
Catholic Theology in the Thirteenth Century and the Origins of Secularism



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Abstract

This article examines two distinct responses to the reception of Aristotle in the thirteenth century: the Bonaventurian and the Thomist. The outcome of this debate (and the Condemnations of 1277) led to the modern separation of faith and reason. Rather than seeing voluntarism and nominalism as the cause of the modern separation of faith and reason, and theology and philosophy, it will be suggested that it is actually the other way around: the Bonaventurian response indirectly resulted in the growing separation of faith and reason, which led, in turn, to voluntarism. It is important not to confuse the Thomist and Franciscan responses, as sometimes happens in recent scholarship, including in the work of Gavin D'Costa, as will be shown. Both the Thomist and the Bonaventurian approaches are legitimate resources to respond to the (post)-secular context in which we find ourselves, and the former should not be reduced to the latter.

Keywords

Aquinas and Bonaventure, faith and reason, origins of modernity

In this article I want to revisit debates that took place at the end of the thirteenth century. From a historical point of view it is exactly in this period that we find the origins of secularism and modernity, especially the growing separation of faith and reason, theology and philosophy. The end of the thirteenth century is therefore a defining moment in relation to secularity, understood here as the beginning of the process of a diminishing role for religion in the academia (and in the arts faculties in particular, resulting in a new relation between theology and philosophy), as well as in terms of the conditions conducive to espousing faith.¹ The reception of Aristotle in the universities led to different

1 Charles Taylor distinguishes between three understandings of secularism: first, secularity can refer to the emptying out of different social spheres (economic, political, cultural, educational)

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ways of conceiving of the relation between faith and reason, theology and philosophy. Apart from the double-truth theory (associated with ‘Latin Averroism’), which cannot be called a Catholic view, there effectively developed two rather different understandings of the nature of theology in the Catholic tradition, a Thomist one and a Franciscan one. I will argue, somewhat controversially perhaps, that the Bonaventurian/Franciscan response to the new learning of Aristotle is indirectly responsible for the generation of the modern secular context.

I will first briefly recall how Thomas Aquinas sees theology, and how his approach differs from that adopted by Bonaventure. I will then go on to discuss the impact of the Condemnations of 1277. Although the thrust of the article is historical, I will conclude this contribution by illustrating the contemporary significance of the issues discussed by giving an example of a contemporary scholar who conflates the Bonaventurian and Thomist responses. Which response is the most adequate one in (post-)secular society—if an exclusive choice must be made at all—I will not say; however, I do think it is important to distinguish the two approaches, and avoid confusing them.

Thomas Aquinas and the Science of Theology

The exact nature of theology in Thomas Aquinas, and its relation with philosophy in particular, are a controversial issue. The discussion is often obscured by our modern (Cartesian or Kantian) understanding of philosophy and reason in terms of autonomy—a view as alien to Aquinas or Bonaventure as to thinkers of Antiquity (for whom rationality was unthinkable in separation from its constituting tradition).

Some have argued, quite rightly, that Thomas Aquinas’s two *Summae* are theological works to the core. Within this ‘theological’ reading, some scholars, like Eugene Rogers or Nicholas Healy, have made the case that Aquinas shuns philosophical arguments. Others have discovered in Aquinas’s works philosophical arguments that have validity, without recourse to revealed truth.² It seems to me that these divergent readings reflect our contemporary (post-Kantian and Barthian) concerns, and I doubt whether they offer the most

from any reference to God or religious beliefs. This finds an expression in the separation of Church and State (or even the repression of religion altogether). Second, secularity may consist in decline of religious belief and practice. The example of the USA (with its separation of Church and State) illustrates that the first kind of secularity does not necessarily imply the second kind. In a third sense Taylor proposes we examine the conditions of belief. He characterizes it as ‘a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace,’ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3. I will mainly focus on the first understanding, and the implications of this for the third understanding.

2 While Paul O’Grady argues that Aquinas should be considered an analytic philosopher *avant la lettre* — see Paul O’Grady, ‘Philosophical Theology and Analytical Philosophy in Aquinas,’ in Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, eds, *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 416–441. Eugene Rogers offers a Barthian reading of Aquinas in his book *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1995). For a lucid overview

nuanced perspective from which to interpret properly Thomas Aquinas's own texts. As Thomas sees it, a theologian is somebody who has a theocentric focus—but that does not mean, as we will see, that a theologian cannot use arguments (e.g. 'the Five Ways') that have a claim to philosophical validity. The readings of those scholars who deny that Aquinas allows for a demonstration of the existence of God by the natural light, seem therefore rather problematic.³ Although it remains subject to theology in the hierarchy of sciences, philosophy (similar to any other discipline) has its own remit and claims to validity.

Aristotle and Aquinas do not use the word 'science' in the modern, western sense of the word. For us, 'science' involves observation, experimentation, formation of hypotheses, their verification, and so forth. *Scientia* for Thomas is the discovery of reasons in light of first truths that are necessary. Thus, in sciences we demonstrate something unknown from principles that are known. Whereas Augustine called theology a science because it is an organized body of knowledge, Thomas Aquinas calls it a science because it is based on demonstrative deduction. Just as at the basis of logic there are some self-evident principles (e.g. principle of non-contradiction), so too the articles of faith lie at the basis of Christian theology. Theology is scientific because it proceeds with certainty from principles which it does not prove. These principles are the articles of faith which reveal something of the mystery of God himself who allowed us to share in his self-knowledge (*scientia*) through his revelation, especially in Christ.

