discussed by man's pride-filled reason. The dialecticians insisted that reason was essential to understanding the faith. Their opponents insisted that the faith's transcendence precluded any such thing. What made matters worse was that in the eleventh century the liberal arts, especially dialectics, began to be studied for their own sakes once again – and not simply as a preparation for theological studies (as in the Carolingian renaissance). In other words, these arts were beginning to be studied once again as secular sciences that have their own rules and their own value apart from theology. In such a climate the use of dialectics can appear far more alien and threatening to theology than it would otherwise have been. The servant is asserting its independence!

Let us now examine the way in which three thinkers used dialectics and the difficulties they faced as a result.

4.2 Berengar (999–1088)

In the eleventh century, the person who symbolised more than anyone else the dangers of overconfidence in the use of dialectics was Berengar (999–1088). He utilised dialectical techniques to analyse the by-then traditional doctrine that bread and wine are really and truly changed into the body and blood of Christ and therefore of the doctrine that Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist. His conclusion was that the statement that bread and wine become the true body and blood of Christ cannot be literally true but only symbolically. A logical analysis of the statement leads, he argued, to the conclusion that it means simply this: the bread and wine symbolise Christ's body and blood. This conclusion contradicted what by then was held to be a virtually non-negotiable element of the Christian faith. Not surprisingly, his views caused an uproar.

Precisely what Berengar taught is a matter of some dispute. But what is undeniable and is of interest to us is the important role he gave to dialectics and the controversy aroused by his application of dialectical analysis to the doctrine of the Eucharist. Berengar's opponents believed he had paid too much

respect to dialectics as a discipline in its own right. Instead of making it a servant of theology, he appeared to them to make it its master. They had grounds for their criticism. For Berengar had argued that theological assertions must pass the test of analysis by means of dialectics. 'It is most desirable,' he said, 'that in all things one has recourse to dialectics, because to do so is to have recourse to reason' (*De sacra coena*:101).

This is often quoted to prove Berengar's excessive reliance on dialectics and therefore that he inverted the true relationship between faith and reason. However, not so often quoted is the theological justification he gives for this, a justification that removes him from the sphere of out-and-out rationalists. It is also one that will be taken up again and again by those who justify a balanced use of reason (dialectics) in theology. Berengar's justification is as follows: 'since it is by virtue of the faculty of reason that a person is made in the image of God, one who does not have recourse to reason ... cannot be reformed daily by it into the image of God' (*De sacra coena*:101). Moreover, Berengar did not by any means reject out of hand authority, represented here by authoritative testimonies to the true understanding of the faith. He was accused of doing so but his response was that such an accusation was false, since he used authority wherever necessary (*De sacra coena*: 100).

Nevertheless, in the eyes of many Berengar committed the cardinal theological sin: namely allowing reason to *correct* the faith rather than *elucidate* it. Moreover, to speak of using authority 'wherever necessary' seemed to sound too much like making it the final court of appeal – and in matters of faith, authority, the authority of God's Word and of the God-given faith of the Church, was the final court of appeal and not simply an initial one. Although it could have a perfectly orthodox meaning, a statement such as the following served only to prove his guilt in the eyes of his opponents: 'to grasp the truth by reason is incomparably superior' to doing so by quoting authorities (*De sacra coena*:100).

One cannot but have sympathy with a man who no doubt was acutely aware that there is a major difference between the authority of God's Word and the authority of the patristic testimonies to and interpretations of it – and acutely aware that these testimonies disagreed among themselves (see below). In such circumstances one could hardly blame him for trying to call in the services of a God-given faculty (reason) in a form that even the holy Augustine allowed. For, as Berengar argued in his defence, Augustine proclaimed 'dialectics to

be the art of arts, the discipline of disciplines, one that knew how to learn, knew how to teach' (*De sacra coena*:100). But one has to concede that he needed to have been more alive to the limitations of a tool such as dialectics, especially when applied to as complex a range of cognitive material as that which claims to speak of transcendent realities. While one can have sympathy for a man who saw more clearly than many of his contemporaries that the believer's statements of faith are not a privileged ghetto immune to rational inspection, one also has sympathy for those who instinctively felt that the issues he was analysing were not susceptible to the sort of unnuanced application of dialectical rules employed by him. When one looks at the arguments he actually used, one's sympathy for his opponents increases. In short, I suspect that part of the reaction against Berengar was an instinctive awareness of the complexity of religious statements, a complexity that demands more complex categories of analysis than those provided by medieval dialectics.

4.3 Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109)

That reason can be used in a more constructive and balanced way was made evident in the work of Anselm of Canterbury (for what follows cf Gaybba 1984:87ff).

Anselm is generally acknowledged to be the greatest theologian in the West between the times of Augustine and Aquinas. He was educated at the school at Bec run by Lanfranc, who was Berengar's opponent. Anselm always spoke of his debt to Lanfranc, but surpassed him in every way. Lanfranc eventually became the archbishop of Canterbury and, when he died, Anselm was appointed in his place. Anselm remained there until he died and is therefore known as 'Anselm of Canterbury'.

His significance for theology as a discipline lay in the way he united reason and faith. In this he was by no means an innovator. He was really carrying on the tradition started by Augustine. As Knowles put it, 'he resumed, almost unconsciously, and as if it had been scarcely interrupted, the theological task that had been abandoned soon after Augustine's death by the divines of the West' (Knowles 1962:100), doing this at a time when theology was going through the initial stages of a renewed growth. Moreover, that very renewed growth was being stimulated by the whole issue of the use of dialectics in

theology. The direction the growth would take would depend on the resolution of this issue. Anselm's approach, though not immediately influential, was the one that would become characteristic of scholastic theology. Hence it is with justice that Grabmann calls Anselm 'the true father of Scholasticism' (Grabmann 1909:259).

Even a cursory comparison of Anselm with the general direction taken by his predecessors shows his originality and creativity. As Grabmann points out (1909:261ff), though utterly steeped in the Fathers (above all Augustine, who is his guiding light) and scripture, he is no compiler. In his works he presumes the faith that is contained in the biblical and patristic sources and proceeds to analyse it in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of it. His Latin is of a purity virtually unknown in those days and, thanks to his education at Bec, crystal clear. Combined with all this is the sort of piety that makes him more than simply an *intellectual* successor to Augustine.

Anselm's guiding principle – also Augustinian – has become famous. It is *fides quarens intellectum* – faith seeking understanding. His favourite saying is the Augustinian *credo, ut intelligam* – I believe in order to understand. Anselm's starting point, then, is faith – the faith that has been handed down to him. Found in scripture, proclaimed authoritatively by the Church, that faith is not to be questioned, but accepted (*Tractatus de concordia*:528). He immediately distances himself therefore from all those who would use dialectics to question what the Church believes.

This stress on 'faith' led some (cf Grabmann 1909:276) to believe that for Anselm faith is a prerequisite for any form of human knowledge whatsoever. Such an interpretation could find some support in that whereas Anselm repeatedly insists that he believes in order to understand, he does not mention the second half of the full Augustinian vision: *intellige ut credas* – understand, in order to believe. However, this interpretation of Anselm forgets that his whole interest was simply in understanding his faith – and not in outlining a general epistemology. Indeed, while displaying remarkable philosophical talents, Anselm displays no interest in philosophy as such. Anselm's starting point is the faith of Christians. However, it is his starting point in the sense that he is quite emphatic that one can and should attempt to understand that faith, using to the fullest extent all that reason can offer.

Reason plays a triple role in Anselm's theology (cf Grabmann 1909:336). First

of all, it strives to gain a rational insight into the faith. In other words, it tries to see the reasons that what we believe to be so is indeed so. This involves the use of analogy, the widespread use of dialectics and – and here he really stands head and shoulders above his predecessors – metaphysical analysis.

Second, reason plays a systematising role. It seeks to interlock, to relate one element to another, so that the organic unity of the faith is revealed.

Third, reason played an important role in solving problems: replying to objections, eliminating apparent contradictions. The best example of this is in one of his last works, the *Tractatus de concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis necnon gratiae Dei cum libero arbitrio* ('Treatise on reconciling God's fore-knowledge, predestining and grace, with free will'). We have here in outline the approach to a theological issue that will become typical of Scholasticism: one first develops the arguments for and against a particular standpoint; this is followed by giving one's own views on the issue; finally, one is then in a position to answer the objections raised at the beginning.

Anselm's free and liberal use of rational arguments in his theology has led to accusations that he was a rationalist. He certainly gives the impression now and then that he is quite confident that reason can penetrate all God's mysteries. However, to view him as a rationalist is to ignore the role that faith continues to play in his thinking. Anselm was always trying to understand a truth whose existence he presupposed. He was not trying to prove the truth in question, or deduce it from pure reason, even though his attempts to understand the inner rationale of a particular belief at times give such an impression.

Nevertheless, the rationalist strain is there, though kept in check by his intense faith and, in particular, his deep spirituality. It is not surprising then that Anselm's influence would only really be felt when the debate over the usefulness of reason was virtually settled – as it was by the end of the twelfth century. As Ghellinck 1948:83 points out, during the period immediately following his death, 'neither his treatises, nor his doctrines, nor his way of theologising seems to have entered straightforwardly into the schools. He is rarely quoted, apart from Abelard, who refers to him three times, or later John of Cornwall and some others.' However, from the thirteenth century onwards his contributions to theology came to be recognised and would remain so ever afterwards.

4.4 Peter Abelard (1079–1142)

Mention of Abelard brings us to the dominant theological figure of the twelfth century. As will be seen, Abelard more than any other single theologian was to lay the foundations for changing the shape of what is today known as systematic theology. However, our interest in him at this point resides in his passionate defence of the use of reason, in the form of dialectics, in theology. He too will engender strong opposition from the more traditionalist minded theologians. Indeed, in the fight between Abelard, on the one hand, and Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St Thierry, on the other hand, we witness the final battle between the dialecticians and anti-dialecticians. The dialecticians will be the victors, albeit due in large measure to the more balanced voices that arose in both the eleventh (as in Anselm) and the twelfth (as in Hugh of St Victor) centuries.

To return to Abelard (or, as it is more correctly spelt, Abailard), he began his intellectual life not as a theologian but as a philosopher, having studied under two men whose views on the raging philosophical issue of the day – the nature and status of concepts known as ‘universals’ – he would later attack in his typically scornful fashion: Roscelin and William of Champeaux (for what follows cf Gaybba 1984:117ff). In the fashion of the time he would set up schools wherever suitable – at Melun, Corbeil, and finally in Paris. It was there that he decided to become a theologian. He therefore went to study under the most renowned of the teachers of the day, Anselm of Laon (a pupil of Anselm of Canterbury). He soon decided – again in typical Abelardian fashion – to set up his own school (of theology) at Laon. His first lecture was a foretaste of what sort of a theologian he would be: it was an exegesis of Ezekiel done with the aid of the knowledge of the logical structure of language that he had mastered from his philosophical days. This was a break from the traditional dependence on commentaries. In Abelard’s own prejudiced account of the incident (*Historia Calamitatum*:125) he was a brilliant success, thereby proving the point he had made and which had led to him being challenged to produce such an exegesis: one does not need extensive commentaries if one has mastered dialectics!

He returned to Paris, gathering, as always happened with him, large numbers of students. These students, he said, wanted reasons that were logical and which made sense to them (*Historia Calamitatum*:141–142). One of his pupils was Heloise. The two fell violently in love, had an affair, and a son. Since he

was neither in major orders nor a monk at the time, Abelard was free to marry. However, this would have blocked his career as a theologian. They therefore married secretly. Disaster followed. Heloise's uncle plotted and brought about a physical assault on Abelard in which he was castrated. Abelard decided to become a monk and pressurised the heroically loyal Heloise to become a nun. The names of Abelard and Heloise have been inextricably linked ever since, ensuring yet another distinction for Abelard – he is the only theologian to have attained the mythological ranks of the great lovers.

His life now revolved around his career as a theologian, even though it had many stormy episodes. He seemed unable to get on with his fellow monks and was the object of repeated attacks because of his use of dialectics. In particular, his writings on the Trinity were condemned. However, he never broke with the Church, and his last year was such an exemplary one of humility and self-discipline that even Peter the Venerable was impressed.

Abelard was a brilliant dialectician and has earned a justifiable place not only in the history of theology but also in the medieval development of logical theory. When one takes full cognisance of the extent of his talents in this field, his mercurial temperament, the opposition, often obscurantist, against the use of a discipline – dialectics – brought into disrepute by Berengar and Roscelin, one can understand and forgive the passion with which he defends his use of the secular arts in theology, especially dialectics – and even why he sees dialectics as a divine gift and not just an acquired art!

To justify the use of dialectics in theology, he appeals to three factors.

His first appeal is one that recalls the earliest use of philosophy by Christian thinkers: the defence of Christian beliefs against attacks made on philosophical grounds (*Introductio ad theogiam*:1040). His second appeal is that all the arts and their insights are part of God's good creation and can therefore be used in his service (*ibid*). The idea is expanded in one of his letters in a manner reminiscent of the positive evaluation of pagan philosophy found in the early Greek Fathers. Abelard points out that the very word 'logic' comes from the Greek 'logos' and that this same word is used by John for Christ. Its application to Christ indicates that the science that takes its name from it ('logic') belongs first and foremost to Christ. Moreover, he argues, one sees Christ using it when he confounded his critics. Christ promised to share this gift of his with his disciples when he said: 'I will give you a wisdom that your

adversaries will be unable to resist' (Lk 21:15). By taking on our nature, Christ therefore makes us not only Christians but also true philosophers (Ep 13:355–356). It is a fascinating theological argument for the full and free use of reason in theology. Abelard's third appeal is to something that he justifiably felt his conservative opponents should accept: tradition! And his star witness is, of course, the one Berengar appealed to, namely Augustine, who clearly saw the use of philosophy in the service of theology as not only justifiable but desirable.

However, for all his impassioned defence and brilliant use of dialectics in theology, it would be a mistake to regard him, as so many have done, as being simply a rationalist. Wrong too is the related judgement that would see him as 'the leader of free thought and rationalism against the obscurantism and intolerance of St Bernard' (cf Knowles 1962:116). To appreciate Abelard's true view of the role of dialectics one has to take seriously his strictures against those who used it simply to show off, to dazzle with their display of dialectical skill, and who acted as though there was nothing that could not be grasped and defended by means of dialectics (see his *Theologia Christiana*:1212, & 1218).

Abelard certainly does not wish to see dialectics being the master of theology. Grabmann demonstrates this with his customary thoroughness in an analysis of the way in which Abelard saw the relationship between faith and reason (Grabmann 1911:188ff). The mark of the rationalist is that reason is the final court of appeal in matters theological, that only those things are worthy of acceptance that reason can dissect analytically and of which it can demonstrate the cogency. However, for all his love of dialectics, Abelard remains fundamentally the believer. His comment to Heloise that he would rather abandon philosophy than conflict with Paul or be cut off from Christ (Ep 17:375) was not simply empty rhetoric on his part. Abelard is quite explicit that reason cannot prove the Trinity or the procession of the Spirit. It can only appeal to arguments of convenience to show that it is 'close to human reason' – that is (as I read him) it is not unreasonable. Moreover, he distinguishes quite clearly between (a) belief, (b) the sort of understanding of it that reason can aid us in, and (c) the sort of comprehension that lays the inner rationale of a reality bare (*Introductio ad theologiam*:1050–1051). The rationalist seeks the latter of the two types of understanding, (c). Abelard, however, is attempting the former, (b). Third, Abelard acknowledges and stresses that the mysteries of the faith transcend the intellect's capacities.

