

Scholasticism

I. Introduction

A. Definition

1. “The effort to reconcile faith and reason.”
 - a. Organize, systematize, and defend the teachings of the church
 - b. Use reason to vindicate and buttress the Christian Faith
2. Sources (Beale)
 - a. Augustine: Substance
 - b. Aristotle: Method

B. Methodology

1. Method of Aristotle in reasoning
 - a. Syllogism: Logical argument
 - b. Dialectics: Resolving contradictions of facts or ideas
 - c. Philosophy is an *essential* tool
2. Resources: Scripture, Tradition (consensus of the Fathers—*from* Christ but *reflected* in Fathers), and Nature
3. A study of what was inherited, not an investigation of new truth. **Theological “Cathedrals”**: what the Scriptures, Church Fathers, and church had already produced became the “building blocks” of these cathedrals
4. Speculative: Mocked for extremes—How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Will a man at the final resurrection also receive his nail clippings? Can one baptize with beer? Could God have become incarnate as a woman? At what hour of the day did Adam sin? What is the result if a mouse should consume a crumb of the host?—**Attempted to be exhaustive**
5. Sought clear & precise definition and categorization
6. Systematic theology central to its method

II. Leaders

A. Anselm of Canterbury

1. Archbishop of Canterbury
2. Faith comes first: “I believe that I may understand.”
3. Ontological argument for the existence of God
 - a. Found in *Monologion* and *Proslogion*
 - b. Began with a meditation on Ps. 14:1, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” Bible says atheism unreasonable—how is this so?
 - c. We cannot conceive of that which does not exist
 - d. The fact that we can conceive of a perfect being of whom nothing can be greater is a proof that such a being exists
4. Satisfaction View of the Atonement
 - a. Reacted to the “ransom to Satan” theory, which had been pretty standard since time of Gregory the Great
 - b. *Cur Deus Homo* (“Why God became man”)
 - 1) Satisfaction theory of the atonement—that Christ by dying on the cross paid the penalty for man’s sin and satisfied God’s justice
 - 2) A definite legal aspect, both its strength and weakness; does not include the idea of vicariously bearing the sins of the world

- 3) Virtually no reference to the place of the Christian in the atonement. Berkhof notes, "There is no hint of the mystical union of Christ with believers."

B. Peter Abelard

1. Character: A nonconformist
 - a. Somewhat rationalistic: "I understand that I may believe."
 - b. He is un-traditional (i.e., questioning tradition): "By doubting, we come to inquiry, by inquiry we discover the truth."
2. Life
 - a. A brilliant scholar and popular lecturer
 - b. Famous tragic romance w/ Heloise
 - c. Opposed by Bernard of Clairvaux, who said he had the outward appearance of the apostle John and the heart of King Herod
3. *Sic et Non* ("Yes and No")
 - a. Outlined—but did not reconcile—the views of the church fathers on 158 different topics
 - b. Tended undercut the claim of the consensus of the Fathers
 - c. Stated purpose was to show there were unresolved questions and promote their resolution (true Aristotelian method)
4. Moral Influence Theory of the Atonement
 - a. Christ's death is a demonstration of God's love in order to move us to love and sacrifice
 - 1) An inspiring example that makes a change in us
 - 2) "The real atonement takes place within us, not on the cross" (Olson).
 - b. Abelard thought the love of God needed to be stressed
 - c. Contrast with Anselm
 - 1) Anselm stressed an objective change in the sinner's status
 - 2) Abelard suggested a subjective change in the Christian's heart

C. Peter Lombard

1. Called the "father of systematic theology"
2. Influenced by Abelard, but more orthodox
3. Wrote *Sentences*, the major theology textbook of the Middle Ages
 - a. Not original but a compilation
 - b. Shows medieval tendency to cite authorities where ancient fathers cited scripture
4. Unlike Abelard he attempted to reconcile contradictions (truly Aristotelian)
5. One of the first to set down the seven sacraments of the church, which eventually became dogma.

D. Thomas Aquinas

1. Significance
 - a. "The angelic doctor"; the most important of the schoolmen
 - b. His teaching was declared "the standard of Catholic orthodoxy" (the norm for the Catholic way of doing theology) by Pope Leo XIII in 1879 (adherents of his approach are known as "Thomists")
 - c. His system of theology is that which became the accepted system of Catholicism
2. Theological Approach
 - a. Devoted to the rediscovered Aristotle and Aristotle's method, although he did not follow him blindly (e.g., eternity of matter).

- b. Often philosophical in approach
 - 1) God is “pure act”
 - 2) There is always analogy in religious language about God, faith, etc. (E.g., when one says “God is wise” and “Solomon was wise,” the terms are not identical but neither are they completely dissimilar.)
- c. Desire to reconcile contradictions pushed him to eccentric interpretations as it did the other schoolmen
- 3. Place of Reason in Theology
 - a. Saw limitations of reason.
 - 1) The doctrine of the Trinity was above reason (although not irrational) but the existence of God was accessible to reason → sought to define the proper spheres of faith and reason
 - 2) By reason one could not disprove Aristotle’s view on the eternity of matter; by faith one must accept creation *ex nihilo*.
 - b. Importance of Nature
 - 1) Natural theology: Believed in the use of reason in the study of theology and that one could discover God’s truth from nature
 - 2) Natural law: God’s standards as part of the natural order and therefore accessible to and binding upon all people
 - 3) Nature cannot bring salvation
- 4. Apologetics
 - a. Aquinas is the fountainhead of classical apologetics (Norman Geisler)
 - b. Unlike Anselm, he believed such arguments must begin with the senses, which are the source of knowledge
 - c. Offered five arguments for the existence of God
 - 1) The first and second proofs are based on cause and effect, i.e., for every effect there must be a cause and ultimately a First Cause, Himself uncaused
 - 2) The third and fourth proofs argue from lesser to greater (e.g., that the imperfect exists supposes the existence of the perfect)
 - 3) His fifth argument is based on apparent design in the universe, and is paralleled by the modern “Intelligent Design” movement in the creation/evolution debate.
- 5. His greatest work is *Summa Theologica*.
 - a. The fullest statement of medieval theology; the height of scholasticism
 - b. Exhaustively rigorous, logical, and analytical → Covers over 500 questions attempting in an Aristotelian manner to resolve all contradictions.

III. Evaluation

A. Negative

- 1. Relied on human autonomy, not reckoning with human depravity
- 2. Relied on tradition as an authority instead of Scripture alone
- 3. Offered little opportunity for progress in knowledge → one could only organize and scrutinize what was inherited
- 4. Served to confirm Catholicism, to harden the lines of dogma
- 5. Highly philosophical in emphasis/method
- 6. Little contribution to exegesis or biblical theology

B. Positive

1. Development of universities and higher education
2. Revival of Aristotle (promoting scientific investigation)
3. Real progress in the doctrine of the atonement (Anselm)