Now the articles of faith, unlike principles of logic, are not self-evident. Aquinas therefore distinguishes between two kinds of science: sciences that start from self-evident principles (such as logic); and sciences whose principles can be retraced to a higher science (e.g. today's molecular biology is based on chemistry). Christian theology is a science of this sort. It takes its principles directly from God through revelation (and not from any of the other sciences). The fact that theology 'borrows' its principles—it is a science only fully known by God—explains the peculiar nature of the virtue of faith of the Christian believer; it is between science and opinion. It is intrinsically more certain (in its cause) because it is founded on divine Truth itself, and yet it is less certain for us, because for us matters of faith are above the human intellect.⁴

For Aquinas, theology (*sacra doctrina*) and philosophy have a different focus. As he explains in *Summa contra Gentiles* II.4, whereas the philosopher focuses on creatures first and is then led to a consideration of God, the first consideration of the theologian is God, and he/she examines creatures only in relation to God. But why do we need Christian theology in the first place? Aquinas explains that it was necessary for our salvation that there should be a body of knowledge revealed by God, in addition to philosophical researches. There are a number of reasons for this: first, because the Christian understanding of God as Trinity and other core truths of the Christian faith are beyond the grasp of human reasoning; second, 'even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a

of divergent readings of Aquinas on a range of issues, including faith and reason, see Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

3 See O'Grady, 'Philosophical Theology and Analytical Philosophy in Aquinas,' 426–429.

4 STh II-II 4.8.

divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors.⁵

In reply to the second objection that it is superfluous to introduce another science (given the fact that philosophy already deals with God), Thomas Aquinas replies that ‘there is no reason why those things which may be learned from philosophical science, so far as they can be known by natural reason, may not also be taught us by another science so far as they fall within revelation.’⁶ This suggests that Aquinas sees philosophy and theology in harmonious terms, although the scope of theology is more universal and broader than any of the other sciences. It comprises truths which can be attained through natural reason in other sciences without, however, cancelling out the integral nature of those other sciences. Theology looks at things from the perspective of God’s self-revelation. All sciences are part of a hierarchy which is crowned by theology (the most universal and noble science). There are many things that theology does not explicitly deal with, and which are the subject of other disciplines.⁷ Holding the opposite view would cancel out the very notion of hierarchy of the sciences. Of course, the theologian can sometimes use arguments from other disciplines (e.g. philosophy) to illustrate a theological point, just as a philosopher can use arguments of other disciplines (e.g. physics) to make his (philosophical) point. Similarly, philosophy can be used to demonstrate the preambles of faith (such as that God exists); or it can be used to refute assertions that are contrary to the faith by showing them to be false, or lacking in necessity.⁸

The idea of a hierarchy of sciences implies, further, that the other sciences cannot truly teach something that is in contradiction to the Christian faith. Aquinas also states (in STh I 1.6 *ad* 3) that theology can judge the principles of other sciences. Theology therefore does not simply judge the conclusions but also the principles of other sciences. Finally, Aquinas is also committed to the view that we should resist any attempt to reduce theology to philosophy: it would be an error to include ‘the content of faith within the bounds of philosophy, as would happen should somebody decide to believe nothing but what could be established by philosophy. On the contrary, philosophy should be brought within the bounds of faith, as the Apostle says in 2 Cor 10:5: “We take every thought captive to obey Christ.”’⁹

Responding to the criticism that Aquinas’s view on the harmonious relation between theology and philosophy may appear to be mixing water with wine (Bonaventure’s point), i.e. mingling philosophical doctrines with sacred teaching, Aquinas retorts that ‘those who use the works of the philosophers in Sacred Doctrine, by bringing them into the service of faith, do not mix water with wine, but rather change water into wine.’¹⁰ For

5 STh I 1.1. All translations are from the Benziger Brothers edition (1947). Translated by the English Dominican Province.

6 STh I 1.1, 2.

7 See ScG II, 4.

8 See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius*, Q.2, art. 3, (trans. Armand Maurer in *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason and Theology. Questions I–IV of the ‘Commentary on the De Trinitate’ of Boethius* [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987], 49).

9 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius*, Q.2, art. 3 (trans. Maurer, 49).

10 Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius*, Q.2, art. 3 *ad* 5 (trans. Maurer, 50).