Reason has its limitations even in the natural order. It is even more limited, then, when confronted with such mysteries. This is particularly true of the transcendent nature of God (*Theologia Christiana*:1222ff, 1242). Fourth, Abelard as a result stresses that the concepts philosophy uses cannot be applied straightforwardly to the divine (*Theologia Christiana*:1247). Finally, and perhaps most important of all, he clearly regards the authority of the faith as the foundation of subsequent theological activity. He agrees that, particularly in matters theological, 'it is safer to follow authority than human judgement'. The break with Berengar at this point is clear. Instead, he explicitly links up with Anselm's procedure by stating that in his *Introduction to theology* he will give first of all the authoritative foundations for what follows and then, added to these as a support, arguments from reason (*Introductio ad theogiam*:1039). As can be seen, Abelard was not simply defending himself but was dealing explicitly with some fundamental issues of theological method, involving the use of reason. His solutions are still subscribed to by many today.

However, while Abelard was not a rationalist, those of his contemporaries who felt he had gone too far in that direction had – like Berengar – genuine grounds for complaint. That his forays into trinitarian and incarnational theology led to some heterodox statements did not help his cause. Nor did his temperament help matters. It was one that only too easily appeared to many people to be excessively puffed up with its own self-confidence and insufficiently humble before God's Word.

What is clear, however, is that Abelard became more clearly orthodox as the years passed by (Knowles 1962:124). He had an immense following – one can talk of a true 'school' of Abelard – and among his pupils are to be found several famous names, including a future pope (Roland Bandinelli – Alexander III) and, quite possibly, Peter Lombard, through whom Abelard's *Sic et non* will influence the entire structure of future theological work. We must look at that influence shortly. But first let us examine the related process whereby theology came to be an *academic* discipline.

5 | Becoming an academic discipline (twelfth to thirteenth centuries)

5.1 The rise of universities

Unquestionably the intellectual developments of this period owe more to the events constituting the rise of the universities (cf Gaybba 1984, chapter 10 for much of what follows and for further references, especially to a core work, Evans 1980) than to any other single factor. At the end of the eleventh century there were four kinds of schools in Europe: the cathedral schools; the monastic schools; the – for want of a better word – personal schools; and, in Italy, the liberal arts schools (cf Evans 1980:8–9). The liberal arts schools were confined to Italy and had little influence on the development of the universities further north. The third type – the personal schools – lacked any form of institutionalisation. They consisted simply of a famous teacher and whatever pupils came to hear him. Any teacher could set up such a school (as Abelard did several times), the existence of which could be very short-lived.

The most common was the second type – the monastic schools. They had a certain stability since they were attached to particular monasteries. The tuition was generally competent, with every now and then a particular school achieving eminence because of an outstanding individual (for example the school of Bec – here Anselm was educated – under Lanfranc). However, the

tuition was aimed mainly at teaching monks what they needed to know to be good monks. The aim was not to provide all-round tuition. Originally, such schools did take outside pupils, but this ceased in the twelfth century. Thereafter the monastic schools regressed to being mostly centres of study aimed at improving the monks' personal piety. Unlike the cathedral schools, 'there was no steady development of a syllabus of study, no examination leading to the award of a degree' (Evans 1980:8).

It was in the cathedral schools, then, that the major developments occurred. Situated as they were in cities, they attracted not only students who wished to improve their theological learning but also those who wished to steep themselves in what the secular sciences had to offer. In the twelfth century these schools attracted not only an increasing number of students, but also a diversity of teachers.

It is not difficult to see how the pupils who came to hear one master lecture might draw other masters after them, masters who came in the hope of attracting some pupils to themselves. Slowly an aggregation of masters in certain schools made it less likely that the departure or death of one of them would bring an end to the school's period of prosperity. In this way a school came to amount to something more than a meeting of master and pupils; it became a meeting-place. Long before it became impossible for someone to set up his own school at will (as it did in the thirteenth century) it became unusual for him to do so (Evans 1980:11).

These conglomerations of students and masters from all over the Western world were the nucleus from which universities would originate. Hence a university was originally called a *studium generale* 'where studium denotes "facilities for study" or organized school, and generale has reference, not to the subjects taught, but to the provenance of the students, as we might say "of general resort" or "international"' (Knowles 1962:153). The actual word *universitas* was originally used to mean 'the whole group (of students or masters or both)'. Later it came to mean their 'trade unions' (as we would put it – in those days such organisations were called 'guilds'). Only much later did the word come to refer to the universal scope of studies offered – that is, studies in all fields.

The two original universities were those at Bologna (in Italy) and Paris, Bologna being the first one. However, it is the university of Paris that influenced the subsequent style not only of universities in Northern Europe but also of

theology. The final step towards the formation of Paris as a university took place sometime between 1150 and 1170. This step was taken when the teachers decided to form one single institution. This institution would grant degrees (the concept of degrees originated from the licences to teach that had already been granted for some time by cathedral schools to their successful applicants). And it would have four faculties: theology, canon law, medicine and arts. The University of Paris became medieval Europe's most famous centre of learning, becoming a model for virtually all others.

Let us now see how all this influenced the teaching of theology.

Briefly, the movement to form universities brought about a structured programme of studies that all students had to go through. Gone were the days when masters and students could arrange their own course of studies entirely as they wished. Instead, clear syllabi, prescribed texts, mandatory exercises and examinations now appeared. Theology thereby became a distinct subject in which an individual could only be declared proficient after having passed through a defined course of instruction and performed satisfactorily in an examination.

This standardisation obviously raised the general level of theological learning in Europe. It also created a common pool of theological knowledge that could be taken as given. This then freed those who had mastered it to focus on specific points of debate or problematic areas in theology, and this in turn advanced theological learning at a more rapid rate than hitherto. All of this was assisted by the availability of new resource material that occurred in the twelfth century.

5.2 The availability of new resource material

The availability of new resource material in the West was one of the effects of the crusades and the increasing trade between East and West. Greek and Arabic works unknown to the West were made available in translation. The new sources covered a wide area, ranging from classical pagan literature (which influenced neither the content nor the method of theology very much) (Grabmann 1911:59), through philosophical works, to Greek patristic writings hitherto unknown in the West (which did have a notable influence on scholasticism) (Grabmann 1911:81). However, two authors need to be mentioned explicitly.

The first is *Aristotle*. Although other philosophical sources (Platonic and neo-Platonic) were made available through translations at this time, it was the translation of the rest of Aristotle's logical works that had the greatest influence on the subsequent development of medieval theology. These works began to become known and used in the middle (Knowles 1962:185–190) of the twelfth century. They came to be known as the *logica nova* ('the new logic') to distinguish it from what was now called the *logica vetus* ('old logic'). The *logica vetus* comprised those dialectical works of Aristotle that were already known to the medievals (see above). It was, as the twelfth century discovered, only the first half of a much bigger work on logic, that is dialectics, called the *Organon*. The *logica nova* was the second half and comprised the *Prior analytics*, and the *Posterior analytics*, the *Topics* and the *Sophistical arguments*. Congar has referred to the *logica vetus* as Aristotle's first entry into medieval thought, and the discovery of the *logica nova* as his second entry. His third entry will be the thirteenth-century discovery of the rest of his philosophical works – his psychology, metaphysics, etc (although some of his psychological and metaphysical works were known and sporadically used towards the end of the twelfth century) (cf Congar 1968:59–60, 85).

The influence of these newly discovered dialectical works of Aristotle on the subsequent development of theology was enormous. As Knowles points out, dialectical logic became 'the be-all and end-all of the course in the liberal arts which so soon became the necessary preparation for all the higher studies in the nascent universities. In so doing, it canonised, for the whole of the Middle Ages and beyond, the question and disputation (see below) as the basic form of all teaching and discovery. These in turn rested upon the correct manipulation of the syllogism, and upon the critical technique of the "new" logic in demolishing false argument and pressing home valid demonstrations' (1962:190). Of course by 'whole of the Middle Ages' Knowles is referring to the rest of the Middle Ages (which have already run half their course). Up to the twelfth century the *lectio* was the only meaningful ingredient in teaching. After Aristotle's second entry the disputation of issues will become a prominent feature alongside it.

The second author to be mentioned specifically is the last of the Greek Fathers, *John Damascene*. In the middle of the twelfth century the third part of his *Fount of wisdom* was translated into Latin. It was called *De fide orthodoxa* ('On the Orthodox Faith'). As Grabmann points out (1911: 9), in this way the scholasticism of the East (John Damascene) was familiar with and used

Aristotelian philosophy in his work) and that of the West came into contact with each other, with the East giving the West new material as well as new methodological insights.

As regards the new material, this was especially evident in twelfth-century trinitarian and Christological controversies, since Damascene had gathered together in his work all the previous Greek thinkers on the issues (he saw himself primarily as a compiler, since for him too theology was mainly a matter of preserving the insights of the past). As regards methodology, he provided medieval theologians with an impressive example of how Aristotelian dialectics can be used to illuminate theological issues. In particular he bequeathed to them an example of terminological precision in a field that, despite Tertullian, still needed it: the doctrine of God and the related one of the incarnation (Grabmann 1911:111–113).

5.3 The elements of an academic discipline

The rise of the universities and the development of theology as an academic discipline are closely connected. For, once it began to be taught as one subject among several, it needed to define its own identity in relation to them. It needed to work out where theology fitted into the general scheme of learning. But it particularly needed to specify its object of study and its methods.

As regards its object of study, this involved two things: finding theology a name of its own and clarifying what fell within its ambit. As regards its methods, for the twelfth century this amounted to working out its ‘rules’. Every discipline had its rules. So too must theology.

For most of the twelfth century there was, in the West, no single clear term for what we would today call theology – that is, a field of study ranging from the study of the biblical text to speculative analyses of points of doctrine (Evans 1980:30). Since it is difficult to discuss the nature of something clearly until you have a term that delimits the entity under discussion, the pressure to clarify theology’s field of study and ‘rules’ also led to the emergence, at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century, of ‘theology’ as a name for the infant academic discipline.

When exactly the term ‘theology’ (which was an old term and which was used to refer especially to what is today called the doctrine of God) came to be

used for the infant academic discipline is unclear. But we find it used in the first of half of the thirteenth century to describe the faculty in which theology was taught at the University of Paris: the Faculty of Theology. It also begins to be employed by writers in the sense of a discipline that has a clearly defined field of study (for example Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*, even though his favourite term for the discipline is the older one of *sacra doctrina* ('sacred doctrine')). But even before the term 'theology' came to be widely used, the field of study had come to be reasonably clearly delineated, especially from the time of Aquinas onwards.

As regards the field of study itself, already in the twelfth century three distinct branches of theology were emerging: biblical studies, speculative theology, apologetical theology (cf Evans 1980:40). The developing academic character of theology can also be seen in the various attempts made by twelfth-century theologians to relate these to each other in an orderly way, to impose on them a unifying scheme, that is, one that would clearly reflect the unity that enabled them all to fall under the one label of 'theology'. As Evans remarks, 'the need for organization ... marks the early development of an academic discipline' (1980:40).

However, one final and – for the medievals – most important element had to be added, so that theology could be an academic discipline. This was a set of 'rules'. According to medieval ideas, an academic discipline was one that could be taught according to a clearly defined set of rules (Evans 1980:28). These 'rules' were the basic presuppositions, axioms, maxims, etc, that guided the way in which a particular discipline was practised. It was felt that theology too, if it was to be regarded as an 'ars' ('art', what we today would call an 'academic discipline'), had to be able to clarify its basic terms, presuppositions and axioms in such a way as to enable any intelligent person to understand and evaluate what is being said. While Gilbert of Poitiers (1076–1154) seems to have been the first to have drawn attention to the need for theology to clarify its basic 'rules', only two thinkers in the twelfth century seem to have made a major attempt to do so.

The first was Alan of Lille (died c 1202) and his attempt is to be found in his aptly entitled work *Regula de sacra theologia* ('Rules for sacred theology'). In it he lays down rules for the correct use of words in theological matters, especially when speaking of God. He also clarifies certain basic axioms (for example 'whatever is in God is God'). The second author was Nicholas of Amiens,

who wrote a work called *De arte catholicae fidei* ('on the art [discipline] of the catholic faith'). What is particularly interesting about this work is that it is an early attempt to base theological method on a mathematical-deductive model. His work is divided into five books (God, creation, creatures, the incarnate Word, sacraments, resurrection). But all of this is prefaced with a section in which he gives a series of definitions of terms (for example 'cause', 'substance', 'matter', 'form'), states his presuppositions (which will undergird the rest of the work), and gives seven axioms that he regards as self-evident. He then proceeds to compose each of the five books in such a way that it is made up of a chain of logically linked propositions.

As has been remarked by others, these early attempts to clarify theology's presuppositions, axioms and procedural methods did not take sufficient account of the difference between theology and philosophy, between a faith-based discipline and one which bases itself on reason or natural experience. But the very fact that these attempts were made is indicative of theology's transformation into an academic discipline. Let us now go on to see what else went into that transformation – namely, the shift from being mainly a commentary on a text to a probing of issues through logical debate.

6 | Giving theology a new shape (twelfth to thirteenth centuries)

6.1 The development and increasing importance of the ‘quaestio’

As we saw, up to and including much of the twelfth century, theological activity was conceived of as reading and commenting on the scriptures and the Fathers. However, the twelfth century witnesses a change taking place – a shift from such commentary to the discussion of issues. This in turn assisted greatly the process of systematisation, focusing on creating a systematic exposition of all the themes, all the *issues*, that could be discussed in theology. We therefore begin our story by examining the increasing dominance of what was known as the *quaestio*, namely the ‘question’ or ‘issue’ in theological discussions.

Three factors in particular stimulated the development of the *quaestio* (see Gaybba 1984:130ff): the practice of interrupting the reading of the text to discuss a particular point; Peter Abelard’s *Sic et non*; the ‘second entry’ of Aristotle (that is, the discovery of the rest of his *Organon*).

6.1.1 Interrupting the text to deal with an issue

The practice of interrupting the text being read in order to deal with a particular issue was an old one, going right back to patristic times. However, the

twelfth century saw a dramatic increase in the number of such questions being raised and dealt with. Until the time of Peter Abelard, such questions were still regarded as part of biblical commentary. But with the publication of his *Sic et non* a new form of theological literature appeared on the scene, one that concentrated entirely on debating issues. The issues arose precisely because the Fathers of the Church appeared to hold divergent opinions on them. This leads us to the next factor influencing the development of the *quaestio* – namely Abelard's *Sic et non*.

6.1.2 Abelard's *Sic et non*

We saw how the practice arose of making collections of patristic statements about a variety of issues (the collections came to be called 'Sentences', as was seen). We also saw that the practice of putting alongside each other statements by a variety of Fathers on a particular theme served to highlight that, judged simply by their words, the Fathers disagreed with each other. Attempts at reconciliation can be traced to as far back as the seventh century. In the ninth century Hincmar of Rheims and then in the eleventh century Bernold of Constance provided a list of criteria for resolving the apparent contradictions: for example consult the context of the text, compare it with other texts, and check its authenticity. However, these attempts were made principally by canonists – those versed in canon law – in order to deal with canonical disputes. Peter Abelard would build on Bernold's work by using his criteria to probe strictly theological issues. This he did in his *Sic et non*.