Thomas Aquinas, this is nothing but an application of his foundational theological stance that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it. Similarly,

the light of faith, which is imparted to us as a gift, does not do away with the light of natural reason (*lumen naturalis rationis*) given to us by God.... Now just as sacred doctrine is based on the light of faith, so philosophy is based on the natural light of reason (*lumen naturale rationis*). So it is impossible that the contents of philosophy should be contrary to the contents of faith, but they fall short of them.... If anything is found in the sayings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this is not philosophy but rather an abuse of philosophy arising from faulty reasoning.¹¹

It is important to note that Thomas Aquinas is explicitly stating that the light of faith does not do away with the natural light of reason. In other words, it is the very same reason that is used in theological and philosophical pursuits. Of course, Aquinas's understanding of theology remains indebted to the Anselmian *fides quaerens intellectum*: theology uses human reasoning, not to prove faith, but to make manifest some implications of its message. Natural reason should assist faith 'as the natural loving bent of the will yields to charity.'¹²

We saw earlier that theology borrows its principles from the *scientia* of God himself. It does not aim at demonstrating its principles but it advances from them to prove other things, which were not yet known (for instance, from the resurrection of Christ and his communion with us, we can deduce the resurrection of all). This has important consequences for our dealings with those people who reject some, or all, of these principles. We should not try to prove the basic truths of revelation (e.g. God as Trinity, the Incarnation) in a rational manner, although we can argue from revealed truths, if our opponent admits some of them. If he/she does not admit any revealed truths, we can only refute his/her objections but we will not be able to prove in a positive fashion the truth of revelation. However, we should remember that Aquinas has more confidence in human reason when it comes to establishing the 'preambles of faith' than most post-Kantians would: he holds, for instance, the view that we can prove the existence of God from the created world.¹³

Bonaventure

In Bonaventure's view, merely relying on the natural light of reason is nothing but a dangerous, self-inflicted tutelage. Philosophy has to subject itself to theology if it is to flourish.¹⁴

11 Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius*, Q.2, art. 3, (Trans. Maurer, 48–49).

12 STh I 1.8 ad 2.

13 STh I 2.2 and 2.3.

14 In the twentieth century, a major controversy broke out between Etienne Gilson and Ferdinand Van Steenberghen over the status of philosophy in Bonaventure. Gilson argued that Bonaventure does have a philosophy but we should not project our modern-day understanding of philosophy (as autonomous) onto medieval thinkers. Bonaventure presents us with a 'Christian philosophy,' that is, a philosophy pursued in the context of the Christian faith, and with Christ at its centre. For Van Steenberghen, this is simply incoherent. According to

An independent philosophy will ultimately result in errors.¹⁵ Only faith can separate light from darkness (Gen 1:4) while a presumptuous, supposedly autonomous philosophy will only lead to error.¹⁶ These views may, at first, not appear all that different from Aquinas's. After all, Thomas too had expressed concerns about the fallibility of philosophy, and had emphasized the need for *sacra doctrina*. A closer examination, however, will bring out the differences.

Bonaventure was deeply concerned about the growing influence of Aristotelian philosophy at the expense of Augustinianism. Because Aristotle rejected exemplarism and the theory of ideas, he fell into a triple error: he affirmed the unity of the intellect, the eternity of the world; and he denied the immortality of the soul.¹⁷ In contrast, Bonaventure asserts, 'This is the sum total of our metaphysics: emanation, exemplarity, and consummation, that is, to be illuminated through spiritual radiations (*illuminari per radios spirituales*) and return to the Supreme Being (*reduci ad summum*). And in this you will be a true metaphysician.'¹⁸ It is useful to discuss these elements in turn.

Emanation for Bonaventure does not refer to the fact that the world flows from God (as in some pagan Neoplatonic authors). Rather, for Bonaventure, it is above all a Trinitarian concept. Within the Trinity the fruitfulness of the Father generates his Word, while the Holy Spirit proceeds as their Bond of Love. Bonaventure states that the whole of creation is a material extension, freely willed by God, of these intra-divine processions—a view shared by Aquinas (STh I 34.3 and 45.7). For both Bonaventure and Aquinas, the created world is a vast expression, a symbol (in the sense that it re-presents, or makes present) of the Trinity, and as such it is caught in the dynamism of *egressus* and *reditus*.¹⁹ In *Breviloquium* II, 12.1 Bonaventure writes that 'the created world is a kind of book, reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker, the Trinity, at three different levels of expression: as a vestige, as an image, and as a likeness.'²⁰

From the fact that the inner-Trinitarian life of God grounds, and is reflected in, the world, Bonaventure, unlike Aquinas, concludes that a philosopher who examines it from the perspective of natural reason will fail to perceive its most fundamental dimension. Philosophy is therefore a deeply ambivalent enterprise for Bonaventure. He links its pursuit with the Genesis story (the tree of knowledge of good and evil), claiming, moreover,

him, Bonaventure's thought is theological speculation. For a more recent discussion of 'the Bonaventurian problem,' see Andreas Speer, 'Bonaventure and the Question of a Medieval Philosophy' *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 6 (1997): 25–46.

15 Bonaventure, *Hexameron* IV, 1.

16 Bonaventure, *Hex.* VII, 13: 'only faith "separates the light from the darkness" (cf. Gen 1:4) ... Faith, with hope and love and its works, heals the soul and, thus healed, purifies it and renders it deiform.' (All translations from *Hexameron* are my own.)

17 Bonaventure, *Hex.* VI, 1–4.

18 Bonaventure, *Hex.* I, 17.

19 Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St Bonaventure* (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2000), 12–13.

20 All translations from *Bonaventure Texts in Translation Series* Vol. IX, *Breviloquium*, edited by Dominic V. Monti (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2005).

that philosophers are in danger of changing wine into water, bread into stones, ‘a most miserable miracle’ indeed.²¹

Exemplarity, the second aspect of Bonaventure’s metaphysics, refers to the view that things have their true reality in the divine ideas. These divine ideas are located in the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal archetype through whom God eternally expresses himself in all things, and without whom we cannot understand the most fundamental truths.²² Thus, for Bonaventure, the Word is the true reality of created things, and it is only in the Word, as the metaphysical centre (*medium metaphysicum*) that we can know things properly.²³

But how do we share in the divine truth of the Son? Bonaventure does not claim that we have a direct knowledge of divine ideas. As a matter of fact, he adopts a version of the Aristotelian abstraction-theory to explain how the intellect gathers its data. However, this occurs only at the lower level of the epistemological scale, so to speak. In order to attain truth, these ‘data’ need to be evaluated in light of the divine ideas, the eternal standards of truth, which we simply intuit and which we cannot, in turn, evaluate. As Christopher Cullen puts it: ‘The eternal art is that by which we judge, even though it is not the object of cognition. It illumines our judgements, even if it does not provide the objects of those judgements.’²⁴ Thus, the divine ideas are not the *obiectum quod* of human knowledge—not *what* we can perceive—but rather the *obiectum quo*, i.e. that *through* which we can attain certainty.²⁵ In a famous quotation from *De Scientia Christi* 4, Bonaventure explains: ‘For certain knowledge, the eternal reason is necessarily involved as the regulative and motivating principle (*ut regulans et motivans*), but certainly not as the sole principle nor in its full clarity. But along with the created reason, it is contuted by us in part as is fitting in this life.’²⁶ Contuition refers to an indirect and implicit awareness of the divine ideas, which make our truthful judgements possible in the first place.²⁷

Now it is important for our argument that Bonaventure claims that this kind of illumination, as the condition of possibility of our intellectual processes, is situated somewhere

21 See Bonaventure, *Hex.* XIX, 14; XVII, 27. In *Hex.* II, 7, he writes: ‘It is a very great abomination that the most beautiful daughter of the king (namely wisdom) is offered to us as a bride, and we prefer to fornicate with a base servant-maid and resort to a prostitute.’ Luther was to echo these sentiments.

22 Bonaventure, *Hex.* III, 4. See also *Hex.* I, 13: ‘From all eternity, the Father has generated a Son who resembles him [in whom] he expressed himself ... He has expressed everything he can do and above all everything he wanted to do, and he has expressed all things in him, the Son, as in a medium and as in his art. This is why this medium is the Truth ... and this is why no truth whatsoever can be known except through this Truth’ (my translation).

23 Bonaventure, *Hex.* I, 7.

24 Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 85.

25 Speer, ‘Bonaventure and the Question of Medieval Philosophy,’ 36.

26 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*, edited and translated by Zachery Hayes (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2005), 134.

27 See Charles Carpenter, *Theology as the Road to Holiness in St. Bonaventure* (New York: Paulist, 1997), 81–93.

between the order of nature and that of grace.²⁸ Given his emanationist, exemplarist, and illuminist views, Bonaventure argues that philosophical reason is in radical need of divine assistance, and cannot operate properly at the ordinary, natural level. It is clear that on this issue Bonaventure takes a different stance from Thomas Aquinas. For Thomas, natural reason, in its pursuit of truth, may be fallible and in need of guidance. But it is not *intrinsically* inadequate without God's assistance. For Bonaventure, it is.

When it comes to theological reason, even more assistance is required, namely an infusion of grace.²⁹ Theology, as a kind of wisdom (*sapientia*), is both knowledge (*cognitio*) and love (*affectum*). Theology is 'an affective habit' (*habitus affectivus*) with both speculative and practical dimensions, but it is, for Bonaventure, mainly practical, namely 'that we become good.'³⁰ For Thomas Aquinas it is just the opposite: theology is more speculative than practical.³¹ Bonaventure's sapiential understanding of theology implies a closer link between theology and spirituality than we find in Aquinas: 'There is no sure passage from science (*scientia*) to wisdom (*sapientia*); a medium must be provided, namely holiness (*sanctitas*).'³² This is the reason why Bonaventure, quoting Wis. 6:18, argues that a scholastic discipline needs to be complemented by a monastic one: 'It is not solely by listening but also by obeying that we attain wisdom.'³³ While Aquinas and Bonaventure are in agreement that faith is a prerequisite for theological engagement, Bonaventure differs from Aquinas insofar as, for the Franciscan, theological wisdom and