As its title indicates, ('Sic et non' means 'Yes and no') the work is devoted to probing apparent contradictions, in this case contradictory patristic statements. However, Abelard's purpose is not to discredit the Fathers but to stimulate young theological students to think. As he says in his Prologue, 'the first key to wisdom is constant and frequent questioning', and he gives a biblical justification for this by quoting Matthew 7:7: 'Seek and you shall find!' (*Sic et non*:1349). Questioning for Abelard is absolutely central to theology – and therein lay his contribution to it.

In the Prologue to this work he gives five rules for reconciling contradictory texts, rules which he obtained from Bernold of Constance: (1) check the authenticity of the text; (2) check with the author's other, especially later, writings, so as to see whether or not the problematic text represents a view-

point once held but then retracted; (3) check the binding character of conflicting laws; (4) search for different shades of meaning in the words used; (5) if the previous rules did not resolve the contradiction, then establish which of the conflicting viewpoints has the greater authority supporting it, and opt for that.

Having given the guidelines for resolving such contradictions, he then proceeds to list opposing patristic authorities on 158 issues, beginning with the widely debated one of the relationship between faith and reason: 'that faith should be supported by reasoning – and that it should not'. All the questions are posed in the form: 'that *x* is so; that *x* is not so'. Moreover, Abelard craftily selected texts in which only one of the above rules would normally be invoked, namely the fourth rule, which forced the students to probe the concepts behind the words used and in that way argue out the issue for themselves (cf Grabmann 1911:211–212). For he himself did not resolve the issues in his book, leaving them as a challenge to his students. This forced the students to use dialectics as their major tool. It had the danger of leading to hairsplitting about the meaning of words. But it had the enormous advantage of forcing people to think through the opposing arguments for an issue. When the rest of Aristotle's logic became available, then the issues would be debated with greater logical precision. This brings us to the third of the factors stimulating the rise of the *quaestio*: the discovery of Aristotle's *logica nova*.

6.1.3 The discovery of Aristotle's *logica nova*

Abelard knew only that part of Aristotle's logical writings known as the 'old logic' when he wrote his *Sic et non*. However, between 1120 and 1160 the remainder of Aristotle's *Organon* was disseminated in translations in the West. In it the West discovered a theory of syllogistic reasoning and the principles of scientific demonstration.

This was to influence decisively the form that the *quaestio* eventually took. The *Sic et non* method had already begun the process of casting the *quaestio* in the form of a thesis and its antithesis. The newly discovered work of Aristotle led to an expansion of this form, so that the *quaestio* came to take on the following structure as its normal one: thesis; arguments for; arguments against; the master's own viewpoint; responses to the arguments.

Crucial to this development were the rules of syllogistic reasoning. These rules were exercised in what was called the scholastic 'disputation'. The further development of the *quaestio* was therefore influenced by the dominant role that the disputation came to play in the infant universities.

Of course, the art of disputing issues and the use of the disputation as a learning tool was not exclusively a twelfth-century phenomenon. We find it in patristic times and also in several tenth- and eleventh-century schools (Grabmann 1911:16–17). However, in the newly discovered part of the *Organon*, Aristotle had laid down the logical rules to be observed in conducting a disputation. Mastering those rules and putting them into practice became part of every theological student's education.

In a disputation, one party would propound a thesis and argue briefly in its defence. An opponent would then reject the thesis and provide counter-arguments. The defender would then have to defend his arguments, usually by means of distinctions. He may say something like this: as regards your objections, if you mean x, I agree, but if you mean y, I disagree, for x and y must be distinguished because of p, q, r. And so the battle would rage back and forth. When students disputed a thesis during a lesson, the practice arose of the lesson ending with the master giving his resolution of the problem being debated.

The effect of this on the development of the *quaestio* was that it ceased to be a simple unstructured discussion of a particular point, but a logical arguing of it according to clear rules. A thesis would be stated, briefly explained, and a brief argument given in its defence. Then arguments for rejecting the thesis would be presented. The problematic character of the issue having now been made clear, a solution would then be offered, together with answers to each of the objections. The fruits of this development can be seen by opening any page of medieval theology's most famous work: Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*.

The *quaestio* had, then, its roots far back in history and entered theological method through Abelard's *Sic et non*. From there it would spread through the influence of Lombard's *Sentences* (see following section), a work which was constructed around a series of systematically arranged *quaestiones*. Opposition occurred. This was predictable, because the process involved a move away from simply studying the writings of the Fathers and the scriptures. But the *quaestio* triumphed in the end (cf Congar 1968:84)

6.2 Systematisation of theological issues

Closely linked to the development of the *quaestio* was a strong twelfth-century drive towards systematising theological issues, and the rise of the *summae*, as they were called (see Gaybba 1984:138ff).

Of course, as with so much else that we have seen, systematisation too was not a twelfth-century invention – even systematization in matters theological. As early as the third century, Origen and Tertullian were not only arranging their theological data systematically, but they also sought to weld such data into a system (Origen) or to elucidate the system believed to be inherent in the faith (Tertullian). Furthermore, in the seventh century Isidore of Seville's *Libri tres sententiarum* was a work in which the material was systematically arranged around doctrinal themes. There are other works that could also be mentioned.

However, it was only in the twelfth century that a strong, widespread, and conscious move towards systematisation took place and did so in two senses. First of all, it did so in the sense of arranging data according to a clear plan. Secondly, and more importantly, it did so in the sense of bringing out the connection between the various doctrines so as to present them as part of an organic whole. It is with this latter drive that systematic theology was truly born.

The reasons for this taking place in the twelfth century should be clear by now. First of all, it was a period of systematically organised theological activity unparalleled in the history of the Church. Second, since systematisation is an intrinsic element in any true discipline, theology's development as an academic subject entailed a drive towards the systematisation (in both the above senses) of its data. Third, during the days when mere commentary reigned supreme, the order of treatment was dictated by the text being commented upon. One followed the outline of the text rather than a more logical arrangement of material. The increasing dominance of the *quaestio* provided the freedom for a more logically systematised arrangement of issues. Many of the questions that originated during textual commentary were later gathered together and arranged into a systematic order. Fourth, the development of the *quaestio* also involved the analysis of particular issues. The result was that data were not only systematically arranged, but also

analysed so that the logical relationship between the various issues was laid bare – thereby creating a true system, an organic unity.

The beginnings of the twelfth-century's drive towards systematisation are to be found in the collections of Sentences emanating from two schools: Laon and St Victor (Grabmann 1911:157–168; Ghellinck 1948:133–148). Both became famous for their learning, and it has been said that either or both of these schools played a role in the formation of just about every twelfth-century theologian of note. But other works systematising theological issues also began to appear, such as Abelard's *Introductio ad theologiam* ('Introduction to theology') and Hugh of St Victor's outstanding work *De sacramentis christiana fidei* ("The sacraments of the Christian faith") – in which the entire spectrum of Christian belief is covered (he is using the word 'sacrament' here in the broad sense of 'the mysteries of the Christian faith'). However, neither of these nor many other similar works were destined to have the sort of influence on subsequent theology that Peter Lombard's *Libri quattuor sententiarum* – 'The four books of sentences' – would have. We must now examine briefly that historic work.

6.3 Peter Lombard's 'Sentences'

Born in Lombardy (hence his 'surname') at the turn of the century, Peter Lombard studied at Bologna, Rheims, in the school of St Victor and, probably, under Abelard. From 1140 he taught at the cathedral school of Paris. In 1159 he became the city's bishop and died two years later.

His fame rests on his *Four books of sentences*, composed some time between 1150 and 1158, according to the prologue of the Grottaferrata critical edition of this work. Lombard's *Sentences* cover the entire spectrum of Christian beliefs. Divided into four large books, the first deals with God – one and triune; the second with creation, grace, original and personal sin; the third with Christology and soteriology, the virtues and the ten commandments; and the fourth with the sacraments and eschatology.

The work is clearly systematic in the sense that the material is arranged in a logical order. However, it lacks the systematic strength of Hugh of St Victor's great work. It has, for example, been criticised for having no clear, consistently followed, unifying idea or ideas. But it was a good middle-of-the-road work, one that managed to take the best of the two traditions that were

beginning to diverge so strongly in the twelfth century: the more monastic orientation of Hugh of St Victor and the more progressive, questioning approach of an Abelard. Lombard's work breathes the spirit of humility and respect for the truth and for the Fathers which is typical of monastic theology. But it also breathes the spirit of the *Sic et non*. For it is Abelard's *Sic et non* that gave Peter Lombard his basic technique: the setting down of opposing viewpoints as the beginning of the investigation of an issue. Moreover, he goes further than Abelard, since he not only gives the opposing views but actually attempts to resolve the issues raised by them. In doing so he does not hesitate to use dialectics and his grasp of syllogistic reasoning betrays the influence of the newly discovered works of Aristotle. Indeed, the Abelardian aspects of his work were to earn for him opposition from several quarters and even a papal condemnation for some doctrinal stances taken. Nevertheless, the work's merits were sufficient to overcome these setbacks and it was destined to play a major role in establishing a form of theology in which every issue undergoes the test of a series of searching questions.

In addition to its balance, embracing the best of the old and the new, the *Sentences* also had two other qualities that would contribute to its universal and long-lasting appeal: it was a mine of information about the ideas and issues being debated in the author's day; it was not wedded to any particular philosophical system. The work breathes the Augustinian air of its times but is not committed to Platonism for its intellectual framework in the way that Aquinas would be to Aristotelianism. Finally, personal factors also contributed to its rapid diffusion and universal acceptance. That he became bishop of Paris may have helped focus attention on his work but a more important influence seems to have been exercised by his student, Peter of Poitiers, who used his position as chancellor of the schools in Paris to impress the merits of the *Sentences* on the theologians there as the twelfth moved into the thirteenth century.

In 1222 Alexander of Hales made what was to become one of the most momentous decisions in the history of theology as a discipline: he introduced the *Sentences* as the manual of theology for his course in Paris. What was significant about that action was that it introduced into theology a textbook other than the Bible. Of course other works were always available to students. But Alexander's action rapidly led to the situation where the two basic texts that every student had to master were the Bible and the *Sentences*. The authority that the *Sentences* had as a result of this action is difficult for us to imagine

today, since we take for granted a situation where theological texts other than the Bible form a major part of theological studies. Indeed, it was Alexander's action that eventually led to a reassessment of theology's specific body of knowledge, as we will see later on.

The *Sentences* was to become the most influential theological book in medieval times. Indeed, one could perhaps say that it became the most influential book in the whole history of theology, influencing the views on the relationship between the various parts of theology of untold generations of students. 'No book save the Bible was copied and commented upon so often between 1150 and 1500' (Knowles 1962:182). Peter Lombard was called 'The Master of the *Sentences*' and his book rapidly became the standard theological textbook in all the universities. After completing his biblical studies, the theological student then had to study Lombard's work, after which he became a 'Bachelor of the *Sentences*'. He was introduced to Lombard's work by means of commentaries. Most of the commentaries on the *Sentences* preserved in manuscripts were the product of a bachelor's studies (Glorieux 1967:95). Many were published after the author qualified as a master of theology. As a result, commentaries on the *Sentences* became one of the most striking features of theological life for centuries. The custom of writing such commentaries continued in at least some centres to as late as the mid-seventeenth century. As you can imagine, the commentaries that grew up around Lombard's work were legion and have become the major source for any research into theological thought from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.

6.4 The use of secular knowledge in theology

We saw above how the use of dialectics led to passionate opposition to the sort of role that was now being accorded to reason. These fights were about reason as a *tool*, that is to say, about using it as a technique for analysing something. They were fights about the extent to which logic could be applied to divine truths. That fight was largely won by the time the thirteenth century got under way. The next issue would be using reason not just as a tool but as a source of knowledge, namely using secular knowledge as a framework for illuminating the faith. We see this happening at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when theologians started using Aristotelian psychology to understand the structure of the soul and the way the human mind worked.

This was relevant to their discussions about the way in which God worked within the souls of believers and believers responded to God's grace. From such beginnings there developed that widespread use of secular sources that we see occurring in Thomas Aquinas (mid-thirteenth century). By that stage all of Aristotle's works had been discovered by the West and the result was a body of literature that covered virtually all the known fields of knowledge. This massive entry of an alien secular body of knowledge into a Christian culture which had forgotten how influenced it had been centuries earlier by Platonic thought created a near-crisis in the young theological faculty of Paris. The challenge presented by the presence of such a body of knowledge was in its own day as threatening, if not more so, as Galileo and Darwin would be in their days. Aquinas's genius was that he took Aristotle's philosophy by the scruff of its neck and baptised it. Not all appreciated it at the time and one could still argue that the baptism was not all that successful. But one cannot ignore the immensity of what he did achieve.

After Aquinas, it became common practice to utilise secular knowledge in theology. This was viewed in different ways by different theologians. Some saw the result as meriting the name 'theology', others did not. But the practice was widespread nevertheless. As a result, a theory of theology as a science (taking science in a broad sense) of 'conclusions' developed. The background to this was the role that syllogistic reasoning (the science of logical argumentation) had come to play in theology. A syllogism was a form of logical argumentation whereby a conclusion was drawn from two premises (to give a text-book example, premise 1: 'all human beings are mortal'; premise 2: 'but this is a human being'; conclusion: 'therefore this is mortal'). Theology came to be seen as a science that widened one's knowledge (of God, etc) by drawing conclusions from premises. Both premises may be taken from what were seen as the sources of revelation (scripture, but also the Church's traditional beliefs). Or one may be taken from revelation and another from secular sources. We will look at this in a bit more detail later on. Suffice it to say that the use these medievals made of such secular knowledge not only echoed the earlier uses made by the Apologists of Stoic ideas or the uses made by Augustine and Origen of neo-Platonist ideas (though more subconsciously than consciously) but also presaged the widespread use of secular knowledge that is found in theological circles today.

6.5 The rise of 'scholastic theology'

What we are witnessing is the rise of what has come to be called 'scholastic theology'. The name 'scholastic' means 'of the schools' and refers to the fact that this type of theology grew out of the cathedral schools in which secular learning was revived and which led to the establishment of universities. As such, this type of theology contrasted (as we saw earlier on) with the more mystical, traditional type of theology.

Scholastic theology was therefore from the beginning a way of doing theology that placed great emphasis on the importance of rational debate, using the fruits and tools of reason to probe the data of faith. It was, if you wish, the full flowering of the legitimate use of reason in theology.

That scholastic theology displaced the older, monastic type of theology was because of its undoubtedly merits. It brought to theology a precision and analytical thoroughness that it had not had before. It enabled theology to become a true academic discipline. It took seriously the idea that the believer is in a world which must not only be illuminated by Christianity's faith but which must also illuminate the understanding of that faith. It brought with it a drive towards systematisation that enabled a clearer picture of the inner unity binding the various Christian beliefs to each other to be expressed. This not only gave one a holistic picture of the faith, it also illuminated aspects of each individual doctrine that would otherwise be lost sight of.

However, its very merits also contained the seeds of its dangers and of its ultimate widespread rejection centuries later. These will be examined briefly below as a conclusion to our survey of medieval scholastic theology.

6.6 The dawning of specialisation

When dealing with the development of theology into an academic discipline, I referred in passing to the beginnings of specialisation that were beginning to manifest themselves. To complete this section on theology's new shape, let me expand a bit on that (for more details cf Evans 1980:40).

Traditionally, what we call 'theology' had been seen as being simply a study of the Bible. And medieval theologians would continue for quite some time yet to see their task as being basically just that. However, one can study the

Bible in two ways. One can either focus on the text and what it says, commenting on it and drawing out its meaning. Or one can focus on what one sees as its message – that is on the doctrines or beliefs that arose from reflection on it.