28 Bonaventure, *Unus Est Magister Noster Christus*, no. 16.

29 This becomes clearer when we compare two texts. In the sermon *Unus Est Magister Noster Christus*, nos. 16–19 Bonaventure links the different kinds of divine assistance with the hierarchy of creatures as vestiges, image, and likeness, which he had dealt with in the *Brevil.* II, 12. 1–3. Every creature is a *vestige*, mirroring, and participating in, God's unity, truth, and goodness. More immediately relevant for our purposes is the aspect of *image*, which is found in intellectual creatures, such as human beings. God is not just the principle who caused our existence (*ad principium causativum*) in creating us (as in vestiges), but he is also the end who motivates us (*ad obiectum motivum*). Finally, there is the similitude or *likeness*, which applies to all intelligent beings who possess God through the infused gifts (*per modum doni infusi*) of faith, hope and love (see Bonaventure, *Brevil.* II, 12.1–3 and *Unus Est Magister Noster Christus*, no. 16). *Unus Est Magister Noster Christus*, no. 17 goes on to teach that operations at basic natural level (linked with the vestige) are supported by God's general creative presence (as principle and cause). In relation to image, as when we use our intellectual faculties, God operates as goal and motivating principle (*sicut obiectum et ratio motiva*), while those who are in the likeness (*similitudo*) of God are in receipt of God's infused gift as grace (*donum infusum per gratiam*). It is not difficult to recognize a parallel between philosophy, which draws on illumination from God as the motivating principle, and the way Bonaventure describes the image-aspect of intelligent beings. Similarly, the special illumination through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (the infused gifts of grace) are linked with similitude or likeness, and it is these gifts, especially wisdom, that are needed to be a theologian in the eyes of Bonaventure.

30 See Bonaventure, I *Sent Proem* q. 3 concl. See also Carpenter, *Theology as the Road to Holiness in St. Bonaventure*, 24–27.

31 STh I 1.4.

32 Bonaventure, *Hex.* 19, 3.

33 Bonaventure, *Hex.* II, 3.

wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit converge. As Carpenter puts it, ‘this wisdom is, in fact, none other than the gift of the Holy Spirit.’³⁴

It is clear that Bonaventure’s views on the relation between faith and reason, theology and philosophy, differ significantly from those of Thomas. While Aquinas allowed for the integrity of philosophical search (and happily continued to write commentaries on Aristotle long after he was required to do so as part of his university education), Bonaventure’s theological stance results in subsuming philosophy into theology.

Given the fact that Aquinas allows for a certain integrity to philosophy as a discipline in its own right (albeit ranked lower than theology in the hierarchy of science), it is hardly surprising that Bonaventure is often portrayed as an alternative to the Thomist synthesis, which, in the eyes of some of its critics, has ceded too much to a secularizing outlook. Gregory LaNave, for instance, writes, ‘Bonaventure has seemed to many to hold our hope either for a salutary corrective or even a very different methodology.’³⁵ He refers, among others, to Hans Urs von Balthasar who is deeply influenced by Bonaventure. Indeed, von Balthasar’s key insight in the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord* is quintessentially Bonaventurian: theology requires a proportion between its subject and its object.

I will refrain from deciding which perspective is the most appropriate to respond to the (post-)secular climate in which we find ourselves. My aim is merely to show that the Bonaventurian stance has unintentionally led to the separation of faith and reason which it set out to abolish. In a sense this is not entirely surprising: there can only be a genuine encounter between faith and reason, theology and philosophy when the integrity of both areas is respected. In order to flesh out this argument in historical terms, I will now turn to the famous Condemnations of 1277.

The Condemnations of 1277 and the Origins of Modernity

The works of Aristotle were translated (from the Greek, or from Arabic translations) during the twelfth and first half of the thirteenth century in Sicily and Toledo. William of Moerbeke (+1286) translated and revised translations of Aristotle, allowing his fellow-Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, to write important commentaries on the Aristotelian oeuvre on the basis of more reliable texts. From the middle of the thirteenth century the works of Aristotle were a well-established part of the academic curriculum in Paris and elsewhere, despite initial (and recurring) reservations about Averroism. Some of these concerns were raised in the 1270s.

A first official reaction occurred on 10 December 1270 when Etienne Tempier, bishop of Paris, condemned thirteen propositions, as opposed to the Christian faith. The key issues were monopsychism (the teaching that there is only one intellect for the human race, i.e. the divine intellect); the denial of individual immortality which follows from monopsychism; denial of freedom of will; the doctrine of the eternity of the world

34 Carpenter, *Theology as the Road to Holiness in St. Bonaventure*, 25–26. He refers to Bonaventure, III *Sent.* d. 35, au., q. 1 (III, 772–75), *Brevil.* V, 5 and *Hex.* passim.

35 Gregory LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom: The Nature of Theology according to St Bonaventure* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 2005), 13.

(Aristotle, like other Greek thinkers, was not familiar with the notion of a world created out of nothing); and the denial of God's knowledge of individual things, and hence of Providence.³⁶

This initial condemnation had little impact, and Pope John XXI requested Tempier to examine the situation at the Parisian University in more depth. Instead of producing a report as requested, Tempier actually issued a condemnation, on 7 March 1277—significantly, three years to the day after Aquinas's death. The condemnation consisted of 219 erroneous propositions. Apart from a number of specific theses lifted from the work of Averroes, Aristotle, Siger of Brabant, and Thomas Aquinas, the document takes issue in general terms with the *Diesseitigkeit* of the new climate and the way the new Aristotelian science threatens Christian faith and theology in general. The first condemned proposition reads 'That there is no more excellent state than to study philosophy'; the second: 'That the only wise men in the world are philosophers'; the fifth: 'That man should not be content with authority to have certitude about any question'; others state: 'That happiness is in this life and not in another' (172); 'That the Christian law impedes learning' (180); 'That there are fables and falsehoods in the Christian law just as in others' (181); 'That the teachings of the theologian are based on fables' (183); and the final erroneous proposition (216) reads: 'That a philosopher must not concede the resurrection to come, because it cannot be investigated by reason.' The document goes on to comment: 'This is erroneous because even a philosopher must bring his mind in captivity to the obedience of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5).'³⁷

In the past, scholars may have exaggerated the impact of the 1277 condemnations. The view that it caused the decline of Aristotelian influence and paved the way for modern science has been discredited.³⁸ It was not the first time that the use of Aristotle had been condemned in Paris (also in 1210 and 1215); nor did it result in the decline of the influence of Aristotelianism in the Schools, as the example of Duns Scotus makes clear. Similarly, it has been argued that the Condemnations led to the rise of voluntarism, nominalism, and ultimately paved the way for the rise of the modern sciences, and our secular world as we know it today. In an important article, however, Peter Harrison has argued that the traditional link between voluntarism and the emergence of science simply does not hold up. There were empiricists who were rationalists, and voluntarists who were not empiricists. He reformulates the thesis of the link between voluntarism and the sciences as saying something about the limitations of human intellect rather than about the arbitrary nature of God.

This is an important nuance,³⁹ for it makes clear that the real issue was not voluntarism as such but rather the decline of confidence in reason. The modern split between faith

36 For a more detailed discussion, see Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1980), 407.

37 Translation from: *Philosophy in the Middle Ages. The Christian, Islamic and Jewish Traditions*, eds Arthur Hyman and James Walsh, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1973), 584–91. For a discussion of the Condemnation and its context, see John Wippel, 'The Condemnation of 1270 and 1277 at Paris,' in *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1977): 169–201.

38 See Jason Gooch, 'The Effects of the Condemnation of 1277,' *The Hilltop Review* 2006/2: 34–44.

39 Peter Harrison, 'Voluntarism and Early Modern Science,' *History of Science* 40 (2002): 63–89. 'It is also possible to sketch an alternative account of theological influence on the

and reason is not the result of voluntarism and nominalism; it is the other way around: the critique of natural reason in Franciscan theology (in response to the impact of Aristotelian philosophy) led to voluntarism and nominalism. Thus, the Condemnations of 1277 both expressed, and contributed to, a different theological climate, in which there was a growing awareness of the limitations of philosophy in its dialogue with theology, thereby reinforcing a growing separation of faith and reason, theology and philosophy. For instance, whereas the immortality of the soul was considered a demonstrable truth for most theologians up to Thomas Aquinas, it will cease to be considered a philosophically demonstrable conclusion by Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and others.⁴⁰ In general, theologians will rely on revelation and faith more than upon philosophical reasoning to ascertain the truth of theological conclusions.⁴¹ The decline of confidence in the human intellect, rather than voluntarism, links Bonaventure's Augustinian pessimism with that of the Reformers.

The condemnation of the use of Aristotle in the Arts Faculty in Paris was repeated ten days later by Robert Kilwardby, archbishop of Canterbury, at the University of Oxford. John Peckham, a Franciscan successor to Kilwardby, reiterated the condemnation in 1286, targeting the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and his followers (Richard Klapwell), labelling them as 'heresies.' In an invaluable letter Peckham allies himself to the thought of Alexander and Bonaventure who, in Peckham's view, remained faithful to the thought of Augustine, in marked contrast to Aquinas and others. The reference to the Augustinianism of Bonaventure is revealing: those who opposed the influence of Aristotle's new learning aligned themselves explicitly with Bonaventure: 'Which doctrine is more solid and more sound, the doctrine of the sons of Saint Francis, that is, of Brother Alexander (of Hales) of sainted memory, of Brother Bonaventure and others like him, who rely on the Fathers and the philosophers in treatises secure against any reproach, or else that very recent and almost entirely contrary doctrine, which fills the entire world with wordy quarrels, weakening and destroying with all its strength what Augustine teaches ...?'⁴²

development of experimental natural philosophy—one that takes as its point of departure the relative importance of human cognitive powers. The Protestant reformers laid considerable emphasis on the limits of human knowledge, which for them was a consequence of the Fall. Thus it was not Calvin's contention that God's decrees were irrational, but rather that they were *unsearchable*. This does not imply a capricious absolute divine will but one the determinations of which cannot be fully grasped by fallen human minds ... To assert the inscrutability of the divine will is to make a claim not about the nature of God, but the human intellect. The divine will is not in principle beyond reason: rather fallen and finite human minds are incompetent to grasp its operations,' (81).

40 Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, 409.

41 *Ibid.*, 465.

42 *Registrum Epistolarum Fratris Johannis Peckham Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis*, ed. C.T. Martin, London, 1882, 3 vols., III, 871, quoted in Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, 359. It is important to note that Kilwardby was Dominican. The opposition between the Franciscan and Dominican orders was a result of the Condemnations of 1277 and beyond, not its cause. It took a while before the Dominicans aligned themselves with Thomas Aquinas as the main representative of the Order of Preachers.