In the twelfth century, this distinction begins to become much clearer. The reason, of course, is that with the increasing dominance of the *quaestio* and the systematisation of such issues around logically arranged doctrinal themes, a form of theology became widespread that differed quite noticeably from the traditional straight commentary on the Bible.

As a result, two distinct types of theology arose. They will eventually become what they are today: two distinct specialisations within theology. One is the study of the Bible. The other is speculative theology (which is part of what we know as ‘systematic theology’). Each specialisation will have its own clearly defined purpose and distinctive method. However, the close link between the two remains to this day.

The twelfth century was also a period in which Christians began to enter into debate with Muslim and Jewish ideas. This gave rise to a third type of theology, the beginnings of a third specialisation: apologetics.

Apologetics has been variously defined, but broadly speaking it is that part of theology that focuses on defending the Christian faith against its adversaries or giving the reasons for accepting Christianity. Of course, apologetics is a normal part of the intellectual equipment of most religions. Not surprisingly some of the earliest theological writings in the Christian church were written by people called ‘apologists’. However, as Pelikan notes, the theologians of the twelfth century ‘encountered, more intensely and more systematically than had any of their medieval predecessors, the spokesmen for other faiths’ (1978:242). This was particularly true of Judaism. ‘The twelfth century, therefore, seems to have produced more treatises of Jewish-Christian disputation than any preceding century of the Middle Ages, perhaps as many as all those centuries combined’ (Pelikan 1978:246).

This third type of theology, too, had its own purpose and methods, distinct from those of biblical studies and speculative theology. The purpose was to show the error of the opposing position and its arguments, and provide convincing arguments for the Christian one. Hence, as regards method, the disputants had to search for starting points that would be agreed upon by

Christians and Jews or Christians and Muslims, and argue from there. One could not, as in biblical studies or speculative theology, appeal to patristic authority or that of the New Testament.

The twelfth century, then, witnessed the rise not only of theology as an academic discipline, but also the beginnings of specialisation within it, the beginnings of disciplines that will be known later as biblical studies, systematic (or dogmatic) theology, and apologetics.

7 | Some debates about the nature of theology (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries)

7.1 Introductory remarks

By the beginning of the thirteenth century the word ‘theology’ had come to refer to the discipline taught in the faculty of theology. The existence of a single name and the acceptance of the idea that theology was in some sense an art, that is a discipline with definable axioms and methods of procedure, gave it a unity. But this unity was more apparent than real. In fact, the new discipline contained within itself very different blocks of knowledge and correspondingly different theories about theology’s procedural methods. In the next section we will therefore look at what sort of knowledge theologians had in mind when they talked about ‘theology’ and how their views on this changed. In the section following on that we will see how this affected theories about theology’s procedural methods. This in turn will lead us to the final section, which will examine theology’s ‘scientific’ character.

7.2 What kind of knowledge is theological knowledge?

When thirteenth-century writers theorised about ‘theology’, the central item that affected their theorising was the way in which they conceived of the

information, the truths, the body of knowledge (the *doctrina*, that is ‘teaching’) that was proper to theology. When they used the word ‘theology’ it was this body of knowledge that they particularly had in mind (for the detailed justification of all that follows cf Gaybba 1988, chapter 2).

Traditionally, this body of knowledge was conceived of as God’s revelation as contained in the scriptures. It was therefore regarded as a purely transcendent body of knowledge, one communicated to humanity by God and therefore one that was not the result of human reasoning or human experience or human reflection. In practice, of course, theologians had for centuries been reflecting and commenting on that revelation. But that was seen simply as human reflection *on* revelation, of value only to the extent that it reflected and contained that revelation. And when in the thirteenth century discussions began to multiply about the nature of theology as a discipline, it was the pure, biblically based content of revelation that was conceived of as the knowledge, the information proper to this discipline.

However, when Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* were introduced into the curriculum as a textbook alongside scripture, questions began to arise as to the status of the information it contained. Since it was a textbook that students had to master, the information within it seemed to merit the name ‘theology’. Yet it was not the pure word of scripture. It was not unsullied revelation but clearly the product of a certain degree of human reflection. As noted above, it was Alexander of Hales who prescribed the *Sentences* for his students in Paris. While he himself does not display any concern with the theoretical issues that his act raised, the concern surfaces already in his pupil Odo Rigaldi, who recognises that the proper response to the information contained in the *Sentences* need not necessarily be faith – unlike the doctrinal content of scripture, which does demand faith as its proper response. For Odo the *Sentences* provide us with a deeper insight into the revelation contained in scripture. But in theorising about the sort of knowledge that is truly ‘theological’ knowledge, one can see his confusion. On the one hand, only what God has revealed is truly ‘theology’. On the other hand, the *Sentences* cannot be regarded simply as non-theological material.

The confusion generated by a theological textbook that was not simply a verbatim repetition of scripture breaks out into the open in the Robert Kilwardby’s prologue to his commentary on the *Sentences*. Kilwardby was an Oxford theologian and successor to Richard Fishacre. Fischacre had (against

opposition!) copied Alexander's action by introducing the *Sentences* as a textbook into the Oxford curriculum. For Kilwardby, theology's teaching or knowledge is basically a purely transcendent datum – namely God's revelation as found in the scriptures. But how then can the *Sentences* qualify as book containing theological knowledge? Kilwardby tries to solve this by asserting that one and the same revelation can exist in two different forms. The first form is that of scripture and it transmits revelation to us through parable, historical narrative, etc. The second form is that of the *Sentences* and it transmits revelation to us through the more academic form of definitions, distinctions and logical argumentation. However, clearly this is somewhat unsatisfactory since one could hardly regard the *Sentences* as simply containing revelation in another form. That even Kilwardby found it difficult to maintain such an idea is clear from a passage in which he distinguishes between the *teaching* contained in the *Sentences* and the *teaching* contained in what he calls 'the whole of sacred scripture' (cf Gaybba 1988:86). The phrase 'the whole of sacred scripture' was meant to include not only scripture but humanly authored works on scripture that clarified its meaning (for example commentaries by the Fathers, the book of *Sentences*). This was a common way of conceiving the relationship between scripture and the writings of the Fathers. Hence it would not have been difficult to extend it to the relationship between the scriptures and the book of *Sentences*, even though it was recognised and accepted that such humanly authored writings did not form part of the canon of scripture and could not lay claim to the inspiration that gave scripture its unique authority. It simply testified to the conviction that no teaching could claim to be part of theological knowledge if it did not reflect the revelation contained in the scriptures.

With Kilwardby, then, we see the problems caused by identifying theology's information or *doctrina* with an inspired text and yet seeing the identical transcendent knowledge incarnate in another non-inspired text break out into the open. The theory that identified theology's body of knowledge with revelation was increasingly being contradicted by a practice in which theology involved reflection on and debate about issues or *quaestiones* that arose out of human reflection on revelation.

It is only with Bonaventure, commenting on the *Sentences* somewhere between 1250 and 1252, that we will find a clear and consistent integration of theory and practice taking place for the first time. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, theology's body of knowledge, its 'teaching', is consistently seen as

the product of human reflection on scripture and therefore not to be confused with scripture. It is true that he simply switches texts: theology's body of knowledge is now widened so as to include the knowledge found in the *Sentences*. In this respect he displays another traditional idea about theology's body of knowledge, namely that it is fixed in a text. However, this is a minor point and elsewhere Bonaventure himself hints that the contents of writings by other 'doctors' also belong to this widened vision of theology's body of knowledge. Interestingly enough, however, at virtually the same time that Bonaventure was expounding these views in Paris, his fellow Franciscan in Oxford, Richard Rufus, was vehemently defending the thesis that the contents of the *Sentences* were most certainly *not* 'theology', since theology's teaching was simply revelation. 'This compendium [that is the *Sentences*] is not itself theology nor is it any part of it. It is holy scripture, in itself complete and perfect without this or any other compendium [that is such]' (cf. Gaybba 1988:97). This gives one an insight into the tensions and confusion about what should or should not be regarded as part of theology's specific body of knowledge.

The shift we find in Bonaventure is retained by Thomas Aquinas, who wrote his commentary on the *Sentences* about four years later. He is not as consistent as Bonaventure, since at times he speaks in ways that make sense only if one conceives of theology's body of knowledge as being exclusively revelation. But his main emphasis is on a conception of that knowledge that includes the fruits of human reflection on revelation.

Thomas sees theology as consisting of two types of knowledge. The first is what he calls theology's 'principles'. The second comprises the 'conclusions' derived from the principles. The distinction between theology's 'principles' and its 'conclusions' and the identification of the principles with the articles of faith had already been outlined by William of Auxerre in his *Summa aurea* (1220–1225). It is the same sort of distinction as we saw being made in the twelfth century between theology's basic axioms and the body of knowledge built on them. It is a distinction that was important in trying to structure theological studies in such a way that they took on the clear shape of an academic discipline. Thomas takes up this distinction and makes it central to his exposition of the nature of theology as a discipline.

For Thomas (I am siding here with what I believe to be the correct interpretation of Aquinas, cf. Gaybba 1988:99, 106) the whole of revelation – and

not just the articles of faith in the creed – serves as theology's 'principles'. Hence, for him theology's traditional *doctrina* or body of knowledge becomes theology's *principles*. The fruits of human reflection – whether it is seeing the logical connection between various revealed truths or whether it is drawing further conclusions utilising secular knowledge – belong to the area of theology's *conclusions*. It is the fruits of such human reflection rather than the principles themselves that form the distinctive body of knowledge proper to theology. Of course, the principles are included, but they form the foundation rather than the main body of theological knowledge. The inclusion of the two in theology's body of knowledge does cause some confusion – especially since at times Thomas speaks as if theology's only body of knowledge is revealed truth (which elsewhere functions for him simply as principles). But Thomas is basically in agreement with Bonaventure in that both disentangle divine revelation and the products of human reflection on it. Both move moreover in the direction of regarding the latter as constituting theology's real body of knowledge. Theory is aligning itself at long last with practice, since in fact the discipline of theology had produced a massive amount of material that could only be regarded as human reflection on revelation and not revelation itself. The traditional identification of theology's *doctrina* with a transcendent body of knowledge derived its strength from the equally traditional idea that all Christian thinking must be but an attempt to uncover the meaning of scripture. However, to Bonaventure and Aquinas must go the credit for taking seriously the idea that it is impossible to uncover the meaning of scripture without also adding one's own insights. They may not have viewed it that way. But they realised clearly that theology's body of knowledge was one that had been built up by the application of rational thought and argumentation to God's revelation. With them, then, the gap between a theory of theology's body of knowledge and what the schools were actually producing was closed.

7.3 Theology's procedural methods

One of the distinguishing characteristics of an academic discipline was that it clarified and taught its pupils the methods used for discovering and building up its body of knowledge. Hence, the thirteenth century witnessed for the first time an ongoing debate about the methods of procedure proper to

theology. The answers given to this question depended very much on the view taken of theology's body of knowledge.

As long as one stuck to the traditional idea that theology's body of knowledge was God's revelation as found in the scriptures, then clearly the ways in which that knowledge was conveyed to those who sought it was through the various literary forms to be found in the biblical text. For – so it was argued – that was the way in which God conveyed the divine Word to us. Theology's procedural method was therefore nothing other than the methods used by God in scripture. How then does scripture convey its revealed message to us? It does so in a variety of ways, according to the demands of theology's practical aim and human limitations. As regards the practical aim, in order to move people to respond to the Word, scripture conveys some of its knowledge in the form of prayer, some in the form of commands, some in the form of knowledge that is wisdom, some in the form of practical examples drawn especially from historical events. These were called the prayerful, preceptive, revelatory and exemplary modes of conveying the revealed Word. As regards the limitations of the human mind, this is catered for by scripture's use of the 'poetic' mode, that is, one that conveys its transcendent information mainly through symbols. We find retained here as a biblical 'procedural mode' an idea that was central to monastic theology – namely the inherently symbolic character of all theology.

Conceiving of theology's body of knowledge as God's revelation left no place for debate or deductive reasoning in establishing its contents. The only response to revelation is to accept in faith what is presented. Reason cannot establish revelation. It can only defend it against heretics (as Paul did in arguing the case for the Resurrection), strengthen the faith of believers and assist unbelievers in coming to faith, as William of Auxerre summed the tradition up in his *Summa aurea* (cf Gaybba 1988:121). As long, then, as one equated theology's body of knowledge with revelation, reason can play no role in establishing that knowledge. The tension between theory and practice referred to in the previous section breaks out here again. For on the one hand, we read repeatedly that rational argumentation was not a proper way for 'theology' to operate, while theologians not only used rational arguments but, as an essential part of their training, had to become proficient at its techniques, as we saw. This was to some extent enshrined in Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and therefore could not be ignored. The tension breaks out – predictably (see previous section) – in Robert Kilwardby. Having noted that

reasoned argumentation is *not* a fitting procedural method for theology ('reasoned argumentation does not belong to it ... therefore the proper procedure for scripture is partly that of precept, partly that of exhortation'), he finds himself confronted with the question: why then do the *Sentences* (which he sees as part of theology – see above) use such argumentation? The answer is inevitable, being the only answer possible in the circumstances: 'not out of necessity for the body of knowledge (*scientia*) but because of the infirmity of others, namely in order that the disposition of the weak be aided, that of the faithful be strengthened and that of those in error be informed to at least the extent of illuminating their vision' (see Gaybba 1988:121). It is a repetition of the tradition summed up by William in his *Summa*.

However, once one begins to include the fruits of human reflection on revelation as being part and parcel of theology's body of knowledge, the picture changes dramatically. As we saw, for Bonaventure and Aquinas, revelation now becomes theology's *foundation*, its *principles*, the material it takes as its starting point. As an academic discipline, theology's main body of knowledge is built onto that. And that takes place primarily through rational argumentation (albeit illuminated by faith). The ways in which scripture communicates its contents to the reader are now ways in which scripture communicates theology's *foundations*, its *principles*. Both Bonaventure and Aquinas, therefore, have no difficulty in stating that theology's proper procedural method *is* rational argumentation. Aquinas puts the final touches to the picture by comparing theology to any other academic discipline and pointing out (what was accepted in his day) that no discipline proves its basic principles but only what flows from them: 'Just as the other sciences do not use argumentation to prove their principles but only to demonstrate other things from those principles, so too does this discipline [theology] not use argumentation to establish its principles, which are the articles of faith, but rather to demonstrate something or other from them' (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q 1, a 8 resp.).

7.4 Is theology a 'science'?

That theology was now one of several disciplines in a university inevitably invited comparisons with the other disciplines. And one of the points of comparison was its standing as a 'scientia'. The term meant not just 'knowledge' (which is its literal translation) but knowledge that can be regarded as

established, as certain, as something that could not be doubted because its inner evidence was clear. Only then was something truly *known*, and not simply a matter of conjecture or faith or probability. In his *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle had clarified the conditions necessary for such knowledge and so the discussions about theology's 'scientific' character were conducted against the background of those conditions (hence they did not mean then what we mean by 'science' today; instead they meant an academic discipline whose body of knowledge could not rationally be doubted).

The thirteenth century has often been presented as one in which theologians moved from a position which held that theology was not a science to one which held that it was a science. However, this is not accurate, despite Aquinas's theory of theology as a subalternate science (which we will examine briefly below). If one examines the literature of the period it is clear that the general conclusion of the thirteenth century was that theology was *not* a 'science' in the strict (that is, the Aristotelian) sense of the term. It is doubtful if even Aquinas saw it as such.