It is certainly ironic that the conservative Franciscan reaction of 1277 contributed to the double truth theory, which was rejected by Stephen Tempier, and which is very much part of the modern outlook (due to the influence of Kant, which finds a theological response, faithful to the Kantian presuppositions, in the work of Karl Barth and others). In short, I suggest that the Bonaventuran attack upon natural reason had two historical consequences, both unintentional: first, as indicated, there occurs a growing separation of faith and reason. If you do not have an even moderate confidence in natural reason (as, for instance, Aquinas had) there will be a tendency to subsume reason in faith. By not respecting the distinction between reason and faith, reason becomes subsumed into faith, and instead of elevating it (as Aquinas proposes) we end up abolishing it (fideism), which, ironically, leads to a further separation of faith and reason. Bonaventure's stance, reinforced by other Franciscans after him, resulted in a separation of faith and reason, theology and philosophy—although its explicit goal is just the opposite, that is, to draw philosophy into the ambit of grace and theology.

A second unintended consequence is the division between spirituality and theology. Scholars have noticed how from 1300 onwards few theological scholars are saints, and vice versa.⁴³ A satisfactory historical account has not been forthcoming, and within the confines of this article I can only make a brief suggestion. In my view the growing separation of theology and spirituality should be partly attributed to the Franciscan scepticism of reason which finds its origins in Bonaventure's stance against the new Aristotelian learning: where intellect is silenced, love enters, Bonaventure writes. This may have been a traditional enough dictum but in a climate in which reason and faith are seen as increasingly antagonistic it acquires a more troubling meaning. Hence, whereas Bonaventure himself attempts to bring theology and spirituality together, the attack upon natural reason and philosophy throughout his later works (such as *Hexameron*) will actually result during the fourteenth century in the growing separation of spirituality from an allegedly intellectualist theology.

These issues are not merely relevant in historical terms. In the final part of this contribution I will argue that a number of modern authors, of whom I will discuss just one, have misinterpreted Aquinas's approach, and have effectively misunderstood it in terms of a Bonaventuran perspective. This leads to an impoverishment in our understanding of the multifarious nature of Catholic theology in its response to secularism.

Gavin D'Costa: A Modern Misreading of Aquinas

In his book *Theology in the Public Square* Gavin D'Costa argues, 'that liberal modernity is in fact committed to religious plurality and diversity in society, and that these goals are best served, in some circumstances, by helping religious communities to learn and practice their traditions faithfully.'⁴⁴ In a society which takes the ideals of pluralism, tolerance and diversity seriously, it makes sense for the state to support diverse religious

43 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Theology and Sanctity,' in *Explorations in Theology*. Vol. I. *The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 181–209.

44 Gavin D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy and Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), xi.

expressions. I am sympathetic with this line of argument and in my view D'Costa has developed it eloquently.

D'Costa also tries to make a different point, arguing that Catholic theology should be released from its Babylonian Captivity in the secular university. As D'Costa sees it, 'Theology, properly understood, cannot be taught and practiced within the modern university.'⁴⁵ It is undoubtedly the case that theology operative in a secular setting is at times in danger of bracketing out some of its key presuppositions. All too often 'Theology' Departments have become 'Religious Studies' Departments. Nonetheless, I disagree with the *monolithic* way D'Costa construes and presents Catholic theology, and the way it should respond to secularism within the university. More specifically, I would like to challenge D'Costa's reading of how Aquinas sees theology. I have argued that there are at least two responses to secular learning within the late medieval Catholic intellectual scene, namely a Bonaventuran and a Thomist one, and I will now show that D'Costa is interpreting the latter in terms of the former, thereby presenting us with an impoverished and one-dimensional reading of the Catholic tradition.⁴⁶

D'Costa claims that Aquinas's discussion in STh I 1.6 of the issue whether or not theology is the same as wisdom, should be read in conjunction with 'the gift of wisdom' (one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit), discussed in STh II-II, 45. D'Costa is right in stating that, for Thomas, the gift of wisdom is a grace, bestowed by the Holy Spirit, arising from the cohabitation or fellowship with the divine life. It is a sympathy or connaturality with divine things, resulting from charity, which unites us to God.⁴⁷ In short, if wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit is required to make us good theologians, to assist us in discerning the truth and beauty of the Christian faith, D'Costa's claim that Thomas Aquinas makes a case for a sapiential theology, which is predicated on the theologian participating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, appears to be plausible. As D'Costa sees it: 'In the *Summa Theologiae*, 2a 2ae. 45, Aquinas discusses "The gift of wisdom," which should, for the purpose of our discussion, be read with the *Summa* 1a.1.6, where he argues that theology is "wisdom" ... [Aquinas] argues that *theological* wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit, precisely because it arises from cohabitation with the divine life which facilitates right judgement.'⁴⁸

This is a serious misreading of Aquinas's text. As a matter of fact, nowhere in STh II-II 45 does Aquinas state that this kind of wisdom is the prerogative, or even the requisite of *theologians*. Indeed, the habit of wisdom (as distinct from the act), as a gift from the Holy Spirit, is shared with 'baptised idiots and little children' (STh II-II, 45.5 *ad* 3). D'Costa mistakenly identifies 'wisdom' as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit with

45 Ibid., 1.

46 As a matter of fact, D'Costa takes a lead from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian* (1990), and goes on to read it from an allegedly Thomist perspective, although he appears to acknowledge that the document is more Bonaventuran than Thomist. He claims 'to follow Aquinas to illuminate' the point that theology's method is dictated by the dynamism of love, *Theology in the Public Square*, 127 note 26.