All could agree that theology was a *scientia* in the broad sense of information about which one had certainty for a variety of reasons. Thus Odo Rigaldi makes the following distinctions and applies them to theology: "Science" or "knowledge" can be understood in two ways: either in a more general or in a strict sense. In the strict sense it is the name given to the disposition (*habitus*) whereby one has the sort of certainty that our reason or intellect can achieve by itself. It is thus a disposition acquired by our own efforts. Taken in this sense theology is certainly not "knowledge", certainly not a "science" ... However, if we take "knowledge" in the broad sense of any intellectual knowledge about which we have certainty ... then we must agree that theology is "knowledge", is a "science" (*Quaestiones theologiae*, q. 1 resp.).

All could also agree that theology was *more* than a science. It was wisdom and as such was seen as the queen of the sciences. Hence, on the principle that the lesser was contained in the greater, theology could be said to be in some sense or other a *scientia* or 'science'. But strictly speaking – no. To be such was beneath its dignity, for it implied that theology's truth was on the same level as all other knowledge, whereas it transcended all such knowledge since it came directly from and was authenticated by God.

Several objections to the idea that theology was a science were discussed and not all were felt to be equally valid. For example, Aristotle had argued that a true

science deals only with what is universally and necessarily true. But scripture is filled with individual historical events and the deeds of individuals. How can the knowledge of such contingencies be regarded as constituting a 'science'? The main thrust of the replies given was that these events are presented as but individual examples of more enduring and universally applicable divine principles or realities. Theology does deal with universal truths, then, but ones that are manifested through particular events. The symbolist/Platonic background to this is obvious. Another objection was that a true science uses rational argumentation. But such argumentation was not proper to theology. This objection (and to some extent the previous one too) clearly has its full force only where theology's body of knowledge is identified exclusively with God's revelation, and especially when identified with the biblical expression of that revelation. It falls away once theology's body of knowledge is widened so as to include the fruits of human reflection on revelation. But these and other objections were relatively minor in comparison to the most fundamental one of all: namely that theology's body of knowledge was either entirely accepted on faith (the old, transcendent view of theology's body of knowledge) or was based on faith (the newer view, in which revelation constituted theology's foundation). Hence in tracing the foundations of theology's claims a point is arrived at where inner evidence is lacking. According to Aristotle's criteria, the body of knowledge making up any 'scientific' discipline must rest on rational arguments, arguments that can be pushed back ultimately to principles that are *per se nota*, that is, immediately evident, whose truth is so clear that it needs no demonstration.

This objection was one that, I believe, made even Aquinas regard his own otherwise brilliant portrayal of theology as a *subalternate* science as something not to be taken literally. Let us examine his views in a bit more detail.

A *subalternate* science was recognised as a true science. It differed from other sciences, however, in that it used as its principles knowledge that had been established by another science, which was called the *subalternating* one. One could speak of the subalternate science as taking its principles 'on faith' from the subalternating one. The example Aquinas uses from his own time is the 'art of perspectives which draws on principles derived from geometry'. The concept is one we are all familiar with. A computer scientist need not be an expert mathematician in order to take on trust mathematical insights and apply them in the field of computer science.

Bonaventure had already spoken of theology as a body of knowledge 'sub-

alternate to scripture. His point was that theology was a body of knowledge built on scripture, taking its foundational information from scripture. However, he did not apply this idea of subalternation to the debate about theology's scientific character (he does not appear to have addressed that question at all). Aquinas, on the other hand, did do so. Whenever Aquinas poses the question as to whether theology is a 'science' he always gives the straightforward (and unusual for its time) answer: yes, it is. He then goes on to show in what sense it is a science. Theology is, he explains, a subalternate science. It is such since it takes its principles, its foundational information, from the knowledge that God and the blessed in heaven enjoy of divine things (note the shift away from identifying theology's foundation simply with biblical revelation to rooting it in the knowledge enjoyed by another mind – God's mind and that of the blessed who see God face to face in heaven). 'Theology is a science. But it needs to be pointed out that there are two kinds of sciences. There are those that proceed from principles known by the natural light of reason ... And there are those which proceed from principles known by the light of a superior science. For example, the art of perspective draws on principles derived from geometry ... And in this way theology is a science, because it proceeds from principles known by the light of a superior science, namely that body of knowledge enjoyed by God and the blessed in heaven' (*Summa theologiae*, I, q 1, a 2). Remember that the term 'science' means here a body of knowledge that is indubitable because its inner rationale is fully grasped by the knower.

That this is a brilliant comparison between theology and a subalternate science cannot be questioned. But did Thomas Aquinas intend it to be more than that? Did he believe that theology fulfilled all the criteria for a truly subalternate science? I believe that there are good indications that he did not. For he was aware that, as he himself put it on another occasion, 'the person who has subalternate knowledge, can only be said to know in the strict sense of the term if there is a certain continuity between his or her knowledge and that of the person who possesses the subalternating knowledge' (*De veritate*, q 14, a 9, arg 3, ad 3). By 'continuity' he meant that in principle someone should be able to follow through the chain of reasoning back through the principles that had been accepted on faith until one arrives at immediately evident principles. A human mind should, in principle, be able to resolve the subalternating body of knowledge into its first principles, thus establishing clearly the logical continuity between the subalternate and subalternating

sciences. It should be possible for someone to follow the chain of logical argumentation supporting the principles that were, simply for the sake of convenience, taken on faith by the subalternate science. One should be able to follow that chain of reasoning back to immediately evident principles.

Thomas himself argued that there was indeed *some* continuity between the two blocks of knowledge – that possessed by God (and the blessed) and that which resulted from human reflection on revelation. The continuity was found in the fact that through faith we were united to God and, united to God, we shared to some extent or other in God's own self-knowledge. But we share only 'to some extent'. And at that point the strict parallel between theology and other subalternate sciences breaks down.

Whether or not Thomas believed that theology was *truly*, that is *literally*, a subalternate science was disputed from the thirteenth century onwards. Some of his closest followers believed he did not mean it to be taken literally. But he did draw a parallel between subalternate sciences and theology that was taken up and commented on by subsequent writers. The idea of viewing theology as a 'science of conclusions' became widely accepted, particularly within Thomistic scholasticism and was accepted as such even if it was acknowledged that this did not mean that theology was a science in the strict sense of the term.

The one notable exception to the general consensus that theology was a science only in a broad sense was Henry of Ghent. He evolved an extraordinary theory that theologians benefited from a special divine light that gave them just sufficient insight into theology's principles (that is, revelation) to enable them to go beyond faith to an understanding of those principles that would give theology a truly scientific character – while allowing a sufficient obscurity for faith to continue to exist. It was a tortuous and untenable position for which this otherwise outstanding theologian was roundly and justly attacked (see his *Summa*, a 6, q 1; cf also Gaybba 1988:145).

There have been those who have held that there was a time in the thirteenth century when a generally positive answer was given to the question of theology's scientific character (cf Gaybba 1988:147). However, my own examination of the evidence has convinced me that this is not so. Thirteenth-century theologians believed (and rightly so) that theology bore many similarities to a true 'science' in Aristotle's sense of the term and therefore to the scientific character that other disciplines in the universities of the day

claimed. However, while they sang the praises of theology as the noblest and queen of the sciences, as the knowledge in whose light all other things must be evaluated, as the most certain, most sublime *scientia* we have on this earth, they were fully aware that it lacked several elements present in a true ‘science’, above all inner evidence, an insight into the logical necessity of its principles. Hence, the overwhelming response to the question of theology’s scientific character was that it was not a ‘science’ – in the strict sense of the term.

As a footnote to this section it is worth observing that the debate that has arisen in modern times about theology’s status as an academic discipline in a university goes back almost to the point when theology became an academic discipline. The only difference is that in those days the legitimacy of theology’s presence in the university was unquestioned, even while its status as a ‘scientia’ was debated, whereas today questions about its status as an academic discipline are closely linked to questions about its legitimacy as a human science in a university setting.

7.5 What then is ‘theology’?

The wide acceptance of the idea that theology was a deductive discipline composed of conclusions drawn from revelation led to a focusing of attention, especially in fourteenth-century authors, on the issue of the exact nature of theological activity.

The issue had already been discussed in several thirteenth-century writers but it became a particularly pressing one in the fourteenth century since by that time it was generally accepted that theologians performed a wide range of activities in the execution of their task. These were broadly categorised as follows: they assented in faith to the contents of scripture; they explained and defended scripture’s contents, using whatever rational tools were suitable for the task; (they drew conclusions from the articles of faith and scripture, thereby broadening the explicitly known body of theological knowledge (see for example Durandus of Saint Pourçain, *In Sent*, Prol q 1; Gaybba 1988:197–200).

‘Theology’ and ‘theological work’ had become umbrella terms and it was generally accepted that ‘doing theology’ involved a variety of activities. But were all of these activities truly ‘theological’ activities? For example, since unbelievers could in principle explain the scriptures and even use logic to

draw conclusions from them and the articles of faith, would that mean that they were doing *theology*?

William of Ockham's response was to argue that for any specific activity to be theological it had to be connected in some way or other to the theologian's own faith. It had to be an activity directed towards acquiring a broader grasp of one's faith or extending the area of explicit truths comprising the cognitive content of one's faith (see his *In Sent*, Prol q 7).

From the above it can be seen that this area of debate went hand in hand with the issue of the sort of certainty generated by theological activity. Was it the certainty of faith? That is to say, were theology's findings truths that now demanded an assent in faith? Or was the certainty generated by those findings something other than faith? The conclusions that were now accepted as part of theological work could be drawn in one of two ways. Either both premises were taken from revelation or one was taken from revelation and one from secular knowledge. In the former case the conclusion would seem to warrant the assent of faith since it rested entirely on God's word. In the latter case it would not seem to warrant that assent, since it rested partially on God's word and partially on the discoveries made by human reason. Are both types of conclusion to be regarded as 'theological' or only the former? But even as regards the former, was not reason involved in making the logical connection between the two revealed premises and drawing the conclusion that followed? Did this mean that such an activity could not be 'theology'? For some, you only had theology in the strict sense when all the premises were drawn from revelation. For others, the use of secular knowledge was a perfectly legitimate part of theology. For some, the assent involved in theology was the assent of faith. For others, it was distinct from faith.

It would be impossible to go into the complexities of the debates here and the variety of positions adopted (details can be found in chapter 6 of Gaybba 1988). Suffice it to say that the issue was raised and debated at length – demonstrating once again that the theologians of the day were fully aware of the theoretical issues raised by their discipline. In particular, it is interesting how an issue widely debated to-day – namely whether one needs to have faith in order to be an academic theologian – was one that surfaced soon after theology had become established as an academic discipline that functioned in ways similar to other academic disciplines in the use it made of rational investigation and debate.

8 | Sectional loyalties and the decline of creativity (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries)

8.1 The rise of sectional loyalties

The type of theology that we saw developing in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries came, as we saw, to be known as ‘scholastic theology’. Initially there were no particular schools within this new type of theology. However, such schools did eventually develop. In the middle of the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas created a form of scholasticism that would become typical of his religious order, the Dominicans. His brand of scholasticism would be called ‘Thomism’.

The rival religious order of the times, the Franciscans, found in Bonaventure, a contemporary of Aquinas, their great intellectual light. Bonaventure’s approach contrasts sharply with that of Aquinas because Bonaventure holds on to Augustine’s views about how the mind comes to understand divine realities, while Aquinas had shifted to a more Aristotelian epistemology. Towards the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century the Franciscans produced another intellectual giant – John Duns Scotus. Scotus

retained many of Bonaventure's insights but developed his own highly intricate scholastic system, one in which he differed from Aquinas on many points. Once again, the most basic difference was epistemological – namely about the way the mind comes to know truth, especially divine truth. It was Scotus's system that would become the typical Franciscan form of scholasticism and which came to be known as 'Scotism'.

Later, another Franciscan, William of Ockham, developed his own form of Scotus's thought. It was to be a radical break with all previous forms of scholasticism since it attacked a key idea on which both Thomist and Scotist forms of scholasticism had been based, namely that the concepts (known as 'universals') used by the mind for grasping what were called the 'essences' of things corresponded to essences really existing in those things themselves. Ockham argued that these concepts were simply names used to refer to such things. He was not new in holding this position, which was known as 'nominalism'. But he did so with a rigour and a thoroughness that led to the formation of a third major type of scholastic thought in medieval times. This came to be known as the 'via nova', the 'new way' in contrast to the older way of both the Thomist and Scotist types of scholasticism. It was this Ockhamist type of scholasticism that would have a major influence on Luther through the writings of Gabriel Biel, a devout follower of Ockham's 'way'.

Scholasticism, therefore, was not a homogenous entity. Like any other vibrant intellectual movement, it spawned a variety of ways of utilising reason to probe the data of faith. I mentioned three major ways above – Thomist, Scotist and Ockhamist. There were other ways too but they did not develop into any major system such as these three did. Initially this was a good thing. However, in the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries sectional loyalties developed that effectively stifled all creativity. The loyalties became so total that the practice developed of not simply repeating the chosen master's ideas (for example those of Thomas or Scotus or Ockham) but, as far as possible, his exact words. 'The questions posed are usually the questions posed by the master. And they are normally posed in the same order and using the same words. There is certainly no attempt to stand back – as fourteenth-century thinkers such as Ockham, Peter d'Ailly and Gregory of Rimini did – in order to survey the field and attempt to produce a synthesis that represents the author's own personal convictions or even to dialogue with the master's thoughts so as to give them new depths or applications, as will become typical of sixteenth-century Thomism. Indeed, there is a clear decision to avoid

personal convictions as far as possible. Thus, Gabriel Biel announces that he intends simply to present Ockham's views and that he therefore sees Ockham and not himself as being the master of the book that is to follow. What is more, he defends this on the grounds that to follow one master is a surer way to the truth. The reason is that one thereby avoids being thrown about by the conflicting winds of opinion. Capreolus, in turn, says that he in no way wishes to express his own views but simply to present those of Thomas, a procedure from which he will deviate only rarely. Even when refuting views critical of Thomas, he says that he will do so using Thomas's own words. And, to give but two examples from the extensive Scotist material, William Gorris says that his book should bear not his name but that of Scotus, since it is simply a stream flowing from Scotus as its source while Nicholas of Orbelle declares in his introductory remarks that his intention is simply to put Scotus's views across in a more digestible form' (Gaybba 1994:107–108). So myopic were the printed expositions of the master's thought that most dissenting views that had arisen since the master had completed his work were simply ignored as if they did not exist.

There is a new form of traditionalism here. But it differed from that which was characteristic of the monastic theology that scholasticism displaced. Whereas the monks stood in awe of the entire range of patristic thought, what we are witnessing here is the elevation of a chosen individual's thought to a point beyond criticism. The destructive character of these loyalties and the intellectual sterility generated by them were already decried at the beginning of the fifteenth century by Gerson who sees in it an abandonment of commitment to the truth in favour of commitment to one's own school of thought. 'If,' he says, 'there is one Lord, one Faith, one Law, if truth is something we possess in common, something moreover that comes from the Holy Spirit no matter who utters it, then what is the point of all this heated fighting between the different states and orders of Christianity? What is the point of defending, adulating and giving preeminence to one particular doctor rather than another? Why should this group defend only these doctors and that group defend only those?' (*Contra curiositatem studentium.*)

8.2 The decline of creativity

This sectional loyalty stifled creativity so much so that when one reads fifteenth-century views on the nature of theology one is simply turning the

clock back and reading what either Aquinas or Scotus or Ockham had to say. However, the decline in creativity that occurred in the fifteenth century was also due in large measure to the reprisals that could be taken against theologians who stepped out of line. It was a time when theological innovation was risky and so the safest path was to repeat, with protestations of reverence, the accepted luminaries of the past (cf Gaybba, 1994:109–111). It is not accidental that the only truly creative approach, that of John Huss, came from the pen of someone who was condemned as a heretic.

Huss's exposition of the nature of theology as a discipline is refreshingly different from what had become by then the traditional way of dealing with the material. There is a passion and a piety, a reverence and reforming zeal about his commentary that, despite its brevity, lifts it above the other major commentaries of the time and especially above the slavish repetitiveness (bred by school loyalties and fear of censure) of subsequent commentaries in the fifteenth century. When reading his exposition one sees immediately the greater affinity he had with theologians of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries than with the later scholastics. This is revealed not merely in the fact that he uses the old term for theology – *sacra scriptura*, 'sacred scripture' – but also and especially in his repeated emphasis on the crucial role played by the theologian's dispositions in attempting to understand the revealed deposit.

The central idea around which his exposition turns is that theology or *sacra scriptura* is a wisdom originating indeed from God but one that flows only into the minds of those whose hearts are open to God's action. Hence he begins with a lengthy examination of the text "if you lack wisdom, seek it from God" (James 1:5) (Gaybba 1994a:79–80). That Huss made the issue of the theologian's moral dispositions *the* single question around which everything else was discussed was not only a bold reformist action in itself but also a pointed criticism of a style of theologising that seemed to have long forgotten monastic theology's insistence on the dependence of the theologian on God's illuminating grace.

Huss's approach reminds us, therefore, of another reason for the decline in creativity, namely that scholastic theology had developed into a highly abstract form of reflection and discussion, one in which ideas were dissected into ever-smaller parts. The seeds for this development were contained in the very qualities that made scholasticism so attractive to the youth of the day

when it first appeared on the scene. We saw above how the cut and thrust of formal theological debate, which was the heart of the *quaestio*, was of the utmost importance for theology's development. But it brought in its train the gradual disappearance of serious patristic studies. As the search for organic inner unity proceeded hand in hand with the development of the *quaestio*, the issues being debated were studied with the aid of dialectics and collections of patristic sayings that had been wrenched from their contexts – and which were therefore interpreted, when obscure, by means once again of dialectics. As Grabmann remarks (1911:85) it was no wonder that in the twelfth century the anti-dialecticians were also the ones who complained that the reading of the Fathers was disappearing. Of course not all were guilty of this. Men such as Hugh of St Victor, Gilbert of Poitiers, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure certainly read many of the Fathers' works themselves and did not rely simply on citations. But the trend was clear. The symptoms can be seen in the decrease by the end of the thirteenth century of manuscript copies of patristic writings and an increase, from the thirteenth century onwards, of manuscripts of *quaestiones*, etc (Grabmann 1911:85).

It is this trend that brought scholasticism into widespread disrepute by the end of the Middle Ages. For the major cause of its decadence was that it became a dry philosophical analysis of minute details utterly removed from any perceptible link with experienced reality and without the life-giving vitality of the patristic period. Anything cut off from its roots withers and ultimately dies. Scholasticism withered badly, even if it did not die completely.

The decadence occurred particularly in the Scotist form of scholasticism, which was the dominant form from the fourteenth to the end of the fifteenth centuries. The very word 'dunce' comes from the ridicule that came to be poured on the sort of theologising done by the followers of John *Duns* Scotus. The Thomist form only began to gain some sort of ascendancy in the sixteenth century, where new concerns (the issues and debates raised by the Reformation) and new centres of learning (Paris had become lifeless; Salamanca in Spain had become one of the new and exciting scholastic centres) arose and which therefore gave a liveliness and a relevance to it.

As a footnote to all of this, it can be noted that while Luther, and with him the reformers in general, poured scorn on scholasticism and had little to say in its favour, barely fifty years later we see Protestantism developing its own

form of scholasticism (which came to be known as Protestant 'Orthodoxy'). Stranger still is it to see a Protestant theologian such as Musaeus recasting Protestant theology into a typically Aristotelian-scholastic format, regarding himself as a scholastic in the age-old scholastic tradition dialoguing with those he regarded as his Catholic scholastic predecessors!

9

The spiritual stream: the theology of wisdom

9.1 Introductory remarks

We closed our examination of monastic theology by noting that its heart – the importance of experiencing God and the epistemological role of love – continued to beat in the mystical movements of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, where it would be rather isolated from the mainstream of theological discussion. However, we also noted that it did find a niche in mainstream theology in discussions on wisdom as a gift of the Spirit. We can conclude our survey of a period dominated by scholastic theology with an examination of what was regarded as the greatest of the Spirit's gifts – the wisdom that tasted God's presence in the soul and which was illuminated by the love created by that presence.

9.2 The theology of the 'gifts of the Spirit'

When people speak today of the 'gifts of the Spirit', they normally have in mind the list of gifts to be found in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. However, in patristic and medieval times and until very recently within Catholicism, the phrase 'gifts of the Spirit' referred to the list of gifts drawn from Isaiah 11:2. The gifts referred to in Paul's letter to the Corinthians were called 'charismata' or 'charisms'.

As translated by the Latin Vulgate, there rested upon the person referred to in Isaiah 11:2 a seven-fold Spirit: of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, fear of the Lord and piety. The number seven was arrived at by translating the Hebrew for ‘fear of the Lord’ in two ways: ‘fear of the Lord’ and ‘piety’. The number had immense symbolic significance – it indicated fullness, perfection.

Since Isaiah 11:2 was seen as a messianic poem and therefore as referring to Christ, the qualities listed there (qualities required for exemplary kingship) were qualities that belonged to Christ. For Christians, the Spirit that descended on Christ at his Baptism brought with it the qualities or gifts (as they were called) listed in Isaiah 11:2. However, that same Spirit is given to all believers. Hence, it was reasoned, all who are united to Christ and who share Christ’s Spirit receive the same gifts. The gifts therefore are enjoyed not merely by believers in this life but also by the blessed in heaven and indeed the angels, since they too are united to Christ (cf Lombard’s *Sententiae*, III, d 34).

That was the broad idea and it remained a broad idea until medieval times, when systematic thinking on the topic began for the first time (for details see Gaybba 1987:88). The earliest discussions seemed to revolve around the relationship between these gifts and the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Initially it was believed that the gifts were simply the virtues in another form. However, in 1235 Phillip, Chancellor of the University of Paris, argued for a distinction between the two – and indeed the superiority of the gifts over the virtues. Phillip wanted to link the theology of the gifts to a theology of the spiritual progress of the soul. The soul moved from the stage of practising the virtues to the stage of being under the influence of the gifts, finally reaching the stage represented by the beatitudes. As a result, the idea became widespread that the gifts of the Spirit enabled Christians to perform the virtues more easily, with a greater openness to the influence of the Spirit. This became the position espoused in particular by the followers of Thomas Aquinas. However, the older viewpoint which saw no real difference between the gifts and the virtues also remained widespread. It was espoused by Scotus and, after him, Ockham (who disliked unnecessary distinctions) and therefore represented the more widespread viewpoint for the rest of the medieval period. This meant that the literature exploring the topic of the gifts of the Spirit was limited for the most part to those who accepted Thomas Aquinas as their theological luminary.

Strange to say, the gifts of the Spirit were not a major point of interest for the spiritual or mystical writers of the period running from the late thirteenth to the end of the fifteenth centuries – though two such writers did devote lengthy treatises to the topic (Rupert of Biberach in the fourteenth and Denys of Ryckel ('the Carthusian') in the fifteenth), one of which (that of Denys) was, to my mind, the most exhaustive and illuminating treatise on the subject until it was eclipsed in the seventeenth century by John of St Thomas's 'The Gifts of the Holy Spirit'. But while by and large they were not interested in the gifts as a whole, they were intensely interested in one of those gifts: the gift of wisdom. Apart from love (that is, the love poured into the believer by the Holy Spirit, the theological virtue known as *caritas*, the translation of which hardly conveys its meaning any more – 'charity'), wisdom was seen as the greatest of all the gifts showered on believers by God. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to distinguish between the claims of love and the claims of wisdom for the top position, since in the life of the believer the two were seen as being inseparable. The love that the Spirit pours into the hearts of believers brings with it wisdom, and the wisdom that is given by the Spirit has as its purpose the experiential knowledge of divine realities that only love can bring. The connection between this and the bond between love and understanding forged by Augustine and taken up into monastic theology is evident. In what follows, then, we will concentrate on wisdom (though the connection between wisdom and understanding was sufficiently close for the latter to be discussed fairly often as well).

9.3 Setting the pattern: Peter Lombard on the gift of wisdom

The pattern for medieval discussions of the gift of wisdom was set – as in so much else – by Peter Lombard's treatment of the theme in his *Sentences*. In distinction 35 of the third book, he discusses the difference between the gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. Wisdom differs from knowledge, he argues, in that wisdom is the loving contemplation of eternal realities, while knowledge is concerned with information on how to use temporal realities in a good and proper way. As regards the difference between wisdom and the gift of understanding, the scope of wisdom is limited strictly to the divine while that of understanding goes beyond the divine so as to include spiritual creaturely realities. This could give the impression that wisdom is really a subdivision of understanding. However, this is not so,

since wisdom's action not merely grasps the divine intellectually but also savours it.

All of these points will be raised and discussed again and again by commentators down the ages. As regards wisdom, the idea that it is the contemplation and savouring of eternal realities will constitute the framework for all subsequent discussions of the gift up to the seventeenth century, when we see a shift of emphasis from classic medieval ideas about contemplation to a broader conception of spirituality.

In what follows, however, we will limit ourselves to three examples, all taken from the thirteenth century: Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Aquinas. They not only have provided us with the first reasonably detailed expositions of the gift of the wisdom but represent between them virtually all the major points that will be made in the future about the gift. Later expositions may concentrate on various aspects and explore various points in greater depth. But the link between what they have to say and what is to be found in Albert, Bonaventure and Aquinas is clear. Moreover, of the three it is Aquinas who will most influence future development and it will therefore be in order for us to conclude our sketch of medieval thinking on this topic with a consideration of his views. In the fifteenth century Denys of Ryckel will provide a magnificent treatise on the gifts of the Spirit that are a mixture of mystical and Thomistic thought. But space precludes us from examining the specific contributions he makes there.

9.4 Albert the Great

Commenting on distinction 35 of the third book of the *Sentences*, Albert devotes three articles to the gift of wisdom.

The *first article* examines three definitions of wisdom, notes certain objections to the definitions and proceeds to discuss the nature of wisdom in response to the issues raised by the definitions and the objections against them. The definitions are: (1) wisdom is the cognition of divine realities; (2) it is the cognition and love of that which is eternal and immutable, namely, God; (3) it is the gift that refreshes the mind with the hope and certitude of eternal realities.

These are not mutually contradictory, because the first definition deals, he says, with wisdom's subject matter; the second notes that wisdom is not

limited to the genus of cognition but is also part of the genus of love (*dilectio*); the third refers to the effects of wisdom and therefore says nothing about its substance.

It is in response to the objections that his views on the nature of the gift of wisdom are clarified.

His starting-point is the observation that wisdom is not the same as faith, even if both deal with what is eternal. Wisdom is a different light, one that enables the recipient not merely to see but also to taste divine realities by experiencing them. The light therefore not merely illuminates but also warms – a striking image that is appealed to by several writers on wisdom. What is specific to wisdom is that ‘it tastes God in God’s gifts’.

This does not mean that wisdom’s knowledge is freed of the veiled character of all knowledge of God acquired in this life, freed of having to know God through the medium of creatures. Like faith, wisdom too knows only dimly and through the mirror of images. But ‘tasting God in God’s gifts’ does mean that one of the images through which wisdom knows is the self’s own likeness to God and to the goodness that is God. This provides a medium for knowing God that is based on the immediacy of God’s presence to the soul and of the effect of that presence on the soul, conforming it in a unique way to God and the Goodness that is God. This in turn enables the soul to have a knowledge of God in this life that has about it an immediacy of contact between knower and known despite being through the medium of creatures.

The connection between truth and goodness in all this is significant. Albert is making a point that, I believe, is of crucial importance but which unfortunately was to a large extent lost sight of in the later history of the gift: namely that wisdom sees the truth in goodness and experiences the goodness of truth. Indeed (to bring out the full significance of Albert’s words) wisdom has about it something of the ontological identity of truth and goodness as it exists in God (*In Sent*, d 35, a 1, ad aliud 1).

This unity is important. Because it means that wisdom is not, as one objection put it, a composite made up of two different activities rooted in two different dispositions or ‘habits’ (*habitus*): love and cognition, the love that is *charitas* and the cognition brought by faith. Rather is wisdom something that has its own proper activity and therefore its own proper *habitus*, one that certainly includes cognitive and affective elements but in such a way that both are transformed and taken up into a unity that is more than the result of

the two working together (*ibid*). In short, wisdom is a form of knowing that is also loving and loving that is also knowing – and not simply a composite of an act of knowledge and a separate act of love.

The experiential knowledge brought by wisdom refreshes the soul. However, it also leaves the soul with a desire for more, since what refreshes it is only the savour, the odour of the infinite reality it knows. It is this restless reaching out for growth in the knowledge and love of God that distinguishes wisdom from the ‘fruits’ of the Spirit. For what is typical of the fruits is the peace, the stilling of the soul’s restlessness or appetites that they bring. What is typical of wisdom, however, is its constant search for an ever-greater tasting and knowing of God (*In Sent*, d 35, a 1, de 3a).

In the *second article*, Albert focuses his attention on wisdom’s subject matter. It had already been said to be eternal realities. But is wisdom limited to that? Albert’s answer is that, strictly speaking, it is – for it is only divine realities that can produce wisdom’s distinctive taste.

Since it is this taste or savour that is clearly the distinguishing mark of the gift of wisdom, *article three* appeals to it as the element that distinguishes the gifts of wisdom and understanding from each other. Wisdom’s light carries with it a savouring of what is known, whereas understanding’s light only sees. It does not taste.

Wisdom’s savour through experiential contact with what it knows is also the way in which it perfects the virtue of faith. As was seen above, Peter Lombard raised the issue of whether the gifts and the virtues were distinct from each other. Albert’s position is that they are. He aligns himself with the view of Gregory the Great that the gifts perfect the virtues by enabling them to be exercised more expeditiously (*In Sent*, d 34, a 1 & a 2).

9.5 Bonaventure

That the gift of wisdom incorporates both cognitive and affective elements is the focus of Bonaventure’s rather brief treatment in his commentary on distinction 35 of the *Sentences*. The central issue (q 1) is whether wisdom’s specific act is knowledge of the truth or experiencing the good. He lists all the arguments in favour of the thesis that wisdom’s specific act is a cognitive one. He then lists all the arguments in favour of the thesis that its specific act is an affective one. His own position – given after distinguishing four senses

in which the term wisdom is used – is that wisdom is a bit of both, but in such a way that the cognitive leads to the affective, which has its own form of knowing through tasting. (The four senses, incidentally, are as follows: the common meaning of the term, namely that wisdom is a knowledge embracing all reality, divine and human; a less common meaning, limiting wisdom to the knowledge of eternal realities; a proper meaning, namely a knowledge of God that is also an act of piety or worship; and the most proper meaning, which is an experiential knowledge of God involving savouring God.)