47 STh II-II 45.2.

48 D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 127, italics added.

‘theological wisdom,’ i.e. *sacra doctrina*. Now Aquinas explicitly denies this in a passage which, oddly enough, is quoted by D’Costa himself. In the main body of the article Aquinas makes clear that theology or sacred doctrine is wisdom insofar as it immediately considers God as the highest cause, who has revealed himself. The third objection to this view states: ‘This doctrine is acquired by study, whereas wisdom is acquired by God’s inspiration; so that it is numbered among the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11.2) Therefore this doctrine is not the same as wisdom.’

In his reply Aquinas will argue that wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit should be distinguished from theological wisdom, acquired by study:

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 Corinthians 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.⁴⁹

There is no scope for ambiguity. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of judgement in relation to something that is morally problematic: judgement by *inclination* (such as when a virtuous person almost instinctively knows that something is wrong, even if he/she cannot give proper reasons for this) on the one hand, and a *reasoned* judgement on the other. In the latter case, the person giving the reasoned justification does not necessarily have to be virtuous him/herself. Similarly, wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit is compared with the judgement by inclination or connaturality, while theology is explicitly linked with the wisdom which we acquire through study. The fact that the principles of theology are revealed does nothing to change that position. In short, for Thomas, a theologian is somebody who gets his/her intellectual priorities right (i.e. a theocentric focus); he/she does not have to be a saintly figure. D’Costa has effectively read Aquinas through the lens of Bonaventure.

Conclusion

Neither Thomas Aquinas nor Bonaventure would have been sympathetic towards the understanding of reason and philosophy that Descartes, Kant, and other moderns espouse. Both Aquinas and Bonaventure would have been deeply uncomfortable with this kind of alleged ‘autonomy,’ and the separation this ‘autonomy’ implies between reason and faith, philosophy and theology. Having said this, Thomas, unlike Bonaventure, respects the integrity of philosophy as a discipline that pursues truth in a valid manner, and he acknowledges the intrinsic goodness of the operation of natural reason. Bonaventure is

49 STh I 1.6 *ad* 3.

more sceptical of natural reason. Summarizing Gilson's views, Christopher M. Cullen has captured well how Bonaventure and Aquinas differ in their understanding of the role of theology and philosophy, faith and reason:

In Aquinas's thought, philosophy has a certain relative autonomy. While it has its own proper methods, it accepts the extrinsic control of faith. As a result, philosophy is formally distinct from theology. In Bonaventure, however, philosophy is heteronomous (especially because it cannot avoid error without theology) and is strengthened by the intrinsic influence of faith.⁵⁰

Acknowledging and respecting their distinct natures, Aquinas proposes a dialogue between theology and philosophy. In Bonaventure, this dialogue is in danger of becoming a monologue as he radically subsumes philosophy into theology. This was considered a highly unsatisfactory position for philosophers in the Arts Faculty, and it is little wonder that the Franciscan attempt to subsume philosophy into theology effectively led to their separation.

The claim that there are at least two distinct ways of responding to the secularism of Aristotle in the thirteenth century should not prove particularly controversial. Nevertheless, it is important to make this point, if only to resist those interpretations that tend to blur the distinction between the two, or those that interpret the Thomist view from the Bonaventurian one, thereby distorting the former (as D'Costa and others appear to do).⁵¹ Aquinas has much more confidence in the light of natural reason than Bonaventure does—a confidence that is ultimately based on his commitment to the goodness of the created world, which is open to the grace of God, rather than in tension with it.

I have argued that late-medieval voluntarism and nominalism are the outcome of the separation of faith and reason. This separation finds its remote roots in the thought of Bonaventure who, in his later works, expressed a deep scepticism of the claims of natural reason. From this it does not *necessarily* follow that in a secular setting (in which faith and reason, theology and philosophy, are now deeply separated from one another), the Bonaventurian stance may not be a viable way to re-establish the dialogue between the two. One could argue, in a dialectical manner, that what caused the split (the Franciscan view on faith and reason) may now very well be the way to re-establish the link between faith and reason, philosophy and theology. Nor is it to say that the Bonaventurian approach, which D'Costa espouses, should not be pursued in institutions with a clear Christian ethos. But to give up on theology in the secular university on the basis of a Bonaventurian stance seems misplaced. It does not do justice to the plurality of Catholic responses to secularism, singling out just one approach. The approach that acknowledges the integrity of philosophy, while at the same time exposing the untenability of the modern view that reason is totally autonomous, is an important alternative

50 Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 33.

51 William Hankey has argued that John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock are guilty of this kind of (mis)reading of Aquinas. I cannot pursue this discussion within the confines of this contribution. For a more detailed critique, see William Hankey, 'Why Philosophy Abides for Aquinas', *Heythrop Journal* 42 (2001): 329–348. Hankey takes particular issue with Milbank and Pickstock's book *Truth in Aquinas* in which an illuminist reading of Aquinas is defended.

to the Franciscan one. This is the approach adopted by Aquinas, and the papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.

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