Unlike Albert, then, who rules out any talk of wisdom being a composite reality, Bonaventure seems happy to remain within such a framework of thinking. He does not actually speak of wisdom as being a composite reality but he does say that wisdom is ‘partly cognitive and partly affective’. He is fully aware of what this implies, because he discusses the obvious objection that since knowledge and affectivity are acts of two different powers of the soul, arguments in favour of affectivity would seem to rule cognition out altogether and make wisdom *solely* an affective activity. Albert’s reply to such an objection would surely have been that wisdom is a form of knowing that is also loving and a form of loving that is also knowing. Bonaventure, however, responds by keeping the cognitive and affective activities distinct from each other and making one of them the primary purpose of the gift and the other the necessary precondition for it. For Bonaventure, then, wisdom is *primarily* an affective activity. The cognitive element is simply the necessary precondition for the affective savouring of God (*In Sent*, d 35, q 1, resp.).

This clear ordering of activities – from cognitive to affective – is also brought out in his *Collationes de Donis Spiritus Sancti*. The ninth collation is devoted to wisdom and in it he speaks of wisdom as a light, descending to us through the Son from the Father of lights (James 1:1). It descends initially to the soul’s cognitive powers in order to illuminate them and then moves on to the soul’s affective powers to give them joy and shifts finally to its operative powers, to strengthen them. Wisdom therefore ‘descends from God on high into the intellect, from the intellect into the affective powers until it finally reaches the operative ones’.

However, it would be a mistake to think that Bonaventure is dividing the gift of wisdom up into cognitive and affective elements in such a way that the only relationship between them is one of cause and effect. He is clearly limiting the word ‘cognitive’ here to what is grasped by the mind through the

intellect's normal conceptual activities. Bonaventure's point in speaking of the gift as partly cognitive and partly affective, with the former the precondition for the latter, is to honour the classic principle that one cannot be united in love to something without first knowing that to which one is united. The gift of wisdom draws on the knowledge of God given by faith but then moves into its own form of knowledge – the *cognitio experimentalis Dei*, that is, the experiential knowledge of God.

Like Albert, Bonaventure believes that what is distinctive of wisdom is a grasp of divine realities that is *at one and the same time* cognitive and affective: namely the experiential knowledge of God that is a knowledge through tasting God, savouring God. That this is truly a form of *cognition*, of knowing, is perfectly clear from Bonaventure's assertion that 'the very tasting or savouring is an experiential form of knowing' (*In Sent*, d 35, q 1, resp) and that this is 'the best way of knowing God'. This last comment is all the more interesting because it is made in the context of an objection that no one is wise simply by loving. Knowledge too is required. Bonaventure's answer is that it is indeed true – but the love of God brings with it its own form of knowledge, one that is the best way of doing so, far greater, nobler and more delectable than any that is gained through rational argumentation (*In Sent*, d 35, q 1, ad 5). Indeed, as Schlosser 1990:209 points out, for Bonaventure this experiential knowledge can in some way or other give greater depth to one's speculative knowledge of God. But this is not an assertion that such greater depth is one and the same act – only that the knowledge one has of God through tasting the divine can have a spill-over effect on one's speculative knowledge of God.

As can be seen, Bonaventure retains the idea that wisdom brings with it a distinctive 'taste'. 'Savouring' is central to the exercise of the gift. However, he is careful to distinguish this savouring from that associated with the gift of understanding. For – as the philosophers had already indicated – knowledge brings its own delights. As a supernaturally enabled grasp of the truth, the gift of understanding too has its delights but it is the delight of knowing the truth – as distinct from the delight that flows from tasting or experiencing the reality that is the truth (*In Sent* d 35, a 1, q iii, ad 3).

Of course, wisdom's effects do not flow from the gift automatically. As with the rest of grace, the gift confers a possibility that did not exist before, an ability that needs to be utilised for the gift to have its full effect. The exercise

of the gift demands spiritual effort. One must therefore distinguish between the infused disposition or *habitus* and its actual exercise (see on this Schlosser 1990:188) and take note of the prerequisites (mostly moral ones) for the gift to flower. In his *Collationes de Donis Spiritus Sancti*, he describes these prerequisites as wisdom's seven pillars, each of which is drawn from James 3:17: modesty, innocence, moderation, openness to the truth (*suadibilitas*), liberality, maturity and simplicity.

Furthermore, wisdom has effects other than tasting the divine but they are all related in one way or another to this experience. Bonaventure lists these effects briefly when discussing the suitability of the number seven for the gifts (*In Sent*, d 34, a 2, q 1). If one looks at the dispositions (*habitus*) that are annexed to the gifts, each gift corresponds to a virtue and the virtue that wisdom corresponds to is love, *caritas*. If one looks at the capital sins, the gifts are opposed to these and the sin that wisdom opposes is carnality (*luxuria*). If one looks at the moral debilitation caused by sin, the debilitation that wisdom helps overcome is *stultitia*, foolishness. If one views the gifts as conforming believers to the suffering Christ, then wisdom is the gift that provides delight, *delectatio*, in performing the Father's will. If one views the gifts as expediting the actions required for attaining our ultimate end, then wisdom does so by enabling us to taste it. If one views the gifts in relation to the contemplative and active lives, then wisdom belongs to the former and indeed to its highest level, the perfection of contemplation. Finally, if one looks at the powers of the soul, wisdom helps the concupiscent appetite to overcome the impediments to its reaching out for the good – it does so by enabling that appetite to taste the good.

Finally, Bonaventure aligns himself with the view (which he describes as the common one) that the gifts are really distinct from the virtues. The distinction consists principally in this that the gifts give a greater facility to the exercise of the virtues than would otherwise be so. Wisdom obviously does this through enabling the believer to taste and relish God's goodness (*In Sent*, d 34, a 1, q 1, resp.).

9.6 Thomas Aquinas

Thomas dealt with the topic at some length – first in his commentary on the *Sentences* and then in his *Summa*. In the *Sentences*, the context is the contemplative

life (he begins his commentary on d 35 with a major discussion of the nature and respective merits of the contemplative and active lives, the reason being that ever since Anselm (Blic 1946:169) the gifts of the Spirit were seen as being given, some for the contemplative and some for the active life, with wisdom falling under the contemplative one). In the *Summa* the context is love, *caritas*.

9.6.1 The Commentary on the *Sentences* (Bk III, d 35)

We have seen how both Albert and Bonaventure stress the experiential element, the tasting element in wisdom. This is retained in Thomas's thought, but it is now linked to the philosophical idea that wisdom's function is to judge and put everything into its proper order (on the concept of order in Aquinas see Woznicki 1990). Thomas's thought on wisdom, as in so much else, sees the natural as the framework within which God works and elevates and reveals. Hence, natural wisdom, as expounded by Aristotle, becomes the main analogy for the gift. From a philosophical point of view, wisdom implies a grasp of the highest principles – whether within a particular discipline or as regards reality taken as a totality – and that grasp enables the wise person to judge and put into its proper order all that falls within the scope of those principles. Something similar applies therefore to the gift of wisdom.

What is specific to wisdom *as a gift of the Spirit* is that the highest principles are grasped not so much through a process of study or intellectual insight but rather through an affinity with the divine. Wisdom implies 'an outstanding degree of sufficiency of knowledge ... However, in some people this sufficiency is attained through study and teaching combined with intellectual ability ... whereas in others it is attained through a degree of affinity with the divine' (*In Sent*, d 35, q 2, a 1, resp). Grasping the highest principles simply through study or intellectual insight is the province of the *intellectual virtue* of wisdom. The *gift* grasps its object through being conformed to it by the unity forged by love.

This affinity is, then, the result of the same reality that causes the 'tasting' referred to by Albert and Bonaventure: the unity forged by love between the person and God. It is this love that gives wisdom its distinctive 'savour' (see *In Sent*, q 2, a 1, ad 1).

Thomas's placing of judging and ordering at the centre of his exposition of wisdom immediately shifts the balance from the affective to the cognitive aspect of the gift. We saw how Bonaventure believed that wisdom was primarily

an affective activity, since what distinguished it was its ‘savouring’ the divine. Thomas, however, holds that wisdom is primarily an intellective, a cognitive activity – since the whole point of the affective basis for the savouring is to enable a ‘connatural’ type of judging and ordering divine realities to occur. A ‘connatural’ way of making judgements is one that flows from becoming assimilated to, similar in nature to, the reality that is being judged.

Hence Thomas places the knowledge and love that make up wisdom in exactly the opposite order from that in which Bonaventure placed them. For Thomas, wisdom begins with the love that bonds and conforms and it ends with the knowledge that results. Hence, whereas for Bonaventure the cognitive was simply the precondition for the affective, for Thomas it is the other way around – the affective is merely the precondition for the cognitive (though he grants that the cognitive can be accompanied by its own delights, as is often so with knowledge). Moreover, whereas Bonaventure stated that the very tasting or savouring was an experiential form of knowing, Thomas distinguishes between the savouring and the knowing, making savouring the preparatory stage for knowing: ‘It must be said that wisdom’s savour refers to the love that precedes and not the knowledge that follows – unless it is a question of the delight that arises out of an act of knowledge’ (*In Sent*, d 35, q 2, a 1c, ad 1um). It is the beginning of a process of shifting wisdom’s ‘taste’ to a more marginal position.

Thomas’s shifting of the emphasis from the affective to the cognitive as the primary purpose of the gift is marked. To appreciate just how marked the shift is, one has to recall that the widespread view was that wisdom’s whole purpose was to provide its distinctive taste. The gift was given in order to assist the contemplative life and it did so by adding to contemplation the all-important dimension of ‘taste’. Nevertheless, it is more of a shift of emphasis than a radical break. The opposition between Thomas and Bonaventure – representing apparently opposing positions – is not as great as it may seem to be. For the cognition that Bonaventure holds as a prerequisite for wisdom’s savouring of the divine is the sort of cognition that Thomas himself would admit as preceding the love that gives rise to wisdom – namely the knowledge that the faith gives us of God. Also, the idea that loving unity with God is the prerequisite for the experiential knowledge that follows on it is something that Bonaventure would agree with. Moreover, if one takes Thomas at his word here, he is saying that the experiential knowledge should be categorised

primarily as a cognitive rather than as an affective reality. He is concentrating, in a way that Bonaventure does not, on the epistemological power of love. Thomas is in fact saying that as regards the gift of wisdom, love is the major epistemological power: uniting and conforming, thereby enabling an understanding of the divine to occur that goes beyond that of study and therefore enabling a type of judgement and ordering to take place that rests primarily on love and not on study. By contrast, Bonaventure concentrates on love's unitive power and its concomitant ability to delight – while certainly noting its epistemological consequences.

Like Bonaventure, Thomas too notes that the gift of understanding brings its own delights (though he does not use the term 'savour' at this point, he is dealing with the same reality) but that they are quite different from those brought by wisdom. Hence, wisdom and understanding differ not simply in that the one grasps the meaning of something while the other exercises 'judgement' about it and related matters. The difference is also in the epistemological basis of knowledge. For the delights that flow from love are not central to the gift of understanding. The delights proper to that gift are nothing more than the delights that accompany a faculty operating properly – the sort of delight that the mind experiences in knowing truth. Wisdom's delights, by contrast, flow from the love that binds one to the divine and makes an experiential knowledge of it possible (*In Sent*, d 35, q 2, a 2, quaest 3).

Finally, we can note that Thomas applies all of this to the relationship between the gift of wisdom and the virtue of faith. Both involve knowledge of the divine. However, one can compare the relationship between the gift of wisdom and faith with that which obtains between the intellectual virtue of wisdom and the first principles of all knowledge. The intellectual virtue probes these principles, makes judgements in the light of them and can put them and all that relates to them in their proper order or relationship. Similarly, the gift of wisdom probes, etc, the articles of faith, which for Thomas form theology's first principles, but probes them through a 'deiform contemplation'. And this brings out the distinction between the gift of wisdom and the virtue of faith, since faith grasps its object in a human way (through images and concepts) while wisdom grasps it through the believer's ontological conformity to it, that is, through the divinely engendered likeness to it (*In Sent*, q 2, a 1, ad 1).

9.6.2 The *Summa Theologiae* (IIa IIae, q 45)

Fundamentally the same position is taken in the *Summa* as regards the nature and purpose of the gift of wisdom. The analogy with wisdom as conceived by Aristotle continues: wisdom's purpose is to be able to judge all things and place them in their correct relationship to each other. It does so through its knowledge of the God that is the supreme cause of all things. This knowledge can be obtained in one of two ways: either through philosophical thought, in which case we are talking about the intellectual virtue of wisdom; or through a degree of conformity to divine things, in which case we are talking about the infused gift of wisdom (a 2, resp.).

Moreover, the order of affectivity leading to cognition is maintained in the *Summa*. Love conforms us to God by uniting us to God thereby allowing connatural judgement to take place: 'wisdom therefore has indeed got its cause in the will, namely, in charity, but its essence is in the intellect, whose act it is to judge correctly' (a 2, resp.).

Wisdom's distinctive 'taste' occupies even less attention here than it did in the commentary on the *Sentences*. Thomas does not exclude it, but associates it with the love that leads to knowledge and leaves the matter at that (see q 45, a 2, ad 1 & 2). It is the ability to judge by connaturality, and not wisdom's delights or distinctive taste, that is the centre of Thomas' attention when dealing with the gift of the wisdom.

Once again, if we take Thomas at his word, he is saying that the knowledge specific to the gift of wisdom is that which is derived through an affinity with its object, through connaturality – as when someone who is chaste can instinctively judge what is or is not chaste, without having to go through a lengthy analysis of the matter. However, it is difficult to believe that Thomas seriously thought that such connatural knowledge was even the major source of the gift's ability to judge. He had already stated earlier (a 1, ad 2; see also his commentary on the *Sentences*, above) that wisdom presupposes faith. It differs from faith for, while faith assents to its object, wisdom uses the knowledge gained by faith to judge all things. He also speaks of wisdom using the knowledge gained by the gift of understanding to do its judging (see below). It would seem then that the knowledge gained other than through connaturality plays the major role in the exercise of the gift of

wisdom. If so, then such knowledge must be coloured by the unity that love forges, giving it a connatural flavour, so to speak. For otherwise Thomas's insistence on wisdom's distinctive mode of judging as being the connatural mode becomes rather pointless. It would seem, then, that like Bonaventure, Thomas has in mind a spill-over effect from the experiential knowledge of God onto the speculative knowledge contained in the articles of faith.

This interpretation is further supported by Thomas' solution to an objection that not everyone in the state of grace, that is, not everyone united to God in love, receives the gift of wisdom (a 5). The ground for this objection is the obvious one that there are many such people who do not display this ability to judge and order all things. Indeed, infants and small children are graced by God's presence and they cannot really judge anything. Thomas's solution is based on two distinctions. The first distinguishes between a divinely infused disposition (*habitus*) and its actual exercise. Children and infants have the former but not the latter. It is a distinction that we saw Bonaventure appeal to above. The second distinction applies to those who do have the use of reason and can therefore exercise the gift. In their case, Thomas distinguishes between two grades of wisdom. The first grade is the most basic one and is granted to all. It is the ability to judge of those matters necessary for one's own personal salvation. The second grade is a higher one and is granted only to a few. It is the ability to know the higher mysteries and give direction not only to one's own life but the lives of others. This is in the unusual position of being both a grade of the gift of the Spirit and a *gratia gratis data*, one of the charisms listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 (see a 5, resp). But what is of significance for the point being discussed above is that it therefore implies that this higher knowledge is shot through with the insights that come from a connatural knowledge of divine realities.¹

Thomas makes the point here that all receive wisdom in at least its lowest grade. Indeed, this gift, like all the other seven gifts of the Spirit, is necessary

¹ It seems to me that this is the only way to make sense of this particular text. For a brief discussion of its problematic character see, for example, Solignac 1990:111. Commenting on Thomas in the sixteenth century, Cajetan was of the opinion that the the *gratia gratis data* aspect applied to the quantitative increase of knowledge that an individual can develop regarding the faith (an increase *extensive*) and which can be used for the good of others, while the *gratia gratum faciens* aspect was the deepening of a person's goodness, ie unity with God (an increase *intensive*).

for salvation. He argues this point in the *Ia IIae*, q 68, a 2. He views all the gifts as perfecting the virtues in the sense of enabling them be exercised under the impulse of the Spirit. It is essential that we be open to the movement of the Spirit and since the gifts enable us to do that, they are essential for salvation. Wisdom, for example, enables one to judge things not simply by the use of reason but by an instinct for the divine given us by the Spirit (q 68, a 1, ad 4).

All in the state of grace (that is, graced by God's saving presence) receive the gift in some form or other, then. Moreover, it is *only* those in the state of grace who receive it. Precisely because the gift of wisdom depends for its very existence on the unity forged with God by love, it cannot exist in those alienated from God through mortal sin. Such sinfulness not only breaks one's unity with God but deprives a person of that connaturality with divine things that is essential to wisdom's distinctive form of judging (a 4).

Wisdom's central act, therefore, is to judge. It is this ability to judge that differentiates it from the gift of understanding. The latter gift's purpose is simply to understand, to penetrate the cognitive content of the faith. Wisdom's purpose is to make the sort of judgements referred to above on the basis of that understanding (a 2). We can see here once again the speculative bent of Thomas's approach. His mentor, Albert, had distinguished the gifts of wisdom and understanding by saying that understanding merely saw, wisdom also tasted. In Thomas's hands the distinction becomes that understanding merely sees, wisdom also judges.

Despite its essentially intellectual character, wisdom's judging function means that it is not merely a speculative but also a practical gift, for part of its function is to direct the way people should act (a 3). As was seen above, all who receive it and who have reached the age of reason can and must use it to direct the way they should act in matters essential for their salvation. However, a few receive a higher grade of the gift, enabling them to direct others not merely in such matters but also to impart to them a knowledge of the higher mysteries and to direct their actions accordingly.

Precisely because it is able to put things in their proper order, wisdom has an inner dynamism to harmony and with harmony comes peace. Of all the beatitudes, therefore, the one most closely allied to wisdom and which is in a way a fruit of wisdom is the one which proclaims the peacemakers blessed. Moreover, the reward for being such illustrates the beatitude's link with

wisdom: such people will be called God's children. Being God's children implies being conformed to God and it is this conformity, wrought by love, that is, as we saw, the root of wisdom's distinctive connatural form of judging (a 6).

9.6.3 Wisdom as a gift of the Spirit and wisdom as theology

For Aquinas, the distinctive way in which the gift of wisdom judges – namely through connaturality – also distinguishes it from theology as a discipline.

Theology had traditionally been regarded as wisdom in the sense of an ability to understand divine realities through experiencing them. When the discussions about theology's scientific character took place in the first half of the thirteenth century, it was this idea of theology-as-wisdom that led theologians to assert that theology went beyond mere *scientia* or intellectually constructed knowledge. Wisdom outstripped such knowledge since it went beyond purely intellectual categories so as to come into immediate and experiential contact with the divine, a contact that illuminated the divine in a way that purely intellectual categories could never do. This is why Roland of Cremona could insist that 'those who do not have a formed faith [a faith suffused with love] do not know theology ... Without experience there is no art or science, and all intellectual knowledge flows from a prior sentient one. For just as someone who never tasted honey can never have a true knowledge of its taste ... so too is it impossible for someone who is not proficient in living out a faith suffused with love to know theology. Such a person may know how to talk about theology. But this is simply like the case of one born blind who can know how to talk about colours without really knowing them' (*Summa*, prol, q 2; as quoted by M-D Chenu 1957a:61–62).

With the increasing influence of Aristotelian ideas that occurred in the thirteenth century, we can see the tension beginning to develop between Aristotle's concept of wisdom and this more traditional one. As we saw, Aristotle's concept of wisdom was a purely intellectual one. It was the purely conceptual understanding of the supreme cause, the cause of all causes. No 'tasting' of the divine exists in such an intellectual view of wisdom.

The tension between the traditional Augustinian-Christian view and the Aristotelian one manifested itself in that when arguing that theology was 'wisdom', writers increasingly had to note that it was wisdom *not* in the

Aristotelian sense but in the more traditional sense of knowing the divine through experiencing it. Thus, for Kilwardby, the traditional meaning of wisdom dealt with the divine not merely as truth but also as goodness – a goodness that could be ‘tasted’, that is, experienced. ‘The knowledge [*scientia*] that deals with the cause of all causes does so either by focusing on its character simply as truth or on that truth as goodness. The former is the province of metaphysics and limits itself to [intellectual] sight. The latter is the province of theology and looks to the movement of one’s affections. It is this latter that is properly called ‘wisdom from savouring’ [*sapientia a sapore*], since it brings about a knowledge derived from tasting [its object]. The former is called wisdom in a less proper sense, since it limits its knowledge according to what can be seen [with the mind]’ (*De natura theologiae*:49).

However, the extent to which Aristotelian ideas were becoming part and parcel of the accepted philosophical framework of academic institutions made it almost inevitable that theology would come to be seen as being ‘wisdom’ in the Aristotelian sense of the term. The changeover took place in Aquinas, who relegated the traditional concept of wisdom to the area of the gifts of the Spirit, while applying Aristotle’s sense of the term ‘wisdom’ to theology.

In article 6 of the opening question of his *Summa* he poses the question as to whether theology is ‘wisdom’. He lists as one of the main objections to its being wisdom the fact that wisdom is a gift of God, more precisely one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, while theology’s body of knowledge is acquired through study. His reply to this objection is as follows:

Since judgment appertains to wisdom, the twofold manner of judging produces a twofold wisdom. A man may judge in one way by inclination, as whoever has the habit of a virtue judges rightly of what concerns that virtue by his very inclination towards it. Hence it is the virtuous man, as we read, who is the measure and rule of human acts. In another way, by knowledge, just as a man learned in moral science might be able to judge rightly about virtuous acts, though he had not the virtue. The first manner of judging divine things belongs to that wisdom which is set down among the gifts of the Holy Ghost: ‘The spiritual man judgeth all things’ (1 Cor 2:15). And Dionysius says (Div Nom ii): ‘Hierotheus is taught not by mere learning, but by experience of divine things.’ The second manner of judging belongs to this doctrine which is acquired by study, though its

principles are obtained by revelation (English version, London: Burns & Oates, 1920).

Theology, therefore, is no longer wisdom in the older sense of the term but rather the Aristotelian sense. Granted, Aquinas is not asserting that theology is simply the philosophy of the highest cause. On the contrary, he acknowledges that theology gets its principles from revelation. But he does seem to be ruling out the idea that central to theology's way of going about its business is the need for the theologian to 'taste' the realities being discussed.

This will eventually lead to the conclusion that one could be a competent theologian even if one lacked the love that was an essential ingredient of the Spirit's gift of wisdom. We have already seen how in the fourteenth century it was pointed out that in principle anybody – not necessarily a Christian – could perform the academic activities associated with theologising. In the fifteenth century we see Denys of Ryckel making the same sort of distinction Aquinas made between the wisdom that is theology and the wisdom that is the Spirit's gift and going on to bemoan that the former type of wisdom is one that can be found in both the morally good and the morally evil. 'The wisdom that is theology is common to those who are good and those who are evil: for, sad to say, there are many doctors of theology living in the state of mortal sin who nevertheless display such wisdom' (*De donis*, II, iv; p 178). 'The wisdom that is the Spirit's gift, however, is a savourous knowledge of God derived from experiencing God' (*ibid*).

Aquinas's shift to a purely intellectual understanding of the sense in which wisdom is theology became widespread, being followed even by mystics such as Denys of Ryckel. However, it is interesting to note that, in the opinion of the great Thomist scholar Chenu, Aquinas does seem to have preserved some role in theology for the sort of love-filled unity with God that was at the heart of the older idea of wisdom. When dealing with Thomas's theory of theology as a subalternate science, we saw that a continuity between the knowledge making up the subalternate science and that making up the subalternating one was essential to the former being a true *scientia*. Chenu believes that for Thomas there was indeed some continuity and that the continuity in question was the experiential contact with God (and therefore with the subalternating wisdom of God) that the believer's love-filled faith brought about. The experiential knowledge that was essential to the older concept of wisdom therefore is now being appealed to in order to provide

the necessary continuity within the theologian between theology's principles (God's knowledge of God as revealed to us) and the body of knowledge built onto them. If Chenu is correct, then his comment is apt: 'that which makes theology a science is [for Thomas] precisely that which makes it mystical' (Chenu 1957a:74). However, whether he is correct or not, what is clear, as I wrote elsewhere, 'is that the whole thrust of Thomas' approach was to push love's illuminating role into the background of theological work. The only place where it may fulfil a role was as regards the principles on which theology was based. After that, logic took over. Theology's conclusions were entitled to stand as scientifically established ones only if the logical coherence between them and the principles was perceptible' (Gaybba 1990:100). As we saw when dealing with monastic theology, it was at that point above all that monastic and scholastic theology parted company.

9.7 Conclusions

After Aquinas, the medieval theology of the gift of wisdom came to rest on two pillars. The first pillar was the older of the two in Christian theology: a knowledge rooted in an immediate experience of the divine, one that is in turn rooted in a love that binds the knower to God. The conceptual framework within which medieval discussions of such knowledge took place was neo-Platonist mysticism, particularly in the form given to it by Pseudo-Denys in his *De nominibus divinis*. But the idea of such knowledge was seen as having strong biblical roots. The most favoured text appealed to again and again was Psalm 34:8, 'taste and see that the Lord is good', since the text appeared to combine experiential ('taste') and cognitive elements ('see'). The second pillar was a knowledge of the cause of all causes that enabled someone to grasp the conceptual connection between that supreme cause and everything else. This pillar was Aristotle's idea of wisdom.

The two pillars were united into a single structure for the first time in Aquinas's theology of wisdom as a gift of the Spirit. However, the tensions between the two very different types of knowing represented by each pillar remained: one that operated with clearly delineated concepts, tracing as clearly as possible the logical connections between them; and one that operated more with instincts and feelings that are aroused in the believer through a loving unity with God.

The only way in which such tensions could be resolved was by seeing the latter as giving a depth of insight and certitude to the former that would otherwise be lacking. For in the last analysis the gift of wisdom was seen as the place where mind and heart were united in the believer's grasp of God's revelation. Christians were people who were meant to be able to taste the goodness and rightness of their faith because they were able to taste the God at its core: and such an ability, the followers of Thomas argued, was absolutely necessary if a Christian was to be a Christian. Christians were people who, through their being formed in God's image, were meant to be able to judge with a sure instinct what was and what was not in conformity with their faith.

In the writings of the mystics, the power of the gift becomes awesome. It can flood the intellect with light and create a spiritual 'feast' within the soul, one in which the believer 'can become drunk on the wine of divine love and light' (see for example, Rudolph of Biberach's *De donis*, chapters 5–11). It brings a joy and a facility to exercising the Christian virtues. It gives to faith a firmness that comes from experiencing its truth. It overwhelms one with what Ruusbroec calls its 'delicious taste'. And so on.

Needless to say, the gap between such claims and empirical experience (since the gift was said to be given to all) did not go unnoticed. Authors were aware that Christians in general did not display all the effects attributed to wisdom. The main explanation for the gap is the same that Christians to this day use to explain the difference between faith-assertions about the believer's inner renewal or sanctification and the fact that Christians by and large do not live outstandingly saintly lives. The explanation is that the gift opens up possibilities that can only be activated through moral effort on the part of the recipient. More detailed explanations depended on which theology of wisdom one was emphasising. If one emphasised wisdom as a gift enabling one to reach the heights of contemplative mysticism – which was by and large the approach of the mystics – then clearly the gift would be wasted on anyone not willing to travel the long and hard road of self-discipline required by such a contemplative life. If one emphasised wisdom's ability to judge con-naturally of divine things, as Aquinas did, then one response (which was that of Aquinas) was that the gift existed in two grades, the basic grade being an ability to make the necessary instinctive judgements about what is essential to one's salvation and which is given to all, the higher grade being the ability to make more difficult judgements and guide others as well as oneself, a

grade that is given only to a few. Another response, which we find in some seventeenth-century popular spiritual writers, is that the grip of sin even on the life of the believer reduces the ability of the gift to achieve its full potential.

But even after all the necessary reservations have been made about some of the claims that have been made for the gift, there remains an important insight preserved within the theology devoted to it, namely that all who have been justified and sanctified by Christ have an experiential insight into God and the things of God, thanks to the presence of God and God's love within them. Even if one divests this insight of a theological packaging that may seem strange to many a Christian today, it remains a valuable one. It is interesting that after Protestantism spawned its own dry scholasticism, the Pietist reaction was one in which precisely this experiential element came once more to the fore. For the Pietists, doctrinal formulae are meaningless if they do not correspond to one's spiritual experience.

As has been pointed out repeatedly, the theology of the gift of wisdom retains at its heart the idea that love illuminates, an idea that goes back to the gospels, found explicit expression in Augustine and became the centre of monastic theology's insights. It is an idea that is still influential today, albeit under a different guise. For the central insight of liberation theology that action influences theory, that orthopraxis is a prerequisite for maintaining orthodoxy, is but a sophisticated expression of the fundamental thesis that, as regards the things of God, love illuminates in a way that mere abstract knowledge can never do. This insight owes a great deal to what the sociology of knowledge has taught us. But the insights of this modern discipline are ones that, in the final analysis, enflesh the central medieval conviction of love's ability to illuminate, since the social relationships that affect knowledge are relationships that give structure to love.

In our own day, therefore, the split between heart and head that occurred shortly after theology became an academic discipline is being healed to some extent. In this process of healing we need the insights of a very wide range of contemporary disciplines. But we also need to retrieve the insights of the past. The theology of wisdom as a form of knowing that combines conceptual and experiential knowledge of the divine should form the core of any balanced modern theory of theology. It also has valuable contributions to make to a theory of the bases for inter-religious dialogue. For if, as Christians

believe, God is love and if the most widely experienced and universally valued experience amongst human beings is love (however it may be defined), *the key to mutual understanding is to explore the relationship between our experience of love, love of God and love of neighbour, and the doctrinal constructs that make up the explicit content of our differing faiths.* But that is a different story and one that requires far more discussion than the few thoughts offered here.

Clearly there is still a long way to go and much we need to learn about ourselves, our experiences of the divine, the way in which our hearts and heads interact both within the individual and in society. But in learning those lessons we should remember not to jettison the insights bequeathed to us by our Christian forebears, for however strange the packaging of those insights may be to us today, the insights themselves are of enduring value.

10

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